

Warning: the following presentation contains names and images of Aboriginal peoples now deceased

Domesticity on the frontier: An investigation of daily life at a Queensland Native Mounted Police Camp

Leanne Bateman
PhD Candidate



Archaeology of the Native Mounted Police project -
Dr Lynley Wallis,
Professor Bryce Barker,
Associate Professor Heather Burke,
Dr Noeline Cole,
Dr Kelsey Lowe and the
Rinyuru Aboriginal Corporation



Native Police Camp, officers' quarters, Lower Herbert (Cairns Historical Society, Neg. P15/P15979)

Introduction

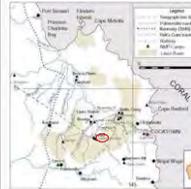
- Australian archaeological research - pastoral industry, missions, early settlements and frontier violence in the form of potential massacre sites
- Some similarities in the experiences of Aboriginal troopers and Aboriginal women residing at NMP camps, with those of Aboriginal people who were interred in institutions elsewhere.
- Comparisons for the study - archaeological excavations at Boralga and historical evidence relating to Native Police life in the form of photographs, maps and archival records



Native Police Barracks
Herbert River
(Cairns Historical Society,
Neg. P12/P12782)

Boralga

- The Boralga Native Police Camp is located on the floodplain of the Laura River within the Lakefield National Park, 140 km west-south-west of Cooktown



Map of the research area, cited in Cole (2004)



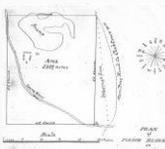
Laura River
Photograph (Bateman 2016)



Historic plan of Cook district, 1883
(Queensland State Archives, A/41367)

Boralga

- Early maps drawn by sub-inspector Stanhope O'Connor in 1877 show the Police Reserve on the Laura River to cover an area of 238.5 acres (96.5 hectares)
- Abundant material remains, with the majority of artefacts associated with building remnants and features



O'Connor's plan of the Police Reserve
Laura River, 1877
(Queensland State Archives, A/40117)



Examples of surface finds at Boralga
Photographs (Bateman 2016)

The domestic space

- The negotiation of shared domestic space - isolation, adjusting to domestic life, power inequalities, economic disparities and the maintenance of cultural identities
- Pressure to conform was comparable to mission objectives - co-opting Aboriginal people into European agendas regarding NMP recruitment tactics



Cooktown NMP Station, c1880



Detachment of the NMP, Cardwell
(Cairns Historical Society Neg. P12/P12782)

The domestic space

- The intent of the NMP was military - the system of organisation was primarily directed at single men amongst whom discipline had to be enforced
- This included wearing and upkeeping uniforms, and living in a very European-ordered and regulated spatial setting



Native Police Camp at Lower Laura, 1890
(Queensland State Library, Neg. 66439)



Native Mounted Police at Lower Laura Camp, 1890's
(Cairns Historical Society Neg. P/8/P/8275)

The domestic space

- Aboriginal women dressed in their 'best' show that European discipline extended to them as well
- Historic photographs show Aboriginal women and children living in what appears to be a serene domestic setting at the Borlaga NMP camp.
- It is not known exactly how they came to be there or what their role was



Native Police troopers and their wives outside their bark huts at Borlaga NMP camp, 1881
(Qld Police Museum, Neg. PM5691)

The domestic space

- Aboriginal troopers involved in more stable relationships were occasionally allowed to have their partners reside with them at police camps



1898-99 ration cash book for the Cooktown NMP listing Aboriginal troopers, women and children residing at the camp
Photograph (Burke 2017)



Black Tracker Carving and his wife at Boulia, 1902
(Qld Police Museum, Neg. PM01121)



1898-99 ration cash book for the Cooktown NMP camp referring to disciplinary action against tracker Tommy
Photograph (Burke 2017)

The domestic space

Letter from Walter E. Roth, Northern Protector of Aborigines, to the Under Secretary from the Home Department in 1903 discussing the distribution of food rations:

Gins of native troopers have never been taken into account in the recruitment or engagement under police regulation any more than the wives of any white man recruited for general police. Aboriginals when recruited are generally single, and cannot at any time be said to be 'married'. They annex and discard gins at pleasure and no sort of police control over the women has ever been authorised.



Roth, WE, 1903, Letter to the Under Secretary Home Department 05/02/1903 (Queensland State Archives, ID87382)

The domestic space

Roth virtually accuses the NMP of captivity
Stating that:

As far as my experience goes the presence of these 'gins' in the police camps is a convenience for the constable (married or single) in charge: they practically work without wages as servants for him, and without his paying for their keep.



Mary at Laura with Policeman Daniel Fitzgibbon's children, Constance and Ned
(Queensland State Library, Neg. 151978)



Roth, WE, 1903, Letter to the Under Secretary Home Department 05/02/1903 (Queensland State Archives, ID87382)

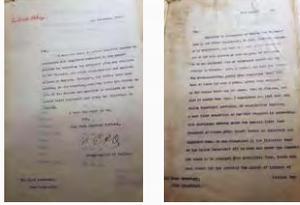
The domestic space

The contribution of these women to the successful running of NMP camps was undeniable, as expressed in a letter written in 1866 by an officer stationed at the Norman River NMP camp:

I have the honor to request that this Detachment may be allowed continuous rations for gins. There is no hunting ground for them now that the surrounding country is all occupied by stock. The ration allowed for troopers is inadequate for themselves and gins. I must draw your attention to the fact that this is the only station in the district that has not been allowed continuous rations for gins. The wood and water has to be carried by them some considerable distance and they are constantly employed in keeping up a supply of each. [QSA Item ID 290524 Administrative file, police, Police Stations - Norman River]

The domestic space

- Issues demonstrated in the correspondence between the Police Commissioner, David Thompson Seymour, Walter E Roth and the Under Secretary in 1902-03, when discussing ration cut-backs for Aboriginal women within NMP camps
- The absolution of responsibility for Aboriginal women is indicative of attitudes as late as 1903



Rosh, WE, 1902-1903, letter to the Under Secretary Home Department 04/11/1902-22/01/1903, (Queensland State Archives ID87382)

The domestic space

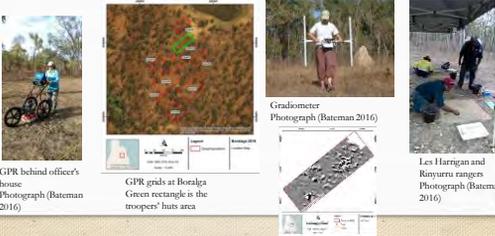
- The archival information has prompted the faunal analysis carried out on bone recovered from the troopers' huts area at trench 7
- By identifying the principal taxa, this analysis explores the prospect of insufficient food rationing and self-provisioning at Boralga



Mary (servant girl who came with the Fitzgibbons), Rosy and Mr Kennedy (possibly an inspector) at Laura in the 1900s (Queensland State Archives, Neg. 131976)

Methods

- Geophysics, including ground penetrating radar and magnetometry were used
- A metal detector was also used to locate metal items and establish patterns in the discard of material culture beneath the surface
- Twenty trenches were identified and excavated by hand, using the single context system



GPR behind officer's house Photograph (Bateman 2016)

GPR grids at Boralga Green rectangle is the troopers' huts area

Gradiometer Photograph (Bateman 2016)

Les Harrigan and Rinyuru rangers Photograph (Bateman 2016)

Methods

- The majority of trenches began with one or two 1m x1m squares
- The trench pertinent to this paper is trench 7, or the troopers' huts area
- Trench 7 was identified from photographs, surface material, geophysics and metal detector information.



Native Police troopers and their wives outside their bark huts at Boralga NMP camp, 1881 (Qld Police Museum, Neg. PMS691)

Trench 7, trooper's hut area at Boralga photograph (Bateman 2016)

Trench 7

A wide variety of artefacts was recovered from trench 7, including:

- 454 g of knapped glass
- knapped stone
- clay pipe stems and bowls
- various militaria such as a musket ball
- 4 brass foil cartridge cases with base discs still attached from Martini-Henry or Snider rifle cartridge cases
- 3 lead projectiles
- 5 revolver cartridges
- 2 small pinfire cartridges
- 1 larger pinfire cartridge
- melted lead
- military snake clasp belt buckle
- and 4 military buttons with the VR cipher



Trench 7

- Two post holes were uncovered as well as a campfire or cooking area as demonstrated by the variety of burnt bone and associated charcoal
- The soil, which was mostly compacted sandy loam, was sieved through 4 mm gauge mesh
- Artefact deposits recovered from within and immediately surrounding the troopers' huts area were less than 30 cm deep
- The majority of bone came from squares 3 and 5



Trench 7, square 1, south wall showing cut and fill with post hole on the right. Photograph (Barker 2016)



Trench 7, square 5, cast baulk showing post hole Photograph (Barker 2016)



Charcoal sample from trench 7, square 5

Table 1: Summary of faunal weights for trench 7 in grams - Total bone weight = 824 grams

Class or Taxon	Wt. bone identified to class level	Wt. bone identified to taxon level	Wt. unidentified bone	% of Tot. bone Wt.	% Domestic	% Native
Mammal	156.7				?	?
Bird	2.0					0.24
Fish	2.0					0.24
Tot. Wt. bone class level	181.2			21.99		0.48
Mammal		37.7				4.57
Kangaroo or Wallaby (Macropod)		8.4			1.02	
Cow		1.1				0.13
Mammal		0.5				0.06
Possum		0.3				0.03
Rat		0.3				0.03
Reptile						
Snake						
Tot. Wt. bone taxon level		48.0		5.82	1.02	4.79
Tot. Wt. unidentified bone			594.9	72.12	?	?

Results

- The total weight of bone removed from trench 7 was 824 g
- Of the bone removed, 741 g or around 90% was not well preserved as it was burnt or calcined, or small and fragmented
- Around 595 g or 72% of the bone was non-diagnostic
- Four small pieces of bone appeared to be cut through rather than broken
- Only 22% of the bone could be identified to a class level, and most of this, (19%) was mammal bone
- The bird and fish would most likely have been native, making up around 5% of the overall assemblage



Calcined and fragmented bone



Example of bone possibly cut



Most mammal bone - unable to positively separate into domestic or native categories

Results

- Around 7% was identified to a taxon level, making it possible to divide the bone into domestic and native categories
- The domestic category contained 1% bovine and just over 6% native taxon after the bird and fish bone was incorporated
- Included in the native category were bones and teeth belonging to macropods such as kangaroo and wallaby, snake, represented by vertebrae, the jawbone of a possum which is most likely the common brushtail possum or *Trichosurus vulpecula*, and the mandible of a bush rat which is most likely *Rattus fuscipes*
- In addition, 1.5 g of fresh water mussel shell with evidence of burning was also recovered



Distal end of a wallaby humerus



Snake vertebrae



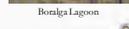
Possum mandible



Bush rat mandible



Fresh water mussel shell



Boralga Lagoon

Interpretation

- The faunal assemblage demonstrates that a portion of their diet consisted of traditional foods hunted and gathered for their own consumption
- Although agency and the decision to maintain cultural practice should be considered, the evidence supports the archival record which indicates that the Aboriginal troopers and women were self-provisioning possibly in order to survive within the Boralga NMP camp

Trench 7 at Boralga
Photograph (Bateman 2016)

References

- Brown, S, Avery, S, Goulding, M 2002, Recent investigations at the Ebenezer Mission cemetery. In *After Captain Cook: The Archaeology of the recent indigenous past in Australia*, Harrison R and Williamson C (eds) 2002, pp. 147-170. Sydney University Archaeological Methods Series 8.
- Cole, N 2000, 'Laura: places of cultural and historical significance, recording stage 1', *Queensland community cultural heritage report initiatives program*, Environmental Protection agency, Brisbane.
- Cole, N 2004, 'Battle Camp to Boralga: a local study of colonial war on Cape York Peninsula, 1873-1894', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 28, pp. 156-188.
- Filios, M, & Blake, N 2006, *Animal bones in Australian archaeology: A field guide to common native and introduced species*, Sydney University Press, AU.
- Gibbs, M 2005, 'The archaeology of subsistence on the maritime frontier: Faunal analysis of Cheyne Beach Whaling Station', *Australian Historical Archaeology*.

- Gigurie, N 2008, Appendix 1, Weapons on the Frontier, pp. 421-422, in Burke, H, Morrison, M, and Smith, C, *The Archaeologist's Field Handbook*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, NSW.

- Harrison, R 2002, Shared histories and the archaeology of the pastoral industry of Australia. In *After Captain Cook: The archaeology of the recent indigenous past in Australia*, R, Harrison & C Williamson (eds) 2002, pp. 38-58, Sydney University Archaeological Methods Series 8.

- Lydon, J 2000, 'This civilizing experiment': Photography at Coranderrk Aboriginal Station during the 1860s. In *After Captain Cook: The Archaeology of the recent indigenous past in Australia*, Harrison R and Williamson C (eds) 2002, pp. 59-74. Sydney University Archaeological Methods Series 8.

- Queenslander*, 1872, 2 March, Brisbane.

- Raibmon, P 2003, 'Living on display: Colonial visions of aboriginal domestic spaces', *BC Studies*, no. 140.

- Richards, J 2008, *The Secret War: a true history of Queensland's Native Police*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Queensland.

- Roth, WE, 1905, Letter to the Under Secretary Home Department 05/02/1905, ID87382, Ration Cash Book, Native Police, QSA.

- Roth, WE, 1902-1903, Letter to the Under Secretary Home Department 04/11/1902-22/01/1903, ID87382, Ration Cash Book, Native Police, QSA.

- Rowland, M 2004, 'Myths and non-myths: Frontier 'massacres' in Australia's history – the Woppaburra of the Keppel Islands', *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol. 81, pp. 39-57.
- Skinner, I.E 1975, *Police of the Pastoral Frontier: Native Police 1849-59*, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, AU.
- Smith, P, Blau, S, Fitzpatrick, R, Pate, D with Thomas, M, Barny, G, Dril, S, Patrick, M, Thomas, R, Thomas, O, and Traditional Owners 2005, Forensic archaeology on the Kimberly frontier, Unpublished Paper, Presented at the *Australian Institute of Maritime Archaeology/Australian Archaeological Association Conference*, November 2005, Fremantle.
- Stuart, I 1997, 'Cultural landscapes as an analytical tool: Analysing squatting landscapes', *Historic Environment*, vol. 3 & 4, pp. 24-27.
- Triggs, B 2004, *Tracks, scats and other traces: A field guide to Australia mammals*, Oxford University Press, AU.
- Williamson, C 2002, Finding meaning in the patterns: The analysis of material culture from a contact site in Tasmania. In *After Captain Cook: The Archaeology of the recent indigenous past in Australia*, Harrison R and Williamson C (eds) 2002, pp. 74-101. Sydney University Archaeological Methods Series 8.
- Wallis, LA, Wright, R, Moffitt, I, Domert, K, and the Woolga Valley Aboriginal Corporation 2005, Investigating the Woolga Aboriginal Massacre site: Northwest Queensland, viewed 15/01/2017, <https://ehll.finders.edu.au/archaeology/department/research/woolga.php>