

Rewriting the History of the Native Mounted Police in Queensland

Lynley A. Wallis, Noelene Cole, Heather Burke, Bryce Barker, Kelsey Lowe, Iain Davidson and Elizabeth Hatte

Nulungu
Publication
Series

Nulungu
Insights No. 1



Nulungu
Research Institute
The University of Notre Dame Australia

WARNING: This document may contain images and names of people who have sadly passed away.

Co-Editors: Mrs Melissa Marshall and Dr Kathryn Thorburn
Advisory Editor: Dr Lynley Wallis

Lead Author Affiliation: Nulungu Research Institute, The University of Notre Dame Australia

Address for correspondence: lynley.wallis@nd.edu.au

The authors accept full responsibility for any omissions or errors contained in this paper.

Research Papers from the Nulungu Publication Series are available at <http://www.nd.edu.au/research/nulungu/publication-series>

Photographs: unless otherwise indicated all images are by the author

Cover Photo

Lynley Wallis examining a photograph album of officers and troopers of the Native Mounted Police held in the John Oxley Library in Brisbane (photo courtesy Heather Burke).

Cover Artwork: 'Seeing Country' by Nyapuru Laurel

Nyapuru Laurel was a Walmajarri artist and educator from the Kadjina Community (part of Millijidee Station) in the Kimberley region of Western Australia on the edge of the Great Sandy Desert.

Along with her sisters, brothers and mothers, Nyapuru advocated to set up the remote Wulungarra Community School and, through her work, contributed to the passing on of knowledge of the land, law and culture to future generations. She passed away in August 2015.

Extracts from 'Seeing Country' are located throughout the document.

Acknowledgements

On a project of this size, where we are working with many communities and groups across Queensland, there are a great many people who we need to thank. In particular, we are extremely grateful to Mandandanji Cultural Heritage Services, Rinyirru Aboriginal Corporation, Rinyirru (Lakefield) National Park, the Rinyirru Rangers, the Laura Rangers, Normanby Aboriginal Corporation, Balnggarawarra Rangers and Muluridji Tribal Aboriginal Corporation. In addition, staff at Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing, the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Environment and Heritage Protection, the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, the Queensland State Archives and John Oxley Library have all been helpful. Jonathan Richards, Lyndall Ryan, Isabel Tarrago, Steve Nichols, John Sciavo, Steve Nichols, Tony Kelly, Sandra and Jim Hagan, and Dave Cameron have also been of great assistance to us. For help during fieldwork, we'd like to thank Leanne Bateman, Alyssa Madden, Ryan Taddeucci and Uri Gilad. This research derives from the ARC funded project entitled "The Archaeology of the Native Mounted Police" (DP 160100307).

Acronyms

GPR:	Ground penetrating radar
NMP:	Native Mounted Police
Nulungu:	Nulungu Research Institute, The University of Notre Dame Australia, Broome Campus
RAC:	Rinyirru Aboriginal Corporation
RNP:	Rinyirru (Lakefield) National Park
UNDA:	University of Notre Dame Australia



Nulungu
Research Institute

The University of Notre Dame Australia





INTRODUCTION

‘The Archaeology of the Native Mounted Police in Queensland’ project, jointly led by Nulungu research fellow Dr Lynley Wallis, is a long-overdue exploration into the nature of frontier invasion.

This project was a long time in development. Several of our team members have worked in Queensland for many decades and, in every Aboriginal community in which we’ve worked, stories are told about the ‘killing times’ or the ‘war’, as community members call the period when the Native Mounted Police (NMP, also referred to as the ‘Native Police’) were operating. Many community members have asked us over the years to record their stories about the massacres that took place, or have shown us places associated with the police camps or the massacre sites, and often told us that they would like to know more about what happened. These requests eventually led to the archaeologists on this project coming together, talking with key Aboriginal people and communities, and developing a research project to address their interests — the project described in this paper is the result.

While researchers in the past have explored the experiences of Aboriginal people in places such as missions, native schools, fringe camps and pastoral settings, studying the history of the NMP forces us to re-evaluate what we think we know about ‘contact’, ‘agency’ and cross-cultural relationships in colonial Australia. Furthermore, the trauma associated with this brutal period of Australia’s past is not just ‘in the past’ — it’s not *just* an historical legacy, but it’s an *ongoing* history that is current, raw, and very, very complex, making it a challenging space for us to work in.

Background to the NMP

The NMP were a paramilitary force whose primary role was the subjugation of Aboriginal resistance to European ‘settlement’ in Queensland (Richards 2008; Skinner 1975). While on occasion the NMP did undertake other tasks, such as escorting gold shipments, blazing new tracks and searching for missing persons, their main task was to respond to European requests for police assistance to ‘disperse’

Aboriginal people in newly settled districts. In such instances, the term ‘disperse’ was used as a euphemism (meaning a mild or polite way of saying) for ‘kill’.

The first detachment of NMP arrived on the Darling Downs in May 1849 with Commandant Fredrick Walker — at this time Queensland was still part of the colony of New South Wales (it became a separate colony in 1859). Fourteen Aboriginal men had been ‘recruited’ for the NMP by Walker from the Murrumbidgee River district in New South Wales (though it is not clear what methods of ‘recruitment’ he used) — it was these men who formed the nucleus of the original NMP force. Typically units operated with 4–12 troopers under the command of a single European officer, from a base camp that was often staffed with one or two additional European constables who served as ‘camp keepers’ and sometimes blacksmiths.

From these humble beginnings, the NMP force eventually grew to nearly 200 troopers at any one time, though there were large fluctuations in numbers of both the troopers and their commanding officers. NMP camps were established across the state, and as Aboriginal people in ‘settled’ areas became ‘subdued’, the force would move out and establish new camps in the new districts and repeat the process of ‘dispersal’. The force was officially disbanded in 1904, though at least some of the remaining troopers went on to become trackers in the regular Queensland Police Force after this time.

While some people think that the NMP was an organisation unique to Australia, in fact it follows a long tradition of using local Indigenous people to police other Indigenous people that was used elsewhere in the British Empire, including, but not limited to, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Cape Colony (South Africa), India, and Canada (Nettlebeck and Smandych 2010; Richards 2008:185–193).

Our starting point for this research project (which commenced in June 2016) was to consider whether there would, in fact, be any archaeological sites associated with the NMP for us to investigate. Jonathan Richards, an expert historian on the



NMP who wrote *The Secret War: A True History of Queensland's Native Police*, suggested on the basis of records from the State Archives that there were at least 78 camps over the force's 55 year lifespan. Our own interrogation of the sources has produced references to the existence of between 150 and 200 camps. For about 43 of these we have a pretty good idea of exactly where the site should be, meaning that there is either:

- an historic map available that shows the location of the site;
- an official notification of a gazetted police reserve with a detailed written description of the locale; or,
- oral testimony amongst usually local community members (sometimes Aboriginal, sometimes non-Aboriginal) about where the site can be found.

Thinking about how important this force was in Queensland's history, and how many sites potentially exist, it logically follows that they should be well represented in heritage registers. Yet the State Heritage Register, administered by the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection (DEHP), lists no NMP sites. On the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Database, administered by the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships (DATSIP), there are just 12 entries related to NMP camps, seven of which are specific site locations while five are general locales. What the latter means is that an actual site on the ground hasn't been identified and only a general notion about where the site was once located exists.

Of course, we don't expect all of the sites we've found mentioned in historical documents to have survived. We know many of them will have been very short-lived — perhaps being used for just a few weeks or months before the troopers and officers moved on to another area. Such short-lived sites would have had insufficient material culture associated with them for it to have survived in the archaeological record through to the present. However, we do know from our archival research that at least a percentage of these sites will have been sufficiently large and/or long-lived enough for the remains of them — theoretically at least — to be archaeologically visible if their location has not subsequently been developed (see Table 1).

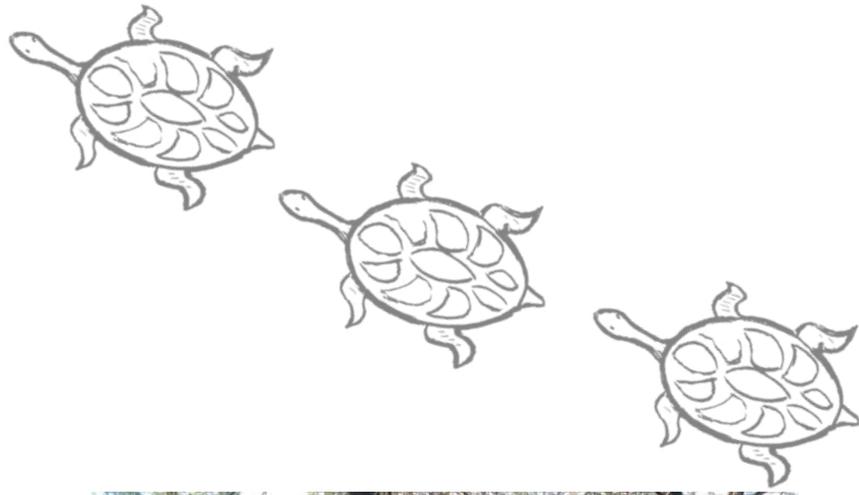
Name of NMP Camp	Length of Occupation
Cooktown/Endeavour River	30 years
Kirtleton	24 years
Herberton	23 years
Turn Off Lagoon	20 years
Boralga (Laura)	17 years
Burketown/Norman River	16 years
Tambo/Barcoo River	16 years
Yo Yo Creek	15 years
Dunrobin/Georgetown	14 years
Oak Park	10 years

Table 1 Information about the length of use of some of the longer-utilised NMP camps across Queensland.

Given the significance of these types of sites for Aboriginal people today, and the increasing acknowledgement of 'dark heritage', their minimal presence on heritage registers and a lack of contemporary knowledge about where they actually are, is in itself perhaps telling of a continued desire to forget, rather than remember, this chapter of Australia's history, even amongst contemporary government agencies and the general public.

The Aims of Our Research

Having confirmed that archaeological sites related to the NMP should still exist, our project aims to look at the range of historical archaeological evidence for NMP life, including police activities, living and working conditions, the roles played by Aboriginal women in the force, and oral histories about troopers, officers and conflict held by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. It will explore the links between the NMP and local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people by studying the artefacts (the things people left behind) and remains of the buildings in the NMP camps. Finally, it will map sites across key areas of Queensland in order to look at the changes to the NMP system over time, and the movement of frontiers across space and time.



While many studies have confirmed the violence unleashed by the NMP on Aboriginal people, there is also evidence to suggest that troopers at times acted against orders to help local Aboriginal people, or deserted the force and returned to their own country. Some Aboriginal people today can trace family connections to the NMP and can recount such stories. The project will include recording oral histories to shed light on how the NMP are remembered today by Aboriginal people.

And, although most deaths on the frontier were of Aboriginal people, settlers were also threatened and killed. It was very common for settlers to write about their fear of attacks from Aboriginal people, resulting in constant calls for police patrols and the over-reporting and sensationalisation of frontier violence in colonial newspapers. Locating descendants of early settlers and recording their oral histories will also be part of the study.

Comparing how the frontier is remembered by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people will be important to understanding people's links with the past, the present, and each other.

Fieldwork in 2016

Reconnaissance

Our fieldwork in 2016 was focused on preliminary reconnaissance to locate some of the NMP camp sites for which we had found archival evidence. This meant travelling around the state, talking with Aboriginal community members, government department representatives, local council members, land owners and pastoralists, and spending a lot of time wandering around in the bush with maps, GPS units and cameras. We visited Wondai Gumbal, which is the second oldest NMP camp in the state, located about equidistant between the townships of Roma, Surat, Miles and Condamine in southeast Queensland; see Figures 1 and 2), and multiple camp sites in northwest Queensland and Cape York Peninsula. One of the sites we visited in northwest Queensland was the NMP camp at Bouliia. This site

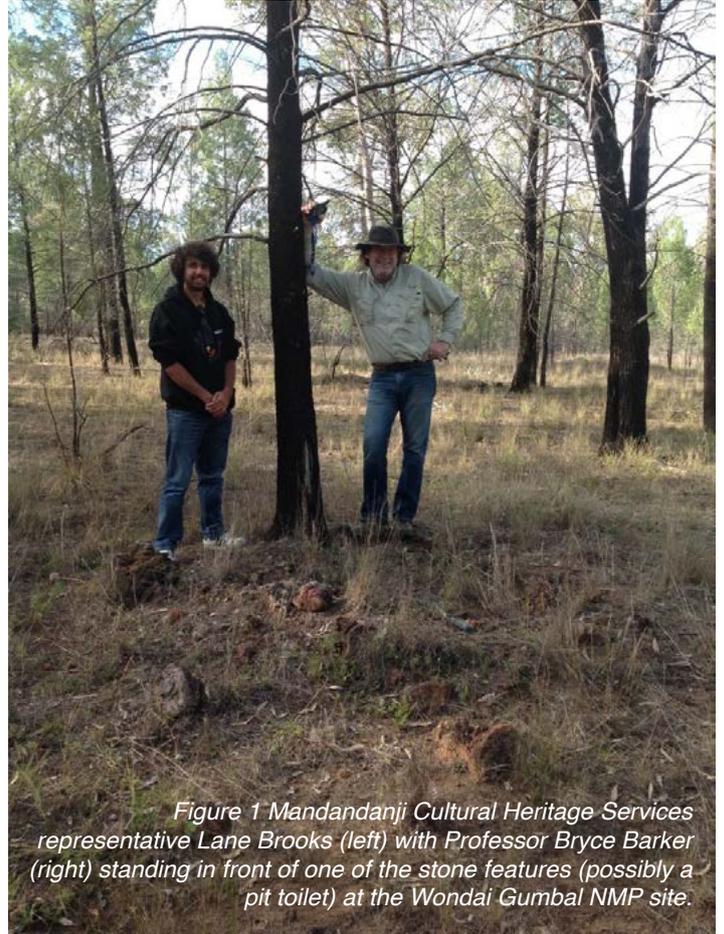


Figure 1 Mandandanji Cultural Heritage Services representative Lane Brooks (left) with Professor Bryce Barker (right) standing in front of one of the stone features (possibly a pit toilet) at the Wondai Gumbal NMP site.



Figure 2 A button from a Native Mounted Police trooper's uniform found at the Wondai Gumbal NMP site (photo courtesy Heather Burke).



Figure 3 The remains of one of the stone buildings at the Boulia NMP site (photo courtesy Iain Davidson). Lots of broken glass, ceramics and metal objects can still be seen on the ground around this and other buildings at the site.

is located on a permanent waterhole and, since the stone walls of some of the main buildings are still very well preserved, is a regular tourist destination found just a short distance out of the Boulia township past the race course (Figure 3).

The Boralga Native Mounted Police Camp, Cape York Peninsula

After we had finished our reconnaissance in southwest and northwest Queensland, we headed up to Cape York Peninsula to commence excavations at the NMP site of Boralga, in the Rinyirru (Lakefield) National Park (RNP). The first detachment of NMP were installed at Boralga (on the edge of a lagoon near a bend in the Laura River) by December 1875, and the site was used as a base for operations in the region for the next 17 years while the Laura River goldfield was at its peak.

Boralga had first been surveyed and mapped in 2000 by a team including Aboriginal community members Dr Tommy George and George Musgrave, accompanied by one of our current team members, Dr Noelene Cole (see Cole et al. 2002 and Cole 2004). We were keen to do excavations here for several reasons, including the strong community interest in the site, as well as the fact that it had been used for such a long period of time.

Prior to starting work at Boralga we had meetings with representatives of Rinyirru Aboriginal Corporation (RAC) and staff from the Qld Parks and Wildlife Service. Les Harrigan (Chair, RAC) and Tony Cockburn (Head Ranger, RNP) co-ordinated our subsequent fieldwork, which was conducted from 1–28 August 2016. At the beginning of fieldwork we were very saddened to hear of the death of Dr Tommy George, senior Traditional Owner of RNP, fluent Kuku Thaypan speaker and respected Laura Elder. Then



on 4 August, we were shocked to hear that his son, Thomas George, had also passed away. Members of our team attended their funerals in the township of Laura on 12 July 2016, and the team ceased fieldwork for a further five days in respect to the bereaved families, RAC and the local community.

The 2016 fieldwork at Boralga consisted of:

- Surveying the site and remapping its surface materials (such as posts, pieces of metal, glass, pottery and culturally modified trees) to extend the plan done in 2000, using Total Station surveying equipment;
- Geophysical survey using ground penetrating radar (GPR) and gradiometer (which is a type of magnetometer); and,
- Excavating in selected parts of the site.

Geophysical Results from Boralga

We used geophysical survey methods to detect and map subsurface features of the site. Geophysical methods are non-invasive, as they do not require us to dig up or disturb the ground. Differences which show up in the maps made using the equipment are defined as ‘anomalies’ — these anomalies represent changes in the soil.

In the case of the gradiometer these changes are typically associated with iron-bearing materials, in a manner that is quite similar to how a metal detector works (Figure 4).

In contrast, GPR works by transmitting electromagnetic energy in the form of radar waves into



Figure 4 Kelsey Lowe using a gradiometer to survey part of the Boralga site (photo courtesy Heather Burke).



Figure 5 Kelsey Lowe using the GPR to survey a different part of the Boralga site (photo courtesy Heather Burke).



the ground. When the wave encounters a different material (such as air voids, stone or a material with different moisture content), a reflection occurs, sending part of the wave back to the surface, where it is received and recorded (Figure 5). GPR can potentially find buried things such as building foundations, holes, pits, graves, hard packed floors, rubbish pits and post holes.

Nine geophysical grids were surveyed at Boralga (see Figure 6). Both the GPR and gradiometer identified numerous anomalies under the ground surface, indicating that it was very likely that additional buried cultural material existed. We found the buried archaeological features to be best preserved in areas that contained wooden posts still present at ground level. These are most certainly the former ant bed floors of huts or other buildings. Other areas contained smaller anomalies that proved to be intact rubbish dumps. Overall, the geophysical methods proved to be quite successful for locating intact buried deposits across the site and were valuable in helping us work out where it would be best to excavate.

Excavation Results from Boralga

After the geophysical survey, we excavated 20 trenches at several different locations across Boralga (Figure 7). In some cases, we placed the trench over artefacts that we could see on the ground — like broken bottles and ceramic pieces, or inside structures with standing timber poles. We chose other excavation trench locations because the gradiometer and GPR results told us there might be metal artefacts or floor structures beneath the ground that were not visible on the surface. Some of these were probably trooper's huts, some officer's huts and others were likely work areas.

Trenches 1, 2 and 7 were located beside the lagoon that can be seen in the top of Figure 6. These trenches are in the area where we think there were once small trooper's huts facing the water. Inside these trenches we found bullets, dark green bottle glass that was flaked using similar techniques to those used to make stone artefacts (Figure 9), animal bones, shells, and buttons, including some from Native Police uniforms (like the ones shown in Figure 2). Unlike some of the other trenches we excavated,



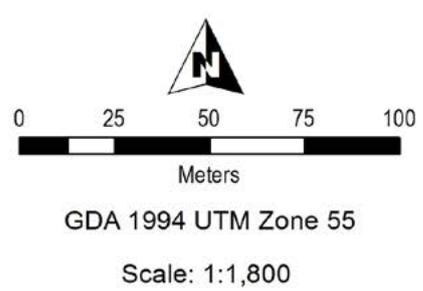
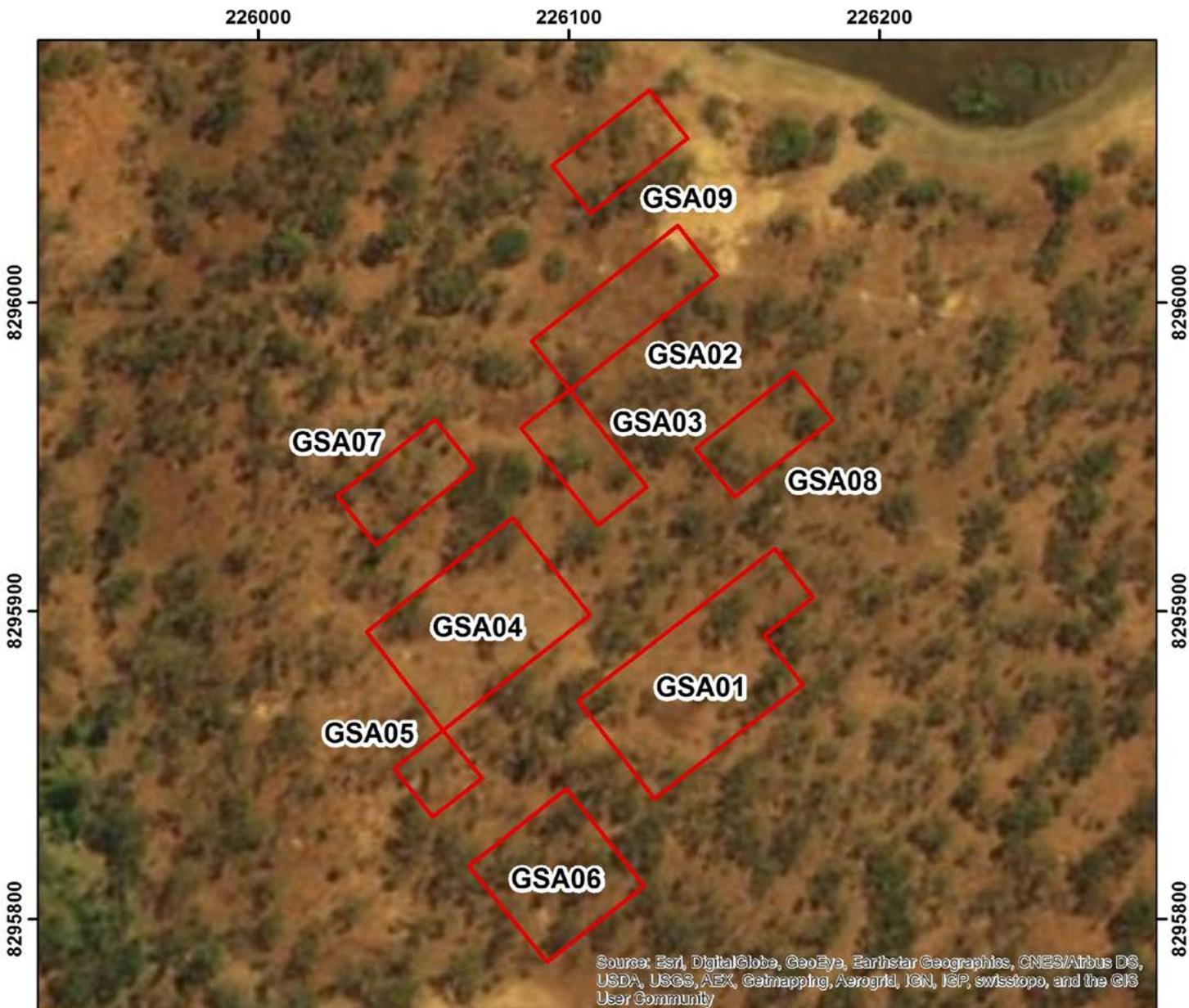
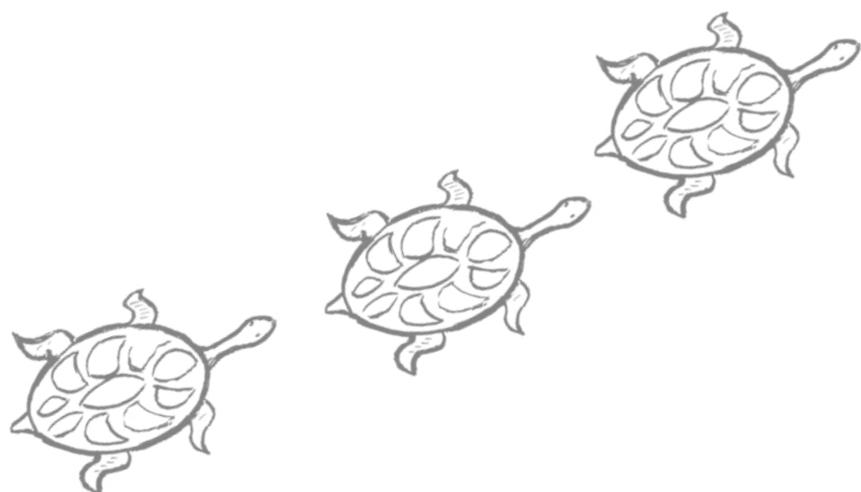
Figure 7 Les Harrigan (RAC) excavating at Boralga.

there were almost no ceramics found in these trenches.

Trenches 6, 13, 14 and 15 were positioned in and around other possible troopers' huts located further back from the lagoon. These were very difficult to excavate because they had very hard packed surfaces which may have been ant bed floors, and they didn't contain very many artefacts except nails. The nails likely come from the now decayed posts and roofing of the huts.

Trench 5 was located inside an officer's hut, and Trenches 8, 9 and 12 outside it. These were quite a distance away from the huts belonging to the troopers. We found very few items in Trench 5, but quite a few pieces of metal (including wire) in Trench 8. Trenches 8 and 9 were both in areas with lots of pebbles on the surface and very hard to dig. These pebbles were in a layer about 5 cm thick. We think this pebble surface was deliberately placed to stop the ground from becoming too boggy in the wet season, but we don't know exactly what it was used for.

Trenches 3, 4 and 11 were put over the top of small buried rubbish pits found downslope from the officer's hut. In these there were lots of pieces of bottle glass, ceramic plates and cups, bullets and other objects, and the pits had been burnt, making them very hard



Legend

Geophysical Grids

Boralga 2016

GPR Map

Figure 6 Map showing the location of the geophysical survey grids at Boralga (courtesy of Kelsey Lowe). Note the edge of the lagoon in the top right of view. The Laura River is just off the map to the south and west. The smaller excavation trenches were positioned inside these geophysical grids.

to dig. We think that the rubbish from the officer's hut was probably thrown away in these small pits. One of these trenches (Trench 3) had been dug up and damaged by bottle collectors, probably years ago. They didn't leave much behind and we don't know what they took away.

Ongoing Laboratory Analysis

After we completed fieldwork, the excavated materials were transported to the archaeology laboratory at the University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba. Bryce Barker and Heather Burke are supervising the analysis of the materials by postgraduate student Leanne Bateman (Figure 9). As you might imagine, given how much material we excavated, it is going to take quite a lot of time for her to analyse it all!

As well as this ongoing laboratory analysis, team members are also locating information in museums, archives and libraries, and adding this information to an online project database. We hope to be able to make the database available for members of the public to view in the coming year.

What's Next?

In 2017 we are planning to do geophysical surveys and excavation at the Wondai Gumbal site. We are also going to head back up to Cape York Peninsula to do some reconnaissance and excavation work at several other sites. In addition we are going to do investigations at the Boulia NMP camp site in partnership with the Pitta Pitta Native Title Claimants.





It will take us several years to finish all our research, and we're sure the results will be fascinating. We look forward to telling you more about this significant project in coming years, but in the meantime, if you want to keep up with the latest news from our project you can visit our blog at archaeologyonthefrontier.com

REFERENCES

Cole, N. 2004 Battle Camp to Boralga: a local study of colonial war on Cape York Peninsula, 1873–1894. *Aboriginal History* 28:156–189.

Cole, N., G. Musgrave and L. George with T. George and D. Banjo 2002 Community archaeology at Laura, Cape York Peninsula. In S. Ulm, C. Westcott, J. Reid, A. Ross, I. Lilley, J. Prangnell and L. Kirkwood (eds), *Barriers, Borders and Boundaries: Proceedings*

of the 2001 Australian Archaeological Association Annual Conference, pp.137–151. Tempus 7. St Lucia: Anthropology Museum, University of Queensland.

Richards, J. 2008 *The Secret War: A True History of Queensland's Native Police*. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press.

Nettlebeck, A. and R. Smandych 2010 Policing Indigenous peoples on two colonial frontiers: Australia's Mounted Police and Canada's North-West Mounted Police. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology* 43(2):356–375.

Skinner, L.E. 1975 *Police of the Pastoral Frontier: Native Police 1849–59*. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press.

Figure 9 Postgraduate student Leanne Bateman analysing some of the ceramics recovered from Boralga (photo courtesy Heather Burke).





Author Biography

Dr Lynley Wallis is an archaeologist based in the Nulungu Research Institute at the University of Notre Dame Australia in Broome, Western Australia. She holds a PhD from the Department of Archaeology and Natural History at The Australian National University, and a Bachelor of Science (Honours) degree from the University of Western Australia.

Lynley's work in archaeology, rock art and cultural heritage is usually community driven, oriented towards goals and outcomes determined to be important by the Aboriginal partners with whom she collaborates. Over the past 20 years she has worked with many Aboriginal communities including

Wanamara (Queensland), Woolgar Valley Aboriginal Corporation (Queensland), Mitakoodi (Queensland), Ngarrindjeri (South Australia), Khangalou (Queensland), Barngarla (South Australia), Yanyuwa (Northern Territory), Gundjeimi Aboriginal Corporation (Northern Territory) and Banjima (Western Australia).

She has previously held lecturing positions at James Cook University and Flinders University, research positions at the University of Queensland and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, and has worked as a senior heritage officer with ACT Environment and in the consulting industry.

Broome Campus

PO Box 2287 Broome WA 6725

Tel: +61 8 9192 0670 **Email:** nulungu@nd.edu.au

The Objects of the University of Notre Dame Australia are :

- a) the provision of university education, within a context of Catholic faith and values; and
- b) the provision of an excellent standard of -
 - i) teaching, scholarship and research;
 - ii) training for the professions; and
 - iii) pastoral care for its students.