Welcome to the 2004 Mill Point Archaeological Project Field Season Report. Mill Point (or Elanda Point) in the Cooloola Section of Great Sandy National Park is the site of one of the earliest timber settlements in Queensland, operating between 1869 and 1892.

In 2004, community concerns about the long-term future of the site prompted the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Noosa Shire Council (NSC) and University of Queensland (UQ) to collaborate in the first stage of a project to undertake a detailed survey of the site. The survey will inform management plans to help preserve the site for future generations.

Situated within a National Park, public accessibility is a key feature of the site and the major responsibility of QPWS, Elanda Point. In the past, the site has been managed by allowing lantana to engulf the area keeping public access to a minimum. In 2003, community concerns about the management of the site (in particular the cemetery) prompted the development of this project to better identify and understand the site and allow for improved visitor access and experience. Noosa Shire Council, through its Arts and Heritage Board, contributed to the project and their financial support has allowed interpretative signage to be erected.

In 2004, the project was coordinated by Judy Powell (Environmental Protection Agency), Jill Reid (Environmental Protection Agency) and Sean Ulm (University of Queensland). Over the two week 2004 field season a vast range of archaeological artefacts dating to the sawmill period were identified and recorded, the site was visited by a large number of local residents and the project featured in both local and national media.

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**2004 PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS**

- collaborative project framework established
- 27 archaeology student volunteers involved
- over 60 visitors on project open days
- local media coverage (TV & newspapers)
- national media coverage on *Totally Wild*
- articles in EPA publications
- interpretative signage installed
- signage launched during Noosa Longweekend
- ongoing vegetation management with Green Corps
- boundaries defined for core site components
- over 2,000 individual artefacts recorded in detail
- project website established
- site nominated to the Queensland Heritage Register
"A little republic in everything else but name, probably the most unique community of its kind”
The Brisbane Courier Thursday 5 July 1877.

**PROJECT BACKGROUND**
The site of Mill Point has long been recognised as of State significance by the National Trust and EPA.

In 1869, the Cootharaba sawmill opened at Elanda Point on the shores of Lake Cootharaba. The sawmill was established to exploit the extensive timber resources of the hinterland and during its heyday employed over 200 men. They and their families made up a thriving community. A school, hotel, shops and other businesses supported the community. An extensive tramway system was constructed to bring timber from the hinterland to the mill, and boats carried the sawn timber down the lake and river system to Tewantin for shipment to Brisbane.

A cemetery was established at the Mill Point settlement, and 43 burials were recorded between 1873 and 1891, including 9 men, 4 women and 30 children. The first burials included four of the five men who were killed in the boiler explosion of 29 July 1873, namely Charles Long, Patrick Tierney, Joseph White and Phelim Molloy. The fifth man, Patrick Molloy (brother to Phelim) was buried in the Gympie Cemetery after transport to Gympie Hospital for treatment of his severed foot as a result of the explosion. Children buried in the cemetery died of causes such as lung problems, wasting, thrush, convulsions or drowning.

![Image: Green Corps volunteers help clear weeds.](image1)
![Image: Students clear leaf litter to expose artefacts.](image2)

**The Gympie Times 30 July 1873.**

From the mid-1880s, a series of events occurred that would influence the eventual decline and closure of the sawmill in the early 1890s. The Queensland Government introduced royalties in an effort to control wasteful cutting and competition from imported timbers, but it reduced the output of local sawmills and kept the price of timber down. By the early 1890s softwood resources near the Cootharaba sawmill were nearing “economic exhaustion”, having been exploited for close to 20 years. The sawmill finally closed in 1892.

Dairy farmers moved into the area in the early twentieth century, but dairy farming was never really successful owing to the poor pasture available. The property changed ownership a number of times until it was transferred to the Queensland Government in 1983. The Mill Point area was gazetted as part of Cooloola National Park in 1985.

**2004 PROJECT AIMS**
- clear vegetation in visitor areas
- identify key components of the site for management
- map site boundaries for Heritage Register nomination
- record site components and artefact distributions
- develop interpretative materials, including signage
- provide management recommendations to QPWS
- provide opportunities for community involvement

![Image: Students survey the lake for artefacts.](image3)
![Image: Pink flags mark the location of artefacts.](image4)

![Image: Pink flags mark the extent of graves at the cemetery.](image5)
![Image: Archaeology student Ian Nibloe flags artefacts.](image6)

![Image: Pylons are recorded for height and diameter.](image7)
![Image: QPWS surveyor Tom McDonald plots artefacts.](image8)
Over a two week period at the end of February 2004 a team of staff from UQ, EPA and QPWS with a large group of student volunteers from universities in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria began the survey of Mill Point.

The fieldwork commenced with a welcome by Aboriginal elder Dr Eve Fesl and an introduction to the history of the site by local historians Elaine Brown and Dr Ruth Kerr.

The first task was to clear weeds from key areas of the site with the help of Green Corps volunteers. QPWS surveyor Tom McDonald began mapping components of the tramway complex, cemetery and settlement including the complex wharf system in the shallow lake.

Detailed archaeological surface artefact recording was conducted over two 25m x 25m grid squares in the vicinity of the boiler highlighting the rich potential of the site. Over 2,000 individual artefacts were found in these two grid squares alone, consisting of brick, glass, ceramic and metal. All of these artefacts were described, mapped and photographed and will be entered into a site database. A high degree of integrity was found in the archaeological remains, with rows of bricks found largely undisturbed.

The cemetery was surveyed in detail. Although only one headstone base remains on the site, depressions were mapped to indicate the general extent of burials at the site.

Providing opportunities for the local community to be involved in the project was also a key aim. One day each week of the fieldwork was a designated public open day where groups were given a guided tour of the site and the chance to see the archaeologists at work. The project was widely reported in local newspapers and both local and national television programs.

Much work remains to be done to identify and map known components of the site, particularly the tramway which extends off the National Park and the artefacts and extensive wharf system in the lake.

**Future & Ongoing Project Objectives:**
- potential excavation of areas of interest
- development of further interpretative material
- ongoing historical research (off site)
- photographic and archival recording of grave material and other artefacts held at QPWS, Elanda Point
- ongoing management of site by community and other groups – including vegetation management and surveys of visitor use
**FUTURE COLLABORATIONS**

The Mill Point Archaeological Project has potential for a range of collaborations between community, research, educational, tourism and heritage organisations. The site provides opportunities for links with:

- regional heritage tourism trails
- local schools & other educational institutions
- local community groups
- local museums & historical societies
- environmental groups (e.g. catchment management groups)

The location of Mill Point within one of the State’s most significant National Parks provides an extra dimension to the National Park visitor experience.

**FURTHER READING**


**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**