

EDITORIAL

As 1987 comes to a close a very important piece of Queensland legislation is being repealed, an event which affects all archaeologists working in this state. I refer of course to the Aboriginal Relics Preservation Act 1967-76 which, since its enactment has served to protect Aboriginal cultural remains by making them the property of the crown. While it has come under quite a deal of fire over the years, especially for not providing for sites of Aboriginal cultural significance and for appearing to have little power to prevent the theft and vandalism of relics, it has worked quite well compared to similar acts in other states. I write now not to mourn its passing so much as to raise some skepticism regarding the piece of legislation that will take its place -- The Cultural Record (Landscapes Queensland And Queensland Estate) Bill.

The Cultural Record Bill is designed to, among other things, foster an awareness of, and offer protection for, an historic continuum ranging from the present back to a time when the first human stepped foot on Queensland soil. Any place or thing on, in, or from that soil which has significance to a person or persons may be nominated and, in due course, perhaps declared by Order in Council, placed on a Register of the Queensland Estate and thus offered protection under the law. As ideas go, that of an historic continuum is not a bad one; at least it implicitly admits the notion of a multicultural history for the state (the Bill is not actually so explicit on this point). Under this rather ecumenical umbrella then, people of all cultures and interests may seek protection of things and places of significance to them. Not a bad idea you say? I agree. Then why do I feel the rumblings of disquiet in my bones?

My discontent lies not with the notion but with the realities of the administration of such an act. In the first place, the Minister has complete power over the acceptance or rejection of a petitioner's claims. The Minister may also, at his/her discretion and subject to rules under the Act, remove items from the Register. Secondly, the Minister takes advice from any number of Advisory Committees, the establishment composition and maintenance of which is at the Minister's discretion. In short, there is no specified provision for persons with particular skills or experience. For example, in a case pertaining to prehistoric cultural material, the Minister is under no obligation whatsoever to include professional archaeologists, anthropologists or Aborigines on such committees. S/he has simply to include "such expertise as he considers appropriate" (Cultural Record Bill 1987:7). While one would expect most progressive Ministers to include such expertise, I caution that portfolios change ministers more often than some people change their socks and we can seldom be sure of getting the informed and enlightened minister we would desire in matters

archaeological. A third important point - perhaps the most significant - is that things/places of cultural significance may only be declared after the owner of the land gives consent! Thus, as pointed out by a submission to the Queensland Government by the Australian Archaeological Association earlier this year, the Queensland Government would appear to have little or no power to protect sites at all. One may readily guess at the attitude of some of our more avaricious land developers on this score.

There are a number of other gripes I personally hold concerning this legislation (e.g. the neat sidestepping of Aboriginal political issues by substituting the terms "Aborigine" or "Aboriginal" for the terms "indigenous peoples" - any race of people inhabiting Australia before Europeans [but not since?]). However, I shall limit this editorial to what I consider a more crucial matter which takes the form of a plea to all archaeologists who work or wish to work in this state and who want cultural resources protected. Given the Cultural Record Bill as it now stands (it is to be enacted this month or soon thereafter), it seems obvious that while it has great scope for protection of a multitude of things cultural, the kinds of cultural things that will be protected will be those petitioned for by the loudest and most influential voices. At present, I venture to suggest that the loudest and most influential voices are coming and will continue to come from those interested primarily in the preservation of Queensland's historic buildings. Thus, the main lobby group would include local amateur historians, architects, and others who wish to protect the European part of our historic continuum. These people have a head start on we archaeologists in that they have always had socio-political links with conservative government. It's time we archaeologists caught up and began forging our own links as well as making loud noises. As I see it, we get nowhere very quickly by muttering negative comments in either the halls of academe or over the bar at our favorite watering hole. We must become more vocal and much more committed in terms of public archaeology if we are to protect for our discipline's future those places which we covet for helping humanity understand human cultural ways. So its a call to arms that I trumpet here; a call to all who would be involved in the understanding of (esp.) Aboriginal culture, its origins and development. The Cultural Record Bill is there for us to use; let's use it to our advantage.

And now to Volume 4 of QAR. This year's crop begins with the first really systematic analysis of earthen circles (Bora Rings) for the south-east Queensland region. This paper has been much developed by Leonn Satterthwait and Andrew Heather from a foundation produced by Heather for his Hons. B.A. thesis a few years ago. I think that you will find it most stimulating and useful as it adds an important dimension to past Aboriginal socio-political life. The two following papers relate to an important question of post-Pleistocene coastal occupation in Moreton Bay and both contribute to the argument that early to mid-Holocene sites are not to found on the present coastline but further inland due to an effective sea level drop at some after 3,000 B.P. The Hope Island site is significant in two ways. Firstly, it demonstrates that people were exploiting the intertidal zone for shellfish quite early in the Holocene (< 4,300 B.P.) and argues against a substantial time-lag for this activity such as was documented by John Beaton for Princess Charlotte Bay. Secondly, it represents the first time that Aboriginal people have contributed to an archaeological manuscript in the pages of QAR. In this case, the Kombumerri of the Gold Coast area were actively involved in all phases of the work leading to this publication. The next contribution comes from Mike

Morwood and Luke Godwin who found some interesting sites during an archaeological contract in central Queensland and have written them up with a view to adding the archaeology of the open and rolling Dawson River lands to the large body of information already gathered for the adjacent central Highlands.

Finally, as promised last issue, I have included a section on Current Research--a kind of newsletter section which allows readers to see who is doing what at the moment in Queensland. I might add that if anyone is now working or is planning to do work in the state over 1988, feel free to drop a note to The Ed. for inclusion in this section for Volume 5.

Volume 5 is already underway with two articles having been accepted and two others are in the hands of referees. In closing I wish to thank the referees for taking time out of their busy schedules to undertake this onerous but vital task. Also, thanks for replying so promptly.

J. Hall - Editor
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