

Register of Historic Places and Objects

SHI Number
4671001

The PHA NSW Heritage Register

Item Name: **Brewarrina Fish Traps**

Location: **Brewarrina**

Address:

Corner:

Suburb / Nearest Town: Brewarrina

State: NSW

Local Govt Area: Local Government Area:
Brewarrina

DUAP Region:
Southern & Western

Historic region:
Western Plains

Property Identifier:

Boundary:

Item Type: Built

Group: Aboriginal

Category: Fish/eel trap

Owner:

Owner Codes:

Code 2:

Code 3:

Current Use: Fishing, meeting place, education, tourism

Former Uses: Fishing, meeting place, education

Assessed Significance:

Endorsed Significance:

Statement of Significance: The fish traps are significant because they are a rare example of Aboriginal fisheries which provide evidence of Aboriginal occupation and demonstrate a highly skilled fishing technique. They are outstanding because of their location on a bedrock outcrop in the Darling River, which permits rare geological exposure that could yield information about the landscape's history. That landscape has, in turn, influenced the location and construction of the fish traps and the fishing methods practised, which required an understanding of river hydrology and fish biology. They represent a distinctive way of life, rarely practised today, although the fact that current generations of Aboriginal children in the region fish the traps and know the stories surrounding them demonstrates a continuity of traditional ways of life, customs and techniques.

The fish traps are associated with important figures in Aboriginal culture and the stories surrounding their construction and use, together with art work depicting the traps, demonstrate the fish traps' association with and importance in Aboriginal culture and spirituality.

Historical Notes or Provenance: In traditional Aboriginal accounts the fish traps (ngunnhu) were built by Baiame and his two sons Booma-ooma-nowi and Ghinda-inda-mui during drought times when the Ngemba people faced famine as Gurrungga (the water hole at Brewarrina) dried up. Use of the fish traps was first documented by European settlers in the 1850's. Publications in the early 1900's were first to have detailed descriptions of the site and these descriptions are similar to the way the site looks today (NSW Heritage Office, State Heritage Inventory, 1999).

National Themes:

State Themes: Aboriginal pre-contact

Aboriginal post-contact

Environment

Fishing

Professional Historians Association (NSW) Inc

Date: 26/08/2001

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Item Name: **Brewarrina Fish Traps**

Location: **Brewarrina**

Townships

Study Themes:

Designer: Baime

Maker / Builder: Baime, Booma-ooma-nowi and Ghindi-inda-mui

Year Started:

Year Completed:

Circa: No

Physical Description: The fish traps are a complex arrangement of stone fish traps and walls, nearly half a kilometre in length. They are built on a rock bar in the Barwon River, a major tributary of the Darling River in Western NSW. The fisheries determined the location of the town of Brewarrina.

Physical Condition: The fish traps are currently in good condition. The curtilage is currently littered with rubbish and ways to improve this situation could be investigated.

Modification Dates: Rebuilding to some of the walls that had been neglected over time took place in 1996 by members of the Aboriginal community under a CDEP program.

Recommended Management:

Further Comments: Recommendations for management of the fish traps and its surrounds should always include members of the local Aboriginal community.

Historical Significance: (a) The fish traps provide evidence of Aboriginal occupation of the region and demonstrate traditional fishing techniques practised by the Aboriginal inhabitants before and after European contact. Recent generations of Aboriginal children in Brewarrina fish the traps and learn the stories associated with them, thereby demonstrating the continuity of traditional Aboriginal practices at this site.

The site demonstrates the way in which the natural landscape has influenced cultural practices, as the fish traps are built on a bedrock outcrop which is a rare geological exposure along the Darling River system. The location, structure and layout of the fisheries was based on an understanding of river hydrology and fish biology and demonstrates an engineering method no longer practised.

The fish traps are particularly significant to Aboriginal people as they are a physical representation of historical Aboriginal land ownership and traditional way of life.

(b) Aboriginal accounts of the origin of the fish traps indicate that they were associated with important figures in Aboriginal culture, namely Baime and his two sons, Booma-ooma-nowi and Ghinda-inda-mui, who built the fish traps during a drought when the Ngemba people faced famine as the water hole at Brewarrina had dried up.

The explanation of the fish traps' origin and the beliefs surrounding them is associated with Aboriginal philosophies and customs. This is demonstrated through story association and artwork featuring the fish traps across Western NSW.

The fish traps are associated with the spread of settlement and the development of townships as they determined the location of the town of Brewarrina.

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The traps are associated with the establishment of Aboriginal reserves and changes in land ownership as their social and spiritual value to the Aboriginal population led to the establishment of the Aboriginal reserve which is now Aboriginal owned land.

Aesthetic Significance: The fish traps are significant for their technical, creative and design excellence as well as for innovation and technical achievement.

Social Significance: The fish traps are an essential landmark in the present Aboriginal community's sense of place. They are valued by the community as a highly visible symbol of traditional life and land ownership. They also have strong spiritual associations for the Aboriginal community.

Technical / Research: The fish traps have the potential to yield information about the design and engineering methods used in their construction. They also have the potential to demonstrate traditional Aboriginal practices.

The bedrock outcrop on which the fisheries are built is a rare geological exposure which has the potential to yield information about the history of the landscape.

Representativeness:

Rare Assessment: The fish traps at Brewarrina are the best example of a rock fish trap in NSW. Of the 4 other fish traps recorded in NSW, 3 are only exposed in extreme drought conditions and are almost completely eroded.

The traps provide evidence of an activity which is rarely practised by Aboriginal people today.

Integrity / Intactness:

References:	Author:	Title:	Year:
	Dargin, Peter	Aboriginal Fisheries of the Darling Barwon Rivers	1976
	Hope, Jeanette & Vines, Gary	Brewarrina Aboriginal Fisheries Conservation Plan	1994
	National Parks and Wildlife Service	Aboriginal Burials of the Brewarrina Region	1999
	NSW Heritage Office	State Heritage Inventory	

Studies:

Listings:	Name:	Title:	Number:	Date:
	Heritage Act - State Heritage Register		01413	11/08/00
	Register of the National Estate			21/10/80

Custom Field One:

Custom Field Two: Rosemary Kerr of Sue Rosen & Associates, Heritage Assessment And History

Custom Field Three: 28/08/2000

Custom Field Four:

Custom Field Five:

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Item Name: **Brewarrina Fish Traps**

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Custom Field Six:

Data Entry:

Date First Entered:

Date Updated: 26/08/2001

Status: Completed