



REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES - ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

11. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The criteria adopted by the Heritage Council in September, 1991 have been used to determine the cultural heritage significance of the place.

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE

Sealers' Oven has aesthetic value in that it contributes to the quality of the landscape at Waychinicup Inlet. While obviously being man-made, the fact that *Sealers' Oven* consists solely of mud and unworked stones give it a natural aesthetic entirely complimentary to Waychinicup Inlet. (Criterion 1.3)

11.2. HISTORIC VALUE

Sealers' Oven demonstrates the way of life during a phase of commercial seal hunting on the southern coast prior to the European colonisation of Western Australia. (Criterion 2.2)

11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE

Sealers' Oven provides information about its builders, who were among the first non-Aboriginals to visit this region and as such it has scientific value. (Criterion 3.2)

11.4. SOCIAL VALUE

Sealers' Oven is highly valued by the community for its association with the activities and way of life of early sealers. As an important relic within the Waychinicup National Park, it is a feature of interest to campers and other park visitors. (Criterion 4.1)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12. 1. RARITY

Sealers' Ovens are extremely rare. *Sealers' Oven* at Waychinicup Inlet is thus highly significant. (Criterion 5.1)

12. 2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

It is representative of a way of life that would rarely be lived today. (Criterion 6.2)

12. 3 CONDITION

Sealers' Oven is in good condition.

12. 4 INTEGRITY

Sealers' Oven was built to bake bread. Although it does not appear to have been recently used for this or any other similar purpose, it could still be used as such today. At present it is mainly used as an item of curiosity by campers.

12. 5 AUTHENTICITY

The authenticity of *Sealers' Oven* is high. The intention of the original builders, judging by the lack of evidence of any other buildings, was to construct a semi-permanent oven for occasional use only and the fact that *Sealers' Oven* may have been partially or completely rebuilt since then is not inconsistent with the original intention.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Sarah Stephenson, BA. The physical evidence has been compiled by John Loreck, Architect.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Located at Waychinicup Inlet, six kilometres west of Cheyne Beach Whaling Station, Albany, *Sealers' Oven* is a relic from pre-European settlement in Western Australia.¹ It was constructed circa 1800, by seal traders visiting the south coast.² *Sealers' Oven* is a kiln approximately one metre high, consisting of natural granite stones and pug.³

In 1790, commercial hunting of seals and whales began in Australia. Seal skin was sold to Asia, America and Europe.⁴ Discovery of King George Sound in 1791, by George Vancouver, enabled sealing and whaling industries to establish stations along this stretch of coastline over a span of twenty years before European settlement in this locality.⁵ During this period, the safe anchorage and abundant fresh water supply at Waychinicup Inlet became known to sealers operating along the coast.⁶ *Sealers' Oven* was subsequently erected for the occasional use of sealers anchoring in the inlet.

In 1827, a military outpost was established at King George Sound. The devastation of the seal population was noted by Commander Major Lockyer, who suggested that the sealing industry be monitored.⁷ During 1840-1850, sealing in Western Australia ceased.⁸ *Sealers' Oven* was recognised, but not used over the next one hundred and thirty years.

In 1973, at the request of the National Trust, the Western Australian government established a reserve of twelve square metres around *Sealers' Oven* to protect it.⁹ In 1977, *Sealers' Oven* was classified by the National Trust.¹⁰ *Sealers' Oven* is significant due to its early construction and association with sealers. Historically *Sealers' Oven* is a relic of Australia's first European industry.¹¹

In 1981, John Watson of the former National Parks Authority (included within CALM since 1985), proposed the establishment of Waychinicup National Park to protect rare flora and fauna and unusual granite rock formations. The area

1 McIlroy, J. 'Nineteenth Century Bay Whaling Stations in Western Australia' (Thesis 1987), information supplied by Mike McCarthy, Curator, WA Maritime Museum, Fremantle.

2 National Trust Classifications Assessment Form, 4 April 1977.

3 Ibid.

4 *The Scenic Wonderland, Albany, Mt Barker, Denmark, Walpole* (Rolsh Productions, Albany, Western Australia)

5 Ibid.

6 McIlroy, J. 'Nineteenth Century Bay Whaling Stations in Western Australia' (Thesis 1987), information supplied by Mike McCarthy, Curator, WA Maritime Museum, Fremantle.

7 *The Scenic Wonderland, Albany, Mt Barker, Denmark, Walpole* (Rolsh Productions, Albany, Western Australia)

8 Telephone conversation, Mike McCarthy, Western Australian Maritime Museum, Fremantle, transcribed by Sarah Stephenson, 2 January 1996.

9 DOLA Correspondence Files 2260/1908 & 1651/1972.

10 National Trust Classifications Assessment Form, 4 April 1977.

11 Ibid.

was already popular for bush walking, rock climbing, fishing and family recreation and the proposal was supported by the Albany Shire Council and the EPA.¹² Stage one was attained by 1990 and Waychinicup National Park is now a high conservation area with scenic views and *Sealers' Oven*.

13. 2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Sealers' Oven is a small kiln at Waychinicup Inlet, which is about six kilometres west of Cheyne Beach and about seven kilometres east of the summit of Mount Manypeaks.

The Waychinicup River is a small stream which flows into the northern and most inland part of Waychinicup Inlet. Waychinicup Inlet is a narrow serpentine inlet which is about one kilometre long from the mouth of the Waychinicup River to the Southern Ocean.

Due to the curving nature of the inlet and the protection afforded by Mount Manypeaks and other nearby hills, the site of *Sealers' Oven* is well protected, being sheltered from strong winds.

Sealers' Oven is located about 300 metres south-east of the mouth of the Waychinicup River, on the Eastern bank of Waychinicup Inlet. Built on a granite outcrop about four metres above the high tide level, it is roughly circular in plan, with a diameter of about 1.5 metres at the base. The granite stones used to construct *Sealers' Oven* were selected from the vicinity and are generally flat, broad and inherently stable. The walls of *Sealers' Oven* curve inwards and rise to a height of about one metre, with a diameter of about 0.75 metres.

Located at the top of *Sealers' Oven* is a central opening, about one third of a metre in diameter. This would have been used as an access hole for inserting fuel and dough, and for the removal of bread. It is assumed that the two small holes at the base, facing east, would have facilitated cross ventilation.

The stones of *Sealers' Oven*, particularly at the base, are bound together with local mud. There is less evidence of this at the top of the structure, where the mud has presumably eroded.

The stones at the top of *Sealers' Oven* are larger and more circular than the stones at the base, particularly in the north-west quarter, conforming less to the overall beehive shape of the structure, which would seem to indicate that part of the top has been re-built. Indeed *Sealers' Oven* may have been partially or completely re-built a number of times - it is difficult to tell.

13. 3 REFERENCES

No key references.

¹² *Landscape, Western Australia's Conservation, Forests and Wildlife Magazine* (Spring, 1990) p.6.
Register of Heritage Places - Assessment Doc'n Sealers' Oven4
09/05/1997