

# Heritage survey types & levels of recording

country  
culture  
people  
future

This information is intended for reference when identifying and contracting heritage survey requirements for planned works on Country. When completing the **YMAC Heritage Notice**, this fact sheet will assist with selecting the appropriate methodology.

## Heritage survey types

An **archaeological** survey is the active investigation and assessment of a landscape for archaeological evidence, i.e., physical evidence of human culture. It involves both desktop research and on-site fieldwork conducted by a professional archaeologist. Desktop research involves reviewing published and unpublished archaeological reports and relevant site files. On-site archaeological fieldwork is conducted by the archaeologist in consultation and engagement with Traditional Owners, or Knowledge Holders. Fieldwork is usually done via pedestrian transects (i.e. walking the area), but may also include inspection from a vehicle. This kind of survey interprets the ‘tangible’ landscape to examine, identify, record, and evaluate cultural materials within a physical area, through the applicable archaeological research and fieldwork methodologies.

An **ethnographic** survey assesses the cultural, environmental, spiritual, historical, and geophysical views of a landscape for ethnographic evidence. It involves desktop research and on-site fieldwork conducted by a professional anthropologist. Desktop research involves reviewing published and unpublished ethnographic research literature, previous reports, and relevant site files. On-site ethnographic fieldwork assessments are conducted by the anthropologist in consultation and engagement with Traditional Owners, or Knowledge Holders. This kind of survey interprets the ‘intangible’ landscape to examine, identify, record and evaluate the cultural properties within a physical area, through the applicable ethnographic research and fieldwork methodologies.

**Any proposed works must be subject to both archaeological and ethnographic surveys, with results and related recommendations resolved before works proceed.**

**UNESCO\* defines: tangible elements of the landscape as those physical objects associated Aboriginal cultures, including instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces; and intangible elements as the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – associated with Aboriginal cultures.**

\* See, UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization] website:  
<https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>



## Levels of recording

### **Work Program Clearance (WPC) and Work Area Clearance (WAC)**

WPC and WAC are primarily conducted to give access to areas for exploration purposes, and designed to inform proponents where they can and cannot undertake works within a survey area. These are conducted in the very early stages of project planning and exploration.

The **WPC method** is designed for activities with a linear (or corridor) footprint, like exploration drilling, track widening, and drainage excavation. Heritage values encountered within the survey area are mapped out and marked as 'Not Clear' and excised from the work program. The heritage team will seek to provide an appropriate deviation around sites to allow the work program to continue, while also safeguarding the heritage values present.

The **WAC method** covers a polygon (or circle) rather than a linear area. This is used for works such as structures, larger drilling projects, and borrow pits, or when the proponent has not identified the precise location of proposed works. If heritage values are encountered, a boundary is mapped out within the survey area and marked as 'Not Clear' for works to proceed. The proponent can then plan their work program to avoid heritage places, or, if avoidance is not possible, proceed to site identification (SID) recording of the effected heritage places (see page 4).

When a heritage place is identified, it is subject to the following assessments:

- The site type(s) defined;
- Boundary mapped out;
- Primary features marked and recorded (written and photographic);
- Potential impacts assessed;
- Knowledge Holders consulted and comments recorded (though note, participants are not required to divulge specific cultural information for any heritage places that are located during survey); and
- Recommendations devised.

These results are provided to the proponent via Preliminary Advice, Final Report, and spatial data and maps within the post-survey timeframe outlined in the relevant heritage agreement between the proponent and the Prescribed Body Corporate (PBC) for the Traditional Owner group. Digital copies (or hard copies, if requested) are also provided to the relevant PBC, which its members can access.



### **Site Avoidance (SA)**

A SA recording level is used for large projects (such as mining) subject to development pressure. It requires broad site recording to generally characterise the heritage values associated with the place.

Note, this recording level is not sufficient to apply for State Government permission to use the land containing the site (see SID, page 4).

When a heritage place is identified it is subject to the following assessments:

- Landscape context including extent, nature, and broad landscape features;
- The site type(s) defined and described;
- An accurate boundary mapped and flagged;
- Primary features marked and recorded (written and photographic);
- A mud map of the observable characteristics of the site;
- Condition;
- Potential impacts;
- Excavation potential;
- Traditional Owners consulted on the broad narrative of the place, and comments recorded (though participants are not required to divulge specific cultural information for any heritage places that are located during survey); and
- Recommendations devised.

Detailed recordings of the content of the site are *not required*.

Statements of significance are *not required*.

These results are provided to the proponent via Preliminary Advice, Final Report, and spatial data and maps within the post-survey timeframe outlined in the relevant heritage agreement between the proponent and the Prescribed Body Corporate (PBC) for the Traditional Owner group. Digital copies (or hard copies, if requested) are also provided to the relevant PBC, which its members can access.

## Site Identification (SID)

SID surveys/recording programs are used in advanced stages of project planning where the disturbance footprint is fixed, such as the location of a mine pit, or the construction/alteration of a road or bridge. They involve detailed recording that can be incorporated in applications and plans to the State Government to enable decision-making regarding the granting of permission to use the land containing the site(s).

This survey is carried out after SA surveys (page 3), and due to the detailed level of recording, SID surveys and site recordings take significantly longer than SA, WAC and WPC surveys with reporting timeframes also longer due to the need to write Heritage Information Submissions (HISFs) for submission to the Western Australian Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage (DPLH) for each of the recorded sites.

SID recording of heritage places involves:

- Landscape and environmental context, including water sources;
- Location of the heritage place within the survey area;
- The site type(s) defined and described;
- An accurate boundary mapped, flagged, and justified;
- A detailed recording of the heritage features and objects within the place (written and photographic) with noted condition and disturbances and potential impacts;
- Targeted sampling such as sample squares, if required;
- Detailed site plan, elevation, nearby infrastructure and profile drawings;
- Excavation potential;
- Traditional Owners' consultation regarding heritage values, including the potential uses of the place, the aesthetic qualities and the meaning, and importance;
- A Statement of Significance giving primacy to the views of the Traditional Owners and commenting on the scientific potential of the site; and
- Recommendations devised; including additional ethnographic work required, impact mitigation, and management strategies.

Results are provided to the proponent via Preliminary Advice, Final Report, and spatial data and maps within the post-survey timeframe outlined in the relevant heritage agreement between the proponent and the Prescribed Body Corporate (PBC) for the Traditional Owner group. Digital copies (or hard copies, if requested) are also provided to the relevant PBC, which its members can access.

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