Australia’s Ancient Past

The How and What of the Sydney area

Teacher Manual
“What is archaeological evidence?”

Read this section with your partner.

Q. What does archaeology allow us to understand about ancient Sydney?

- the range of land and marine animals eaten
- the raw materials used in making tools and weapons
- aspects of Aboriginal life that have changed over time, e.g. changes in tools and subsistence technologies

“Aboriginal archaeological sites”

Read this section with your partner.

Q. How is archaeological evidence at Aboriginal sites categorised?

- Location
- Contents

Q. Why have archaeological sites in Sydney largely survived?

- Because of the sandstone geology:
  o many rock-shelters and rock-platforms where Aboriginal activity happened
- Because of extent of shorelines

Q. What is the most commonly found archaeological evidence of ancient Sydney?

- Archaeological deposits and shell middens (>50% recorded sites)
“Archaeological deposits and shell middens”

Read this section with your partner.

Q. What tells an archaeologist/historian that an area was once a campsite?
   - Assemblages of stone artefacts including tools
   - Or evidence of the manufacture and use of tools at that site

Q. Why do archaeologists/historians not use evidence of shelters as an indicator of a campsite?
   - No such structures survive in the Sydney region (because they were made of bark and other plant materials)

Q. Where are shell middens found?
   - In rock-shelters or open locations
   - Near water

Q. What does this tell us about how Aboriginal people lived in ancient Australia?
   - Didn’t always eat where they caught their fish
   - Used bait in fishing
   - Kept their “rubbish” in designated areas
   - Few stone tools or artefacts have been associated with daytime hunting/butchering activities, or transit camps. Therefore, some camps must have been more “long term” in nature, with a greater quantity of artefacts indicating longer settlement periods.

Q. Why are shell middens not usually found on lower strata levels in the Sydney area?
   - The acidic sandstone environment of Sydney deteriorate organic materials such as shell and animal after approximately 3 000 years, leaving only stone artefacts as evidence of human occupation.

Extension

Q. Why would rock shelters be more likely than open locations to have “deep stratified deposits”?
   - Less erosion (both human-induced and natural) is likely to occur in rock-shelters than open locations, allowing greater preservation and formation of deep stratified deposits.
“Engraved and pigment images”

Read this section with your partner.

Study the images of rocks carvings, and describe one (including description of its apparent location, the tools required to produce it, the complexity of its design, its surroundings, etc.):

Design your own rock carving, based on the list of common subjects depicted in rock carvings.

Explain how your rock carving would have been made, in steps:

- **Series of small pits were made in sandstone** (possibly along an outline drawn on the rock with ochre, a stick, or a stone)
- **Small pits were joined** (process called “conjoined puncturing”) - worn away by friction of rubbing sandstone with harder stone tool, producing grooves
- **The pits gradually reworked into lines and shapes**
Extension activity

Research the pigments used to create drawings etc., and what they were made from:

- **Charcoal** = black
- **Ochre (mineral)** = red/orange
- **Ash** = grey
- **Ochre, water and animal fat (sourced from emu, kangaroo or echidna)** was placed into the mouth and blown across hand resting on the rock surface. The ochre chemically reacted with and sunk into the surface of the rock – like ink on paper.
“Grinding grooves”

Match the tool to the groove by drawing a line from the word to the groove.

Q. Why have archaeologists concluded that a hatchet sharpening groove found in Sydney sandstone will be less than 4 000 years old?

- *Because ground hatchets themselves (or fragments of them) only first appear in dated stratified deposits and middens 4000 years ago.*
Q. Why have grinding grooves generally not been able to be dated?
   - Because no grooves have been found buried with datable material in the soils above them.

Q. Why are grinding grooves usually found adjacent to a water source? (This will require further research)
   - Because water is used in the grinding process to minimise the amount of heat generated from friction.

“Burial sites”
Read this section with your partner.

Q. How were bodies disposed of after death in ancient Sydney?
   - Buried or cremated
“Carved and scarred trees”

Read this section with your partner.

Q. What is the difference between a carved and scarred tree?

- **Carved** – designs carved into wood or bark (no living carved trees in Sydney region today)
- **Scarred** – scars where bark or wood removed to make canoes, shields etc

Fill in the glossary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word/phrase</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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| Shell middens     | *Shell middens are places where the remains from eating shellfish have accumulated. The remains of other food, such as animal bones, can also be found in middens, alongside charcoal from campfires and tools made from stone, shell and bone.*
|                   | *Found throughout Australia, middens are usually located close to shellfish sources. Middens range from thin, scatters of shell to deep, layered deposits which have built up over time.*                                                                 |
| Pigment           | A natural substance that gives colour                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Grinding grooves  | *Grinding grooves are made from Aboriginal people sharpening their stone axe heads, or wooden spear tips, etc. Axes were constructed from hard volcanic stone fastened to a wooden handle. To sharpen the axe, water is put on to the rock, and the axe is rubbed back and forth until the stone is sharp. The water is used to clean and cool the stone as friction from the rubbing generates heat. The action of sharpening leaves grooves.*       |
| Scarred trees     | *Trees with evidence of bark and wood being removed to make shields, shelters, coolamons and canoes.*                                                                                                          |
| Carved trees      | *Carved trees have complex patterns cut into the tree that may have important ceremonial meaning.*                                                                                                          |