

Reflections on CB08-500

Alternative narratives, Aboriginal heritage and significance assessment in Western Australia

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Abstract: This paper reflects on two narratives about CB08-500, a rock shelter in the inland Pilbara region of Western Australia. The conventional archaeological account emphasises the recent date of the site and its similarity to other sites in the region. The alternative account was developed for inclusion in a community book about sites in Niyiyaparli country. This imagines a vignette of past activity at the site and speculates about its connection to recent historical events. Use of the shelter is not remembered today, but Niyiyaparli generally view archaeological sites as indicating their connection to country and providing information about the lives of their ancestors. The alternative accounts raise issues about how archaeological sites are assessed during the compliance process and how they are interpreted for clients and the wider public. Archaeological investigation in the Pilbara region over the last 30 years has overwhelmingly occurred in the context of mining development, and there is a strong emphasis on site documentation. The Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972, as currently interpreted, requires sites to meet a relatively high threshold of significance. Archaeological significance assessment tends to privilege overarching narratives relating to the colonisation of the continent and the impact of environmental change. However, most sites in the region cannot be connected to these. Our alternative narrative highlights site preservation and connection with recent history and suggests how archaeologists might more effectively engage with clients and the wider community to address questions of significance assessment.

Keywords: significance assessment, archaeological interpretation, hunter-gatherer archaeology, Western Australia, Pilbara region

1. Introduction

Storytelling is an essential human activity (Fagan 2010; Gottschall 2012). Part of what it means to be human is the use of narrative to make sense of the world. Moreover, narrative empowers people to engage effectively with one another, but also to reformulate their current beliefs through imagining different perspectives (Meretoja 2014). Narrative is a powerful influence in many areas of the modern world. In contemporary Western society, interest in narrative is very much alive, both in traditional literary forms and the proliferation of ways of telling and engaging with stories in the expanding electronic space. This interest in the power of storytelling at a personal level can be seen all around us—in gaming, in sport, in genealogy. Business uses story to persuade and influence. Marketing studies, for example, show that people accept ideas more readily when they are in ‘story’ mode as opposed to ‘analytical’ mode (Hsu 2008). Nevertheless, in Western societies, there is a status divide between scientific ways of knowing, which are reductionist and objective, and narratives, which are dismissed as ‘just stories’ or information that is embedded but unrealised in our research (Khazraee & Gasson 2015). This is a particular problem for archaeologists striving for status as ‘scientists’, while engaged in an essentially humanistic enterprise.

Arguably, however, archaeology as a historical discipline retains a strong sense of narrative, especially when interpreting evidence in wider theoretical, synthetic or applied frameworks (eg Flannery 1976; Gamble 2015; Nyiyaparli Community et al 2015). Moreover, when archaeology’s audience extends beyond academe, a conversational or narrative style is commonly employed to communicate information about the past (Mithen 2003; Pryor 2014; Watkins 2006). Brown et al (2015:14) have recently highlighted what they call ‘hidden histories of archaeological practice’—the disjuncture between what actually occurs in field and laboratory work and what is officially reported—and call attention to the deficiencies of conventional scientific discourse with respect to communicating information about the past. They advocate engaging with different forms of discourse, including story, to complement conventional scientific reporting.

Challenges from Aboriginal people in the 1980s (Langford 1983), echoing similar challenges around the world, raised awareness among Australian archaeologists that archaeological fieldwork and research is not context free. From tentative beginnings (Davidson et al 1995), consultation with Aboriginal communities has become standard practice (Australian Heritage Commission 2002; Burke & Smith 2004:12–13; Colley 2002). Indeed, engagement with

Aboriginal communities today bears much in common with the international community archaeology movement (Atalay 2012; Marshall 2002; Nicholas 2007), as shown by innovative approaches to a wider education agenda (eg Ross et al 2013; Niyaparli Community et al 2015) and collaborative style of research (Guilfoyle et al 2011; Russell 2004).

Notwithstanding this ongoing dynamic and contested engagement with Aboriginal communities, much of the practice of consulting archaeologists remains static and positioned within a processual scientific methodology. Consultants have become 'the recorders of places and landscapes that are to be destroyed or damaged, rather than drivers of, or at least partners in, conservation and research' (Brown 2008:25). Compliance archaeology in Western Australia thus sits firmly on the uncomfortable horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, consultant archaeologists are expected to act as scientists and produce knowledge within the western scientific paradigm. But, on the other hand, consultants are required to communicate effectively about the interpretation of their results with clients, including both Aboriginal communities and a range of other organisations such as mining companies, government agencies and so forth. The discourse they are expected to employ undermines that very communication. The scientific paradigm tends to depersonalise and dehumanise what is in essence a very human narrative. Archaeological data is inherently complex and difficult to interpret (Gero 2007). But this uncertainty and ambiguity undermines the ability of consultants to present their results with authority within a scientific paradigm. Conclusions that can be drawn with 'certainty' are often trivial. The resulting failure to tell effective stories about the past has real consequences for decisions about the preservation, salvage and destruction of the archaeological record as this narrative directly relates to the communication of significance.

We illustrate this dilemma by reflecting on the implications of alternative accounts of CB08-500, a rock shelter in Niyaparli country in the inland Pilbara region of Western Australia (Figure 1, Figure 2). These different perspectives on this particular site have clear implications for the practice of consultants in assessing site significance as part of the compliance process. Such assessments in turn have consequences for the development of recommendations, and hence management decisions about preservation or destruction of Aboriginal heritage places.



Figure 1 CB08-500: general view

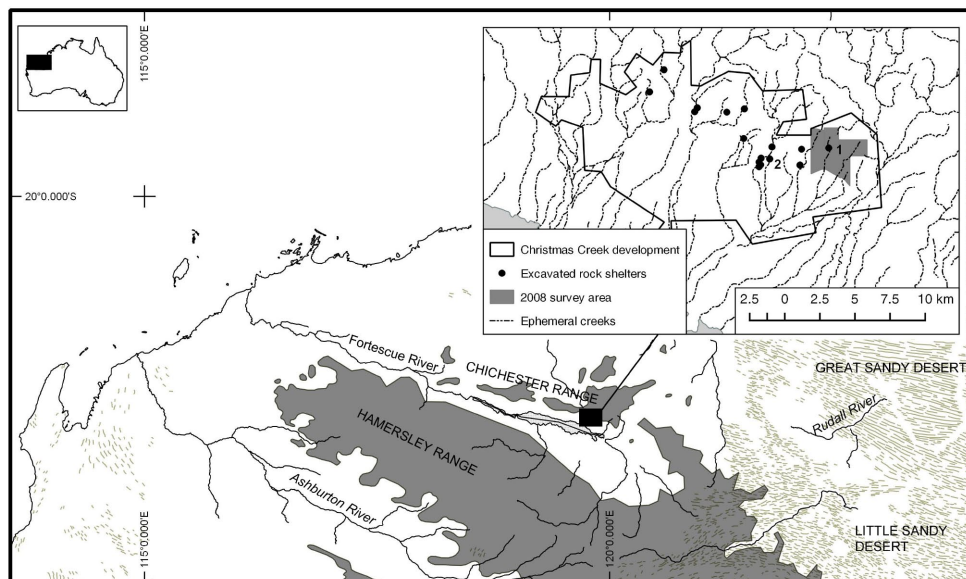


Figure 2 Pilbara region, Western Australia. Inset: Christmas Creek Development Area, showing the 2008 initial mining and waste dump priority survey area and all excavated rock shelters. 1: CB08-500. 2: Kakutungutanta (CB10-93)

2. CB08-500

CB08-500 was identified and recorded as part of heritage compliance field work associated with the development of Fortescue Metals Group's (FMG) Cloudbreak and Christmas Creek iron ore mines in the foothills of the eastern Chichester Range (Hook et al 2008). Archae-aus was the principal archaeological consulting firm engaged by FMG for this development project to conduct surveys and test excavations, provide advice about archaeological significance and carry out the salvage of archaeological remains where necessary. The compliance work associated with the Cloudbreak and Christmas Creek development involved comprehensive survey of about 430 km² along the Chichester Range escarpment between 2006 and 2015, during which Archae-aus recorded more than 2000 archaeological sites, mostly surface artefact scatters, and excavated 19 rock shelters (Figure 2).

Now destroyed, CB08-500 was a large west-facing rock shelter in stable banded iron formation conglomerate along the eastern slope of a shallow north-south oriented gully. An ephemeral creek running the length of the gully was located about 3 m from the shelter. There were several small rock holes immediately north of the site. The shelter measured about 4 m high at the drip line and the floor area within the drip line was 16 m deep by 7 m wide (about 53 m²). Surface artefacts within the shelter included flakes, cores and a top grinding stone, and there was a small associated surface scatter of flakes on a gravel terrace about 20 m to the north.

Following depth probes, two test pits were excavated to determine the archaeological potential of the deposit. Square 1 (1 x 1 m) was located close to the drip line in the densest concentration of surface artefacts and was excavated to bedrock (about 25 cm below surface). Square 2 (0.5 x 0.5 m) was placed about 5 m away in the interior of the shelter close to the south wall. Bedrock was encountered at 19 cm below surface. The sediments comprised fine gravel in a matrix of fine, dark brown degraded banded iron formation sediment. Two stratigraphic units (SU) and one feature were identified during excavation of Square 1. The upper 10–15 cm included plant remains and macropod scats (SU1). Beneath this, SU2 was finer and looser than SU1 with less gravel. The deposits were acid throughout (pH 4.5–5). A substantial feature comprising loose dark brown sediment, rich in charcoal, was noted in the south-west quadrant 15–20 cm below surface. Much of the charcoal was relatively large and a piece of burnt wood was found at the base of the feature. This feature was interpreted as a hearth, or series of hearths, on the basis of the quantity and localised distribution of charcoal. Three charcoal samples

from the feature were submitted for radiocarbon determination. All three returned median calibrated dates less than 300 years old, with substantial overlap between the ranges. The deposits in Square 2 comprised degraded macropod scats, gravel and small amounts of scattered charcoal within a fine and loose matrix. A single large piece of charred wood was found *in situ* at the base of the excavation. This was sent for radiocarbon determination and returned a median date of 1452 cal BP.

Very little cultural material was recovered from Square 2, but Square 1 yielded a rich flaked stone assemblage. This comprised 391 flaked stone artefacts, 194 from the 6 mm sieve fraction and the remainder from a sample of the 3 mm sieve fraction. A range of raw materials was represented, though most artefacts were manufactured from banded iron formation (BIF), chert and mudstone. The assemblage mostly consisted of flakes. One BIF single platform core, two adze slugs (one BIF tula adze and one chert non-tula adze) and one undiagnostic retouched chert flake were also salvaged.

Organic material, including plant remains, macropod scats and insect remains, was found throughout the deposits but was most common in the upper four excavation units. A small amount of highly fragmented bone from small mammals and lizards was also recovered. None was diagnostic and none burnt.

The results from Square 1 suggest a single relatively brief occupation dating to the last 500 years. The results from Square 2 are difficult to interpret because the test pit was so small and yielded very little cultural material. The radiocarbon date from this square may indicate an earlier occupation episode.

2.1 Archaeological narrative

The consulting report about CB08-500 provides a conventional archaeological account set within the context of a heritage assessment of the initial mining and waste dump area at Christmas Creek, conducted in 2008. This involved field survey that identified 13 Aboriginal archaeological sites and 59 isolated artefacts. This particular report documents eight of these sites, including the test excavation of CB08-500 (Hook et al 2008). The report is firmly situated within the Western scientific tradition. This begins with the names assigned to the sites documented in the report. These are clearly related to the formal cataloguing and recording procedures practiced by Archae-Aus and FMG. The naming convention is arbitrary in the sense that it uses a code to designate the site in relation to the project, year of identification and order of identification within the year. This naming practice is standard in large-scale archaeological projects, largely for practical reasons (Burke & Smith, 2004:83–84).

However, the convention also serves to position sites within a scientific knowledge system. This naming style is undoubtedly impersonal and can alienate non-specialists.

Also, the site name arguably carries meaning within the current compliance framework; the use of a code rather than a name signals that the site is relatively unimportant. In Western Australia, Aboriginal archaeological sites identified in the course of compliance work, and deemed to be of particular significance and importance, are often given new names, in consultation with Aboriginal communities, to replace the impersonal codes. The main criterion for determining significance in the Pilbara region is antiquity. More than 70 rock shelters have been excavated as a result of resource developments in the inland Pilbara since the 1980s. Most remain completely unpublished or published only as preliminary reports (Smith 2013:87–88, 139–143). Generally, sites that provide evidence of Pleistocene occupation, and thus relate to the overarching research themes of colonisation of the Australian continent and responses to the climatic changes of the Last Glacial Maximum (LGM), are those recommended for further excavation or are considered worthy of publication.

In the Christmas Creek-Cloudbreak development area, the only archaeological site given a name in this way is Kakutungutanta (CB10-93) (Figure 2). The test pit in this particular shelter yielded a Pleistocene date (Dias & Rapley 2013, 2014). Some Australian heritage agencies do offer advice about appropriate naming conventions for heritage sites. In Victoria, for example, the Office of Aboriginal Affairs requires that sites must be named with reference to geographical location in order to situate the place (Aboriginal Affairs Victoria 2008:8), but the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in Western Australia (DAA), the agency responsible for administering the state's Aboriginal Heritage Act currently provides no advice of this kind.

The report to the client conforms to a standard structure of scientific reporting, set down by DAA (Hook et al 2008:2). It follows a standard and familiar format characteristic of general science writing that emphasises 'factual reporting' (Department of Aboriginal Affairs nd; Smith & Burke 2007). This includes a description of location, physical characteristics of the site and methods of excavation, followed by a presentation of the results of excavation—stratigraphy, radiocarbon dates, cultural material, non-cultural material—for each square in turn. Finally, there is a concluding discussion and significance assessment.

The fieldwork report is also positioned within a scientific frame of reference in its use of language and the data presentation style, primarily tables and graphs. Language used throughout is detached, and personalisation is rare

and confined to specific contexts. Several of the general photographs include members of the survey team (Niyiyaparli representatives and archaeologists), identified by name. However, of 12 photographs in the section of the report that describes CB08-500, only two include a person, in both cases unnamed (Figure 3, top left); the rest are technical photographs showing the excavation in progress, the section and artefacts. The report also lists by name all participants in the field work, processing of results and report writing, and indicates their roles (Hook et al 2008: 2–3).

The conclusion (Hook et al 2008:40–41) emphasises CB08-500's late Holocene date and the expedient use of local raw material:

Given the expedient reduction of cores at this site, the low artefact variability and the moderate lithological diversity this site is interpreted as a short term satellite habitation site which was utilised post 1600 cal BP. The major activities identified in the assemblage include core reduction, artefact manufacture and wood working. (Hook et al 2008:40)

The report considered two criteria for assessment of archaeological significance: representativeness, and the potential for data collected from CB08-500 to address archaeological research questions. The assessment highlighted that CB08-500 was then the first shelter to be excavated in the Chichester Range and that rock shelters are a comparatively rare site type—most sites in the region are surface artefact scatters. However, the site was otherwise regarded as typical within a local and regional context. The archaeological research questions most often discussed for the Pilbara focus on antiquity, change through time and a range of specific regional research questions (Hook et al 2008:24–25). These include the timing and process of initial colonisation, whether occupation of the Chichester Ranges continued through the LGM, the timing of the appearance of the small tool tradition, whether there is evidence of change through time in the Holocene, and specifically late Holocene increases in population, site numbers or technological complexity. As CB08-500 was a single period occupation dating to the late Holocene, it lacked relevance to these sorts of questions. The report also noted that the data collected during the test excavation could contribute to a range of research questions focussing on land use. These primarily concerned hypotheses about how Aboriginal peoples oriented their settlement and subsistence, with particular emphasis on levels of mobility, and how these are reflected in the attributes of archaeological assemblages (Hook et al 2008: 25; Veth 1993). The final assessment of significance for CB08-500 was 'moderate' (Hook et al 2008:41). In the event of an application to disturb the site, no further archaeological investigation was deemed necessary.

2.2 *Community narrative*

We developed an alternative account of CB08-500 for an illustrated community book about sites in Niyiyaparli country (Niyiyaparli Community et al 2015), funded by FMG and the Australian Commonwealth Government. The book is aimed primarily at the Niyiyaparli community and school children, and focuses on Aboriginal connection to place. It is divided into three main sections, which discuss Niyiyaparli connection with their country, the history of this connection, and different ways of understanding place. These sections are interspersed with accounts of individual ‘special places’ illustrating aspects of these connections. CB08-500 is one of these ‘special places’.

This account of CB08-500 invites the reader to imagine life at this place in the past. It draws on specific pieces of excavated archaeological evidence and speculates on connections between CB08-500 and recent historical events.

In 2008 archaeologists and Niyiyaparli conducting a heritage survey in the Chichester Range found a large and spacious rock shelter, which they called CB08-500.

There were rock holes full of water close by and snappy gums provided extra shade outside the shelter. They found stone artefacts on the floor of the shelter, including part of a broken millstone (matharra).

When the team excavated the floor deposits they discovered the remains of a fireplace (karla). They sent pieces of charcoal from the fire for radiocarbon dating. This showed that people had camped in the shelter sometime in the 1800s. Maybe the Niyiyaparli who camped here saw Gregory’s exploring party passing through their country in 1861.

More than 300 artefacts were found in the excavation. Most of these were the waste flakes from making stone tools. The deposits were carefully sieved to find even the tiniest flakes. Finding many very tiny flakes shows that people spent time at the site making stone tools.

The team found two worn out wood working adzes in the same level at the site. One of the adzes was made from grey chert. Close by were several grey chert flakes which could have come from resharpening the adze. Finding finished stone tools rather than waste is unusual in excavations in the Pilbara.

There were only a few fragments of unidentified bone found in the excavation. Like other rock shelters in the Chichester Range, the deposits were very acid and so bone and other organic material was not preserved.

We can imagine a family camping at the shelter about 200 years ago. As they rested around the camp fire, some of the men spent their time wood working. One of the men resharpened the stone blade of his adze, but found that it was too worn to stay in its handle. Perhaps he carried a spare adze flake with him or perhaps he made a new one on the spot. He then replaced the stone blade and threw away the worn out adze flake.

Places like CB08-500 are special to the Niyiyaparli because they show how their ancestors once lived in the land.

(Niyiyaparli Community et al 2015:44–45)

This narrative draws on some aspects of the site that are not strongly highlighted in the original report, including the intact hearth feature and the tight chronological structure of the site, which suggests occupation over a relatively brief period.

The narrative begins with the discovery and naming of CB08-500 by the field team consisting of both Niyiyaparli people and archaeologists. The brief description of the site when the survey team found it highlights the features that make it an attractive living space (shelter, shade and water), as well as signs of past occupation—stone artefacts, including a millstone (Figure 3).

It continues by referring to the meaning of other finds highlighted in the formal site description—a fireplace, the presence of tiny flakes, worn out adzes, flakes that may be the result of adze resharpening. Through these finds the reader

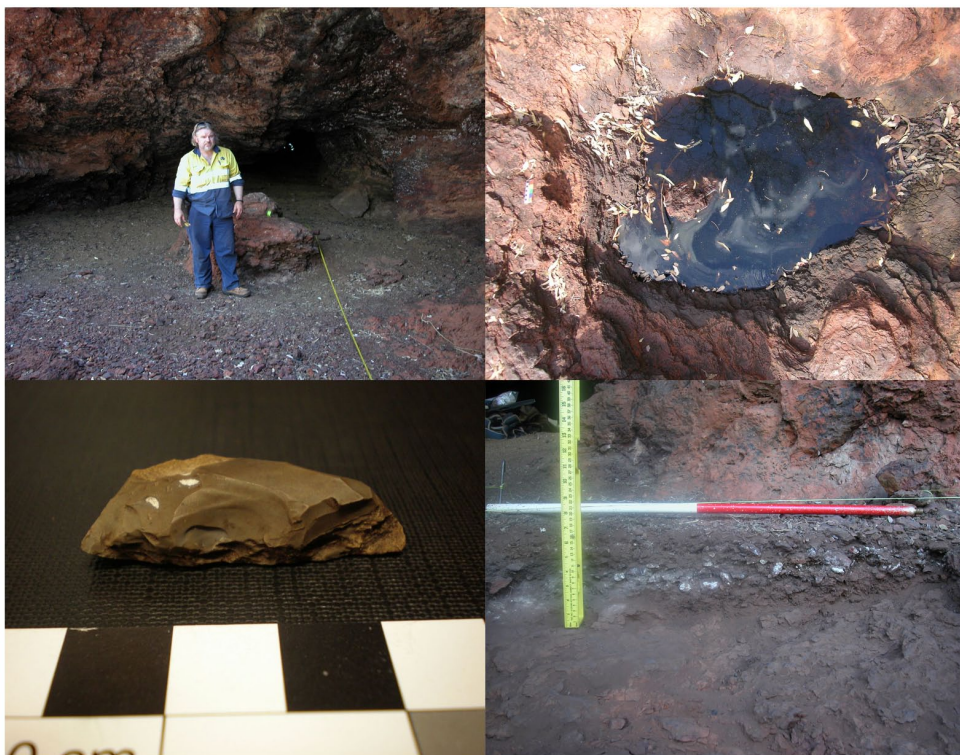


Figure 3 Clockwise from top left. General view of rock shelter interior. Rock hole near the site. Hearth feature visible in section. Adze slug.

is invited to imagine a snapshot of life at the site—a vignette of a family, a camp fire, men working wood, and one man trying to resharpen the stone adze blade mounted on his spear thrower, but finding it was too worn and throwing it away.

The *karla*, or fireplace, serves to position this vignette in time. The median calibrated dates for this feature range from AD 1653 to 1838, while the 68% probability distributions range from AD 1513 to modern. The actual date could therefore be sometime in the 1800s. This invites speculation about connections between the place, and the people living there, with broader historical narratives. The Western Australian coast was well known to East India Company ships from the early seventeenth century, with the first documented European landfall in 1616. The colony of Western Australia was established by the British in 1829. Sealers, whalers and pearlers were active along the Pilbara coast by the mid-nineteenth century. FT Gregory led an expedition to the inland Pilbara in 1861 in search of pastoral country. Gregory passed through Niyaparli country and encountered Niyaparli people near the Fortescue Marsh (Gregory & Gregory 1884:63). It is possible, therefore, that the Niyaparli who camped at CB08-500 also saw Gregory's exploring party.

2.3 Niyaparli narrative

Aboriginal people in the Pilbara region, including the Niyaparli, generally view archaeological sites as indicating their connection to country and providing information about how their ancestors lived in the land:

Our archaeological sites are extremely important to all our members. They are physical representations of where our ancestors lived their lives. We appreciate that there are a great many archaeological sites in the lands of our members. Many of these are artefact scatters, though there are also substantial rock shelter deposits and other sites, which illustrate the length and significance of our members' connection to their land. (Gumula Aboriginal Corporation 2012)

The Niyaparli Elders consulted about the site prior to excavation described it as 'just a place where people shelter', but considered it of high cultural significance because of the likely presence of archaeological material (Day & McDonald 2008:20–21). Niyaparli think of archaeological sites as indicating a physical embodiment of a connection to their country (Niyaparli Community et al 2015:34). More generally, the Niyaparli narrative about archaeological sites is thereby a part of the story of their ongoing connection to country. The community book provides the final explanation for the reader about why CB08-500—and other sites like it—are 'special places'.

3. Discussion

Our comparison of different accounts of CB08-500 exposes the deficiencies in the conventional archaeological narratives that archaeologists commonly use to interpret sites for clients and the wider public. Moreover, it raises substantive issues about how archaeological sites are assessed during the site registration process under Western Australia's Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972. Why do consultant archaeologists working in the Pilbara, the mining companies developing the Pilbara and the government heritage managers regularly prioritise research relating to antiquity and change over questions concerning continuity and the recent past? This is particularly problematic when it is clear that Traditional Owners may well have a more tangible and direct link to recent sites than sites assessed by archaeologists as more significant in scientific terms based on their age. Also, why are sites like CB08-500, with relatively rich assemblages and high resolution, not more frequently investigated and preserved? Such sites have considerable potential for fine-grained investigation at a scale more comparable to the ethnographic than is usual in Pilbara rock shelters.

Western Australia is a sparsely populated state that comprises a third of Australia's land mass. It has received relatively little archaeological research attention and much of the state remains archaeologically unknown. Archaeological investigations in the mineral-rich Pilbara region have, over the last 30 years, overwhelmingly occurred in the context of development associated with resource extraction, and focused on basic site documentation rather than analysis. More than 70 rock shelters have been excavated in the inland Pilbara. Most are small with sparse assemblages, and few have been studied in any detail or published. Fifteen shelters have firm evidence for Pleistocene occupation (Smith 2013; Morse et al 2014). Little effort has been applied to regional archaeological synthesis, so archaeological significance assessments are typically narrow in focus. Questions of antiquity and, particularly, the overarching archaeological narratives about the colonisation of the continent, the impact of environmental change on human groups, particularly the LGM, and mid-Holocene changes in technology and social organisation dominate academic research agendas and thus the criteria on which Aboriginal heritage conservation or loss turn. Unfortunately, and as one might expect, most sites in the Pilbara cannot address these overarching narratives. Most are undated surface artefact scatters with a relatively short and recent history of occupation, not unlike the cultural remains at CB08-500. These qualities inevitably lead to an assessment of low archaeological significance in the Western Australia Aboriginal site registration framework.

In the Pilbara, there are strong economic and political incentives to assess sites as low significance so they are not perceived as obstacles to development. In the last few years, increasing numbers of sites reported have not been registered and numerous registered sites have been reassessed and deregistered (Dortch & Sapienza 2016). While deregistration of sacred sites has been successfully challenged in the Supreme Court (*Robinson v Fielding* [2015] WASC 108), many if not most of the archaeological sites in Western Australia are vulnerable to deregistration. The current practice in Western Australia is usually to conduct anthropological and archaeological surveys separately. Traditional Owners are routinely represented on archaeological survey teams, but usually by junior members of the community rather than more knowledgeable elders. Elders may be consulted about archaeological sites, previously identified by archaeological survey teams, in the course of ethnographic surveys or on the basis of reports. Often consultation about the significance of archaeological sites to Aboriginal people might not occur unless the developer intends to prepare an application to disturb or destroy them. This practice promotes an artificial distinction between archaeological and ethnographic sites. Many ethnographic sites have archaeological elements as well, while Traditional Owners commonly recognise archaeological sites as evidence of connection with country, as we have noted. Considering archaeological sites separately undervalues the connections Traditional Owners may have with these places, as well as undermining the possibilities for improved understanding and interpretation opened up by fully incorporating the perspectives and insights of traditional owners (Clarke 1983).

What other narratives might sites like CB08-500 offer? The vignette of a past way of life that we have presented connects past and present and highlights the personal and the individual. This perspective has the advantage of connecting people and place. In fact, the narrative commonly used by consultants in the region does attempt to make some of these connections through identifications of functional site types at an ethnographic scale. Thus, CB08-500 can be characterised as a 'short term satellite habitation site', while other sites are categorised as, for example, 'task specific site', 'reduction area', 'multi-task habitation site', 'low intensity occupation camp site', 'ephemeral camp site'. These categorisations emphasise uniformity and similarity between sites, as well as giving the impression that there is no further information that can be obtained from them. However, many, even most, sites are probably nothing of the sort. Rather they are palimpsests of many individual events, or even concentrations of stone artefacts that have been exposed by natural rather than cultural processes. Such sites should be analysed, interpreted and assessed in terms of their relations to one another and to the landscape of which they are

a part, rather than as discrete entities. The appropriate narrative here is not at an ethnographic scale at all, but describes long-term patterns of Aboriginal connections to country (Allen et al 2008).

In the Pilbara consultant archaeologists therefore use an 'ethnographic' narrative for sites that cannot possibly be interpreted in such terms. Indeed this ploy undermines any scientific value sites may have. In this context, CB08-500 is significant precisely because of the fine-grained evidence of a relatively brief episode of occupation that can be interpreted within an ethnographic frame of reference. However, sites like CB08-500, which could be linked to such a narrative, are routinely assessed as moderate to low significance, largely because they are recent in date and therefore relatively common. This assessment implies that there is no value in further investigation or comprehensive recording of such a site in the event of an application to destroy it. The Aboriginal Heritage Act, as currently interpreted, requires sites to meet a relatively high threshold of scientific significance, not to mention importance to the State of Western Australia, before being placed on the DAA Site Register. The criteria deployed expose the conventional archaeological narrative as wanting.

Our alternative narrative makes sense of CB08-500 by connecting the past to the present, and then to the future. It is grounded in the archaeological evidence, extrapolating from individual pieces of information to build a story and then to people the place. Highlighting both the Nyiyaparli connection to country and the intersection between Nyiyaparli and non-Aboriginal people draws attention to heritage values focused not on antiquity but on the quality and preservation of the record. It also actively demonstrates the relevance of our recent past, and heritage conservation for that matter, within an environment where there is a strong demand for economic growth.

The response to the community book from which this narrative is drawn has been overwhelmingly positive (Ross 2016). Telling an engaging story brings people together in a sensible discourse about important social values, barely represented in West Australian Aboriginal site assessments. We suggest that developing ways to incorporate imaginative narratives into more conventional forms of archaeological reporting offers an effective way for public archaeologists to communicate a broader range of values to clients and the wider community.

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