

An Analysis of Narungga Fish Traps on Yorke Peninsula, South Australia

by Adrian Mollenmans, Amy Roberts, Jeffrey Newchurch, Quenten Agius and Peter Turner



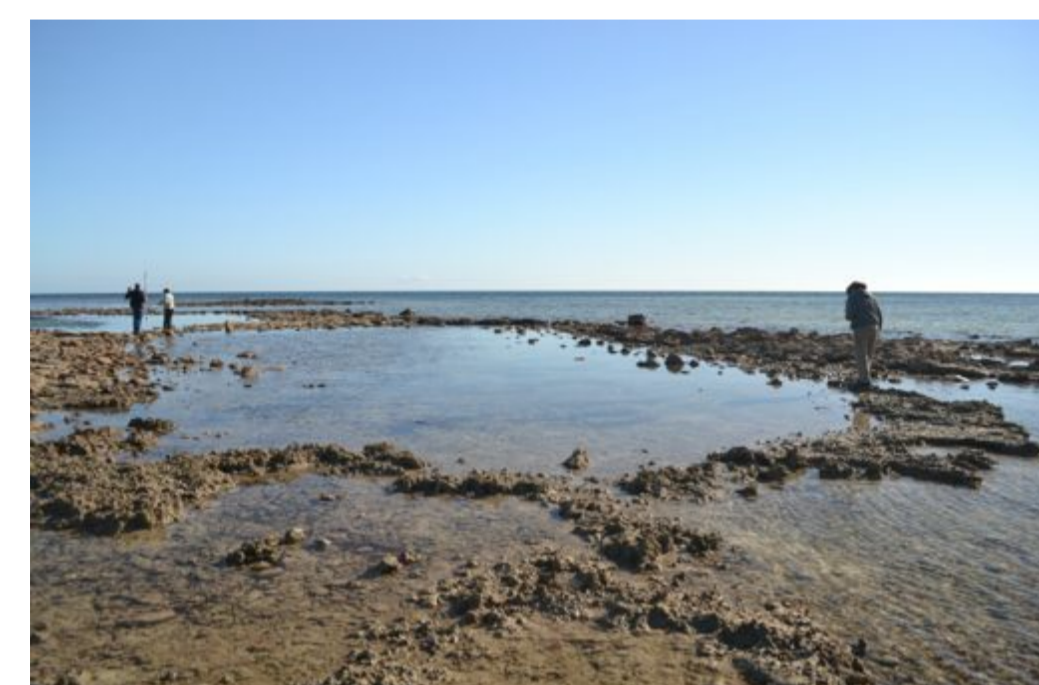
Rocky Point fish trap looking east (showing the constructed wall).
Photograph by Amy Roberts (1 July 2014).



Closer view of the Rocky Point fish trap. Amy Roberts with Peter Turner from Narungga in background. Photograph by Holly Winter and Bob Jones (1 July 2014).



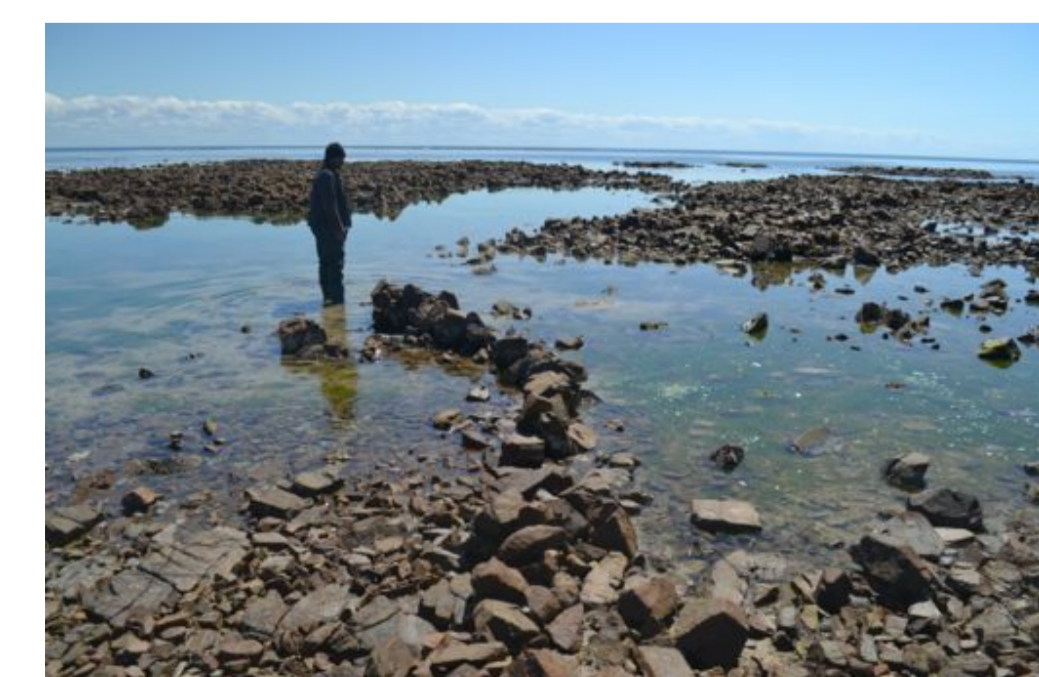
Narungga heritage monitors Quenten Agius and Peter Turner at the Rocky Point fish trap. Photograph by Amy Roberts (1 July 2014).



Slightly modified natural pool used as a trap South of Wallaroo (Wadla waru). Photograph by Amy Roberts (2 July 2014).



Slightly modified natural pool used as a trap - showing area of strategically placed stones and location of identified manuport. South of Wallaroo (Wadla waru). Photograph by Amy Roberts (2 July 2014).



Small rock wall. North of Moonta (Munda). Photograph by Adrian Mollenmans (23 September 2014).

Abstract

This study presents the first detailed analysis of known Aboriginal coastal fish traps on Yorke Peninsula, South Australia. In particular, this research considers their manufacture, use and economic place within the broader land/seascape. The project also seeks to situate the analysis within broader research relevant to Australian/global archaeology by considering how an improved understanding of the Yorke Peninsula fish traps can contribute to debates such as human responses to climate and coastal change including the development of specialised coastal economies during the Holocene.

Whilst fish traps have an economic function in Aboriginal Australia, prior ethno-historical research in areas beyond Yorke Peninsula reveals that they often have numerous other levels of cultural significance. As such, in collaboration with community members, this research also seeks to meaningfully incorporate existing Narungga traditional knowledge about Yorke Peninsula fish traps as well as to understand contemporary perspectives on significance.

Narungga Country

Yorke Peninsula is the traditional country of the Narungga people. During this research, the Narungga people directed and focused the research by providing knowledge of fish trap locations and also nominating community participants who had knowledge that was vital in achieving the research objectives.



Map of Yorke Peninsula.

What is a fish trap?

A fish trap is a structure made of stone, earth or organic material which is designed to catch fish. The structure forms a wall which acts as a barrier to trap fish usually in association with receding tides (Bannerman and Jones 1999:70). Fish traps can also be natural features or include a combination of natural/cultural features (Bannerman and Jones 1999:73; Rowland and Ulm 2011:3).

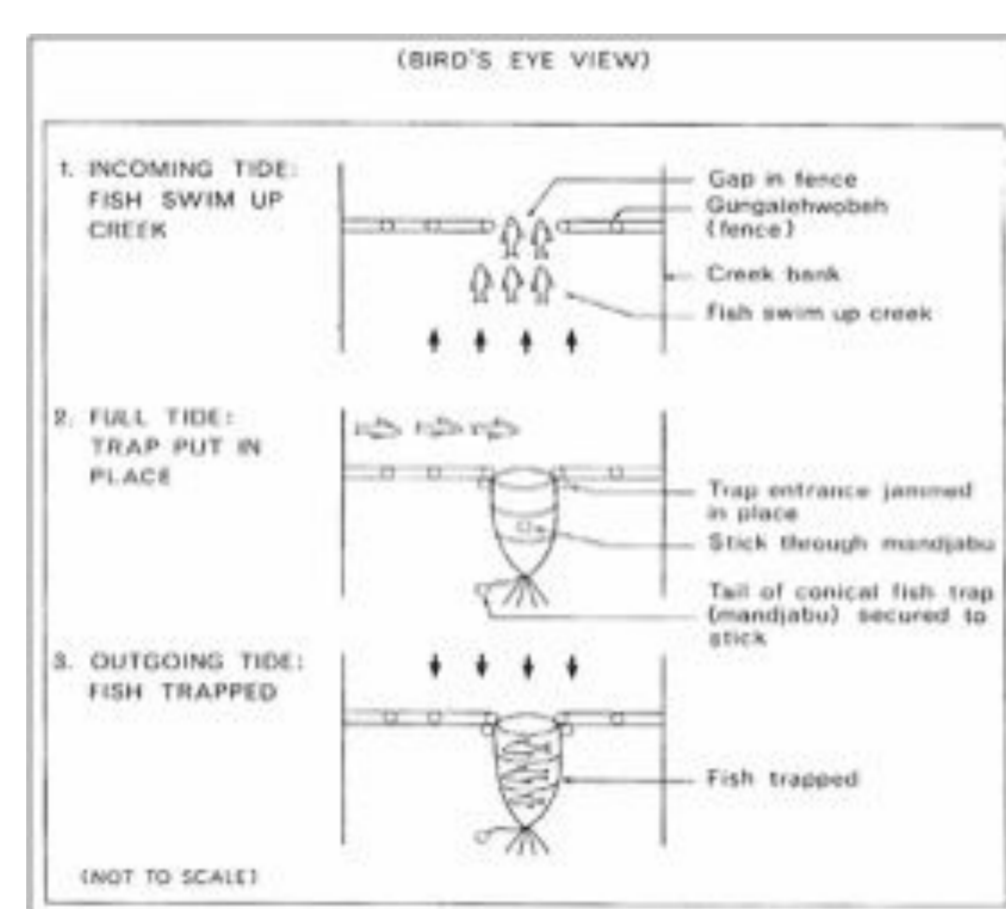


Illustration of how an Eastern Gunwinggu fish trap functions, Arnhem Land, Northern Territory (Altman 1983).

Methods

A range of methods were required to achieve the project's objectives. Three primary approaches were employed including: 1) Utilising the 'Model of Collaborative Inquiry' (see Bray et al. 2000; Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008) - which allowed for oral history interviews, interviews regarding contemporary significance, employment of community heritage monitors, co-authorship of outputs and regular community feedback; 2) A variety of archival investigations; and 3) A selection of field recording methods (baseline and offset, GPS, theodolite survey, photography, tide surveys, marine life surveys and specifically prepared fish trap recording forms [after Martin 1988 and Rowland and Ulm 2011]).

Acknowledgements

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Results

A total of eight fish traps/complexes were identified in the research for this project. They are located in the following general regions:

1. Point Pearce Peninsula (Burgiyana)
2. Wallaroo (Wadla waru)/Moonta (Munda) area
3. Rocky Point
4. North of Rocky Point
5. Stansbury area

These traps constitute a variety of primary types/forms including natural pools/slightly modified natural pools and constructed forms. The constructed forms were of a barrier type.

Four interviews were conducted with Narungga community members which served to demonstrate significant connection to and knowledge of the Yorke Peninsula seascape. Indeed, Narungga community members stressed the importance of understanding and maintaining fish habitats in this regard. Ethno-historical records also provided links to the community information allowing for connections to be made from contemporary practices to the contact period.

Discussion/Conclusions

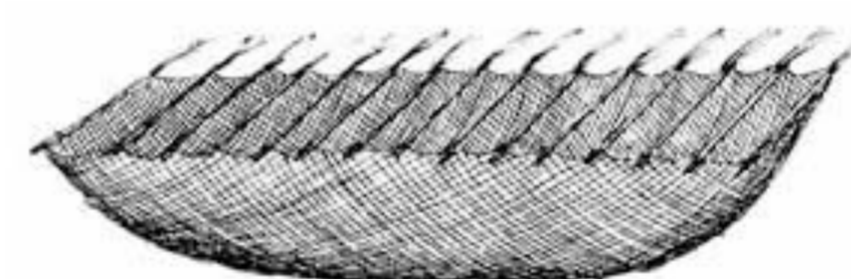
Yorke Peninsula Fish Trap Forms

In relation to the constructed forms identified on Yorke Peninsula as stated above they are of a barrier type (i.e., they are constructed perpendicular to the shoreline and the direction of the current) - e.g., the Rocky Point and Point Pearce Peninsula (Burgiyana) traps. In this regard they are in fact more similar to forms that have been recorded in Wales (Bannerman and Jones 1999).

The natural or slightly modified natural pools used as traps, however, constituted a range of forms including enclosures and small barrier forms. Some traps were part of a complex incorporating other related features such as potential fish holding pens.

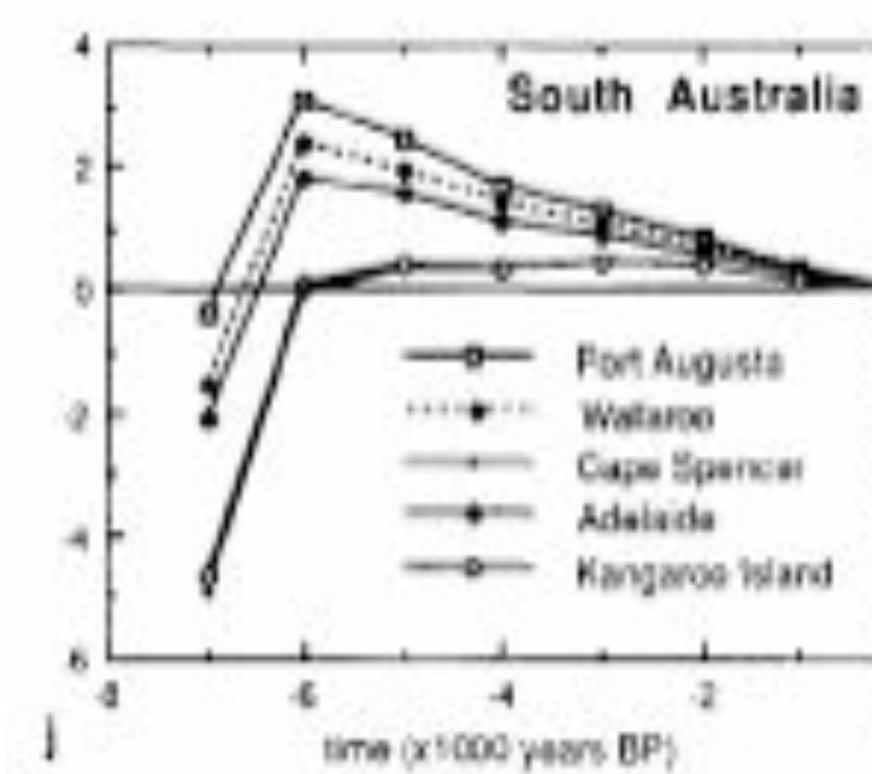
Coastal Economies

Ethno-historical sources and important contemporary community information reveal that in recent times Narungga people used a range of technologies (in addition to fish traps) and approaches to gather marine foods (e.g., netting, spearing and shellfish collecting as well as cultural practices that were employed to 'sing' species in order to herd and/or attract them). This variety of methods and cultural approaches demonstrates the level of marine specialisation achieved by Narungga people.



A Narungga fishing net as drawn by Edward Snell in 1850 (from Griffiths 1988).

The time depth of the technological methods employed (such as netting), however, is currently not well understood due to the relative lack of research conducted on Yorke Peninsula. The time depth of the fish traps recorded in this project, however, are arguably predominantly from the late Holocene - and on the basis of known sea levels for the peninsula were likely constructed in the last 1000 years (see Lambeck and Nakata 1990).



Graph showing sea levels over time in the South Australian gulfs (Lambeck and Nakata 1990).

Narungga's coastal economy by way of comparison, therefore, shows differences from their neighbours. For example, Martin's (1988) Eyre Peninsula research revealed many more fish trap localities/types and her ethno-historical information indicated that netting was not practiced. Thus, research such as was carried out in this project, is important in that new data has been gathered to contribute to such broader debates.



Point Pearce Peninsula (Burgiyana) fish trap facing west - showing the constructed wall at near high tide. Photograph by Amy Roberts (12 August 2014).



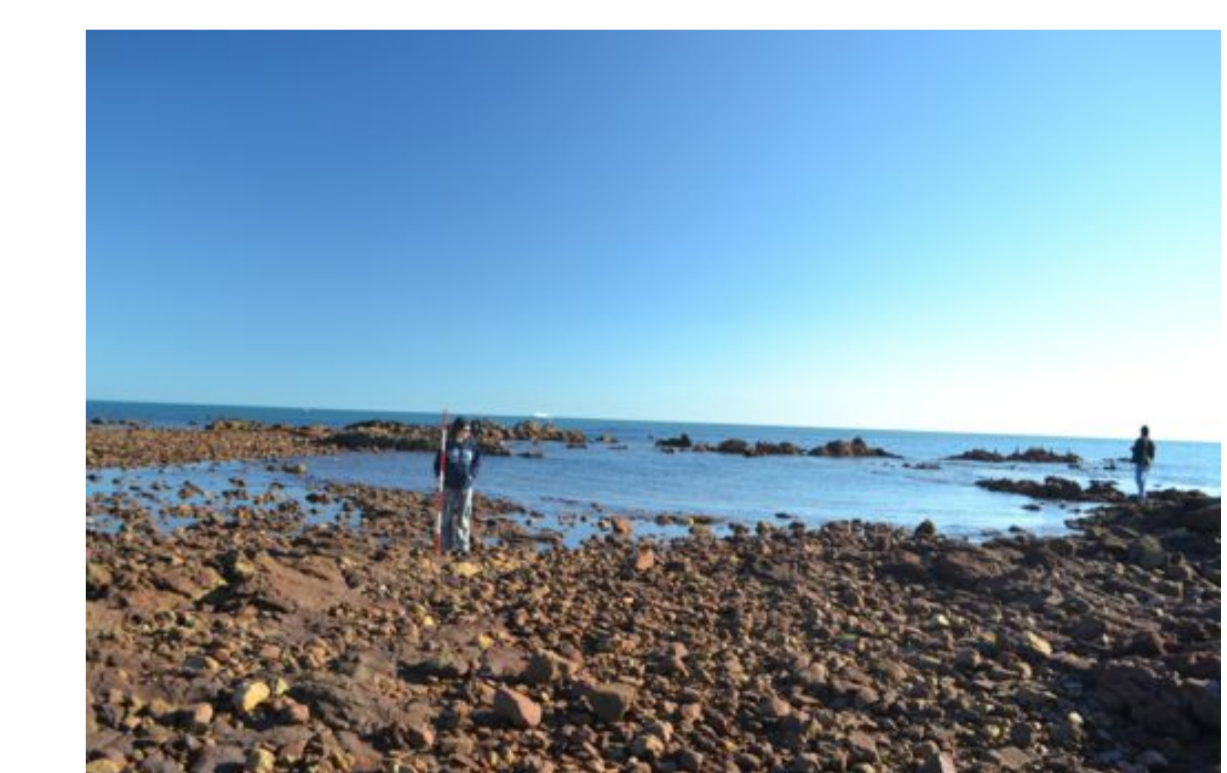
Point Pearce Peninsula (Burgiyana) fish trap - showing closer detail of the constructed wall at near high tide. Photograph by Adrian Mollenmans (12 August 2014).



Surveying the Point Pearce Peninsula (Burgiyana) fish trap - Uncle Tonga (Fred Graham) in foreground. Photograph by Amy Roberts (12 August 2014).



Narungga heritage monitors at the Point Pearce Peninsula (Burgiyana) fish trap - L-R: Bart Sansbury, Uncle Tinto (Lindsay Sansbury), Freddie Sansbury and Uncle Tonga (Fred Graham). Photograph by Amy Roberts (12 August 2014).



Natural pools used as traps north of Wallaroo (Wadla waru). Photograph by Adrian Mollenmans (2 July 2014).



Point Pearce
Aboriginal
Corporation

