



Can Circles in the Search for Identity: an aspect of the archaeology of settlements along the Mundaring - Kalgoorlie settlement corridor (1830-1914)



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Background to project

The region west of the Swan River colonial settlement, which later became Perth, in Western Australia was 'opened up' for Europeans from the 1860s (Figure 1), with the discovery of watering holes by explorers such as Charles Cooke Hunt, assisted by local Aborigines.

In the 1890s, the gold rush brought thousands of people to the area in search of their fortune. Settlement sites grew along this corridor as various components of infrastructure were built (Figure 2).

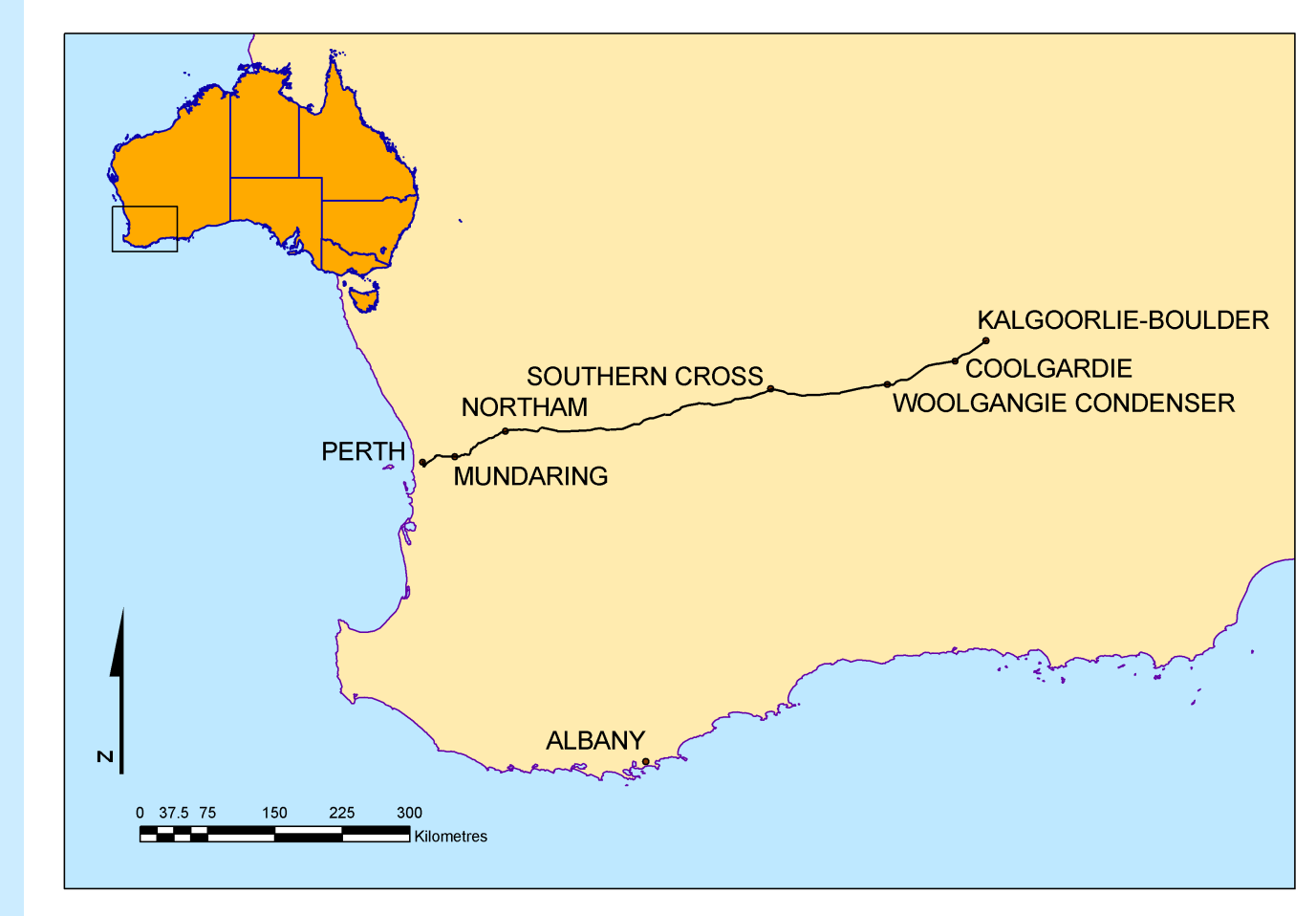


Figure 1 – Map showing location of study area

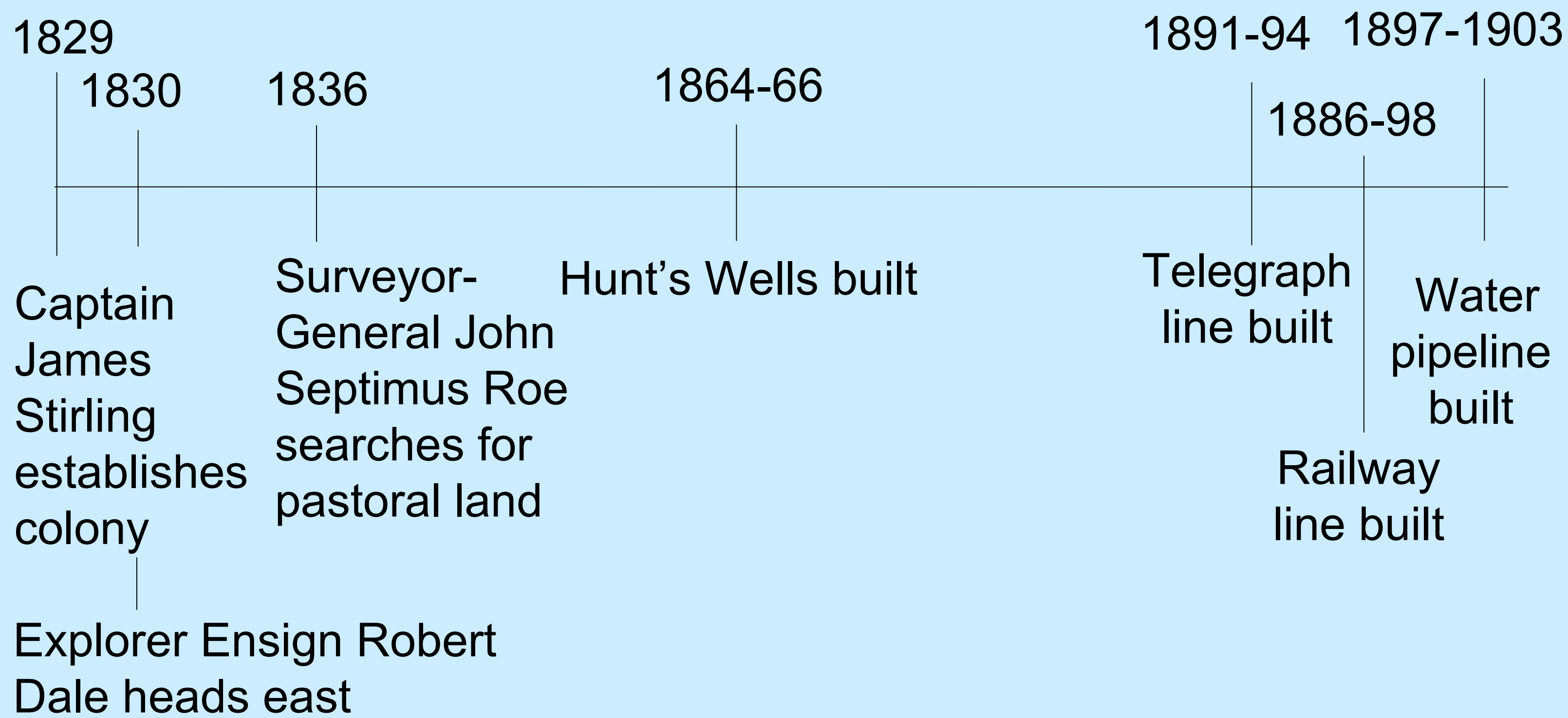


Figure 2 – Timeline of major events in area



Figure 3 – Goldfields Water Supply Scheme

The National Trust of Australia (WA) is currently undertaking a major heritage project around the Goldfields Water Supply Scheme (Figure 3), including interpretation and conservation of significant sites.

My PhD is part of that project, and the thesis questions are:

- what evidence is there for the different groups living and working along the corridor between Mundaring and Kalgoorlie, and
- what does this evidence tell us about life along the corridor?

This poster summarises one of the sources of archaeological evidence – can circles.

Sources of Data

From the historical records the majority of people living and working in the area were single, white men. Preliminary results suggest that there is little variation in the material culture between sites, and as yet there is no clear archaeological evidence for the different groups living along the corridor. Thus to date, the archaeology supports the historical records.

References

- Austin, J. 2004 personal communication.
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- 2000 *Conservation Plan for Karalee Rock Water Catchment*. Report prepared for National Trust of Australia (WA).
- 2001a *Conservation plan for Bullabulling Township and Railway Catchment*. Report prepared for National Trust of Australia (WA).
- 2001b *Conservation Plan for Woolgangie Catchment and Railway Settlement*. Report prepared for National Trust of Australia (WA).

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Case Study - can circles

One source of archaeological evidence is can circles. These are circles consisting almost solely of cans, and have been found at three sites to date (Figures 4, 5).

They were possibly areas used for heating the cans in order to melt the lead solder, to be re-used elsewhere.

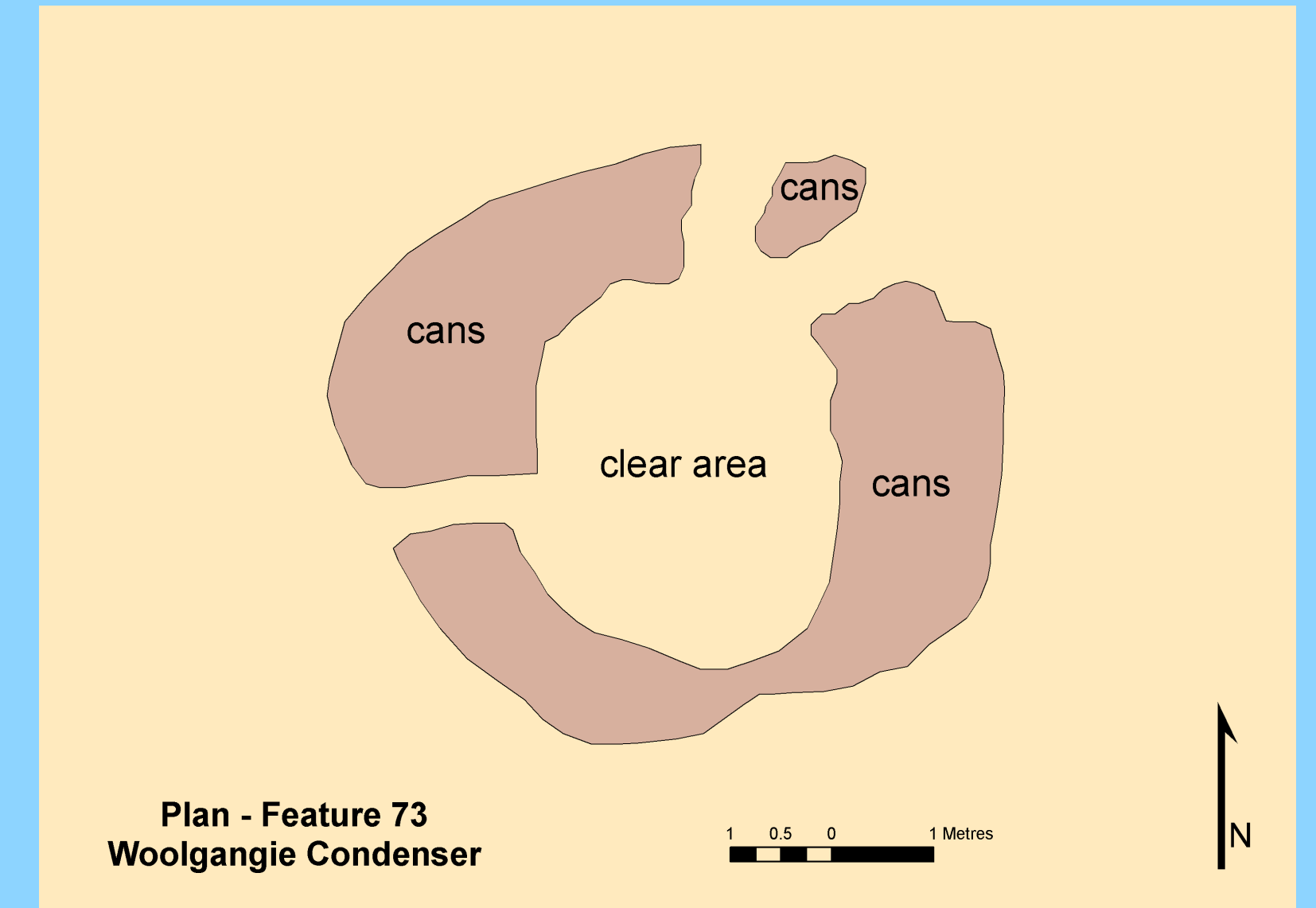


Figure 4 – Plan of can circle



Figure 5 – Can circle at Woolgangie Condenser

From the archaeological and documentary evidence there is no doubt that lead was removed from cans for re-use (Carnegie 1989 [1898]). Table 1 shows the number of cans recorded to date, from can circles, scatters containing other material, and isolated cans, that have lead solder present.

Site	Date	No. of cans recorded	No. cans with lead solder
Karalee Rocks	1892-c.1971 (RICH 2000:3-4)	656	0
No.7 Pump Station	1895-c.1950s (Austin 2004 pers. com.; RICH 1999:29)	284	0
Woolgangie condenser	c.1892-1903	333	0
Woolgangie town	1892-c.1970 (RICH 2001b:4,8)	64	0
Bullabulling	1892-present (RICH 2001a:7)	524	0
TOTAL		1804	0

Table 1 - Number of cans with lead solder

A test excavation in the centre of one of the circles yielded no evidence of any pit or area for burning. The soil from the can circle will be tested for the presence of lead.

Negative results for both the burning and lead tests do not indicate that these were not areas for removing lead from the cans, simply that to date there is no evidence for it.

The search continues for an explanation as to what the can circles are.

Conclusion

By using different sources of evidence, including archaeological and historical data, as well as conducting analysis using geographic information systems (GIS), vegetation surveys, chemical analysis of soils, and other techniques, we can answer questions ranging from who was living and working along the settlement corridor, what life was like, to what material culture was being used and how.

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