

Basic Detail Report



Drysdale River Indigenous Dugout Canoe

Vessel number

HV000514

Date

c 1921

Description

Indigenous dugout canoes are found across the top of Australia, and the Kimberley region is the furthest west they were used. Drysdale River is toward the top or northern extent of the Kimberley coast line, and this example was collected from the Drysdale River Mission at Pago, on the shore of Napier Broome Bay. It was collected by WR Easton who led an expedition in 1921 to the area, and was donated to the Western Australian Museum by Easton and Rev. Prior Salinas. The dugout was shipped to the museum aboard the steamer BAMBRA from Wyndham. William Robert Easton was a surveyor, explorer and pastoralist in the Northern Territory and Western Australia from the 1920s until the 1960s. At both the bow and stern the dugout features a very distinct short, chiselled or bevelled shape and a stem or stern frame carved into it. These ends are not faired into the remainder of the hull; there is a distinct crease and angle at the side. The roughly paralleled sided hull between these ends has a long hollow in the underside (or keel area) at one point. At least $\frac{3}{4}$ of the material has been dugout to create the interior, and no thwarts are included. An interesting feature is the additional narrow planks that have been lashed to the edge of the open hull on either side with a pattern of sewing, raising the freeboard about 50 mm or so. This is done in a very neat and deliberate fashion, with the planks running the full length. It is not known if they were made as part of the original construction, or added later, perhaps to give the hull greater freeboard and make it safer or able to carry a greater load. WAM has an image of a similar dugout that also features the same type of boards. This dugout was photographed off Bigge Island, which is a short distance to the west of Drysdale River. The canoe would have been used for transport, fishing or hunting for turtle and dugong. It would have been paddled along in most instances on open water, but a pole would be useful in shallow water areas. Macassan traders who collected trepang, beche-de-mer and pearl shell from the region introduced the dugout canoe to Northern Australia. It is not known who the builder was and the material has not been identified. Whilst it is possible it was acquired from the Macassan traders, the rudimentary shape appears to be more consistent with a mainland built craft rather than the more boat-shaped craft of Macassan origin.

Dimensions

Vessel Dimensions: 5 m x 0.7 m (16.41 ft x 2.3 ft)