

Telling Better Stories about Aboriginal Archaeological heritage in WA

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Abstract

The management of WA's Aboriginal archaeological heritage understandably focuses on sites. It is a long held convention when describing, assessing and protecting the State's fragile Indigenous heritage. It has conveniently established the basis for where development can proceed – pretty much the 'white spots' in between sites.

Current state government heritage protocols and procedures take this notion to an extreme level. The occurrence of unambiguous Aboriginal cultural remains is no longer deemed important and worthy of recording. Now, sites must attain a state level significance to be registered and preserved under the Aboriginal Heritage Act 1992. Moreover, archaeologists are commonly expected to make this assessment in the field and 'move on' without recording sites that will not meet these criteria.

Logically, the result is clear. There 'really' are very few Aboriginal archaeological places in West Australia. Moreover, future surveys will come to the same conclusion.

This paper reports on a compliance archaeology case study from the Pilbara. The results suggest that understanding the archaeological record would be better served by a shift of focus from site to locality and the adoption of a cultural landscape approach.

Tweetable Summary

Reframing the Aboriginal archaeological narrative overcomes WA government attitudes to heritage conservation.

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