

Aboriginal Heritage Study

In 1996, Council conducted the Hornsby Shire Aboriginal Heritage Study which applies to the whole of the Shire, excluding National Parks. The broad objectives of the study were to:

- identify and assess the Aboriginal heritage of the Shire;
- make practical recommendations for conservation and management;
- promote Aboriginal heritage within the Shire;
- provide advice on management mechanisms for Aboriginal heritage; and
- provide the opportunity for training and education for Kooris through Land Council funding.

To achieve these objectives, the study brief comprised three stages.

- **Stage One** included a research and survey design phase including a brief history on Aboriginal occupation in both the Sydney Basin and Hornsby Shire. This stage also included the consolidation of existing information on Aboriginal sites throughout the Shire, such as the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NP&WS) Register and site specific studies.
- **Stage Two** comprised the survey/inventory phase, whereby four specific survey areas were investigated including Tunks Ridge (Dural), Byles Creek (Beecroft), Elouera Bushland Reserve (Cherrybrook) and Middle-Dural Road (Galston) and also sections of both the Benowie Walking Track and the Great North Walk. These areas were selected for extensive fieldwork on the basis that they are areas under immediate or longer term threat from either development or recreational pressure. It was not feasible or practical to assess the whole of the Shire due to time and budgetary constraints. Individual inventory sheets were prepared for every new site found, including location information, site descriptions, impacts, condition, conservation recommendations, photographs and diagrams.
- **Stage Three** of the study provided an analysis of the information and sites visited, and planning and implementation recommendations for the short/medium and long term management of sites. This included both statutory and non-statutory measures. This stage also involved the provision of text for a brochure outlining the history of the Aboriginal occupation and culture in the Shire and explaining the benefits of conserving Aboriginal heritage.

The study found that the Shire of Hornsby is rich in archaeological evidence of Aboriginal occupation. The predominant site types found in the study area are engravings, shelters with art and axe grinding grooves. Other site types found in the area include middens and shelters with the potential of containing archaeological deposit (PAD's).

A total of 235 sites were included in the final listings of the study. This figure is made up of 206 sites previously recorded with the NP&WS and 29 new sites which were identified during the site specific surveys carried out by the consultant. The study concludes that these sites represent a very small proportion of the total number of sites which are likely to exist across the Shire. The report suggests that approximately 3,000 sites are likely to be present in the Shire, based on the estimate of the number of sites found in a given area and extrapolated for the total area of the Shire (excluding National Parks). Although many sites have been destroyed through urban development, many sites still exist.

The consultant undertook a further assessment of 12 sites previously recorded with the NP&WS to assess their current condition, the effectiveness of previous recommendations and to identify problems with the conservation of sites.

The study concludes that the information available on the existing NP&WS registered sites is often unreliable, particularly in relation to their location. The majority of registered sites have been recorded by interested individuals who have discovered the sites during recreational activities. Information pertaining to the specific location of the site is often miscalculated resulting in approximations and misleading information. This raises

problems in relation to ownership, responsibility and management issues. It is therefore not appropriate for the NP&WS recorded sites to be mapped on Council's Land Information System without a thorough investigation taking place to accurately locate all the sites. This should be undertaken by someone with experience in identifying Aboriginal sites as there is often not enough information to easily identify them in the field. Similarly, the same sites are often recorded a number of times.

The study concludes that sites are found in all topographic units in Hawkesbury sandstone, namely, ridgetops, open sandstone surfaces, rock shelters, overhangs and boulders, creek beds and foreshores. It is not possible to produce a predictive model for site distribution that will indicate the specific location of sites. It is possible however, to predict what site types are more likely to occur in different parts of the landscape. For example, the estuarine foreshore is likely to be the area of greatest site frequency. Engravings tend to be found mostly on ridgetops and axe grinding grooves tend to be most frequent in creek beds.

The study recognises that many sites have been destroyed during past development, especially in the southern part of the Shire where intensive urban development has occurred. Impacts on sites include urban development, land clearing, road and track construction, landscaping, the use of rock shelters for storage or camping and graffiti. It also indicates however, that there are many sites (or parts of sites) that have survived in a reasonably good condition highlighting that sites can coexist with residential and recreational areas. Proximity to these areas does not automatically result in the damage or destruction of sites. Proper management strategies can influence the extent of damage that occurs to sites.

The study recommended a number of management strategies which involve both statutory and non-statutory measures. The major recommendations include the following:

- the requirement for an archaeological assessment by a qualified archaeologist with any Development Application (DA) on land which contains a known Aboriginal site.
- if a proposal (including subdivision and rezoning) affects land greater than 1 hectare (10,000m²);
- if a proposal (including subdivision or rezoning) affects primarily undeveloped land (irrespective of land size) and could impact upon the following features:
 - estuarine foreshore
 - creekline
 - sandstone exposures at ground level larger than 5m².
 - sandstone cliffline or isolated boulder higher than 2m
- a requirement of an archaeological assessment for all rezoning applications
- advice be included on certificates issued under Section 149 of the Local Government Act where an Aboriginal site or place is known to occur on the land.

As the NP&WS has the ultimate consent role in relation to all Aboriginal heritage matters under the NP&W Act, the general procedure for Development Applications would be as follows:

- (i) DA prepared and submitted to Council with appropriate assessments;
- (ii) Council exhibits DA and a copy is sent to the NP&WS for assessment and consent;
- (iii) NP&WS archaeologist evaluates the assessment of Aboriginal heritage, advises Council regarding adequacy of assessment and whether conditions apply; and
- (iv) Council refuses DA or issues DA consent with or without conditions depending on advice from NP&WS and the Local Aboriginal Land Council.

The location of the sites is not made public as the risks of vandalism and destruction increase. Sites to which public access is available are located in Kur-ring-gai Chase National Park.