

**Maritime archaeological site surveys Cape Le Grand, Cape Arid, Middle Island and Goose Island 14–24 February 2011**



**Ross Anderson**

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Figure 1 Cover image: Hand drawn sketch map by Captain Hawes of US whaler *Julian* in 1840 showing Hawes Island lookout and eastern lookout on Cape Arid, Middle Island, Goose Island and Douglas Isles (*Hamilton logbook*, PMB 687).

## **Introduction**

Between 14–24 February 2011 maritime archaeological surveys were undertaken as part of a Gabbie Kylie Foundation archaeological research program and field school based at Lucky Bay, Cape Le Grand National Park, with support from the Gabbie Kylie Foundation and Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC).

### ***Mountaineer* (1835), Thistle Cove**

The *Mountaineer* (1835) was a 23-ton cutter involved in sealing and trading with sealers in Bass Strait, Kangaroo Island and Spencer Gulf in South Australia. In January 1835 the *Mountaineer* was on a return voyage from Albany when it was wrecked while anchored during a gale at Thistle Cove, Cape Le Grand. All the crew and passengers survived, and after spending 10 days on the beach made their way to Middle Island as the closest known settlement.

A reported 'iron slag' feature at the western end of Thistle Cove beach was investigated using a Minelab SD2200v2 metal detector with 11" Double D coil, and partially excavated. The feature had no metal content and was assessed as a conglomerate/ sedimentary rock. A metal detecting workshop was conducted with field school students.

Snorkel diving searches were conducted on dark patches of seaweed in the wave zone along Thistle Cove beach to see if the weed was attached to any substrate such as timber, or rock ballast, however nothing was found.

### ***Mississippi* (1841) French whalers' garden, Rossiter Bay**

The site of the French whaler *Mississippi* (1841) anchorage and camp at Rossiter Bay was inspected. Rossiter Bay was named after the captain of the *Mississippi* who rescued overland explorers Edward John Eyre and Wylie. There is a rock memorial with a brass plaque erected by the Esperance Historical Society to commemorate the event, part way up the walking trail at the granite rocks at the south-western end of the beach. Due to disturbance to the area caused by modern camping/ picnic area car park, bird hide, walking trails, and 80-90% vegetation coverage there is difficulty in assessing whether there are likely to be any remains of the garden or other associated sites extant.

The *Mississippi* was a 386 ton French whaler from the port of Le Havre, and under the command of Captain Rossiter opened up the New Zealand whaling grounds at Cloudy Bay on the south island of New Zealand in 1835, where he was followed by a number of other French whalers. The *Mississippi* had previously had a successful visit to the Recherche Archipelago in 1838, and in 1841 had come with plans to establish a base from which to catch and process whales at their anchorage in Rossiter Bay.

The crew put pigs, sheep and tortoises on an island in Rossiter Bay, and established a small garden with potatoes and peas in a clearing next to a creek on the mainland. They went shooting for game in the freshwater lake behind Thistle Cove. It was fortunate the *Mississippi* arrived just three weeks before the explorer Edward John Eyre and his Aboriginal companion Wylie were reaching the end of their food and stamina reserves, during their crossing of the Great Australian Bight. The

*Mississippi's* surgeon gave the explorers a health check, they had new shoes made for their horses out of cask hoop iron, and fed fresh meat and vegetables to restore their strength. After twelve days Eyre and Wylie were able to complete the remaining 500km of their trek to Albany. On rowing them ashore Rossiter gave Eyre and Wylie some letters to post in Albany and six bottles of cognac (Dickson 2007).

It is likely that this visit by the *Mississippi* would be unknown but for Eyre and Wylie's fortuitous rescue. The site of Rossiter Bay today has historical significance for the involvement of French whalers in whaling in the Recherche Archipelago, and the events surrounding the rescue of Eyre and Wylie allowing them to successfully complete their epic overland trek.

### **Thomas Fishery whaling station**

According to oral history from the late Mrs Amy Croker of Hill Springs Station at Cape Arid, Thomas Fishery is supposed to have been named after Albany whaler Thomas Sherratt. Sherratt is recorded to have been whaling 'at Cape Arid' in the 1860s, and though no precise location is given, it is reasonable to believe he used this location, if only part of the time. There was a resurgence in whaling activity during the 1870s, and possibly Sherratt, or men from Sherratt's crews, used Thomas Fishery at this time (Gibbs 1995: 452).

The sheltered bay at Thomas Fishery was also used by ships to transport wool and produce from local farms including Hill Springs Station, Lynburn Station and Gabtoobitch Stations. A cast iron whaling trypot was removed to Lynburn Station in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Whale bones are reported to cover the seafloor of the bay (Gibbs 1995: 452).



Figure 2: Stone arrangement, possible Cape Arid eastern lookout, Thomas Fishery  
(Photo: Ross Anderson © Western Australian Museum).

A modern wooden fishing boat was recently wrecked (ca. 2005) in the southern corner of Thomas Fishery. There is a campground with toilets at the northern end of the bay, with a 4WD track leading onto the beach. No evidence of try-works or historic artefacts were observed along the beach area. The beach appears to be eroding at dune face. The vegetation is very thick in the south-western corner of bay



in the reported location of ruins. A search was made for the 'eastern lookout' marked on a hand drawn map of Cape Arid by Captain Hawes of the *Julian*, along the 50-100 m contour at Cape Arid above Thomas Fishery. A natural rock feature with associated stone arrangement that offered a natural shelter and is possibly a lookout site was identified and GPS position taken.

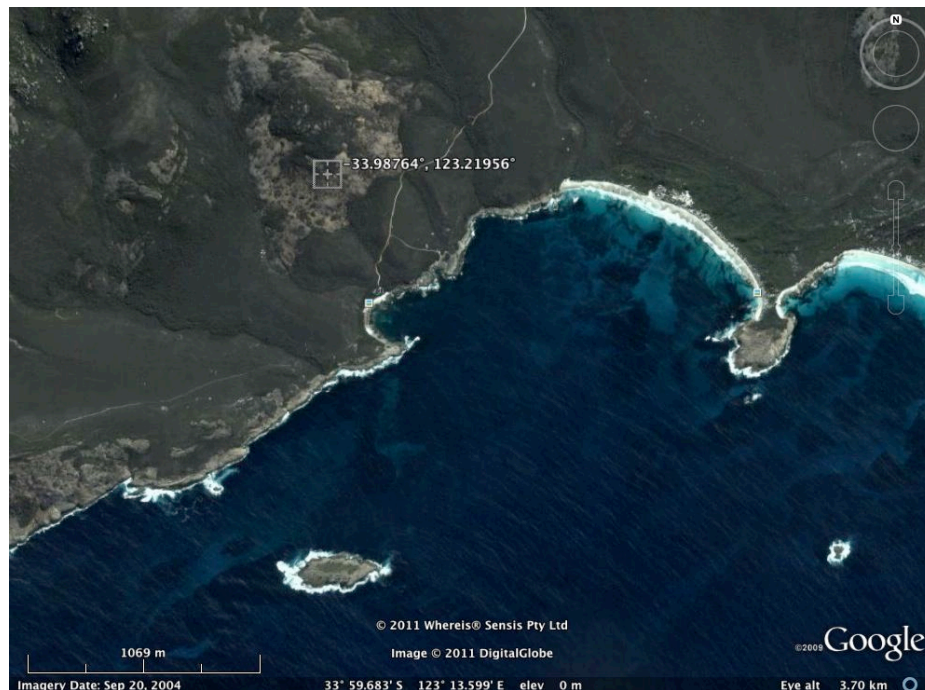


Figure 3: Aerial map showing track leading to Thomas Fishery and possible location of Eastern lookout, Cape Arid (Google Maps).

## Barrier Anchorage whaling station



Figure 4: Aerial map of Barrier Anchorage showing location of try-works on the mainland, Barrier Island (upper left) and the currently unnamed island named 'Hawes Island' by Captain Hawes of the *Julian* in 1840. (Google Maps).



Figure 5: Barrier Anchorage try-works (Photo: Ross Anderson © Western Australian Museum).

Thomas Sherratt was an Albany-based colonial bay whaler who used Barrier Anchorage as a bay whaling station from between 1871-1879. Today there are remains of a try-works and a lookout at the western end of the beach (Gibbs 1996: 446). A sloping granite shelf provides an ideal flensing platform. Artefactual remains include glass, ceramics, clay tobacco pipes, Indigenous stone artefacts and scatters of rusted hoop iron.

Between June and September 1840 the US whalers *Hamilton* and *Julian* in company anchored in Goose Island Bay, Middle Island. During this time the *Hamilton* caught 9 whales and the *Julian* 7 whales, obtaining a total of 1 200 barrels of oil. The Albany pilot was also whaling with the *Hamilton*'s crew. Three boat crews from the US whaler *Julian* camped on what they named 'Hawes Island', now an unnamed island in Barrier Anchorage between June and September 1840. Whalers' lookouts were typically made using low rock walls and canvas sails to protect them from the prevailing winds and elements. The *Julian* later bay whaled further east at Point Malcolm in 1841 (Dickson 2007; *Hamilton* logbook Pacific Manuscripts Bureau (PMB) 687).

In 1841 the explorer Edward John Eyre recorded lettering on a carved tree at Thomas Fishery, Cape Arid that said 'Haws, 1840/ Ship Julian/ C.W.' that also relates to this activity.

GPS positions were recorded for the Barrier Anchorage tryworks, Indigenous and European historic artefacts including blue and white pattern ceramic, a chert flake, and corroding hoop iron scatter.

Overall the sites at Barrier Anchorage have archaeological significance as evidence of whaling activities by both colonial and US whalers.





Figure 6: Aboriginal chert flake and blue and white ceramic fragment, Barrier Anchorage (Photo: Ross Anderson © Western Australian Museum).

## Goose Island

Seven stone structures/ features on Goose Island were recorded, and Indigenous artefacts (mainly quartz flakes) were also recorded. Two large black rabbits observed are likely to be descended from rabbits reported to have been left there as a food source by whalers in the 19th century. Crews from the Middle Island whaling station are recorded to have set up a signal flagpoles and lookouts on both Hummock and Goose Island, to signal to the whaling ships anchored in Belinda Bay when whales were sighted.

**Table 1: Stone structures and features identified on Goose Island.**

Feature	Description
1	Stone arrangement of loose granite rocks and flat slabs approximately 2 x 2 m square on bare rock surface, three-sided and open-ended at east end, view to east, possible lookout shelter.
2	Dry stone rock cairn made of flat granite rocks slabs approximately 1.5 m high on summit of Goose Island, no signs of collapse, solid through to centre, possible whaling lookout flagpole or signal station, alternatively may be related to 19 <sup>th</sup> or 20 <sup>th</sup> century survey activities.
3	Single 'wall' of loose flat slabs and rocks propped up to form a windbreak on bare rock surface, view to south-west, possible lookout shelter/ windbreak.
4	Intact dry stone structure with three walls and up to eight courses of flat granite slab rocks, approximately 2 x 2.5 m square, open-ended at east end (view looking east), definite lookout shelter. Interior has soil sediment and vegetation.
5	Small cairn of rocks on bare rock surface, partially collapsed.
6	Natural vertical rock surface and associated loose rocks, possibly used as lookout shelter in NW winds.
7	Stacked flat granite slab and loose rock arrangement with four sides, approx. 2 x 2 m, sediment and vegetation in interior, possible lookout shelter or fireplace.



Figure 7: Goose Island cairn (Feature 2) view looking south with Flinders Peak, Middle Island in background (Photo: Ross Anderson © Western Australian Museum)



Figure 8: Goose Island lookout (Feature 4) view looking east (Photo: Ross Anderson © Western Australian Museum).





Figure 9: Goose Island stone arrangement (Feature 1) view looking west (Photo: Ross Anderson © Western Australian Museum).



Figure 10: Goose Island stone arrangement (Feature 3) view looking north with Cape Arid in background (Photo: Ross Anderson © Western Australian Museum).

### **Middle Island**

The Middle Island historic site was visited and is now almost completely covered in growth, in some parts with impenetrable vegetation. The survey team could not access the stone-lined well due to dense vegetation growth, but most of the other ruins were inspected and photographed.

Remains of possible timber mast and wreckage in flotsam trap in south-eastern corner of Belinda Bay were photographed and recorded.





Figure 11: Middle Island historic site covered by vegetation regrowth – view looking east. Majority of site is under burnt ti-trees in background, note new green regrowth  
(Photo: Ross Anderson © Western Australian Museum).



Figure 12: Middle Island historic site ruins with vegetation regrowth  
(Photo: Ross Anderson © Western Australian Museum)





Figure 13: Belinda Bay mast, Middle Island (Cat Morgan/ © Applied Archaeology Australia)

### Cape Arid historic station sites



Figure 14: Whaling try-pot from Thomas Fishery at Lynburn Station  
(Photo: Ross Anderson © Western Australian Museum)

An assessment of historic station sites in the Cape Arid area was undertaken that included Lynburn Station, Hill Springs Station and Gabtoobitch Station. The survey team located the domestic house site ruins of Gabtoobitch Station amongst dense scrub. The walls have mostly collapsed with the chimney still partly standing, with an associated collapsed and corroded 'ship's tank' rainwater tank at the north-east corner and partially collapsed stone oven to the north-west.

These historic station sites are associated with themes of Indigenous workers in the pastoral industry, the early historic settlement of Cape Arid area and the shipping of produce from Thomas Fishery. A 'double flat-sided' cast iron whaling trypot at



Lynburn Station recorded to have been removed from Thomas Fishery in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Gibbs 1996: 452) was photographed and recorded.

### **Recommendations**

- 1) A boat-based magnetometer search be carried out in Thistle Cove for the wreck of the *Mountaineer* (1835).
- 2) That research and results of maritime archaeological and heritage surveys are provided to DEC for inclusion in future Cape Le Grand, Cape Arid and Recherche Archipelago Management Plans.
- 3) That the *Mountaineer* (1835) and *Mississippi*/ Rossiter Bay sites are included in as part of any public access and interpretation in Cape Le Grand National Park.
- 4) That vegetation on Middle Island be removed to protect the extant stone structures and archaeological deposits from damage by growing trees, and allow continued access to the historic site by researchers and the general public.
- 5) That further site investigations are carried out at Cape Arid, Barrier Anchorage, Hummock Island, Thomas Fishery and Goose Islands to record historic ruins and sites related to the whaling, sealing, pastoral, guano and salt collecting industries.
- 6) That further assessment and recording of historic sites including Lynburn Station, Hill Springs station and Gabtoobitch station be undertaken including assessment of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous heritage values.
- 7) That results of archaeological surveys and maritime archaeological research in Cape Le Grand, Cape Arid and Recherche Archipelago areas are provided to the Esperance Museum for inclusion in any updating of Esperance Museum displays and interpretation.
- 8) That the un-named island in Barrier Anchorage is officially named 'Hawes Island' to acknowledge the whaling related occupation and activities on the island, based on evidence of it being named by Captain Hawes of the *Julian* in 1840.
- 9) That stone structures and arrangements on Goose Island are gazetted as maritime archaeological sites under the *Maritime Archaeology Act 1973*.

## **References**

Dickson, R. 2007, *The complete history of whalers and whaling on the south coast of New Holland from 1800-1888*, Hesperian Press, Perth.

Gibbs, M. 1995, The historical archaeology of shore based whaling in Western Australia 1836-1879, PhD thesis, Centre for Archaeology, Department of Anthropology, University of Western Australia.

*Hamilton* logbook, 1840, Pacific Manuscripts Bureau microfilm PMB 687, Battye Library, State Library of Western Australia.

## **Acknowledgements**

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**Appendix 1**  
**GPS Positions (Datum GDA94)**

<b>Feature/ site description</b>	<b>Latitude</b>	<b>Longitude</b>
Cape Arid possible eastern lookout	-33.98764°	123.21956°
Thomas Fishery try-works	-33.9740752°	123.1526805°
Thomas fishery artefacts	-33.9742016°	123.1526374°
Goose Island Feature 1 possible shelter looking E	-34.08101°	123.18377°
Goose Island Feature 2 large stone cairn at summit	-34.08043°	123.18391°
Goose Island Feature 3 vertical slabs windbreak looking SW	-34.08022°	123.18269°
Goose Island Feature 4 lookout shelter looking E	-34.08010°	123.18341°
Goose Island Feature 5 small rock cairn	-34.08101°	123.18391°
Goose Island Feature 6 natural shelter looking SW	-34.08090°	123.18355°
Goose Island Feature 7 flat slabs possible lookout or fireplace	-34.08096°	123.18362°