

# PERMISSION TO DISTURB

July 29, 2011 Karen Martin-Stone Archaeological Prospection, Commercial Archaeology, Community Archaeology, Day of Archaeology, Day of Archaeology 2011, Education, Prehistory, Survey Aboriginal, Adelaide, Anthropology, Archaeology, Arnhem Land, Arnhemland, Australia, Darwin, Excavation, Flinders University, Geography of Australia, Geography of the Northern Territory, heavy machinery, http, Indigenous, media department, Minister, Northern Territory, online learning system, South Australia, States and territories of Australia, the Heritage

Today has been a day of tidying up on a number of jobs. My first task of the day was to pick up a total station and other surveying equipment that my company is hiring for a job next week. Then I headed out of town (Darwin, Northern Territory, Australia) to do a site recording and collection job. The day finished up in the office writing up reports (and this blog post), and packing up for next week's travels.

The site that I needed to locate had been recorded years previously, and registered in the Northern Territory Heritage branch's archaeological sites database. It was a background scatter of stone artefacts, located in a road reserve adjacent to a river where the government is building a bridge. The artefact scatter had been assessed as having low Aboriginal and archaeological significance, and a permit to disturb had been approved by the Heritage branch, under delegation from the Minister.

In the Northern Territory, Aboriginal places and objects are protected under the terms of the *Heritage Conservation Act* (1991), and any disturbance requires consent from the Minister under section 39(a) of the Act. The application process requires archaeologists to determine the Aboriginal and archaeological significance of the site, outline consultation with Traditional Owners that has occurred, and identify future curation of salvaged artefacts.

When I arrived at the site, I discovered that it had already been disturbed by heavy machinery, most likely in the course of road works to maintain the gravel road and river crossing where the bridge will be built. I was unable to locate any of the artefacts originally recorded. I recorded the condition of the site, and conducted a survey transect of the wider area to assess whether there was further background scatter in the vicinity. I didn't find anything, so I came back to the office to write up the report.

Work in the tropical north of the Northern Territory is highly seasonal. Unlike most of Australia, we don't have the standard seasons – we have a wet season (October to April) and a dry season (May to September). Most archaeological work happens between July and November. The work is mainly archaeological survey related to development, but can include salvage and research excavations. Highlights of the last two months include working in remote areas of Arnhemland, commuting to work by helicopter each day, and working with some of the most spectacular rock art in the world. We also found a stone quarry where we made a conservative estimate of 1 million + artefacts. It was huge!

I am currently balancing the busy work season with post-graduate study at Flinders University (Adelaide, South Australia). I find the archaeology department (and the screen & media department, where I also study) are very flexible and helpful when it comes to supporting students with other commitments. Before I finish up tonight, I should check the university's online learning system so I can download this semester's unit guides. No rest for the wicked...

Yours in the Top End,  
Karen.