

Basic Detail Report



Johnstone River Indigenous Canoe

Vessel number

HV000511

Date

1873

Description

There is little recorded data with the records for the Johnstone River Indigenous bark canoe, however other research confirms a similar style of craft was recorded in the same area. The Mamu people are the traditional land owners in the region around the Johnstone River. This craft bears a strong resemblance to the skinbark canoe type with strongly raked ends that was used on the north west coast of Cape York Peninsula, in the Gulf of Carpentaria. The bark or wood material is very likely to be eucalyptus tetradonta, commonly found across the northern Australian landscape and known to be used in other forms of bark canoe construction throughout the region, including the skinbark canoes. The sheet appears to have been inverted so that the smoother, more water resistant inner surface is on the outside of the canoe, and the rougher exterior becomes the inside. The two ends are quite similar- the sides of the bark have been brought together at the top, and the bark has been cut on either side with a strong rake to the stem although it is not clear when the cut is made to give that profile. The end is then sewn together with a vine; the sewing is very even and close together to help make the joint watertight. The joint may have been filled with gum, resin or even mud to help caulk the joint. The shape of the hull is supported and strengthened along the entire top edge with branches, sewn to the bark in a series of moderately spaced stitches. There is only one branch on each side. The craft has deteriorated over time and partially collapsed toward its middle where parts of the branches have gone missing, however it is likely that the original full length branches kept the sides quite high to give it ample freeboard or depth throughout its length. Although relatively small, at 2.7m long and about 500mm wide, it has sufficient volume for a person of small stature to use, and would have been suited to calm waters on rivers or estuaries along the coast. George Augustus Dalrymple (1826-1876) was a dashing Scottish born explorer who originally settled in Queensland intending to be a pastoralist. He became a public servant and politician, but is best known for his expeditions in northern Queensland. He undertook an expedition in 1873 to Cardwell in relation to establishing a telegraph line, and went further north to the Endeavour River. He would therefore have collected this canoe as he passed through the Johnstone River region. It is understood he maintained good relations with the indigenous communities he met during his many expeditions. The craft is not on display at Queensland Museum, and kept in storage as a rare, relatively old and original example of the type used in its region.

Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 2.63 m x 0.49 m (8.63 ft x 1.61 ft)