Darling River, NSW
Maritime Archaeological Survey

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Front cover: Remains of the historic paddle steamer Rodney, Polia Station, Pooncarie (Photograph by David Nutley)
# Table of Contents

1  **Executive Summary** ............................................................................................................. 3

2  **Survey Aims** ......................................................................................................................... 4
   2.1  
   2.2  
   2.3  
   2.4  
   2.5  
   2.6  

3  **The Context of Riverine Cultural Heritage** ....................................................................... 7
   3.1  
   3.2  
   3.3  
   3.4  

4  **Methodology** ....................................................................................................................... 9
   4.1  
   4.2  
   4.3  
   4.4  
   4.5  
   4.6  

5  **The Physical Setting** ........................................................................................................... 12
   5.1  

6  **Legislative Controls** ........................................................................................................... 14
   6.1  
   6.2  

7  **The Shipwreck Sites** ........................................................................................................... 15
   7.1  
   7.1.1  
   7.1.2  
   7.1.3  
   7.1.4  
   7.2  
   7.2.1  
   7.2.2  

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Darling River NSW: Maritime Archaeological Survey
TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1: View across wharf at Wentworth to the ps Ruby........................................................................1
Figure 2: ps Rodney...................................................................................................................................4
Figure 3: ps Providence boiler at Kinchega National Park........................................................................5
Figure 4: ps Wave at Bourke....................................................................................................................5
Figure 5: Entrance to the tourist drive where the remains of the Wave lie..................................................6
Figure 6: Remains of ps Nile’s paddle wheels currently installed in the Jandra........................................6
Figure 7: Photograph of Brewarrina weir upstream from fish traps.........................................................7
Figure 8: Scene from the re-enactment in 1994 of the ps Rodney torching..................................................8
Figure 9: Darling River near Wentworth..................................................................................................12
Figure 10: Map of study area..................................................................................................................13
Figure 11: Darling River near the site of the ps Rodney...........................................................................13
Figure 12: Extreme drought conditions on land adjacent to the Darling River.......................................14
Figure 13: ps Rodney at Echuca.............................................................................................................16
Figure 14: Remains of the ps Rodney during the 2002 survey..................................................................17
Figure 15: Location map for ps Rodney remains on Darling River, Polia Station......................................18
Figure 16: Remains of the Rodney.........................................................................................................19
Figure 17: Purpose built 6-metre photograph boom..................................................................................20
Figure 18: Measured site plan..................................................................................................................21
Figure 19: 3-D survey plans......................................................................................................................21
Figure 20: Results of general area theodolite survey..................................................................................22
Figure 21: Aboriginal scarred tree.........................................................................................................23
Figure 22: Aboriginal midden..................................................................................................................23
Figure 23: Aboriginal hearth....................................................................................................................23
Figure 24: Boiler with signs of the explosion that destroyed the Providence.............................................32
Figure 25: Location map..........................................................................................................................33
Figure 26: Measured sketch of ‘up-side down’ and half buried Providence boiler......................................33
Figure 27: Model of a standard Scotch type boiler with two furnaces –..................................................34
Figure 28: Darling River below location of the remains of the Providence....................................................35
Figure 29: The boiler of the ps Providence...............................................................................................35
Figure 30: Fragment of plating, upper river bank –....................................................................................36
Figure 31: Map of Bourke and Brewarrina...............................................................................................36
Figure 32: View of the Wave wreck site..................................................................................................42
Figure 33: Section drawing of paddle steamer Wave wreck site................................................................43
Figure 34: Riverbank against which the Wandering Jew lies...................................................................49
Figure 35: Portion of the Wandering Jew visible at the surface.............................................................49
Figure 36: Map of Bourke and Brewarrina...............................................................................................50
Figure 37: Wandering Jew wreck site from opposite riverbank.............................................................50
Figure 38: Photograph of Nile paddle wheels and shaft in Bourke...........................................................55
Figure 39: An old river punt site at Menindee..........................................................................................57
Figure 40: The new wharf at Wentworth.................................................................................................57
Figure 41: Cemetery at Kinchega Homestead site.....................................................................................58
Figure 42: Kinchega homestead site........................................................................................................59
Figure 43: Punt crossing cutting still visible beside modern bridge.........................................................59
Figure 44: The original Louth Post Office, now a B&B..........................................................................60
Figure 45: Riverboats at the one time Port of Louth...............................................................................60
Figure 46: The terraced riverbank at Louth today....................................................................................61
Figure 47: 1996 replica of original wharf at Bourke................................................................................81
Figure 51: Lynwood, house’ overlooking the paddle steamer route at Bourke........................................62
Figure 52: Road bridge near Government wharf site at Wilcannia.........................................................62
Figure 42: The old wharf site at Wilcannia...............................................................................................63
Figure 53: Old Customs House at Wentworth........................................................................................64
Figure 54: The ‘Captain’s House, at Bourke, positioned to observe steamers on the river.....................65
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Figure 1: View across wharf at Wentworth to the ps *Ruby*.  
Photograph by David Nutley.
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- Johnny Gurr: Researcher
- Barbara Hickson: Heritage Advisor
- Garry Hopewell: Queensland Forestry Research Institute
- Caroline Merrylees: Archivist, Hay Historical Society
- Val and Alec Norris: Echuca Historical Society
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- Leon Wagner: ps Ruby project and 1994 Rodney re-enactment
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- Library: Australian National Maritime Museum
- Library: Mitchell/State Library of NSW
- Robyn and David White: Old Post Office B&B, Louth
- Harry Hart: Brewarrina Council
- Phil Johnston: Manager, Back O’Bourke Exhibition Centre
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The July 2002/August 2003 archaeological survey of shipwrecks and related sites along the Darling River was conducted by the NSW Heritage Office. The survey resulted in detailed recording of the Rodney, location and site condition observations on three other shipwreck sites (Providence, Wave and Wandering Jew) and strong information about a fifth shipwreck (the Nile).

Facilities directly associated with the operation of the riverboats were also noted. These included wharves and strategically positioned buildings such as the old Customs House at Wentworth; Lyndon’ (‘The Captain’s House’) at Bourke; a post office at the port of Louth, various bridges and the Aboriginal fish traps at Brewarrina. ‘References to these, along with brief descriptions have been included in this report to assist in providing a wider context for the shipwreck remains. However, these sites were not a formal part of the current survey nor was their significance evaluated.

The survey established important contacts with key people and organisations within the study area. These contacts have been invaluable in compiling data for this report and for inclusion in the Heritage Office Maritime Heritage Online web site (http://maritime.heritage.nsw.gov.au). It is hoped that this report will be of assistance to those contacts in future interpretative strategies to promote the various communities along the Darling River.

As a result of the survey, invaluable insights into the nature of the waterway, the likely situation of other remains and the current extent of interpretation of the identified sites as items of heritage were obtained. For example, the potential for public interpretation and the continuing social significance of shipwreck remains as physical memorials of chapters in NSW history were illustrated by the 1994 re-enactment of the burning of the ps Rodney by unionists during 1884 shearer’s strike. The re-enactment was organised by current residents along the lower Darling River and attracted hundreds of people from all over Australia.

This study provides a stronger basis for the further study and management of the shipping heritage of the Darling River. It identifies additional opportunities to manage riverine archaeological sites both as heritage tourism assets and as important archaeological records of the river’s history.

In addition, the study focuses attention on the importance of archaeological investigation, assessment and development of management options for riverine shipwrecks – a process that allows them to retain their integrity, authenticity and context.
Darling River NSW: Maritime Archaeological Survey

2 SURVEY AIMS

The Darling River Maritime Archaeological Survey set out to identify key shipwreck and other maritime sites located along the riverbed and adjacent banks of the Darling River and to conduct a detailed investigation of the remains of the ps Rodney. This work was undertaken to assist the development of informed management decisions that will help to secure the long term future of these sites. To achieve this, information has been obtained about the heritage significance of individual sites and associated locations within the broader context of riverine heritage and tourism potential.

Sites investigated as part of this survey were:

2.1 ps Rodney

Objectives:
- To conduct a archaeological recording of the remains of the Rodney
- To evaluate the significance of the Rodney as a heritage item
- To develop management recommendations
- To obtain an accurate position fix for incorporation in the Heritage Office shipwreck database and Maritime Heritage Online web site

Figure 2: ps Rodney. Photograph by David Nutley.

The timber paddle steamer Rodney lies on the bed of the Darling River on private land at Polia Station, about 140km north of Wentworth. The Rodney was sunk whilst being used as a strike-breaker in the shearsers' dispute of 1894 and was burnt to the waterline by unionists that year.

2.2 ps Providence, Menindee

Objectives:
- To conduct a archaeological recording of the remains of the Providence
- To evaluate the significance of the Providence as a heritage item
- To develop management recommendations
- To obtain an accurate position fix for incorporation in the Heritage Office shipwreck database and Maritime Heritage Online web site

The paddle steamer Providence was lost at Menindee on the Darling River in 1872 when its boiler exploded with the loss of six lives. Today, the remains of the vessel's steam boiler lie on the riverbank within the present Kinchega National Park.
2.3 ps Wave, Bourke

Objectives:
- To develop a basic photographic record of the remains of the Wave
- To obtain an accurate position fix for incorporation in the Heritage Office shipwreck database and Maritime Heritage Online web site

The ps Wave was built at Echuca in 1886 and originally operated between Bourke and Brewarrina on the Darling River. The vessel stranded on the west back of the river during a flood in 1921 and never made it back into the river. The owner, Lloyd Surrey, made the stranded vessel his home and lived there for many years. Apparently the number of children and animals present at this time earned the vessel the nickname 'Noah's Ark'!

The wreck site is well known locally, lying in an open paddock, and incorporated into the 'Maritime Port of Bourke', heritage tourist drive in 1995. This site symbolises the vast range and spread of Historic Shipwreck remains scattered right across and the New South
Wales inland and along its coastal regions. The “Back-of-Bourke” cultural tag applies as well to the remains of the paddle steamer Wave, symbolising the remoteness of the place.

Figure 5: Entrance to the tourist drive where the remains of the Wave lie. Photograph by David Nutley.

2.4 *ps Nile*, Bourke

Objectives:
- To information about the location of the remains of the *Nile* to guide future survey

The vessel's name inspired images of the mighty Nile river in Egypt flowing through a desert landscape with fertile river banks. The paddle steamer *Nile*, a regular river steamer, also maneuvered through the twisting Darling River that bisects the hostile inland of NSW.

This work-a-day vessel did not achieve any high points of historical association; its major signifying event appears to have been its final destruction by fire in 1926, having earlier been severely damaged by fire in 1895. The limited exposed remains of the vessel are a local reminder of the vessel and its connection to an earlier time.

Figure 6: Remains of *ps Nile*’s paddle wheels currently installed in the *Jandra*. Photograph by Barbara Hickson, Feb 1998.
2.5 ps *Wandering Jew*, Brewarrina

Objectives:
- To develop a basic photographic record of the location and remains of the *Wandering Jew*
- To obtain an accurate position fix for incorporation in the Heritage Office shipwreck database and Maritime Heritage Online web site

The river steamer the *Wandering Jew* was a regular trader along the Darling River, located in the vicinity of the State significant Aboriginal fish traps near town.

![Figure 7: Photograph of Brewarrina weir upstream from fish traps. The arrow shows the position of ps *Wandering Jew*. Photograph by Jillian Comber.](image)

2.6 Documentation of other maritime sites and places
Photographic documentation of river port infrastructure at Wentworth, Pooncarie, Menindee, Wilcannia, Louth, Bourke and Brewarrina was also undertaken to assist in providing a context to the operations of the riverboats represented in this study.

3 THE CONTEXT OF RIVERINE CULTURAL HERITAGE

3.1 Aboriginal context
On its path across New South Wales, the Darling River flows through the lands of many Aboriginal clans, including 15 major groups representing tens of thousands of years of interaction with the river and other cultural activity (Heritage Office 1996: 192). Shipwrecks and associated sites along the Darling River therefore represent a part of history that interacts with and overlays earlier and concurrent Aboriginal occupation. The current survey, while focused on the remains of shipwrecks, acknowledged this background by recording any adjacent visible evidence of Aboriginal occupation to ensure they were taken into account in management recommendations.

3.2 History of riverine maritime trade and shipbuilding
3.3 Shipwreck Heritage

Shipwrecks are markers to earlier historic events, providing divers and others with the opportunity to return to the exact scene of an incident. By carefully recording and interpreting these fragile sites, direct access can be made to a past era. Information can be obtained on a range of themes, such as ship technology, transport, trade and industry. Special insights can be obtained about life on board through the goods and possessions they carried. Often this information has not survived in contemporary historic records.

Communities benefit from learning about local maritime history. This history can be interpreted through a range of activities including publications, dive tourism, land-based shipwreck walking trails and signage, and school study programs. The information can be disseminated through a variety of media such as plaques, video, CD’s, books, research articles, etc.

3.4 Tourism

Historic shipwrecks have traditionally been a focus of recreational attention by SCUBA divers and other coastal users. With approximately 6,500 Historic Shipwrecks located around the Australian coast and along inland waterways, there are many opportunities to visit and explore these often impressive reminders of a former age. Many of the sites are also associated with sensational stories and sagas, abound in marine life, and are unique in terms of the rewarding learning experience they offer.

Historic Shipwrecks located within the country's inland waterways have generally not been highlighted to the same level as the coastal sites. This is partly due to the much fewer located sites and the distances between them. The favour shown towards working heritage vessels, along waterways like the Murray, have actually had a detrimental effect on the surviving archaeological wreck sites. Many have been pulled apart for their surviving engine components as well as other fastenings and fittings to assist with active boat restoration projects.

Complete historic shipwrecks have been removed from their original context illegally and 'restored' to operational condition. In most cases this has tragically affected the original context and integrity of the historic material - much necessarily replaced with new. In the process, the original material unrecorded and discarded. Due to the fragmentary remains of most extant wreck sites, 50%-98% complete rebuilding is often required, leaving little, if any, of the original fabric intact or interpreted.
This situation needs to be addressed at a local level and the provisions of the NSW Heritage Act 1977 enforced. While the beauty and thrill of working riverboats has been a tremendous boon to the economies of local river towns, there remains a significant local archaeological resource available for complimentary tourism exposure. Some of these sites, like the paddle steamer *Rodney*, played a seminal role in outback communication and development, and were associated with significant historical events. Other unique sites like the stranded remains of the paddle steamer *Wave* at Bourke, have been successfully incorporated into a riverine maritime heritage park and heritage tour program.

The remains of other local intriguing sites await interpretation and awareness. The potential for unique heritage experiences could be show-cased with innovative test tourism projects. It is hoped that successful projects will allow the range of sites to be more fully integrated into local and regional tourism marketing plans. This will help ensure that the respect of each site is maintained, together with physical protection and survival.

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Background research
The NSW Heritage Office had previously assembled historic reference materials related to the loss of each historic vessel, as part of its work in developing the NSW Historic Shipwreck Database.

The Office was aware of the discovery and identification of the boiler belonging to the paddle steamer *Providence*, however, the visible presence of a shipwreck locally identified as the *Rodney* of 1894 came as a surprise. The notification of the site by Mr Glen Dixon was supported by a concise publication prepared by the Wentworth Historical Society.

Likewise, the remains of the *Wave* at Bourke were well known, although the details of the current location for the *Nile* paddle wheels, and possible associated wreck site, was not certain. Other sites like the *Wandering Jew* were known to have been sighted in earlier times, although the current location was unknown to the Heritage Office.

Apart from the *Wave* at Bourke, none of the sites had been formally inspected and assessed for their heritage value, state of conservation or archaeological potential. The Heritage Office therefore made an inspection of the sites a priority for 2002-2003, when river levels supported detailed documentation work.

Additional contemporary media clippings from local newspapers were collated by the Wentworth Historical Society and Wentworth Shire Library and provided to the Heritage Office. NSW Heritage Office Wreck Spotter, Greig Berry, documented the remains of the paddle steamer *Wave* in 1999, building on the earlier excellent work of local Heritage Advisor Barbara Wilson.

Few other documents have been traced for the vessels, further to standard entries in the British Register of Ships (detailing vessels registered to Australian ports) and known pictorial materials. This is a common situation for nineteenth century vessels built and operating in inland New South Wales. Their local manufacture and general nature of the trades, made contemporary recording unlikely.
Today, archaeological wreck sites provide one of the few opportunities to record and discuss the nature of these unique Australian-built vessels, specifics of their method of manufacture and a direct link to a colourful past.

4.2 Site selection
The sites were selected for survey because of their historic significance to the riverine region, and in the case of the Rodney, because of its links to an important interstate historical event. Local environmental conditions also favoured the site inspections – the prevailing drought that continued through 2002 and into 2003 being responsible for minimal Darling River levels and therefore, high exposure of the fragile archaeological remains.

In addition, the Darling River appears to have accounted for only about five (5) or six (6) well attested historic vessel losses, so the sites represented almost the total potential Historic Shipwreck resource.

4.3 Assessment of significance
Non-shipwreck sites were not the focus of this survey and their significance has not been assessed as part of this report.

An assessment of significance has been undertaken for those shipwreck sites which have been located – the paddle steamers Rodney, Providence, Wave and the Wandering Jew. However, until the extent of the remains of the Wandering Jew have be ascertained and recorded the extent of its archaeological significance cannot be established.

Significance has been assessed in accordance with the nature and degree of significance of the site’s primary attributes. These include attributes related to historical, social, archaeological, scientific and interpretative significance.

4.4 Equipment selection and deployment
Because the wrecks were located near established road systems and within walking access, limited survey equipment was required. The archaeological survey required detailed pictorial coverage of each site, both photographic and by measured drawing. The manual sketching and plan recording was undertaken by tape, compass and measuring board. Limited aerial photography was obtained using a 6-metre timber boom and air-pressure shutter release, enabling a photomosaic of the site to be generated.

Due to the suggested complexity of the Rodney site, a 'Total Station' theodolite was deployed to assist with mapping of that site, and to provide important cross-sectional recording of the hull structure.

As a result of time constraints, recording was kept to achievable limits - establishing the extent of the site in a two-dimensional plan and through the theodolite recording, obtaining an approximate three-dimensional shell model of the surviving hull structure and key cross-sectional transects. Greater electronic recording and particularly more sophisticated three-dimensional plotting and image manipulation, were outside available budgets.

Similarly, remote sensing surveys of the water areas to detect any other associated hull remains or structures were not achievable during the current survey. However, based on
the surviving hull form, the potential for further Rodney remains was considered extremely low.

4.5 Composition of the team
The team was chosen to reflect the tasks being undertaken, the nature of the sites being surveyed and the remoteness of the areas in which they are located.

As the focus of this survey was historic river vessels and vessel remains that are at least partly in a submerged environment, the team included Heritage Office archaeologists with training in the recording and interpretation of these sites (David Nutley and Tim Smith for Rodney and Providence; David Nutley for Wave, Nile and Wandering Jew).

However, the shipwrecks in this survey are located within a landscape that has been subject to human occupation and utilisation for thousands of years. The shipwreck sites therefore have the potential for being spatially associated with Aboriginal sites. An archaeologist with training and experience in this area of specialisation was included in the team (Jillian Comber).

Because of the suggested complexity of the Rodney site, a professional surveyor was engaged to assist in the locational mapping of that site, and to provide important cross-sectional recording of the hull structure (Mathew Mclean).

4.6 Constraints

- **Time**
  Travel times from Sydney to the Darling River sites limited the actual window for fieldwork recording. Other commitments meant that only one week was available to the team to meet its target aims. This allowed slightly over one day to record the Rodney wreck site, and a few hours at the Providence remains. Similar times were available for the Wave, Nile and inspection of the Brewarrina weir area. In the case of the Nile, only a brief discussion with the ‘Back of Bourke’ tourist centre was possible. The remaining time was spent transiting the river from Wentworth-Wilcannia-Bourke and Brewarrina, recording other visible heritage sites, and returning to Sydney.

Because of these predicted constraints, the shipwreck surveys were designed to be preliminary in nature. Key aspects of each site formed the focus of the recording aims, while future opportunities for documenting the archaeological remains were identified.

- **Geography**
  Although the sites were within easy car access from established centres and road networks, sites like the paddle steamer Rodney lay approximately one hour's drive from the nearest accommodation base at Pooncarie.

- **Weather**
  The established drought conditions significantly favoured the field recording - the roads were dry and passable at all times and the Darling River levels amongst the lowest recorded. This river "pooling" state meant that any shipwreck remains located towards the bed of the river would be significantly exposed. The Rodney for example was reported to be at a level of exposure not usually seen, allowing for significant ease of survey and best-case visibility.
• **Research**

Available research sources included newspaper clippings held by significant repositories such as the Mitchell Library in Sydney, which detailed each wreck event. In terms of the vessel's themselves, primary source data was located in registry records such as the *British Register of Ships*. Surviving pictorial material was sourced through local Historical Societies, although this remained limited, and for some sites, non-existent.

In all cases, the historical documentation available for each site remained very limited. It is expected that additional material related to the vessels and their operations might still be found in surviving private family collections, although the time required to search for and access these kind of records was beyond the scope of the present study. This meant that details of hull form and finish were almost unavailable, and information on the daily use of the vessels fragmentary, except for details of the wreck events themselves.

Significant research assistance was provided by local Heritage Advisors to Bourke, Barbara Hickson and Jillian Comber; Wreck Spotter Greig Berry; maritime historian Ms Johnny Gurr; the owners of the Old Post Office B&B, Louth, David and Robyn White; and Brewarrina Council Officer, Harry Hart. The Heritage office was appreciative of this kind assistance, together with a host of local contacts.

### 5 THE PHYSICAL SETTING

#### 5.1 Darling River and environs

The Darling River flows through New South Wales from the Queensland border to Murray River at Wentworth. Its primary physical characteristic is its steep sided, alluvial banks that, particularly in times of mid to low water levels, give the appearance of a large canal. The landscape through which it flows is generally arid and predominantly used for grazing sheep and cattle.

Figure 9: Darling River near Wentworth. Photograph by David Nutley.
Darling River NSW: Maritime Archaeological Survey

The inland position of the river and lack of regular rain means that the vegetation that lines the river is often subject to extremes of heat, cold, wet and dry. This has a marked effect of the River Red Gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*). In contrast to tall, relatively straight specimens along the perennially flowing River Murray, those along the Darling are short and gnarled. As a result, the Murray River Red Gums were often used for shipbuilding but those along the Darling River could not be sawn into suitable planks for this purpose.

Figure 10: Map of study area.

Figure 11: Darling River near the site of the *ps Rodney*. Photograph by David Nutley.
During the current survey, extreme drought conditions were being experienced throughout the catchment area of the Darling River. As a result, no water was flowing down the river which had reached ‘pooling’ level. In the lower reaches near Wentworth, the result of this was that water from the Murray River was flowing back up into the Darling River.

Figure 12: Extreme drought conditions on land adjacent to the Darling River. Photograph by David Nutley.

6 LEGISLATIVE CONTROLS
Cultural heritage in and along the Darling River is covered by both the relics (Section 139) and Historic Shipwrecks (Section 48) provisions of the NSW State Heritage Act 1977. Protection can also be provided under the provisions of the Environmental Planning and Assessments Act 1979.

6.1 Heritage Act, 1977
The NSW Heritage Act 1977 is state legislation administered by the NSW Heritage Office. The relics provisions of the Heritage Act cover the entire extent of the State, and extend out to the three nautical mile offshore State limit. Any archaeological remain over fifty years of age and related to the settlement of NSW within the land of New South Wales (including land under water), is protected from disturbance. An approved Excavation Permit is required to be issued by the Heritage Council of New South Wales prior to the recovery of archaeological records, or in cases where excavation might likely disturb buried archaeological sites and deposits.

Recent 2001 amendments to the Act introduced specific protection to historic shipwreck sites. A site is a protected Historic Shipwreck if it situated in State waters, or otherwise within the limits of the State for seventy five years or more (Section 48). An Historic Shipwrecks Permit is required prior to disturbance of a site, including disturbance for archaeological recording, recovery and display (Section 51). Such a permit would be granted only if the research or educational benefits of disturbance is identified. This would normally require and Archaeological Assessment of the site, a developed research,
conservation and management plan, and the support of associated interest bodies, including council, relevant government agencies and Aboriginal Land Councils, where applicable.

The NSW Heritage Office also maintains a register of State significant heritage sites located in New South Wales. Known as the State Heritage Register, it comprises a comprehensive list of publicly and privately owned places of State heritage significance. An item will be of State heritage significance if it is of historical, scientific, cultural, social, archaeological, architectural, natural or aesthetic value of significance to the State.

The State Heritage Register was created by amendments to the NSW Heritage Act 1977. Items will be listed on the Register after an assessment of their heritage significance, following the procedures outlined in Assessing Heritage Significance.

6.2 Environmental Planning and Assessments Act 1979

A property or item may also gain statutory protection as a heritage item if it is listed in the heritage schedule of the local council’s Local Environmental Plan (LEP).

7 THE SHIPWRECK SITES

7.1 ps Rodney

7.1.1 History

The remains of the Rodney encapsulate much of the regional history of the Darling River and the Western Plains: pastoralism, the river trade, the water-frontage stations, the tensions with the shearer’s union and the uncertainties of the Darling flow (Regional Histories of NSW, 1996:195).

The river paddle steamer Rodney (Official Number 73295) was burnt by unionist shearers in 1894 in protest at it being used as a strike breaker during an industrial dispute.

The 1890s shearer’s strikes marked a turning point in Australian politics and the development of a politicised labour movement. Rising costs, job losses associated with new technologies, and a country that was headed towards an economic depression were combined with a growing sense of nationalism. In the pastoral areas it was a volatile mixture. The 1891 strike at Barcaldine in Queensland lead to the election of the first labour representative in parliament the following year. It is also regarded and the birth of the Labor Party (Egloff,1991:63). The 1894 strike was shorter and though by some accounts less hostile was accompanied by the dramatic burning and destruction of the paddle steamer Rodney on the lower reaches of the Darling River.

On Friday 26 August 1894, Capt Dickson was in command of the Rodney carrying 45 non-union labourers upstream to work in the wool sheds at Tolarno Station (Sydney Morning Herald 28 Aug, 1894). The Rodney was also hauling a barge carrying goods and supplies for the stations enroute (Mildura Cultivator 1 Sept, 1894, Riverine Herald, 28 August 1894).

The NSW Heritage Office gratefully acknowledges the research support of Leanne Watmuff, Wentworth Historical Society, and Ms ‘Johnny’ Gurr, Renmark, for background research materials.
Captain Dickson had earlier been warned by the steamer Trafalgar to expect dangerous action by the unionist shearers along the river (Mildura Cultivator, 1 September 1894). He proceeded however in the belief that he was well prepared for such an eventuality.

On Sunday (28 August), the steamer reached a woodpile two miles above Moorara Station having secured for the night near a swampy area. Early in the morning, armed men crept onto the steamer as the crew tried frantically to steam away from the bank in reverse. Unfortunately the rope securing Rodney ashore held (Mildura Cultivator, 1 September 1894).

Up to 150 striking shearers commandeered the steamer and surrounds. Having moved the passengers and crew to the riverbank, bags of chaff in the fore and aft holds were torn apart, soaked in kerosene and set alight (Riverine Herald 28 Aug 1894). The Rodney was soon ablaze from end to end and let go down the river. Eventually the vessel burnt almost to the water line and was destroyed (NSW Police Gazette, 19 Sept, 1894: p291). The barge and its cargo were unaffected, although it is not known when it was recovered.

The hull of the Rodney was reported to be "irretrievably damaged so it was broken up and the debris was drawn out of the fairway of the river" (Mildura Cultivator 2 March, 1895).

In early 1895 the steamer Nile, itself now a wreck in the Darling River at Bourke, was involved in salvaging material from the wreck. The boiler, and most of the machinery was removed and a quantity of tools and ironwork were also recovered. The boiler was allegedly later taken back to Echuca and used to power machinery at the local Freezing Works (Parsons, 1967). It is not known what became of the engine. The lower hull of Rodney remained in the river within Polia Station, north of Pooncarie.

The incident was described in the press as 'the very worst outrage that has yet been perpetuated by shearers in these colonies' (Mildura Cultivator 1 Sept, 1894).

An award was offered for the capture of those involved in the destruction of the Rodney, (NSW Police Gazette, 29 Aug, 1894) but no one was ever convicted (Parsons, 1996:125).

The Rodney was built at Echuca in 1875 for Captain’s Dorward and Davies (Riverine Herald 28 Aug 1894). Constructed by Thomas McDonald at his yard near ‘Mackintosh Mills’, the 133 ton vessel was 106 ft (32.3 metres) in length, 21 foot (6.40 metres) in
beam, and depth of just over 7 feet (2.1 metres). Rodney was powered by a horizontal direct acting steam engine of 70 horsepower, built by Robinson Brothers of Melbourne (British Register of Ships, 61 of 1875: Port of Sydney; Riverine Herald, 29 May 1875).

Framed with angle iron (British Register of Ships), the hull was planked with River Red Gum (Riverine Herald, 28 August 1894). Fitted out with a single deck, cabin and upper saloon, the vessel was believed to be worth about 3,000 pounds (Riverine Herald, 28 August 1894).

At the time of the loss in 1894, the Rodney was owned by Permewan, Wright & Co and was said to be one of the most powerful steamers on the river (Lans, Smith & Smith, nd: 40). It was elsewhere described as ‘one of the finest of the river boats’ (Riverine Herald 28 Aug 1894).

Figure 14: Remains of the ps Rodney during the 2002 survey. Photograph by David Nutley.

On 20 August 1994, a centenary re-enactment event was organized by the Pooncarie & District Development Association Inc. and the Rivers & Riverboat Historical & Preservation Society, on the original Polia Station site. The press reported that more than 700 people came from far and wide to witness a replica being doused in kerosene and set alight, and to celebrate in song with a woolshed dance. Near the actual site of the Rodney a memorial plaque was also set on a plinth and unveiled by the Mayor of Wentworth (The Land, Sept 15, 1994).

7.1.2 Results of current survey

7.1.2.1 Location

Remains of a timber, iron framed shipwreck are located on private property near the river town of Pooncarie. The remains locally attributed to the paddle steamer Rodney lie low down on the bank of the Darling River on Polia Station, on the southern bank. Access to the site is via a riverbank track some seven-eight kilometers east-southeast of the Polia Homestead, through two stock fences. Even at lowest river levels as experienced during the current survey, the lower hull remains of the vessel are partly submerged. Pooncarie lies some 100 kilometers north of Wentworth, and 107 kilometers south of Menindee.

Conversions from Eastings/Northings are in decimal degrees using the datum, AUS66.

ps Rodney Total Station Survey Datum (top of bank), Polia Station UTM 54H Easting 627595 (Latitude 33.218333° S) Northing 6323672 (Longitude 142.3691666° E) Height 55m
7.1.2.2 Environmental context

The Darling River at Polia Station is typical of the Darling in general. It is a deep trench with steep sides and about 14 metres from the top of the river bank to the bed of the river.

At the time of the survey, the river level was about 1.2m, a depth described as ‘pooling’ depth, ie with little or no flow.

The river banks are comprised of light grey sediment and the surrounding land is sparsely vegetated with River Red Gum and other Eucalypt species. The area, being in the midst of extended drought, had very little in the way of grass or other ground cover.
7.1.2.3 Discussion of survey results

The environmental conditions experienced during the survey are amongst the best attainable for recording this historic structure. With minimal river levels, half of the hull was fully exposed and dry where it lay on the riverbed. The remainder of the hull on the river side of the central keel, was fully submerged but could be delineated by wading.

The remains were unquestionably that of a timber planked vessel with iron transverse frames. The hull comprised a central timber keel and upper keelson, and timber floor frames between the angle iron. Several lines of internal ‘stringer’ frames ran the extent of the hull. Some seventy frames could be recorded along the 29.3 metres (~96 feet) of visible hull section, including remains of solid timber stern, or stem post at the southern end of the wreck. The maximum width of the site was 6.7 metres (~22 feet).

There was no evidence of any machinery within the hull, although a fragment of iron plating lying above the wreck on the upper river bank, was identified as part of the boiler uptake.

Interestingly, a close examination of several hull timbers, particularly near the timber stempost (or sternpost?) showed evidence of being burnt – consistent with the known cause of the loss of Rodney.

A complex archaeological structure, several techniques were used to record the layout of historic fabric. These included both still and video photographic recording. A purpose-built 6-metre boom was used to suspend an SLR camera with an air powered shutter release, enabling aerial vertical plan photography of the hull. These images were later overlain to form a partial photomosaic of the length and breadth of the site. The photographs allowed specific details of construction to be compared to the measured drawings of the site.
The measured plan (2-dimensional) drawing was undertaken using the offset survey technique. A metric tape was run down the centerline of the hull as close as possible to the keelson timbers. Starting at the stem/stern post, all significant hull features such as frame ends, stringers and internal timber frames were measured from the baseline. A relatively time-intensive operation, the amount of detail and relative accuracy achieved by this technique meant that the full visible extent of the hull was covered in significant detail. The drawing was undertaken at 1:50 scale.
A professional surveyor identified and surveyed using an EDM Theodolite was contracted to undertake an electronic distance survey of the remains, and to plot the wreck within the general lie of the river and its exposed banks. This survey complimented the hand measured plan being made separately at that time. Key parts of the structure were identified and plotted by sighting to a prism. While extreme accuracy is obtained, the final drawing is fairly angular in form. Only by linking associated points, can the form of individual features be delineated. Sophisticated AutoCad software packages are also required to manipulate the data and present it in a visual form. The ProEngineer package was used, although extracting the three-dimensional data required additional post-processing work has meant that the cross-sectional results have not yet been completed.
Figure 20: Results of general area theodolite survey. Survey by Mathew Maclean, output by Design Resource Pty Ltd. North facing top of page, bank with monument, boiler remains and Aboriginal cultural sites to right of wreck (west).
The survey of Aboriginal cultural sites was undertaken by a foot survey along the river bank, with sites tagged and recorded on field data sheets. Each site was measured into the overall site plan by theodolite and recorded photographically. Key discoveries included a scarred tree and midden.

The degraded nature of these sites and their limited nature, suggests that the river bank surface has been subject to extreme flooding. Vehicular access and sheep grazing has also probably assisted in the dispersement of original remains.
An investigation was made of reports (Parsons, 1967) that Rodney’s boiler was recovered and taken to Echuca. Said to have been installed at the local Freezing Works some time after the vessel’s loss in 1894, the site is now operated at the Echuca abattoir, Echuca Meats. Current owner, Bruce Peat, was contacted following information provided by Val and Alec Norris at the Echuca Historical Society. Mr Peat was very helpful and noted that an old wood-fired boiler was on site until about 4-5 years ago (c.1998), when sold it to Todd Watson, a collector of steam equipment. Mr Watson noted that the boiler is approximately 26 feet long (7.9 metres) and of the “Cornish Type”, originally mounted on a brick support and not likely to have been used to power a paddle steamer. The Freezing Works was known to have a series of engines and boilers on site and therefore is very difficult to attribute the current boiler to the Rodney. Paddle steamers generally were fitted with smaller, more compact box boilers of quite different form.

7.1.3 Assessment of Significance

Introduction

Significance has been assessed in accordance with the nature and degree of significance of the site’s primary attributes. These include attributes related to historical, social, archaeological, scientific and interpretative significance.

Criterion (a): An item is important in the course, or pattern, of NSW’s cultural or natural history.

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• shows evidence of a significant human activity</td>
<td>• has incidental or unsubstantiated connections with historically important activities or processes</td>
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<tr>
<td>• is associated with a significant activity or historical phase</td>
<td>• provides evidence of activities or processes that are of dubious historical importance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• maintains or shows the continuity of a historical process or activity</td>
<td>• has been so altered that it can no longer provide evidence of a particular association</td>
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Comment

The seizure and burning to the ‘Rodney’ was directly related to the endeavours of unionists to counter the attempts by the owners of the sheep stations along the Darling River to circumvent the effectiveness of the Shearer’s Strike.

At that time of the seizure and burning of the ‘Rodney’, the work of the riverboat steamers was a vital transport component of the wool industry. Control of river transport was a key issue during the 1890s Shearer’s Strike, itself a highly significant event in the history of Australian industrial relations.

The existence of recognizable remains of the paddle steamer involved in the Shearer’s dispute provides a strong sense of continuity with the process of industrial relations associated with a key economic activity of the Darling River – an economic activity that has spanned the time since the 1890s dispute to the present day.
Criterion (b): An item has strong or special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in NSW’s cultural or natural history.

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<tr>
<td>• shows evidence of a significant human occupation</td>
<td>• has incidental or unsubstantiated connections with historically important people or events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X • is associated with a significant event, person, or group of persons</td>
<td>• provides evidence of people or events that are of dubious historical importance</td>
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<td>• has been so altered that it can no longer provide evidence of a particular association</td>
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Comment
The shipwreck is associated with the people who have built and maintained the economic activity of the Darling River, the station owners and the shearers.

The presence of Aboriginal occupation sites on the river bank above the wreck site demonstrates the layering of significant human occupation in this area.

Criterion (c): An item is important in demonstrating aesthetic characteristics and/or a high degree of creative or technical achievement in NSW.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X • shows or is associated with, creative or technical innovation or achievement</td>
<td>• is not a major work by an important designer or artist</td>
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<td>• has lost its design or technical integrity</td>
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<td>• is the inspiration for a creative or technical innovation or achievement</td>
<td>• its positive visual or sensory appeal or landmark and scenic qualities have been more than temporarily degraded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• is aesthetically distinctive</td>
<td>• has only a loose association with a creative or technical achievement</td>
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<td>X • has landmark qualities</td>
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<td>• exemplifies a particular taste, style or technology</td>
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Comment
The ‘Rodney’ demonstrates the essential technological character of broad, shallow draft river boats that served the inland river trade in the late 19th century. It is one of the few surviving original hull assemblages that show composite construction of iron frames and River Redgum planks, keel and stem/stern post.

The timbers, fastenings and iron frames that survive substantively intact to the turn of the bilge document inland shipbuilding traditions of the latter nineteenth century.

Criterion (d): An item has strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group in NSW for social, cultural or spiritual reasons.

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<tr>
<td>X • Is important for its associations with an identifiable group</td>
<td>• is only important to the community for amenity reasons</td>
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</table>
Comment
The site epitomises the empathy of local Darling River port towns with their historical links to the river and the earlier paddle steamer era.

The 1994 commemoration and re-enactment event that drew over 700 people to this remote location on the Darling River demonstrated the importance of the Rodney particularly to the communities along the Darling River. The interest in the history of the Rodney continues to be shared by unionists and station owners, as demonstrated by the cross section of people you attended and supported the event.

Criterion (e): An item has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of NSW’s cultural or natural history.

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<tr>
<td>• has the potential to yield new or further substantial scientific and/or archaeological information</td>
<td>• the knowledge gained would be irrelevant to research on science, human history or culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• is an important benchmark or reference site or type</td>
<td>• has little archaeological or research potential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• provides evidence of past human cultures that is unavailable elsewhere</td>
<td>• only contains information that is readily available from another resource or archaeological sites</td>
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Comment
The Rodney is an important reference type to the character and construction of late 19th century riverboats in New South Wales. It fills a gap in the archival records, few of which document construction details. Its original fabric retains a high degree of integrity unlike a number of other shipwrecks along the Murray and Darling which have been recovered and disassembled and the original fabric largely replaced in order to construct working vessels that are effectively only indicative of the original boat.

Criterion (f): An item possesses uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of NSW’s cultural or natural history.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• provides evidence of a defunct custom, way of life or process</td>
<td>• is not rare</td>
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<tr>
<td>• demonstrates a process, custom or other human activity that is in danger of being lost</td>
<td>• is numerous but under threat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• shows unusually accurate evidence of a significant human activity</td>
<td>• demonstrates designs or techniques of exceptional interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• is the only example of its type</td>
<td>• shows rare evidence of a significant human activity important to a community</td>
</tr>
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Comment
Darling River NSW: Maritime Archaeological Survey

The Rodney provides evidence of a defunct transportation system that operated along the Darling River.

The integrity of the original fabric in the hull is unusually accurate evidence of the riverboat boatbuilding skills used in the late 19th century.

The remains of the Rodney are the only known, undisturbed, archaeological remains of a composite built river boat that was built for and operated on the Darling River.

The Rodney was the only recorded riverboat, coastal or ocean-going vessel to have been destroyed in the context of any industrial dispute in Australia. As such it is of high significance to the history of industrial relations in this country.

Criterion (g): An item is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of NSW’s cultural or natural places; or cultural or natural environments.

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<tr>
<td>• Is a fine example of its type</td>
<td>• is a poor example of its type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X • has the principal characteristics of an important class or group of items</td>
<td>• does not include or has lost the range of characteristics of a type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• has attributes typical of a particular of way of life, philosophy, custom, significant process, design, technique or activity</td>
<td>• does not represent well the characteristics that make up a significant variation of a type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• is a significant variation to a class of items.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>X • is part of a group which collectively illustrates a representative type</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• is outstanding because of its setting, condition or size</td>
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<tr>
<td>X • is outstanding because of its integrity or the esteem in which it is held</td>
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Comment
The remains of the Rodney retain the principle characteristics of the inland riverboats in terms of their broad beams, shallow draft and use of indigenous timbers, particularly the River Redgum.

The remains of the Rodney are outstanding due to the integrity of its fabric and the esteem with which it is held as a part of the history of the Darling River and the Shearer’s Strike.

Conclusions on Heritage Significance
With the engine, boiler and crew’s possessions removed from the wreck between 1894-95, together with decades of scavenging by visitors to the site, the archaeological potential of the site is reduced.

However, the extent of surviving lower hull structure allows an important insight into standard contemporary shipbuilding practices of the Murray and Darling rivers.

This physical evidence, along with the historical and social importance of the event to the union movement in general and to pastoralists, as well as to other people now living along the Darling River, make this a site of considerable heritage significance.
Statement of Heritage Significance
The Rodney Historic Shipwreck site is great significance as a physical marker to a violent episode in the Shearer’s Strikes of the 1890’s. Burnt to the water line in an 1894 protest by non-union shearers, the archaeological remains provide a tangible link to this colourful era of riverboat activity on the Darling River. Community interest in the historic shipwreck is demonstrated by the significant centenary celebrations. A vessel renowned locally for its size, the Rodney was an established steamer that provided a critical service to pastoralists and the river towns that it frequented.

7.1.4 Management recommendations

7.1.4.1 Conservation
Typical with shipwreck remains lying in a fluctuating river level zone, the Rodney shows evidence of excessive structural deterioration.

This is most marked in the remains of ironwork, principally the angle iron frames used to attach the outer hull timber planking. The frames are extremely brittle and can be destabilised by physical contact including contact by floating debris or excessive river flow rates. Similarly the hull timbers, while comprising the durable River Red Gum, are located in a zone that witnesses complete water coverage and periods of exposure. This means that timbers and associated ironwork are in an active environmental zone subjected to expansion and shrinking processes.

In timbers, this can cause the breakdown of internal cellulose structure leading to loss of strength, cracking and warping. While not as an aggressive environment as waterlogged timbers in a saline area (eg coastal waters), conservation and stabilisation of recovered timbers is problematic and resource intensive. It is questionable whether much of the historic fabric could be recovered through archaeological excavation, if museum display was identified as a management opportunity. The ironwork would prove a very difficult conservation exercise and potentially not achievable. The extent of remaining hull timbers would also require intensive wood preservation techniques, both costly, long term, and requiring extensive laboratory facilities.

Due to the complex nature of materials conservation, the Rodney Historic Shipwreck site is best preserved in its current location. While the site will continue to breakdown at its current slow steady rate, the archaeological integrity of the hull will be retained, together with its presence as a significant historic structure available for interpretation and site visitation. The wreck site is currently 109 years old and will be retained in situ for an indeterminate, but substantial, amount of time.

7.1.4.2 Display And Public Access
This report has identified the importance of the archaeological site as a rare example of a shipwreck site in the Darling River system, and a direct link to the Shearer’s Strike. Interpretative opportunities have been identified with the construction of an interpretative plinth near the site during the impressive centenary celebration of its loss. The history of the loss has partly been published in a short booklet prepared by the Rivers and Riverboat Historical & Preservation Society, Mildura.
Currently public access to the physical wreck site and interpretation plaque is by approval of the Polia Station proprietor. Located wholly within private land on a working sheep property, access is also dependent on suitable weather conditions and availability of Station staff to guide visitors to the isolated wreck site. All road access from Pooncarie is by unsealed road, and limited sign posting to Polia Station.

Promotion of visitation to the site would be dependent on approval of the Station owners, but could prove a burden. Ad hoc visitation with prior warning has been acceptable to the owners in the past.

7.1.4.3 Promotion

Alternative opportunities for telling the history of the Rodney and the wreck site should be considered. These could include greater web-based interpretation, regionally located static or traveling displays, school resource kits, and publications. Building on the success of the centenary celebration event held at the property in 1994, opportunities for one-off large scale educational events could be considered. These could include re-enactment events, theatrical interpretations, development of historical segments for TV, and standard media coverage. A current initiative of the NSW Heritage Office with ABC regional radio involves 5-minute pre-recorded historical radio plays and interviews featuring specific NSW shipwreck sites, including Rodney.

The shipwreck site is currently included in the Heritage Office Maritime Heritage Online web site, and includes a location map, site history, photographs and an electronically available copy of this report. Other key sources of information include various river history publications featuring the Murray and Darling river systems, and archive material collated by key resource centres such as the Wentworth Shire Library and Wentworth Historical Society.

A two-sided A4 flyer detailing the history of the vessel would be a welcome addition to currently available educational materials, in line with the Heritage Office’s Shipwreck Information Sheet Series.

7.1.4.4 Listing on the State Heritage Register

The Heritage Office is exploring the applicability for listing of the paddle steamer Rodney on the State Heritage Register.

The Heritage Council of New South Wales provides the approval role for such listings. The Heritage Council is currently adding to the Register through a process of analysis and consultation in each of the regions identified in the publication Regional Histories. The “Western Plains” incorporating the Darling River, is one of those established regions.

Sources consulted during this process include Local Environmental Plans prepared by councils, the Register of the National Estate (RNE), the National Trust Register, thematic or heritage studies, State government s170 registers and other reputable studies and lists. The process also involves regional consultation to verify the significance of potential State items with members of the community.

Prior to their formal nomination, items in each region identified as potentially of State heritage significance are entered into HOD with a Potential Heritage Item listing.
When agreement has been reached with the region and the Heritage Council of New South Wales on items of State significance, individual nominations are prepared through a process of consultation with owners or stakeholders. Items are not listed on the State Heritage Register against the wishes of the owner.

Because of the archaeological integrity of the Rodney shipwreck, its uniqueness as one of a handful of located shipwreck sites along the Darling River, its historical associations with the significant Shearer’s Strike, and for the strong community interest in the site, the nomination of the Rodney for listing on the State Heritage Register is being considered. The process will involve liaison with the owners of Polia Station, Wentworth Shire Council, the Wentworth Historical Society and other key parties.

Listing on the register would provide another level of protection of the site by requiring any interaction to the physical fabric and setting being approved through the Section 60 approval under the Heritage Act. These provisions guard against inappropriate activity that would compromise the integrity and values of the Rodney wreck site, while its listing on the SHR would also establish future opportunities for funding assistance to develop site specific conservation guidelines, such as a Conservation Management Plan to guide future actions at the site, and for interpretative opportunities, etc.

7.2  ps Providence

7.2.1  History
The loss of the Providence and the existence of its boiler on the banks of the Darling River is not well known today, although the event was regarded as a significant inland disaster in 1872. A marker plaque at the site provides some information for visitors to the area, while the event is represented more fully in published accounts of the inland river steamers (see particularly, Johnson, nd).

Additional research by the NSW Heritage Office has located the original British Register of Shipping entry for the vessel (British Register, Port of Sydney: 11 of 1865). That primary source document states that Providence was built at Goolwa, South Australia, in 1865, registered in Adelaide, of timber construction and 16 tons burthen, and 78 feet 5 tenths long (23.9 metres). The vessel was powered by a thirty horsepower steam engine and built by David Charles Myrick who also owned the vessel. At the time of the disaster, the owners were stated to be Whyte, Counsell and Co. of Adelaide (Adelaide Observer, 23 November 1872). The British Register records that the vessel was "wrecked in account of explosion of boiler cause unknown, accident occurred about 1 ½ miles above Kinchega Station, River Darling NSW. 5 lives lost".

The vessel’s registration certificate was cancelled on 13 September 1873 (British Register of Shipping, 11 of 1865, Port of Adelaide). Sexton states that the vessel was actually constructed on the Currency Creek Estuary just below Myrick’s timber Mill. From here the steamer was taken to Goolwa in July 1865 to receive engines (Muddy Waters, 1992: 15).

The wrecking event occurred on 9 November 1872 after the vessel left Menindee for Adelaide loaded with wool and towing the barge, Maid of the Murray with about 300 bales of wool aboard, half from Toorale Station. The event was described at the time as “the
most serious and dreadful accident that has occurred on the river since the opening of navigation" (Adelaide Observer, 23 November 1872; Parsons, 1996: 120).

In similar low river levels as experienced at the time of survey, Providence had been stranded near Kinchega station for twelve months. When river levels were sufficient, the owners sent a crew up to fire the engine and bring the vessel home. Accounts confirm that a boiler accident caused the disaster. Captain John Davis steered the vessel some nine miles down river from Menindee when he noticed a problem with the starboard paddle wheel (another source said an engine problem and that the vessel went ashore to load firewood - Adelaide Observer, 23 November 1872). There were six men reported aboard the steamer and two men and a boy aboard the barge (the latter all survived - Adelaide Observer, 23 November 1872).

The Providence was brought into the bank, and when the crew were examining the fault and stopped the steam, the vessel blew up. Reports vary as to the exact nature of the fault, theories included water being let get too low in the boiler, causing gasses to build up that were ignited by the heat (Adelaide Observer, 23 November 1872), to the engineer “putting cold water into the boiler while it was empty and much heated” (Pastoral Times, 23 November 1872). An unconfirmed theory suggested that the crew were in an intoxicated state and had forgotten to refill the boiler with water.  

Providence was said to have parted amidships and sunk, while the boiler flew out of the hull “striking a tree on the side of the bank and then rolling into the river”. A small part of the stern was visible a foot under the river, the wreck lying “in the middle of the river with her stern downstream. The appearance she presents is of being broken in two, the after part lying on top of the bow, a portion of the fore part being visible” (Adelaide Observer, 23 November 1872).

A large piece of the boiler was reported a hundred yards away deeply buried in the bank. A steamer working up the river realized something was wrong ahead when they passed through flotsam including painted boards, a cabin window, a door and a swag. The crew visited the scene later and described the carnage: “the banks were strewn with boards and debris of all kinds; while high up on neighboring trees were lodged pieces of timber, bedding and rugs, firewood, etc. A bag of flour was thrown over the tops of the trees and landed about 70 yards from the banks of the river, while a sledge hammer and several heavy pieces of casting were carried an incredible distance”. The steamer was reported to have “shivered to atoms” (Adelaide Observer, 23 November 1872).

Killed were Captain Davis, Edward Sparks (the engineer), Thomas Gun (a Chinese cook) and John Roach (a fireman). The cook was allegedly blown “thirty feet into a gum tree and had to be winched down. His injuries were treated but he died a short time later” (Pastoral Times, 23 November 1872).

A fifth man, Charles Seymour, was seriously injured having been blown into the air, falling into the river. He allegedly sustained multiple fractures in both legs and was treated by a Doctor who held grave fears for his survival and later believed to have died (Adelaide Observer, 23 November 1872; Pastoral Times, 23 November 1872). A single passenger named Trevenoak, survived.

The killed were buried in the Kinchega Homestead cemetery. Today several unmarked graves might belong to them, while the wreck of the *Providence* was recorded on Darling River navigation charts from c.1875. Interestingly, one such chart recorded the hull section being located in the main body of the river (Freeman, 2001: 44).

The engines from *Providence* were successfully salvaged from the wreck and replaced into a paddle steamer called the *Queen*, then undergoing a refit.  

![Figure 24: Boiler with signs of the explosion that destroyed the Providence. Photograph by David Nutley.](image)

### 7.2.2 Results of current survey

#### 7.2.2.1 Location

Only the boiler from the *Providence* paddle steamer survives. It lies atop the bank of the Darling River within the Kinchega National Park. Access to the site is made by sealed road from Menindee, and after entry into Kinchega National Park. Conveniently located on the unsealed River Drive tourist route through the park, the site is located in local tourist maps and flyers. An information plaque marks the site and provides a general summary of the wreck and vessel history.

The boiler is located at the following position:

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3 *Providence*'s recovered engine was fitted into the *Queen* in 1872, later replaced by another in 1883. The 1872 *Providence* engine was last known to have been refitted into the steamer *Victor*, originally built in 1877 at Goolwa. By 1912, the *Victor*'s registration was closed as it had sunk in the Murray River (Parsons, 1996: 140). It is unknown if any salvage was effected or if the wreck remains today.
Conversions from Eastings/Northings are in decimal degrees using the datum, AUS66.

PS *Providence* 1872 Boiler, Menindee

UTM 54H
Eastings 630144 (Latitude 32.470555 S)
Northings 6406554 (Longitude 142.385 E)
Height 53 m

Figure 25: Location map.

Figure 26: Measured sketch of 'up-side down' and half buried *Providence* boiler. Drawing by Tim Smith.
7.2.2.2 Environmental context

The iron Scotch-type boiler lies on the sandy bank above the river, with its lower side partially buried. Fragments of riveted iron plate lie along the bank slightly removed from the boiler and partly covered by the river bank. These are certainly associated with the wreck and contemporary salvage activity and may have formed part of the uptake funnel above the furnaces.
Surrounded by river gums, the boiler provides a convenient place to relax and take in the turning bends of the Darling River at this point. The quietness of the location leads the visitor into imagining the terrific explosion and calamity caused by the loss of the vessel, and the difficulties that must have been faced in attempting any aid.

### 7.2.2.3 Discussion of survey results

The boiler attributed to the *Providence* wreck is well known locally and often visited by tourists to the National Park. Upon arrival at the site (29 August 2002), a search was conducted of the adjacent river bank and exposed bed to ascertain the probability of any surviving hull structure associated with the vessel. It was readily apparent that the *Providence* shipwreck would have been easily accessible at times of low water and would, in all probability, have been totally salvaged. The fact that the boiler had been dragged from the wreck to the top of the bank, indicates that substantial contemporary salvage work did take place.

Today only the boiler and some isolated fragments lie exposed as a marker to the tragedy. The boiler illustrates the force of the explosion from the engine room fire that tore into the vessel and killed the crew. In all probability, the boiler was not recovered after the event, due to the damage being beyond local repair in 1872.

The end-plate of the boiler shows visible signs of the extreme force from the build up of pressure created during the incident. The plate is torn from the shell of the boiler and substantially buckled. Lying upside down and angled down towards the furnace face, the boiler has a maximum diameter of 2.70 metres (~9 feet), and length of 2.40 metres (~8 feet). The single-ended Scotch type has two furnaces that retain part of their original covers.
7.2.3 Assessment of Significance

Introduction
Significance has been assessed in accordance with the nature and degree of significance of the site’s primary attributes. These include attributes related to historical, social, archaeological, scientific and interpretative significance.

Criterion (a): An item is important in the course, or pattern, of NSW’s cultural or natural history.

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Comment
A vessel representative of the paddle steamers that frequented the Darling River and its isolated settlements during the nineteenth century.

The explosion and loss of life had a traumatic effect on the local community.

The killed and fatally injured were carried over to the existing Kinchega Homestead burial ground for solemn burial.

Criterion (b): An item has strong or special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in NSW’s cultural or natural history.
Comment
The shipwreck is associated with the people who have built and maintained the economic activity of the Darling River, the station owners and the shearsers.

Criterion (c): An item is important in demonstrating aesthetic characteristics and/or a high degree of creative or technical achievement in NSW.

Comment
A site with paramount display and educational opportunities.

The site’s location on crown land, within an established national park, significantly aids public visitation to the site.

Sheltered under river gums, inspection of the boiler and interpretative plaque provides a pleasant recreational experience.

Criterion (d): An item has strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group in NSW for social, cultural or spiritual reasons.

Comment
The significant 1872 explosion of the paddle steamer Providence was a melancholy event for the residents of Menindee.
Isolated by distance and hardship, the event signaled to users of the river, the dangers associated with vessel operations and their harsh environment.

**Criterion (e): An item has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of NSW’s cultural or natural history.**

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<tr>
<td>• provides evidence of past human cultures that is unavailable elsewhere</td>
<td>X • only contains information that is readily available from another resource or archaeological sites</td>
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**Comment**

Not considered applicable in this instance.
Darling River NSW: Maritime Archaeological Survey

Criterion (f): An item possesses uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of NSW’s cultural or natural history.

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Comment
Not considered applicable in this instance.

Criterion (g): An item is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of NSW’s cultural or natural places; or cultural or natural environments.

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Comment
The Providence boiler retains the principle characteristics of the type employed to generate steam power for inland river marine steam engines.

Conclusions on Heritage Significance
With the wreck site and machinery now apparently removed from the environment, the archaeological potential of the site is reduced. However, the surviving boiler is an evocative reminder of the tragic event in 1872 and the sheer force of the explosion that tore the vessel apart. This physical evidence, along with the historical and social importance of the event, makes this a site of considerable local heritage significance.

Statement of Heritage Significance
The Providence boiler provides a unique Darling River experience for visitors to the Kinchega National Park. Intact and imposing, the iron boiler is a rare historic marker to a
former shipwreck site, as a direct link to the riverine heritage of Menindee. Well promoted as a tourism site, the existing site-based interpretation promotes visitor interaction.

7.2.4 Management recommendations

7.2.4.1 Conservation
The site of the Providence explosion and loss is marked by a solitary iron boiler and fragments of iron plating. As such, the physical evidence of the vessel and its crew is severely constrained. There is no current indication that any of the vessel fabric survives, either in association with the boiler, within the river bank deposits, or as relics recovered at the time and now in private ownership.

The iron boiler therefore comprises the substantive site. It has lost much of its original form with the loss or removal of its outer shell, revealing the twin furnace tubes and internal elements. Located on the river bank top and partly buried in the sandy soil, the boiler exhibits a familiar rusting appearance. However, because of the manufactured strength of the item, this exposure to the physical elements is not considered to adversely affect the short-medium term survival of the relic.

7.2.4.2 Display And Public Access
The boiler retains a sense of place being the only physical reminder of the 1872 tragedy, and is therefore the focus of visitor’s reflections on the tragic loss of life and property.

Access to the site is well established being located in a developed National Park property. Sealed roads provide entry into Kinchega National Park from Menindee, where unsealed roads provide two points of access to the boiler. The site is further marked by an interpretation plinth and features in local tourists sketch maps and tourist maps noting local heritage features. These and verbal information on the Providence site is distributed through the local tourist information centre.

The shipwreck site is also included in the Heritage Office Maritime Heritage Online web site that includes a location map, site history, photographs and an electronically available copy of this report.

7.2.4.3 Promotion
Like the Rodney, the Providence site would benefit from being included into a more developed riverine heritage trail. The site is currently featured as a stand alone interest site, but not effectively linked to the nearby Kinchega Homestead Cemetery site, heritage port sites along the Darling River, or to the wider shipwreck heritage and river histories.

An option for promoting the importance of the site as a local marker to this colourful past history would be the development of a riverine heritage driving tour, linking sites along the length of the Darling River. These could include the port town of Bourke with its impressive reconstructed government town wharf, the two local shipwreck sites, Wave and Nile and the Back O’Bourke Exhibition Centre, with other key port centres such as Louth, Wilcannia, Menindee, Kinchega Homestead, Pooncarie, Rodney and the town of Wentworth with its many riverine heritage attractions.
Opportunities exist to promote such a trail concept through existing web sites, and linked in with initiatives developed with Tourism NSW, such as the existing Darling River 4WD safaris, etc.

Like the *Rodney*, the history of the *Providence* wreck event could be locally developed through celebratory events at the site, including historical re-enactments, and collation and publication of local histories relative to the vessel. The current range of interpretative materials, such as tourist maps, could be developed to provide a greater level of information relative to *Providence* and links to local heritage themes.

A two-sided A4 flyer detailing the history of the vessel would be a welcome addition to currently available educational materials, in line with the Heritage Office’s *Shipwreck Information Sheet* Series.

### 7.2.4.4 Statutory protection

The *Providence* is protected by both the *relics* (Section 139) and *Historic Shipwrecks* (Section 48) provisions of the NSW State *Heritage Act* 1977.

Due to its significance to Menindee it is recommended that the *Providence* be considered for inclusion in the Central Darling Local Environmental Plan.

### 7.3 *ps* Wave, Bourke

#### 7.3.1 History

The timber composite paddle steamer *Wave* was built at Echuca in 1886 and originally operated between Bourke and Brewarrina on the Darling River. The 15-ton vessel was later used to carry wood fuel to the Bourke pumping station (Parsons, 1990).

Details of the steamer’s early life have not been determined in detail, although it was a regular river user. The vessel is most known for its unfortunate loss in 1921 when it stranded north of the town during high river levels while apparently traversing the flooded paddocks. It never made it back into the main channel and was left high and dry! The owner, Lloyd Surrey of Bourke, made the stranded vessel his home and lived there for many years until his death in Sydney during 1926, aged 77 years. Apparently the number of children and animals present at this time earned the vessel the nickname ‘Noah’s Ark’! (Barbara Hickson, pers.com.20 May 1998; Oct 2001).

#### 7.3.2 Results of current survey

##### 7.3.2.1 Location

The *Wave* is located in an open paddock which is lightly vegetated with eucalypts. The site lies on the northern side of the Darling River, opposite and north-east of the historic Bourke wharf and within the boundaries of the Maritime Port of Bourke, Heritage Area.

The GPS position of the *Wave* was established in decimal degrees using WGS84. Latitudes and Longitudes are in decimal degrees. The GPS reading was taken 30cm from the edge of the riverbank about midway opposite the exposed cylindrical object.
7.3.2.2 Environmental context

The remains of the paddle steamer Wave have been severely reduced by fire, exposure to the elements, and from ‘souveniring’ from visitors and tourists. The remains today comprise an iron boiler, paddle shaft and two paddle wheels. Photographs taken since its loss in 1921 document the gradual reduction of the site over time with timber hull components and a steering wheel, no longer present.

The site is in view of the river.
7.3.2.3 Discussion of survey results

The paddle steamer *Wave* was surveyed in 1998 by Heritage Advisor Barbara Hickson during research for the *Bourke Heritage Inventory Study 2000*. The boiler and paddle wheels were recorded in sectional view.

7.3.3 Assessment of Significance

Introduction
Significance has been assessed in accordance with the nature and degree of significance of the site’s primary attributes. These include attributes related to historical, social, archaeological, scientific and interpretative significance.

**Criterion (a): An item is important in the course, or pattern, of NSW’s cultural or natural history.**

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**Comment**

A vessel representative of the paddle steamers that frequented the Darling River and its isolated settlements during the nineteenth century.

The vessel, located where it stranded during flood, illustrates one of key hazards of navigating the Darling River.

The reuse of the stranded vessel as a dwelling for an extended period represents a process that can still be seen along parts of the Darling River where old caravans, rolling stock and other constructions are utilized as living areas.

**Criterion (b): An item has strong or special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in NSW’s cultural or natural history.**

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**Comment**

The shipwreck is associated with the people who transported the goods and the people who built and maintained the economic activity of the Darling River, the riverboat captains.

**Criterion (c): An item is important in demonstrating aesthetic characteristics and/or a high degree of creative or technical achievement in NSW.**

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Darling River NSW: Maritime Archaeological Survey

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<td>• is the inspiration for a creative or technical innovation or achievement</td>
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<td>• is aesthetically distinctive</td>
<td>• its positive visual or sensory appeal or landmark and scenic qualities have been more than temporarily degraded</td>
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<td>• exemplifies a particular taste, style or technology</td>
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Comment

A site with paramount display and educational opportunities.

The site’s location on crown land, within an established Shire Council park, significantly aids public visitation to the site.

Sheltered among river gums and with views across the Darling River towards the Bourke township, inspection of the paddle wheels, engine and interpretative plaque provides a pleasant recreational experience.

Criterion (d): An item has strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group in NSW for social, cultural or spiritual reasons.

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<td>• is retained only in preference to a proposed alternative</td>
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Comment

The wreck is important for its associations with the people who worked on and continue to rely on the Darling River as a vital resource to agriculture and commerce.

The wreck strongly symbolises the sense of place of Bourke as a one-time maritime port.

Criterion (e): An item has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of NSW’s cultural or natural history.

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Comment
Not considered applicable in this instance.

**Criterion (f): An item possesses uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of NSW’s cultural or natural history.**

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Darling River NSW: Maritime Archaeological Survey

Criterion (g): An item is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of NSW’s cultural or natural places; or cultural or natural environments.

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Comment
The Wave engine and paddle wheels retain the principle characteristics of the type employed to harness steam power for inland river boats.

Conclusions on Heritage Significance
The machinery remains in-situ at the wreck site and where it was subsequently used as a habitation. The archaeological potential and interpretative potential of the site is therefore intact. This physical evidence, along with the historical and social importance of the event, makes this a site of considerable local heritage significance.

Statement of Heritage Significance
The Wave provides a unique Darling River experience for visitors to Bourke and the Maritime Port of Bourke heritage area. The wreck’s intact paddle wheels and engine are a rare and accessible historic marker to an earlier maritime era and technology and a direct link to the riverine heritage of Bourke. Well promoted as a tourism site, the existing site-based interpretation promotes visitor interaction.

7.3.4 Management recommendations

7.3.4.1 Conservation

Located on a high point of the river bank the engine and paddle wheels exhibit a predicable rusting appearance. However, because of the manufactured strength of the item and the lack of salt air experienced on coastal sites, this exposure to the physical elements is not considered to adversely affect the short-medium term survival of the relic. There was no observed evidence of marked decay or recent human impacts.

The site of the Wave is integrated into the Maritime Port of Bourke Heritage Area and is marked by one of the Maritime Port of Bourke interpretive signs developed by Bourke Shire Council.
7.3.4.2 Display And Public Access

The shipwreck site is included in the Heritage Office Maritime Heritage Online web site that includes a location map, site history, photographs and an electronically available copy of this report.

7.3.4.3 Promotion

The current promotion of the Wave in Bourke is adequate and appropriate. It is a featured site, with accompanying signage, within the Maritime Port of Bourke Heritage Area. There is some further promotion in tourist brochures available throughout the town and the Wave also features in the coverage provided in the local tourist radio broadcast.

7.3.4.4 Statutory protection

The Wave is protected by both the relics (Section 139) and Historic Shipwrecks (Section 48) provisions of the NSW State Heritage Act 1977.

Due to its significance to Bourke it is recommended that the Wave be considered for inclusion in the Bourke Local Environmental Plan.

7.4 Wandering Jew, Brewarrina

7.4.1 History

The Wandering Jew was an iron paddle steamer originally called Riverina, built by J. Duncan and Partner in Echuca during 1866. With a tonnage of 87 tons and fitted with a 10 horse power engine, the steamer was registered in Sydney (British Register of Ships, 88 of 1866). During a turbulent life, the vessel was burnt on three recorded occasions.

Historian Ronald Parsons noted alterations to the steamer in 1875, when the tonnage was reduced to 66 tons gross. A significant event occurred on 2 April 1883 when the vessel was burnt to the waterline. Subsequently rebuilt and re-registered by November 1890, the vessel was renamed Wandering Jew.

After a survey in July 1897, the vessel was no longer allowed to carry wool on deck. Further fire damage occurred on 11 May 1898, but was repaired (Parsons, 1961).

By 1903, the Wandering Jew was owned by a Mr George White and was recorded as the last steamer to reach Walgett in 1912.

On 15 December 1914 the Wandering Jew was again burnt, this time at Brewarrina, and became a total loss. The last known register entry for the vessel was in March 1914. The steamer appears to have had a strong association with this port and was photographed near the important Aboriginal fish traps in the river there (Phillipps, 1972, date of photograph unspecified).

The wreck site has been located within the Barwon River at Brewarrina. The Journal of the Bourke & District Historical Society refers to remains of the Wandering Jew exposed in the river during drought, presumably in the 1930’s. However, the construction of a weir
just downstream of the site has ensured that only the highest part of the wreck, what appears to be a small boiler is exposed.

The *Wandering Jew* had a length 72 feet (21.95 m), breadth 14.4 feet (4.4m) and depth 5 feet (1.5m). Its Official Number was ON38804.

7.4.2 Results of current survey

7.4.2.1 Location

The *Wandering Jew* lies about 100m upstream of the Brewarrina Weir on the eastern side of the Barwon River, one of the upper streams that feed into the Darling River. Just downstream of the weir are the State Heritage Register listed Brewarrina Aboriginal Fish traps (SHR listing # 01413 2000).
The GPS position of the *Wandering Jew* was established by using WGS84. Latitudes and Longitudes are in decimal degrees. The GPS reading was taken 30cm from the edge of the riverbank about midway opposite the exposed cylindrical object.

UTM 55J  
Easting 0486257 (Latitude 29.95673° S)  
Northing 6686000 (Longitude 146.85756° E)

**7.4.2.2 Environmental context**

The wreck lies just below the survey of the water in the weir with only a small section of a unidentified cylindrical object visible above the surface. A second part of the wreck was visible about 10cm below the surface. The turbidity of the water precluded any further sighting of the wreck remains. Because of the effect of the weir, it is understood that no additional portions of the wreck become visible, even during the current extended drought. Harry Hart from the Brewarrina Council, who provided the location of the wreck, advised that, as a boy and prior to the construction of the weir, it was possible for children from Brewarrina, including himself, to habitually play and swim off the remains of the vessel.
Immediately upstream of the wreck is a cutting into the riverbank. Harry Hart reports that that this cutting is presumed to have been used for slipping river craft.

**7.4.2.3 Discussion of survey results**

Further survey work on the wreck of the *Wandering Jew* would be desirable in order to ascertain the extent of the remains, their condition and rate of corrosion and to obtain construction details. The shallowness of the site would preclude the use of side-scan sonar or other remote sensing survey and a diver based survey would be the only effective survey option. The turbidity of the water and the nature of the jagged iron components of the shipwreck would add significantly to the risk factor of such a survey and require particular attention to adequate safety provisions for divers.

The outcome of such a survey would provide graphic site plans that would assist in the interpretation and promotion of Brewarrina’s maritime heritage.

**7.4.3 Assessment of Significance**

**Introduction**

Significance has been assessed in accordance with the nature and degree of significance of the site’s primary attributes. These include attributes related to historical, social, archaeological, scientific and interpretative significance.

**Criterion (a): An item is important in the course, or pattern, of NSW’s cultural or natural history.**

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**Comment**

A vessel representative of the paddle steamers that frequented the Darling River and its isolated settlements during the nineteenth century.

The vessel, located where it burnt and sank, illustrates one of key hazards of shipping on the Darling River.

**Criterion (b): An item has strong or special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in NSW’s cultural or natural history.**

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Comment
The shipwreck is associated with the people who transported the goods and the people who built and maintained the economic activity of the Darling River, the riverboat captains.

Criterion (c): An item is important in demonstrating aesthetic characteristics and/or a high degree of creative or technical achievement in NSW.

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<td>• is the inspiration for a creative or technical innovation or achievement</td>
<td>• has lost its design or technical integrity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• is aesthetically distinctive</td>
<td>X • its positive visual or sensory appeal or landmark and scenic qualities have been more than temporarily degraded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• has landmark qualities</td>
<td>• has only a loose association with a creative or technical achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• exemplifies a particular taste, style or technology</td>
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Comment
Access to the site is through private land. The site is also relatively inaccessible for viewing due to the turbidity of the water. Until a detailed archaeological survey is undertaken to record the surviving features of the wreck it has limited display and educational opportunities.

Criterion (d): An item has strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group in NSW for social, cultural or spiritual reasons.

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<th>Include</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X • Is important for its associations with an identifiable group</td>
<td>• is only important to the community for amenity reasons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X • is important to a community’s sense of place</td>
<td>• is retained only in preference to a proposed alternative</td>
</tr>
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Comment
The wreck is important for its associations with the people who worked on and continue to rely on the Darling River as a vital resource to agriculture and commerce.

The wreck strongly symbolises the sense of place of Brewarrina as a one-time maritime port.
Criterion (e): An item has potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of NSW’s cultural or natural history.

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<tr>
<td>• has the potential to yield new or further substantial scientific and/or archaeological information</td>
<td>• the knowledge gained would be irrelevant to research on science, human history or culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>• is an important benchmark or reference site or type</td>
<td>X • has little archaeological or research potential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• provides evidence of past human cultures that is unavailable elsewhere</td>
<td>X • only contains information that is readily available from another resource or archaeological sites</td>
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Comment
Not considered applicable in this instance.

Criterion (f): An item possesses uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of NSW’s cultural or natural history.

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<th><strong>Include</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• provides evidence of a defunct custom, way of life or process</td>
<td>X • is not rare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• demonstrates a process, custom or other human activity that is in danger of being lost</td>
<td>• is numerous but under threat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• shows unusually accurate evidence of a significant human activity</td>
<td>• is the only example of its type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• is the only example of its type</td>
<td>• demonstrates designs or techniques of exceptional interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• shows rare evidence of a significant human activity important to a community</td>
<td>• shows rare evidence of a significant human activity important to a community</td>
</tr>
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Comment
Not considered applicable in this instance.
Criterion (g): An item is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of NSW’s cultural or natural places; or cultural or natural environments.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Is a fine example of its type</td>
<td>• is a poor example of its type</td>
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<tr>
<td>• has the principal characteristics of an important class or group of items</td>
<td>• does not include or has lost the range of characteristics of a type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• has attributes typical of a particular way of life, philosophy, custom, significant process, design, technique or activity</td>
<td>• does not represent well the characteristics that make up a significant variation of a type</td>
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<tr>
<td>• is a significant variation to a class of items</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• is part of a group which collectively illustrates a representative type</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• is outstanding because of its setting, condition or size</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• is outstanding because of its integrity or the esteem in which it is held</td>
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Comment
An assessment under this criterion cannot be adequately made until a detailed archaeological survey is conducted to record the submerged remains of the wreck site.

Conclusions on Heritage Significance
The heritage significance of the Wandering Jew cannot be fully assessed until the extent of the remains can be more fully recorded.

Statement of Heritage Significance
The Wandering Jew represents an earlier maritime era and technology and a direct link to the riverine heritage of Brewarrina. Its colourful history and repeated damage by fire is evocative of the dramas associated with riverboat travel.

7.4.4 Management recommendations

7.4.4.1 Conservation
The Wandering Jew is almost fully and permanently submerged in relative still, fresh water. As such its deterioration may be expected to be relatively slow. However, the effect of increasing salinity in the inland rivers on iron remains of shipwrecks is not fully documented. A corrosion potential survey would establish the current condition of the iron and its rate of corrosion.

7.4.4.2 Display And Public Access
The shipwreck site is included in the Heritage Office Maritime Heritage Online web site that includes a location map, site history, photographs and an electronically available copy of this report.

7.4.4.3 Promotion
There is currently no promotion of the Wandering Jew in Brewarrina. It does have potential to be a featured site, with accompanying signage, within the Brewarrina precinct.
The history and fate of the *Wandering Jew* also has potential for promotion in tourist brochures.

### 7.4.4.4 Statutory protection

The *Wandering Jew* is protected by both the *relics* (Section 139) and *Historic Shipwrecks* (Section 48) provisions of the NSW State *Heritage Act* 1977.

Due to its significance to Brewarrina it is recommended that the *Wandering Jew* be considered for inclusion in the Brewarrina Local Environmental Plan.

### 7.5 ps Nile, Bourke

#### 7.5.1 History

The Nile was an iron paddle steamer built in 1885 by Wilson & Burkett at Echuca. With Official Number ON89384 and tonnage of 44 tons gross, the vessel was registered in Sydney (British Register of Ships as 1/1886. The *Nile* was powered by an 8-horsepower high pressure steam engine, and was last known to have been owned by Walter and Herbert Brown of Bourke in 1911.

The steamer was photographed c.1890 stranded on the bed of the Darling River during extreme drought conditions, typical of the hazards of the trade (Maiden, 2000:18).

Parsons notes that the vessel had been fitted with acetylene gas lighting and underwent repairs in 1895 after a fire, at which time it may have been fitted with the engines from the steamer *Alert* (Parsons, 1990:100). As previously mentioned, the *Nile* was employed in the salvage of the steamer *Rodney* near Polia Station in early 1895, with that vessel’s boiler allegedly later taken back to Echuca and used to power machinery at the local Freezing Works (Parsons, 1967).

The *Nile* was photographed while undergoing repairs from the fire that year, at Echuca, and was captured in images during low river levels there in 1912 (Phillips, 1972:105 & 108). In what was sometimes an unfortunate event for these paddle steamers, *Nile* was again burnt at Bourke on 22 February 1926 and, this time, totally destroyed (Parsons, 1990:100).

Figure 38: Photograph of *Nile* paddle wheels and shaft in Bourke. Photograph by Barbara Hickson, 1998.
In 1988, noted maritime historian, (the late) Vaughan Evans, informed the Heritage Office of the Nile’s paddle wheels and shaft still located in an historic punt cutting on the banks of the Darling River, across from the paddle steamer Wave wreck. Mr Evans recalled that the “meagre remains (of the wreck) lie in the river bed nearby” (Vaughan Evans, correspondence to Heritage Office 14 October 1988).

In 1998, local Heritage Advisor, Barbara Hickson, photographed a set of wheels which had been recovered into town and set up on the grass verge of a local street (unspecified - Barbara Hixson, correspondence to Heritage Office, 20 May 1998). The Manager of the Back O’Bourke’ visitors Exhibition Centre has advised that these paddle wheels were incorporated into the newly built Jandra that now provides tours on the river at Bourke (Johnston, Phil, pers. com July, 2003).

The Nile had a length of 70 feet (21.34 m), breadth of 15.7 feet (4.8 m) and depth of 4.8 feet (1.46 m).

7.5.2 Results of current survey

7.5.2.1 Location
The remains of the paddle wheel were reported to lie in the Darling River just upstream of the Bourke town area. Heritage Advisor Barbara Hickson also identified a site for the Nile remains in the immediate vicinity of the wharf site. However, no detailed search for the wreck site has yet been conducted.

7.5.2.2 Environmental context
Turbid waters and high risk of snags in the river characterise the Darling River here, as elsewhere along its length. At Bourke, even during the current extreme drought the water level does not fall far enough to expose any remains.

7.5.2.3 Discussion of survey results
The environmental conditions are not conducive to a dive survey and location may be best achieved through deployment of a magnetometer or perhaps a side-scan sonar. In the meantime the resting place of the Nile remains a mystery.

7.5.3 Assessment of Significance

Introduction
In the absence of a located wreck site the heritage significance of the Nile was not yet been assessed.

8 Documentation of other significant sites and places
The current Historic Shipwreck site inspections provided the opportunity to also visit a range of other river-based heritage structures. These included actual remains of wharves and weirs, together with the sites of former activity. Key sites included Kinchega Homestead at Menindee and the adjacent cemetery reputed to hold the remains of the crew lost on Providence in 1872. The Station was in existence by the 1860’s and reached
a peak in the 1880’s where the station covered some one million acres and held 143,000 sheep.

The sites and places were photographed for inclusion in the Office’s existing Maritime Heritage Online web site. Former river port complexes formed the major focus, with the port nodes of Wentworth, Pooncarie, Menindee, Wilcannia, Louth, Bourke and Brewarrina being visited in detail. Wentworth for example, played a significant port role during the nineteenth century, servicing New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. Lying at the junction of the Darling and Murray Rivers, the port once boasted the heaviest vessel traffic in inland New South Wales with 485 vessels passing in 1895 (Historic Port of Wentworth, brochure).

8.1.1 Wentworth

Wentworth lies at the junction of the Murray River and the Darling River. It has been a centre of riverine culture for the Barkindji for many thousands of years. In the nineteenth century it became a hive of riverboat activity transporting people and goods to grazing properties near and far.

The original 1860 wharf was not demolished until in 1982. Today a similar red gum wharf marks the old site.
8.1.2  Pooncarie, Weir
The concrete and rubble weir lies in the centre of the township, although details of its construction and later repairs, is not readily sourced. The weir provides a useful pooling effect on the upstream side, used extensively for local recreation. When river levels and flows are very low, local residents report that many historic bottles and small artifacts can be found trapped by the weir wall. These items remain protected by the relics provisions of the NSW Heritage Act 1977. The weir was inspected.

8.1.3  Menindee, Kinchega homestead, jetties and cemetery
The site of the famous Kinchega Homestead and former property is the centerpiece of cultural heritage attractions for the Kinchega National Park at Menindee. Although destroyed by fire, the site retains impressive remnant structure and has been the scene for earlier intensive archaeological excavation and assessment. Managed by the National Parks & Wildlife Service, the ruins can be viewed by a purpose-built elevated gantry. Located adjacent to a pond area feeding off the Darling River, there is some evidence for a small timber landing or pier in front of the homestead site.

The nearby cemetery reputedly holds the bodies of those lost aboard the Providence explosion of 1872. The associated woolshed, outbuildings and farm machinery provide a fascinating insight into the rigours of large area pastoral holdings during the nineteenth century (see: Freeman, 2001). The community's reliance of river steamer trade for supplies, export and communications with an outside world are forcefully apparent. The sites were investigated and photographed.

Figure 41: Cemetery at Kinchega Homestead site.
Inscription reads: It is not known how many persons or whom is actually buried herein. The obvious graves have been referenced and the crew off the paddle steamer 'Providence' is buried here also. Photograph by David Nutley.
8.1.4 Louth

The one time port of Louth was a village established by Thomas Andrew Mathews in 1865. He named the village in memory of the county he was born in Eire in 1825. “Old T.A.” as he became known, arrived in Australia with shipwright and wheelwright skills. He put these to use at various times but eventually became a major land holder, gained the designation of ‘The King of Louth’ and became a significant entrepreneur in the development of western New South Wales. (Clelland, 1984:19).

By the 1870s, Louth was playing an important role in transporting freight and supplies to and from the copper mines at Cobar. From a navigation view point, Louth had some advantages over upstream centres. Being 200 miles downstream from Bourke and being below obstructions such as a rocky outcrop at Toorale, freight was cheaper and paddle steamers could get to Louth when they could not get up to Bourke. Louth also was a convenient overnight stop when traveling from Bourke by road or river. Like Bourke, it also handled the cargoes of the “Copper Combination Fleet” which included vessels such as the *Excelsior*, *Jane Eliza*, *Kennedy*, *Express*, *Goolwa* and the *Princess Royal*. (Clelland, 1984:46)

Figure 42: Kinchega homestead site.
Photograph by David Nutley.

Figure 43: Punt crossing cutting still visible beside modern bridge.
Photograph by David Nutley.
Today, the only surviving building from the Louth’s halcyon days as a port is the Post Office, now a B&B, which, like all key public and commercial buildings in ports, either coastal or riverine, was built conveniently close to the wharfage facilities.

Figure 44: The original Louth Post Office, now a B&B. Photograph by David Nutley

Figure 45: Riverboats at the one time Port of Louth. Post Office building in background. Photograph courtesy of David and Robyn White.
Like many Darling River ports, the river height was so variable that no substantial structure was built on the riverbank. Steamers would tie off to conveniently placed redgum trees or fairly temporary posts. The river banks were terraced to accommodate drays and carts and a punt was set up to transfer goods, livestock or people across stream. The terraced river banks at Louth are still visible as is the cutting where the punt was located as well as large redgums that may have been used for mooring.

8.1.5 Bourke, wharf and ‘Lynwood’ – also known as the ‘Captain’s House’

Wharf

‘Lynwood’
On the bank of the Darling River at Bourke is an excellent example of a riverside building strategically positioned to enable river captains to view steamers arriving and departing from the port.

The building has a ‘widow’s walk’ and was originally associated with a boat merchant or captain. It was later owned by Bill Mathews of Louth – son of TA Mathews referred to
elsewhere in this report. Subsequently it was owned by FH Brown a well known Bourke poet.

The building and its location are important for their associations with significant people from the Bourke area but for their spatial and architectural associations with the days when river transport was the main transport in the area.

The building is on the Bourke Local Environment Plan.

Figure 48: Lynwood, house’ overlooking the paddle steamer route at Bourke. Photograph by David Nutley

8.1.6 Government wharf site, Wilcannia

The site of the former Government wharf at Wilcannia adjacent to the current road bridge was visited and photographed, although nothing remains except for cuttings on the landward site of the river bank. The site was photographed in detail.

Figure 49: Road bridge near Government wharf site at Wilcannia. Photograph by David Nutley.
8.1.7 Discussion of survey results
The inspected site warrant further detailed investigation and assessment for their historical significance. Research into their former use and importance to the local and regional communities has been undertaken in part through published thematic studies (eg Heritage Office, 1996), and a wealth of information retained by local historical societies, museums and private families. The wharf sites in particular, once formed a pivotal role in local industry and were the bridge between passing river trade and the townships. The survival of remnant timber jetty piles is considered high at many sites, together with partially intact archaeological relic deposits retained within the bank and riverbed soils. Contemporary demolition of the original sites, together with degradation due to floods and biological activity will have had an impact on the survival and integrity of remains.

9 MANAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES – GENERAL DISCUSSION
Much of the communities focus on the inland river regions of New South Wales has focused on the maintenance and restoration of extant riverboats. The success of these individual projects is witnessed by the tourism interest generated in river towns bordering the River Murray and Parts of the Darling. The annual ferryboat runs on the Murray and other historic tours have rekindled an interest in the inland history of the State’s significant and unsurpassed internal river systems. Of these, the Murray and Darling rivers remain pre-eminent. The focus on riverboat rejuvenation has also had a positive effect in keeping the shipbuilding traditions and skills of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries alive.
However, the other physical reminders of that riverboat era have not received as much attention. The many river port towns like Wentworth, Pooncarie, Menindee, Wilcannia, Louth and Brewarrina have few extant river-based heritage structures through which to promote their history. This is particularly so for jetties and wharves, although associated buildings such as customs houses, post office, court houses and magistrate buildings, offer opportunities. Centres such as Echuca and Bourke have rebuilt their original town landings as a tourism focus, and to provide an opportunity to visualise the scale and activity that once surrounded these impressive structures. Unique surviving buildings like the old Customs House at Wentworth, the old Post Office at Louth and the 'Lynwood' at Bourke are powerful reminders of the association of the towns with the maritime activity along the river.

Figure 51: Old Customs House at Wentworth. Photograph by David Nutley.
The shipwreck heritage of the river systems has been under-utilised. Several vessels were lost during their working life and form an important component of the heritage significance of the river systems they served. The River Murray has an extensive number of sites, over 70 located wreck site in the NSW's stretch alone. Importantly, the Darling River had very few recorded losses, making those located sites even more significant for the physical and archaeological record they retain.

Shipwreck sites such as those assessed during the current study are therefore extremely rare, but a direct visual link to the former age of extensive river transportation. The loss of the *Providence* for example has been reported as the worst event in terms of loss of life to have occurred on that river. The paddle steamer *Rodney* by comparison, was one of the largest vessels to ever ply the Darling and intricately associated with a significant historic event – the Shearer’s Strike of the late 1890’s. The paddle steamer *Wave* is remembered fondly for its standing high and dry in a paddock when flood waters receded, and for the colourful captain who then made the wreck his home.

Sites such as these therefore demand inspection, assessment and protection. They are a fragile resource of immense potential value to the local communities in which they are located, but also to the wider regional interest in inland New South Wales. As a tourism opportunity, they are presently under-utilised. The potential interest in site visitation and for educational learning experiences, however, is highlighted by the one thousand people who visited the *Rodney* wreck site on its centenary day in 1994. The educational values of these sites are immense.

These fragile remains will become more valued locally once their fuller historical associations are identified, and when educational materials relative to the sites are more fully available. Until people can learn about archaeological sites, there is little motivation in obtaining greater understanding or instilling an interest in long-term preservation and promotion. Several important initiatives have been made such as the installation of visitor interpretative plaques at both of these key wreck sites, and of site specific booklets outlining vessel histories (eg for *Rodney*). The new Back O’Bourke Exhibition Centre promises to bring the river and its long history to life in a powerful way. However, opportunities exist to complement that facility through fuller documentation and promotion of heritage in-situ.

In all cases, the archaeological characteristics of the sites need to be retained, so that the important record they hold of past shipbuilding practices, engineering accomplishments, life on board, and association with townships, communities etc, are retained for future detailed study. Some Historic Shipwrecks, protected by heritage legislation, have been seriously compromised in the River Murray through improper archaeological process and amateur recovery for ‘restoration’. The recovery of fragile, degraded Historic Shipwreck remains for rebuilding into working condition is often incompatible with the condition of the historic fabric. In most cases, the original context in which the vessels lay was not recorded nor the state of hull components and associated machinery and relics. Rebuilding to original configuration involved massive replacement of original materials which are generally discarded and unrecorded. The retention of original members is often unclear. In these cases, the original heritage structure and its archaeological attributes are utterly destroyed, and little if any of the original vessel is retained in any case.
This activity is not only unnecessarily intrusive but also illegal under the relics provisions of the Heritage Act. The Heritage Office however actively encourages other opportunities for investigating and promoting key sites. A useful alternative is to undertake approved and controlled heritage recording of extant shipwreck structures and to build a replica of the original. This has the benefit of documenting the archaeological wreck site which is retained and not disturbed, and using the archaeological evidence to generate the replica that can then be used to illustrate the prior history of that vessel. Opportunities then exist to use the replica to visit the original wreck site, providing a unique heritage tour experience. To date, no such activity has been attempted.

Fragile, heavily denuded sites like the Rodney lend themselves to in-situ conservation and promotion. The recovery of the remains of the Rodney would probably result in only portions of the keel being available for reuse in any replica/restoration process. The remainder of this highly significant wreck would be destroyed in the recovery process.

9.1 Further research
The current range of site inspections drew on archival resources housed in various repositories such as the State Library of New South Wales and Library of the Australian National Maritime Museum. This information had previously been collated by the Heritage Office to provide short background histories to key shipwreck sites, for inclusion in the NSW Historic Shipwreck Database. This research remains introductory, while other possible sources are identified and obtained. The Heritage Office was grateful to receive key local media clippings and other source material from staff at the Wentworth Historical Society and local identities who have undertaken ongoing research into the river and it’s past.

The collation of these records into centrally available repositories, such as the local Historical Societies, would be a welcome progress. This information would then be more easily accessible for researches and visitors to the region.

The amount of privately held records and memorabilia related to the riverboat days is currently unknown. It is expected that previously unsighted historic photographs, river charts, Captain’s diaries and similar materials might be in existence. A local history research project aimed at identifying and recording such archival material would be a welcome outcome.

Detailed histories of the paddle steamers operating along the Darling River, together with their owners and trades, are not available. Similarly, details of the key individuals associated with the heyday of inland river life are not widely available. Significant opportunities exist to promote these related riverine stories to an eager tourist market, while enriching the local community’s appreciation of their significant history.

The Wentworth Historical Society and NSW Heritage Office are currently exploring the potential for two related shipwreck sites in the Darling River near Wentworth. The paddle steamer, Emily Jane, was reported scuttled on fire with a barge there in 1899, while loaded with stores for a trip north up the Darling. Although set free, it drifted back against the Emily Jane and both were lost. The event allegedly occurred at the Avoca Cutting near Avoca Station on the western side of the Darling, about 20 kilometres north of Wentworth. Additional research is continuing into this contemporary report, to determine whether the vessels were recovered at the time, or might now survive as Historic
Shipwrecks. The area is today controlled by the weir system at Wentworth and lies within the “Wentworth Pool”.

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<tr>
<td>Wentworth Shire Visitor Information Centre</td>
<td><em>The Historic Port of Wentworth</em>, brochure. Wentworth.</td>
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