

## FOREWORD - ARCHAEOLOGY IN QUEENSLAND

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As Queensland and Western Australia receive the archaeological attention which they deserve, during this decade, it is likely that Australian prehistory will be rewritten drastically. Historic settlement populated southeastern Australia and made it the focus of European urbanised development, but there is no reason why the evidence for northern prehistory should not redress this geographic imbalance. Queensland's immensely long and ecologically rich coastline offers diverse possibilities for research, while the hints of a Pleistocene human presence across a range of interior habitats hold equal potential.

Equally significant is the fact that numerous Aboriginal people still inhabit the state, while a cultural renewal is in progress, which involves a concern with their vibrant past. These people and their knowledge are a resource of great potential. The challenge facing prehistorians of Queensland is to develop active collaboration with Aborigines in a mutually rewarding dialogue. Both modern Aborigines and prehistorians are fortunate that they were served so well by those two meticulous recorders of traditional ethnography, W.E. Roth and Donald Thomson. Their collections of material objects, detailed observations and Thomson's photographs of unrivalled quality, provide a corpus of information which otherwise would be largely unrecoverable.

The numerous and varied contributions to the first volume of this new Queensland enterprise are welcome. It is significant that many of them present basic field data. If later numbers contain fewer articles but more detailed and longer excavation reports or field surveys; future archaeologists will be in the editor's debt even more. It is worth reflecting that new approaches to explicating the past, involving model formulation, theoretical constructs and trendy jargon, arose in continents with an archaeological data base and fieldwork traditions extending back over a century. Australians sometimes are criticised for their pragmatism and neglect of abstractions. At this juncture in archaeological research, however, there is much point in recording the mundane. Queensland's archaeology barely reaches across two decades, while entire regions are unsurveyed, major site complexes are unrecorded and connected facts are few. While the practice may be resisted by young enthusiasts as a vestigial colonial cultural cringe, the methodology of old-fashioned British field archaeology must be applied in the Australian bush before a truly national theory and practice of archaeology can emerge. The building blocks of Queensland prehistory remain grounded firmly upon the publication of careful mapping, systematic site plans and the objective description and analysis of finds; stratigraphy and related chronology remains its keystone.

My own involvement in Queensland research dates from the late 'fifties, and it is helpful to review the situation around that era. Only twenty-four years have elapsed since my first excavation on Mt. Moffatt station, but it seems light years away when compared either with the knowledge and research orientations embodied in this volume, or with the number of archaeologists now on the ground.

A series of unrelated Queensland happenings symbolise that period and its assumptions. Donald Thomson attempted to return to Cape York after an interval of some thirty years. Tragically for future Aborigines and ethnographers alike, he was barred by a union of intransigent mission zealots and paternalistic government authorities. Nobody bothered to consult with the people amongst whom Thomson wished to work. Consequently, that talented anthropologist never revisited the scene of his first fieldwork.

However, another anthropologist, W.E.H. Stanner, was invited to tackle a Cape York archaeological problem. Stanner visited Weipa in 1958 to examine the origin of the immense shell mounds. Although he advocated excavation, he attempted none, and he interpreted the mounds as natural features (Stanner 1961).

When a box of slides labelled "Kenniff Cave" arrived in Melbourne during 1959, they provided sufficient stimulus to take me there during the next year. Chance, linked with a hunch, would not constitute a respectable research design today, yet that combination sufficed to discover a major site which both solved and posed problems of continental application.

Kenniff cave literally was a thousand miles away but, in those days, it was much further in conceptual terms. Carnarvon Gorge was an exotic place visited by the adventurous; Kenniff combined the aura of legendary cattle duffers with the remoteness of the moon. We obtained the goodwill of local station people and enjoyed their hospitality, but there was no question of requesting official permits. No sites legislation then existed anywhere in Australia and there was no obligation to lodge finds in any state institution. That I voluntarily chose to deposit all the Fromm's Landing finds in Adelaide and those from Mt. Moffatt in Brisbane, was considered eccentric behaviour by some stone tool collectors of my acquaintance. A child of my time, I assumed that there were no Aboriginal people living in the region; naturally, no legal requirement was in force anywhere in Australia making it necessary to obtain Aboriginal consent.

Archaeological matters moved fast thereafter. In 1962, I obtained a Pleistocene radiocarbon date for Kenniff cave. The next year, Richard Wright (1971) demonstrated that the Weipa shell mounds were archaeological deposits, while the archaeology and art of the Laura region became recognised for its richness and significance. Percy Trezise became one of the best known rock art recorders in Australia (Trezise 1969, 1971). By the time that the Mt. Moffatt excavations were published in 1965, Carmel White had discovered ground hatchets in Arnhem Land and had demonstrated human occupation beyond 20,000 years. In Queensland, legislation was being framed to protect both sites and artefacts. Yet, I suspect that nobody consulted Aborigines concerning such matters. To a great extent that remains a central issue today, critical to the future of archaeological research.

In the 'sixties the archaeological map of Queensland resembled a map of exploration a century earlier. There were isolated patches of knowledge surrounded by the darkness of ignorance. Weipa, Laura, Platform Gallery (Cooktown), Mt. Moffatt and Carnarvon's Cathedral cave, the

Broadbeach burial ground: these provided the congress topics of that decade.

The secondary exploration which followed during the 1970s extended these recorded zones and carbon dates became sufficiently numerous to enable games to be played with time. A regionalism in fieldwork developed, with Laura, Townsville and the southeast, centres for purposeful independent projects.

The most significant research, however, complemented the Mt. Moffatt results. Extended fieldwork in the Central Highlands was undertaken by John Beaton and Michael Morwood. That Kenniff cave still retains the distinction of being the oldest of the many sites investigated there, underlines the whimsical nature of archaeology. Rewards do not go necessarily to the persistent or to the systematic research designers. More seriously, the fact that no other high-Pleistocene site has been dated may support the Bowdler thesis that the Highlands were entered effectively only much later. However, the apparent confirmation of the Kenniff cave sequence of stone tool types, through Morwood's analysis (1981), is a significant benchmark. There are few areas within Australia where a group of well-dated, stratified sites has produced a variety of typologically identifiable types in conformable order. Even at a time when function rather than form, technology rather than typology, attracts researchers, these firm indicators merit further consideration.

In the Principal Components Analysis of the spatial distribution of art at 83 sites, Morwood (1980) inaugurated a new approach to the past. There are behavioural and cognitive aspects incapsulated in rock art, and Morwood has the distinction of demonstrating the possibilities of retrieving some of them through very detailed regional recording. Given the Pleistocene antiquity of engravings at the Early Man site, near Laura (Rosenfeld et. al. 1981), there are opportunities to apply Morwood's approach through an impressive time depth. The immense number and variety of paintings in the same region, currently under the joint scrutiny of Percy Trezise and Josephine Flood, offer comparable possibilities.

The chief consequence of Beaton's Central Highlands campaign resulted from his experience with cycads. His insightful thesis concerning the significant role of cycads in Aboriginal economic and social life has highlighted, like Morwood's art study, intangible aspects of Aboriginal society (Beaton 1982). The link between ceremonial assemblies and abundant food resources is not a new discovery, but the emphasis upon this staple, and its transfer back into prehistoric times is challengingly fresh. It offers a model which is likely to stimulate further research.

Within recent years Prehistory has become an undergraduate discipline at James Cook University and at the University of Queensland, while vigorous fieldwork has been sustained from both institutions. As aspects of this research are reported in this volume this is not the place to discuss them in depth.

In my opinion, however, some of Australia's most significant current fieldwork is based within these institutions. John Campbell's sustained and energetic programme has been rewarded by challenging discoveries. Their detailed publication should ensure a greater measure of Queensland's past in any future book on Australian prehistory. M.J. Rowland has contributed weight to debates on economic prehistory through his impressive study of the Keppel Islands. Peter Hiscock and Phillip Hughes have shifted prehistoric investigations into Carpentaria. The

Colless Creek site should contribute vital data to several crucial issues of national application.

Cape York has become the focus for several major projects. Percy Trezise continues his long-term recording of rock art, now assisted by teams from Earthwatch. Josephine Flood has been associated with this research, particularly in her excavation of the Green Ant Site. On the shores of Princess Charlotte Bay, an important interdisciplinary survey of the relationship between sea levels and Aboriginal shell mounds has been undertaken by John Beaton and geomorphologist John Chappell.

Queensland researchers have followed the lead of those great ethnographers, Roth and Thomson, by encouraging detailed investigation of material culture. Barrie Reynolds, at Townsville, and Peter Lauer, in Brisbane, have set an encouraging standard of scholarship in an area which had been neglected during the rise of academic anthropology. Most importantly, Lauer's Occasional Papers series reflects the input of Aboriginal people and the two-way flow of information which must become the hallmark of Australian Aboriginal studies within this decade and, one anticipates, within this new venture of **Queensland Archaeological Research**.

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