

## CURRENT QUEENSLAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH

### JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY OF NORTH QUEENSLAND

by John Campbell and Paul Gorecki

The Division of Anthropology and Archaeology of the School of Behavioural Sciences is involved in a wide range of archaeological research in Australia and overseas. As befits the location of the University, most recent and current research concerns various aspects of the archaeology of North Queensland. This summary, however, takes a wider view on Northern Sahul.

#### STAFF RESEARCH

John Campbell completed work in 1989 on a major ARC funded project on the Chillagoe region. Further fieldwork is planned for 1990 and 1991, albeit on a smaller budget. The excavations at Walkunder Arch Cave have evolved into two complementary projects, one of which is being directed by Mireille Mardaga-Campbell (see Ph.D. research below). The ARC project's results make it clear that Aboriginal people have lived in the Chillagoe district at least since the height of the last glacial. Between 20,000 and 12,000 years ago people lived in what was in effect an oasis or refugium. It is expected that some dates exceeding 40,000 years ago will now be obtained, partly as a result of the application of AMS, TL and U/Th dating techniques.

Paul Gorecki and Ian Owens (Senior Cultural Officer, Queensland Division of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs) are starting a project in 1990 in the Croydon region (Gulf of Carpentaria) with two long-term aims in mind. One is to record in detail Aboriginal oral traditions and to document the traditional material culture of the region. The second aim is to explore the possibilities for undertaking archaeological surveys and excavations of sites not only of interest to the scientific community but also to the local Aboriginal community. As such, particular involvement from that community will be sought in the project. The community-based approach to archaeological research and consultancy has been developed for North Queensland by Shelly Greer (see Ph.D. research below).

Paul Gorecki and John Taylor investigated a number of camp sites in the Pormpuraaw (Edward River) region, on the western side of Cape York Peninsula, in the second half of 1989. Most of the sites visited were originally documented by Taylor in 1976 and 1984 for his Ph.D. thesis in social anthropology, so that a database for the Aboriginal use of the Pormpuraaw environment is available. The 1989 ethnoarchaeological research focused on taphonomic and cultural processes which are likely to influence the archaeological result in western Cape York Peninsula settings.

**Paul Gorecki, John Campbell and Mark Mabin** (Department of Geography) have been awarded a major ARC grant to undertake in 1990 an archaeological and geomorphological investigation on the northern coast of "Greater Australia" (i.e. New Guinea) between the PNG town of Vanimo and the Irian Jaya border. The main aims of this multidisciplinary project are to establish the first archaeological records for this scientifically unknown coast, to understand its geomorphology - taking into account that tectonic uplift is (and has been) outpacing sea-level rises - and to provide a clearer picture of cultural changes and human adaptations to new and dynamic environments. After pilot surveys and soundings in 1989, the main surveys and excavations were carried out in June and July 1990 near the villages of Musu and Finchin. The archaeological, geomorphological and paleoenvironmental samples collected are currently being analysed in Port Moresby and Townsville. This study allows one to look at a northern "Greater Australian" coral reef coastline, which, if it were in Queensland, would be a drowned one.

#### **PhD RESEARCH**

**Michelle Bird** is starting a new archaeological investigation in 1990 on Hinchinbrook Island and the adjacent mainland. This large island national park covers an area of almost 400km<sup>2</sup>. Despite its enormous archaeological potential, it has remained largely unexplored. In its initial stages this Ph.D. research will include extensive surveying to establish the general nature, extent and distribution of archaeological resources in the area. A database on the archaeology of Hinchinbrook Island will be compiled, and this will form a foundation for investigating specific research questions. The project's main questions are related to island economies, subsistence and settlement patterns on tropical offshore islands, as well as possibilities for Aboriginal intensification in the Hinchinbrook district of North Queensland.

**Gillian Cox** began undertaking in 1989 an examination of almost the entire prehistoric pottery assemblage recovered from archaeological sites excavated along the Papuan coast, with a view to establishing a sequence and possible relationships with other Melanesian pottery-bearing sites. The study area affords a rare opportunity to address an aspect of society which is frequently immeasurable archaeologically. This is the concept of reciprocity, redistribution and marketing of a manufactured commodity (pottery) in an ancient environment and between prehistoric groups.

**Shelly Greer** is currently completing work on consultation procedures in the archaeology of Aboriginal Australia. Her Ph.D. field research has concentrated on northernmost Cape York Peninsula, and has resulted in the formulation of an approach she has termed "Community-based Archaeology". This approach emphasizes Aboriginal consultation at every level of the research, from developing research questions, deciding on methods of recording and describing cultural information through to producing an account of the prehistory of the region. That is, Aboriginal people have a real say in directing and decision making on the project.

**Elizabeth Hatte** is undertaking research on Aboriginal paintings of the Townsville region with a general focus on recovering meaning, particularly in "shield" designs. One research aim is to establish a database not only for motifs but also for the range of decorative

designs which occur on these "shield" paintings. Before this is attempted, experimental work is being done on improving their visibility, as many paintings in the Townsville district granite surfaces are extremely faded. Several methods of computerized image enhancement and restoration are being tested on faded paintings with a view to acquiring replicable techniques for the future.

Mireille Mardaga-Campbell commenced her Ph.D. project on living-floor archaeology in rockshelter deposits in North Queensland in 1984, after having been involved since 1980 in ARGC/ARC funded research which revealed the presence of well preserved prehistoric living-floors in rockshelters of the Chillagoe area. This long-term intensive research addresses key problems in identification, excavation and reconstruction of living-floors. Using precise micro-Stratigraphic and spatial sampling methods in conjunction with taphonomic experiments on fireplaces and their associated materials, the impact of various site formation processes is being addressed. This project also evaluates ethnoarchaeological models of rockshelter use as a basis for the explanation of spatial patterns in connection with Aboriginal behaviour at rockshelter sites.

Sue McIntyre is conducting her Ph.D. research on the significance to Aboriginal people of what many think of as purely European historical sites in northern Cape York Peninsula. She is finding that places such as 19th century Somerset (a failed attempt at creating an Australian "Singapore") and 20th century Higginsfield (a WWII air base operated by Americans and Australians) hold tremendous significance, indeed, possibly more for Aboriginal than for non-Aboriginal Australians.

Sheila McKell is starting Ph.D. research which is based on the premise that gender, which is a socio-cultural phenomenon, as opposed to sex, which is biologically determined, should have a material referent which may be identified archaeologically. Based on ethnoarchaeological studies, her research will attempt to identify whether or not gender has material indicators in the Australian archaeological record.

#### MA RESEARCH

Noelene Cole began conducting in 1989 a new study of Aboriginal rock art in the Laura region of south-eastern Cape York Peninsula. The project is aimed at investigating homogeneity and variability within the rock art system as well as at identifying spatial and chronological distribution of techniques, motifs and stylistic features. Data is being extracted from extant Laura records and from new fieldwork results gained from intensive rock art recording at selected localities.

Mornee O'Keefe is completing a preliminary investigation into the prehistory of the Herbert-Burdekin region of the North Queensland continental shelf. This is being done in relation to locally established variations in sea level as well as the palaeogeography of Herbert and Burdekin River channels. Places holding archaeological potential are being identified on the emergent landmasses of the Palm Islands and in underwater locations adjacent to former estuaries and within antecedent platforms of modern reefs. Late Holocene Aboriginal settlement patterns on Orpheus Island (in the Palm Island group) are possible recent analogues for earlier settlement on the exposed continental shelf.

## BA (HONS.) AND GRADUATE DIPLOMA RESEARCH

Michelle Bird conducted honours research in 1987 at Beach Mount on the northeastern coast of North Queensland which she followed up with further field studies prompted by a succession of environmental disasters in 1988 and 1989. Her honours research located and recorded a large number of endangered/eroding coastal sites, including shell middens, artefact scatters, a burial and a tidal fishtrap. Two tropical cyclones (Charlie in 1988 and Aivu in 1989) subsequently struck Beach Mount causing massive erosion and formation of a new breach in the formerly extensive dune system. Results of surveys indicate not only dramatic changes to coastal geomorphology but also the loss of a significant portion of the archaeological record. This research has important implications for coastal archaeological studies in both tropical Australia and the South Pacific.

Noelene Cole completed honours research in 1988 on the rock art of Jowalbinna near Laura in southeastern Cape York peninsula. About 60 sites and 1700 motifs were recorded and analysed. Features of the Aboriginal rock art in this area were identified with the aid of a computer analysis of the data.

Kristen Erskine is completing an honours thesis on the archaeology and protohistory of the so-called Picts of Scotland. Although an unusual topic to undertake in the tropics, she intends to pursue Ph.D. research in Scotland on this topic and is applying Queensland/Antipodean perspectives to Pictish archaeology.

Damien Foster is completing an honours thesis based on a preliminary archaeological survey of the environs of Lake Elphinstone, a small semi-permanent freshwater lake some 100km WSW of Mackay. This lake is strategically positioned in that it lies only ca. 30km west of the western edge of a rainforest environment, whilst west of the lake the environment grades to areas of semi-arid open woodland which receive very little annual rainfall. Several open sites and a few small rockshelters have been located to date, the data from which are being analysed from a technological and spatial perspective.

Pattie Jeffers is carrying out a detailed and critical review of major archaeological surveying and sampling techniques for her honours research. She is focusing especially on sampling strategies employed by a number of archaeologists in inland open woodland environments. The validity of one technique over another is being assessed and theoretical as well as practical recommendations are to be offered.

Deborra Kirwan is conducting graduate diploma archaeological research on the old mining township of Brookville, North Queensland. Her project aims at identifying the layout and extent of the former township, initially by site appraisal, survey and mapping, as well as at reconstruction of township life. Working on the latter partly involves the use of oral histories and archival records. The nature and effects of site formation processes at Brookville are also being investigated.

Darrin Lee Long is undertaking honours research which involves a basic comparative analysis of two sites, one on the coast of Cape Cleveland, the other on the "fringe" area between the coast and inland regions near Mount Elliot. The questions being addressed concern differences in the stone materials used and differences in diet and subsistence patterns.

**Sheila McKell** carried out honours research in 1989 in the broad area of gender and archaeology, an interest which she is pursuing further in her Ph.D. work (see above). This was stimulated by a perceived lack of adequate models of women in both social anthropology and archaeology.

**Serena Milne** is investigating the relationship between coastal geomorphic change and its effect on the nature and location of archaeological sites. Her study area is Cape Upstart, North Queensland. Here she is mapping a series of large stone arrangements which might also be associated with an adjacent group of shell middens. This sort of coastal environment is one which is regularly under severe threat of near total destruction due to erosion caused by tropical cyclones. An issue which is being addressed is whether or not the Cape Upstart stone arrangements were used to trap marine resources, had a ceremonial function, or perhaps both.

**Allan Plant** conducted honours research on problems relating to the attempt to do spatial archaeology of Aboriginal landscapes. His original field studies were undertaken in 1989 at Cape Cleveland near Townsville. He criticized, amongst other things, the use of inappropriate "off the peg" laws and models. He also advocated the identification of archaeological space from within, and the development of methods suitable for treating and measuring spatial properties at integrated levels.

**Kay Rudolf-Borgar** carried out a detailed study in 1989 on the rock art of selected sites near Mount Isa for her honours thesis. Her work was done in close liaison with the Kalkadoon people and she concentrated her analysis principally on the motifs at Painted Rock.

Other research topics and field areas are also being worked on and/or considered. Some of these will be reported in a future volume of **QAR**. A full list of thesis titles and key publications will also be included in the next summary of current research from James Cook University of North Queensland.

\* \* \*