

## Place No. 14 Depuch Island



View of Depuch Island from Balla Balla landing

LOCATION	
Name of Place	<b>Depuch Island</b>
Other Name (1)	Forestier Islands
Other Name (2)	Warmalana <sup>i</sup>
Location/Address	
Street Number	
Street Name	
Suburb/Town	Vicinity of Balla Balla and Whim Creek
Other Locational descriptor (text)	26 km north of Whim Creek, 6 km from Balla Balla. 575537 mE, 7718538 mN, MGA 94 Zone 50 Latitude: 117.725 Longitude – 20.6308

OWNERSHIP & LAND DESCRIPTION				
<i>Owner</i>	<i>Address</i>	<i>Phone/fax</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Item No.</i>
<i>Reserve</i>	<i>Lot/Location No.</i>	<i>Plan/Diagram</i>	<i>Vol/Folio</i>	<i>Item No.</i>

LISTING AND ASSESSMENT	
HCWA Reference Number	8666
State Register of Heritage Places: (Y/N)	No
Classified by the National Trust (Y/N)	No
Register of the National Estate (Y/N)	No
Local Town Planning Scheme (Y/N)	Yes
<b>Management Category</b>	<b>A</b>

DESCRIPTION	
Construction Date (1)	
Construction Date (2)	

Site Type (Place Type)	Other Aboriginal Site
<b>Use(s) of Place</b>	
<i>Original</i>	OTHER: Aboriginal Occupation
<i>Present</i>	OTHER: Aboriginal Occupation
<i>Other</i>	MONUMENT\CEMETERY: Graves
<b>Construction Materials:</b>	
<i>Walls</i>	
<i>Roof</i>	
<i>Other</i>	
Condition	Good
Integrity (how much original fabric intact?)	Rock engravings largely intact

**Physical Description**

Depuch Island is separated by 3 km of shallow water and mudflats from the mainland coast, which is a tangle of mangroves and mud. The whole island consists of a jumbled mass of great angular blocks of dolerite. There are a few small beaches on the southern and eastern sides and small patches of soil occur between the strewn rocks on the summit and in the upper parts of some of the valleys which deeply incise it. Depuch is 5 km long, 3 km wide and more or less oblong in shape. The highest point (Depuch Beacon) is 530 feet above low water and much of the island is over 300 feet above sea level.

**History**

The site is of great cultural importance to Ngarluma and other Aboriginal people. The island is a major focus for rock art.<sup>2</sup>

Depuch Island was first discovered by the French Commander Nicolas Baudin in the ship *Geographe* in July 1801. It was named after M Depuch, a geologist with the expedition. In 1842, the H.M.S. Beagle was the next vessel to visit Depuch, led by Captain Wickham. An engraving naming the vessel recalls their landing. Wickham reported some engravings, during "many an excursion over that dreary heap of desolation".<sup>3</sup>

It was a proposed site for a major port, before archaeological surveys in 1962 detailed the extensive rock art on the island and the island vested with the WA Museum. The site has also been the scene of several known shipwrecks. Sixteen known burials on the islands date to c.1912.<sup>4</sup>

**Archaeology**

The island is a major Aboriginal site, with over 5,000 individual engravings recorded. Depuch Island has probably a greater concentration of Aboriginal engravings than any other place in Australia, comparable with the Burrup Peninsula. (See Registered Aboriginal Sites, DAA Site IDs: 11625, 6022, 6023, 6044, 11624, 11626 and 11627).

**SIGNIFICANCE****Historic theme (s)**

1. DEMOGRAPHIC SETTLEMENT AND MOBILITY  
102 Aboriginal occupation

**Statement of Significance:**

Depuch Island is of great cultural significance as a major cultural site for Ngarluma people and other Aboriginal people over a great geographic extent. The archaeological record of rock art represents one of the greatest concentrations of rock art in Australia. It has historical associations with key historical events, such as the 1842 visit of the H.M.S. Beagle. The significant social and scientific value of this cultural resource remains to be fully demonstrated.

**ASSOCIATIONS**

Architect/Designer (1)

Architect/Designer (2)

Other Associated Person(s)	Nicolas Baudin Captain Wickham, HMS Beagle
MHI - 1996	Assessment undertaken, Place Name Record created
MHI Review - 2012	Entry updated



DePuch Island, 1912, with Beagle inscription highlighted. State Library of Western Australia  
([http://purl.slwa.wa.gov.au/slwa\\_b2949833\\_1](http://purl.slwa.wa.gov.au/slwa_b2949833_1))

<sup>i</sup> Brandenstein, C. G. von, R. Churnside, and Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies 1970, *Narratives from the North-West of Western Australia in the Ngarluma and Jindjiparndi Languages*. 3 vols, Australian Aboriginal Studies. Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, p 206 based on oral histories created with local Aboriginal people.

<sup>2</sup> McCarthy, F. 1961 'The rock-engravings of Depuch Island, north-west Australia', *Rec. Aust. Mus.* 25(8), pp 121–148.

See also:

Berndt, R.M. 1964, "The Problem of Interpretation and the Significance of the Engravings of Depuch Island." In *Report on the Aboriginal Engravings and Flora and Fauna of Depuch Island, Western Australia*, edited by WDL Ride, IM Crawford, GM Storr, RM Berndt and RD Royce. Perth: Western Australian Museum.

Crawford, I.M. 1964, "The Engravings of Depuch Island." In *Report on the Aboriginal Engravings and Flora and Fauna of Depuch Island, Western Australia*, edited by WDL Ride, IM Crawford, GM Storr, RM Berndt and RD Royce, pp. 23-63. Perth: Western Australian Museum.

McCarthy, F.D. 1961, "The Rock Engravings at Depuch Island, North West Australia." *Australian Museum Records* 25, pp. 121-48.

Ride, WDL, IM Crawford, GM Storr, RM Berndt, and RD Royce 1964, *Report on the Aboriginal Engravings and Flora and Fauna of Depuch Island, Western Australia*. Vol. Special Publication No.2. Perth: Western Australian Museum.

Trendall, A.F. 1964, "Examination of Rocks with Aboriginal Engravings." In *Report on the Aboriginal Engravings and Flora and Fauna of Depuch Island, Western Australia*, edited by WDL Ride, IM Crawford, GM Storr, RM Berndt and RD Royce, 83-88. Perth: Western Australian Museum.

<sup>3</sup> Wickham, cited in McCarthy, 1961, p 121.

<sup>4</sup> Coate, Y. and K. Coate 2001, *More Lonely Graves in Western Australia*. Carlisle Hesperion Press.