

APPENDICES**APPENDIX 1****The Aboriginal Heritage Significance of the Coolbellup/Walliabup Wetlands
(North Lake - Bibra Lake)**

by

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"While not all the South-West people of Aboriginal descent would regard themselves as Nyungar, all are New Aborigines - people who seek a social identity of their own as contrasted with other Australians. And part of what they seek relates to obtaining some knowledge of the Nyungar traditional past. For the South-west, unfortunately, only a very little of that knowledge survives." (Berndt, R.M., 1979, p. 88)

"My own land, I have said, was that of the Nyungars. In spite of our divorcement from it, and the paucity of our traditional Aboriginal heritage, our attachment to it has not decreased. In fact, because we have been deprived of it, that attachment has increased." (Colbung, K., 1979, p. 100).

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1. Aboriginal Heritage Significance

The Aboriginal names for North Lake and Bibra Lake have been recorded as Coolbellup and Walliabup respectively.¹ Accordingly, North Lake and Bibra Lake will often be referred to as Coolbellup and Walliabup in this report. These wetlands are located in the territory of the Beeliar group.² Due to the early destruction of the Beeliar traditions we will never know the full cultural and spiritual significance of the Coolbellup/Walliabup wetlands. We are reliant on the limited information available from archeological research, European historical record and contemporary Aboriginal oral history. However, the evidence from each of these sources consistently points to the importance of the Coolbellup/Walliabup wetlands as an area of importance and significance in terms of Aboriginal heritage.

The Beeliar tribe was one of the first Aboriginal tribes in Western Australia to suffer the full impact of European settlement. Its experience foreshadowed the disastrous impact of European settlement on Aboriginal life and culture throughout the south-west. European possession of Western Australia was claimed in the territory of the Beeliar group at Arthur Head (Fremantle) in 1827. When European settlement occurred in 1829, it was focused along the river foreshores, including those of the Swan and Canning Rivers in the Beeliar area. European use of these areas reduced Aboriginal access to essential food sources.³ In subsequent violent conflict between Europeans and Aborigines over access to food, and the consequent reprisal killing by both Europeans and Aborigines, Midgegeroo, the Beeliar tribal elder and his son Yagan, emerged as principal figures.⁴ There was also considerable communication between Yagan and the European settlers. Yagan was "one of the most famous Aborigines recorded by the settlers in the 19th century".⁵ While the roles of Midgegeroo and Yagan are controversial from both Aboriginal and European perspectives, there is little doubt that they played critical roles in the relations between Aborigines and European settlers in the early years of European settlement. By late 1833, within five years of European settlement, Midgegeroo, Yagan, Yagan's brother Domjum and other male members of the Beeliar group,

had been shot and killed by Europeans in a number of brutal episodes in European-Aboriginal relations. The Beeliar group, with its access to traditional territory and food denied, and its family structure in disarray, would have suffered the further effects of dependence on Europeans for food, disease epidemics like measles, and European alcohol. Still, it is likely that members of the group lived on for some period at Coolbellup/Walliabup and other areas more adjacent to European settlement like Fremantle.

The available evidence indicates that rivers and wetlands were the principal sites of Aboriginal occupation on the coastal plain, while the coastal plain was in turn the most densely populated area of the south west.⁶ The rivers and wetlands provide sources of freshwater and are "the most biologically productive areas of the plain and directly or indirectly support most of its wildlife".⁷ The wetlands provided numerous sources of food to the Aboriginal people.⁸ These included many species and large populations of waterbirds, the much valued turtles and *Typha* roots. Accordingly much of the survival knowledge and traditional customs of the coastal plain Aboriginal people related to wetlands. Wells were dug some distance from the wetlands so that water was filtered by sand.⁹ Waterbirds were speared or trapped with nooses,¹⁰ turtles were trapped with pits¹¹ or tracked and dug out of the mud,¹² while *Typha* was in a sense cultivated with periodic burning.¹³ The bark flakes from paperbark trees were also used to provide a waterproof lining for the mia mia huts¹⁴ and to wrap food for cooking.¹⁵ Spears made from the "spear-wood" which grew near the wetlands were highly valued and were traded with other Aboriginal tribes far up the coast¹⁶. Thus, the Beeliar wetlands, including Coolbellup and Walliabup, would have played an important part in the lives of the Beeliar group.

Furthermore, the available evidence indicates that the Coolbellup/Walliabup wetlands formed a principal and perhaps the main campsite for the the Beeliar group. This location is consistent with Lyon's 1833 report that Midgegeroo's "headquarters" of Mendyarrup was "situated somewhere in the Gaudoo",¹⁷ which he described as the central sandy area of the coastal plain.¹⁸ This location is also similar to Galup (Lake Monger) which formed

Yellowgonga's post settlement "headquarters"¹⁹ and which according to contemporary Aboriginal oral history was an ancient campsite.²⁰ There is a focusing of archeological sites on the shores of North Lake and the northern shores of Bibra Lake with these having the largest number of artefacts for archeological sites in the Beeliar Wetland area.²¹ This, along with the discovery of "chert" artefacts, indicates that the Coolbellup/Walliabup wetlands formed a principal ancient campsite area²² in the Beeliar wetlands. The hydrology of North Lake and Bibra Lake would make them among the most desirable campsite locations. North Lake, in particular, is a largely permanent freshwater lake while the other lakes in the Beeliar wetlands are both more seasonal and more saline.²³ The chain of lakes running from North Lake south to Mandurah are reported to have formed the main transport route between the Swan River and the Murray River tribes, with connected routes travelling north to Gingin and south beyond the Murray River.²⁴ This is supported by Hammond who describes two of the three main Aboriginal "pads" or tracks, one travelling via Fremantle (Walyalup), and the other travelling via the Canning River (Dyarlgarro), meeting at Bibra Lake (Walliabup) before proceeding south along the wetland chain as a single pad.²⁵ A line of small archeological sites between North Lake and Bullcreek²⁶ may indicate the path of the Canning River track. Hammond also describes Bibra Lake (Walliabup) as one of the places on the coastal plain where there was the best food supply, with the largest number of Aborigines camped and consequently the largest number of births.²⁷ At such semi-permanent camps, specific provision for births would be made with two mia mias located some distance from the main camp.²⁸ Thus, the Coolbellup/Walliabup wetlands emerge as a principal site of Aboriginal occupation in the territory of the Beeliar group and probably also as a birth site for members of the group, possibly including Midgegeroo and Yagan. It is also likely that traditional burial grounds for the Beeliar group are located in the general vicinity of Coolbellup/Walliabup.²⁹

The importance of wetland species appears to have been reflected in the spiritual and cultural traditions of the Aboriginal people of the south west. Early European accounts refer to complex kinship categories with totemic identifications to local animals and plants. There is

reference to two major matrilineal moieties named after the white cockatoo and crow,³⁰ with sub-families which "had their origin in species of birds transformed into men".³¹ Species mentioned in this regard include mountain duck, two species of waterfowl and black swan.³² Similarly, the spear-wood referred to earlier was identified with one of these sub-families.³³ These kinship beliefs define important spiritual and personal relations to the non-human species of the natural environment. Similar spiritual and personal relations are indicated by the oral record of the late Mrs. Ollie Worrell who at Munday Swamp (near Perth Airport) would "Call out in Nyungar before fishing for turtle there ... to apologise to the spirits and to ensure a good catch."³⁴ It has been argued that such personal and spiritual relations to non-human nature provide the basis for an environmental ethic of constrained and respectful use of nature.³⁵ The Coolbellup/Walliabup wetlands which still act as habitat for many of the species involved, provide a link to these valuable cultural traditions and ethics.

The role of water as the basis and source of life is also reflected in the cultural and spiritual traditions of the Aboriginal people of Western Australia. Aboriginal groups "held in trust, in perpetuity, specific stretches of country"³⁶ for which they were responsible.³⁷ The "land was sacred because within it were manifested mythic beings of the dreaming"³⁸ and "through these beings it was possible for men to perform land-renewing and land-sustaining rituals ...".³⁹ Individuals were linked to the land through mythological centres⁴⁰ from which it was often believed their spirit derived at conception or birth⁴¹ and in part returned to at death.⁴² On the Swan Coastal Plain the principle mythological centres are those of the Waugal serpent figures⁴³ which created, occupy and maintain the rivers, springs and lakes of the coastal plain on which Aboriginal people and the flora and fauna of the wetlands are fundamentally dependent for life. Accordingly, Waugals have a place of profound importance in the spiritual and cultural traditions of the Aboriginal people of the coastal plain. Waugals provide a connection to the land and to the "dreaming" and form a focus and source of spiritual and physical life. The tradition of water serpent figures plays an important role in the spiritual universe of Aboriginal people throughout much of Australia.⁴⁴ It remains a living tradition for

many Aboriginal people. In the case of the Coolbellup/Walliabup wetlands the "legend that a Waugal inhabits these lakes and maintains the flow of the springs that feed them"⁴⁵ makes the site one of profound spiritual and mythological importance for Aboriginal people. The important role of water serpent figures has been outlined in considerable depth by Richard Kingsford in his 1982 Masters thesis on Yamadyi Law in the Murchison area.⁴⁶

In the post-European settlement period the wetlands of the coastal plain have continued as important campsites and sources of food and survival for Aboriginal people.⁴⁷ This is also true of the Coolbellup/Walliabup wetlands. Hammond's description of the area as a good source of food, popular Aboriginal campsite, birth place and meeting point of Aboriginal tracks relates to the post settlement period of the middle to late 19th century. During the 1930s Aborigines living in the Coolbellup/Walliabup lake area walked into South Fremantle to sell clothes line props to a wood merchant.⁴⁸ According to O'Connor *et al* "recent Aboriginal camping areas were situated on the southern side of Hope Road, close to the north-eastern edge of Bibra Lake.....".⁴⁹ This study also identified a site on the southern shore of Bibra Lake as an area "currently used as a recreation ground and occasional camping area by Aboriginal people."⁵⁰ Further, according to O'Connor *et al* the Coolbellup/Walliabup wetlands were "a widely known source of turtle and wildfowl. Aborigines from Pinjarra, Mandurah and Armadale reported that they and their parents occasionally camped there for extended periods to harvest these resources".⁵¹

O'Connor *et al* provide a useful summary of the important values of different sites in the metropolitan and Murray River area. The North Lake/Bibra Lake site is seen as extremely important as a mythological site⁵² and consequently also of importance for "salvage anthropology".⁵³ These lakes are listed as having important research potential for exploring the impact of European settlement on Aboriginal life⁵⁴ and as important for archeological research of pre-contact habitation and/or usage.⁵⁵ The site is seen generally as an important representative of pre-contact camping/hunting/fishing sites.⁵⁶ These views are well supported by the available historical material and archeological data.

During recent periods many Aboriginal people have moved from the country to the

urban areas of Perth.⁵⁷ Many Aboriginal people live in the South West Corridor of Perth, and particularly in the suburb of Coolbellup just west of the Coolbellup/Walliabup wetlands. The Coolbellup/Walliabup wetlands form some of the few remaining wetlands in the metropolitan area which have been preserved in a close to natural state. They are currently being rehabilitated as part of general proposals to preserve the Beeliar wetlands and their flora and fauna. The Coolbellup/Walliabup wetlands provide an important link to the natural context, cultural traditions, spiritual life and history of the Aboriginal people of the Swan Coastal Plain. They will be of increasing importance to Aboriginal people seeking to maintain and develop an independent Aboriginal identity in an urban context. They also provide an important opportunity to communicate to European people an appreciation of the value of Aboriginal spiritual and cultural traditions.

2. Aboriginal Sites

Figures 1 and 2 show the approximate location of the mythological site, the archeological sites and the projected path of the Roe Freeway. The information on sites is not for publication or general circulation.

The Mythological Site

The area of North Lake, Bibra Lake and the intervening land containing Hope Road Swamp were registered in 1985 as a mythological site.⁵⁸ Within Aboriginal spiritual tradition this area is inhabited by a "Waugal" which maintains the flow of the springs that feed the lakes. Waugal or Serpent figures play a principal role in Aboriginal traditional and contemporary spiritual life throughout much of Australia. Under section 39(3) of the Aboriginal Heritage Act (1972-1980), "Associated sacred beliefs, and ritual or ceremonial usage, in so far as such matters can be ascertained, shall be regarded as the primary considerations to be taken into account in the evaluation of any place or object for the purposes of this Act."⁵⁹

FIGURE 1: APPROXIMATE LOCATION OF THE NORTH
LAKE/BIBRA LAKE MYTHOLOGICAL SITE

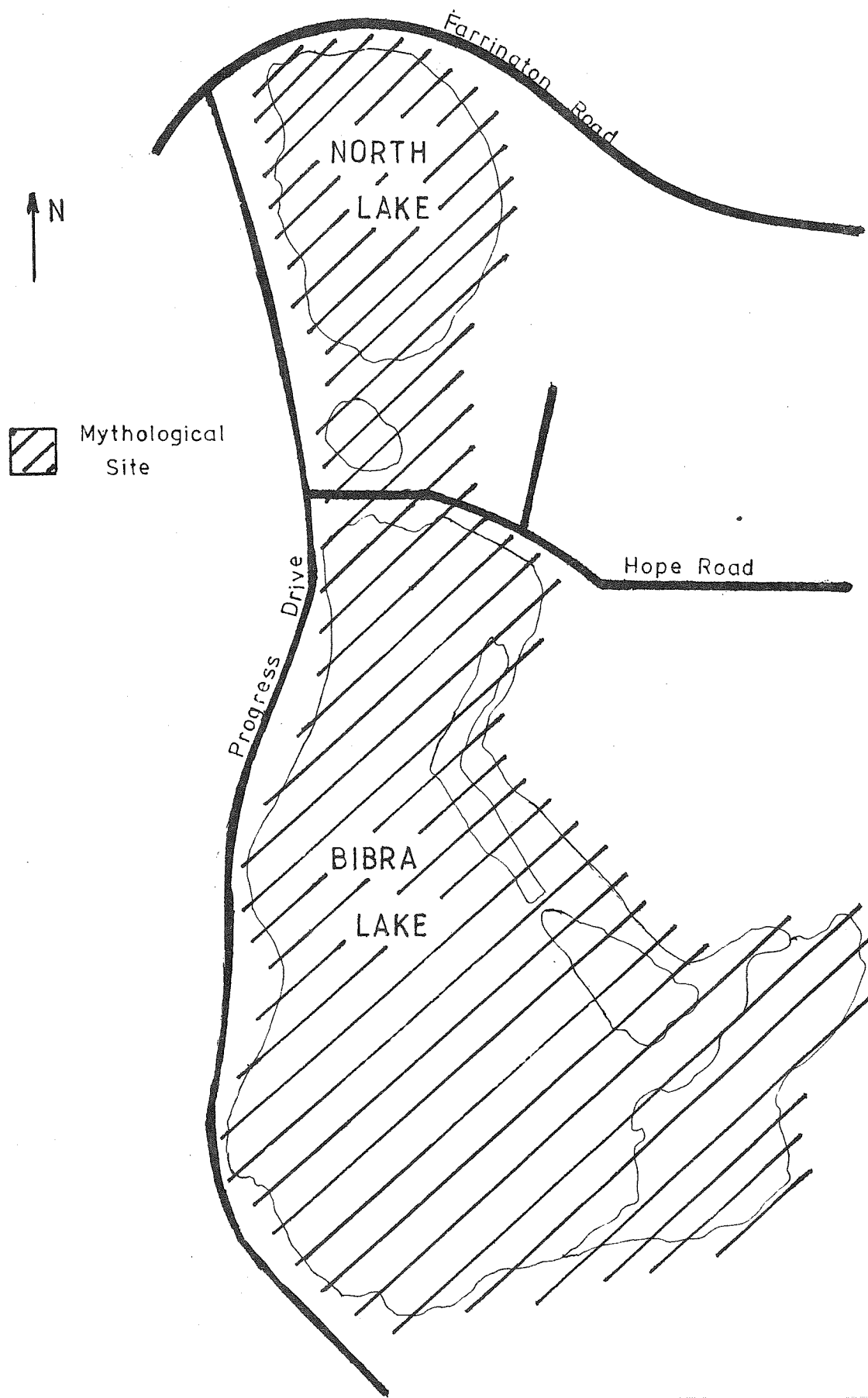
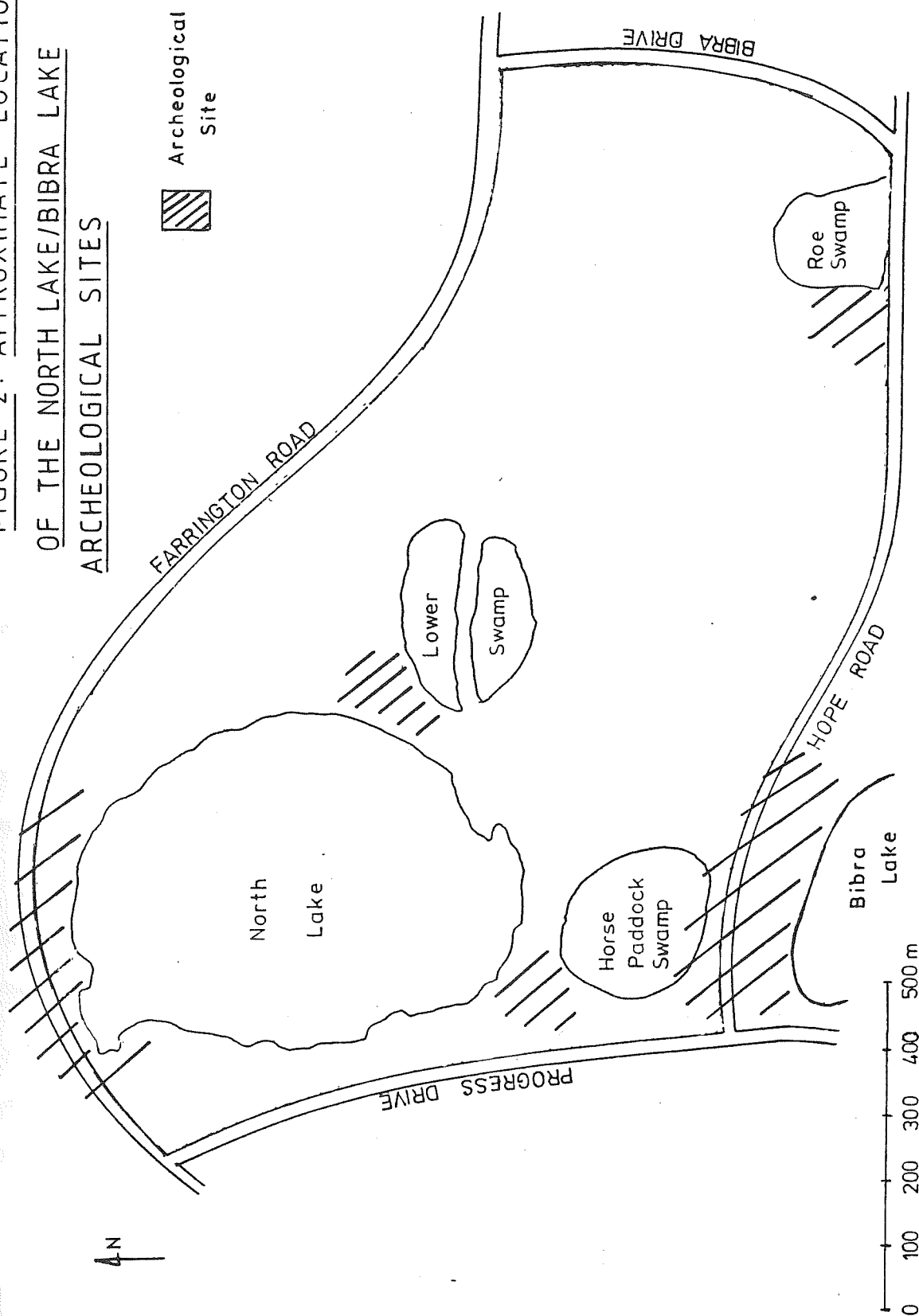


FIGURE 2: APPROXIMATE LOCATIONS
OF THE NORTH LAKE/BIBRA LAKE
ARCHEOLOGICAL SITES



Archeological Sites

There are five archeological sites registered in the Coolbellup/Walliabup wetlands areas.⁶⁰ The two most important sites are on the land to the north of North Lake and to the north of Bibra Lake. At each of these sites more than 1,000 artefacts have been reported. Additional sites to the south east and south west of North Lake, and at Roe Swamp, involve much smaller numbers of artefacts. "Chert" artefacts found at the north of North Lake indicate that these lakes have been used as campsites for a period in the order of 5000 years or more. This takes their period of use to the time of their probable hydrological formation with the rising sea and water table levels at the close of the last ice age. Glass artefacts also found at the north of North Lake indicate continuing usage of the lakes as campsites in the post-European settlement period. Both of these two main sites have large numbers of artefacts from the intervening period. However, the site north of North Lake has now been overlaid by Farrington Road. Further, although there are archeological sites at other lakes in the Beeliar wetlands, indicating the general role of these lakes as sites of Aboriginal occupation, these other sites involve much smaller numbers of artefacts. Accordingly, the area north of Bibra Lake is a principal site for further archeological research in relation to the Beeliar wetlands area and possibly for the coastal plain wetlands in general and should be protected for this reason.

The archeological sites have importance beyond that of future archeological research, because they identify principal sites of recurring Aboriginal occupation in this area of general importance for Aboriginal life. The focusing of archeological sites in the area of North Lake and the large number of artefacts collected at these main sites compared with other sites in the Beeliar wetlands and Beeliar area, indicates that the North Lake/Bibra Lake area has been a principal focus of Aboriginal occupation in the Beeliar area.

The main archeological site at the north of Bibra Lake and the site at Roe Swamp are both in the path of the proposed Roe Highway. The Roe Highway would also bisect the North Lake/Bibra Lake mythological site.

3. Recommendations

1. That the area be developed as a focus for the communication of an appreciation of Aboriginal cultural and spiritual traditions and the role these have played in the development of an attitude of respectful use towards the land. Appropriate Aboriginal cultural education programmes could be integrated with wetland environmental education programmes.
2. That there be further historical, ethnographic and archeological research to increase understanding of the Aboriginal significance of the Coolbellup/Walliabup wetlands and the Beeliar Wetlands generally. This research needs to be complemented by a broader programme of research into the culture and history of the Aboriginal people of the south west. There is significant urgency for this research as "the old people who are repositories of this information become fewer and fewer every year."⁶¹
3. That the natural flora and fauna of the Coolbellup/ Walliabup area be preserved and rehabilitated. These form an essential context to the appreciation of Aboriginal culture and traditional life.
4. That the area of mythological significance, the sites of occupation, and any other sites of Aboriginal significance, be protected and respected in future planning for the area.
5. That "suitable worded plaques" to explain the Aboriginal significance of the area be erected at suitable locations. The production and wording of these plaques should only be carried out after consultation with the Aboriginal people and communities concerned.⁶²
6. That Aboriginal involvement in rehabilitation of the area be invited and that

consideration be given to the designation of certain plants and areas of rehabilitation as being in memory of the prior occupation of the area by the Beeliar tribal group.

7. That Aboriginal involvement in planning and management of the area be ensured through the appointment under the Aboriginal Heritage Act of site wardens in consultation with the Aboriginal communities concerned⁶³ and through the appointment of Aboriginal representation to the management committee for the proposed Beeliar Wetlands Park.

8. That the appropriate steps be taken to have the Coolbellup/Walliabup wetlands declared a protected area under the Aboriginal Heritage Act.

9. That the appropriate steps be taken to have the Coolbellup/Walliabup wetlands area entered on the register of the National Estate under the Australian Heritage Commission Act because of their importance in terms of Aboriginal heritage.

10. That the proposed Roe Highway not be constructed through the area as this will desecrate the area of mythological and spiritual significance, a number of the campsite locations including the important campsites on the northern shore of Bibra Lake, and the natural environment context of the area. The Roe Highway would constitute significant desecration of an area of importance and significance in terms of Aboriginal heritage.

11. Consideration should be given to returning North Lake and Bibra Lake to their Aboriginal names of Coolbellup and Walliabup.

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