

CURRENT RESEARCH

THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND

by J. Hall

Archaeological research at UQ is presently very healthy with a number of people doing a variety of projects. An important milestone was reached in 1987 when The University of Queensland awarded its first Ph.D. in archaeology to Ian Walters for his thesis research into the development of the prehistoric Aboriginal fishery in Moreton Bay. Ian has since gained a position as the first archaeological Lecturer at the new University College of the Northern Territory (see next section).

1987 saw Dr. Ian Lilley join our department's ranks as a Postdoctoral Fellow for two years. Although his position does not begin until January 1988, he has gained interim employment with us as Manager for UQASU, the department's archaeological consulting unit, from July. Having successfully applied for funding from National Geographic, he leaves for P. N. G. early in 1988 to conduct an archaeological project there for his postdoctoral research.

Harry Lourandos, while kept busy on a new work on Australian prehistory commissioned by Cambridge University Press this year, has begun a review of archaeologically pertinent areas in Queensland for future research possibilities. He is particularly interested in areas in the north and expects to begin a research project there late in 1988.

ARGC was good to us last year in that funding was granted for Stage II of the Moreton Region Archaeological Project (MRAP) for 1988. It will employ the full-time expertise of Peter Hiscock (as Senior Research Assistant) in a systematic investigation into technological change in the region. It is thereby hoped that perceived changes in the Holocene archaeological record will be given some explanation based upon empirical evidence. Work will include a pilot study of Platypus Rockshelter stone artefacts and further excavation of Bushrangers Shelter and other sites in the region. Although the study is projected for three years (dependent upon funding) the first year should see some significant results if present indications run true to form.

MRAP research, largely funded by the department this year, saw a fuller excavation of the New Brisbane Airport Site (see this volume). It coincided with the first running of the Field Archaeology course (AY225) and the eight students involved were able to participate in the full range of activities from the planning of the excavation, through the laboratory

analysis, right to the report production stage. It was a very tough and intensive course but they learned a great deal of "dirt archaeology" along with their theory and method. In 1988, the second AY225 class will carry out an even more extensive excavation of this interesting mid-Holocene coastal site.

UQASU (University of Queensland Archaeological Services Unit) was also quite busy in 1987. After finishing up a large Telecom contract in June, we undertook work for the Australian Heritage Commission to add Queensland sites to the National Register. Also, we administered an AHC grant to Bruno David who is presently conducting a systematic and sizable rock art recording program in the Chillagoe-Mitchell region of north Queensland. His field reports show an interesting coincidence of art styles and motifs with recorded tribal boundaries. Bruno will take up Ph.D. research at UQ later in 1988. Apart from several smaller contracts, UQASU also undertook a systematic survey and excavation program of the northeastern coast of Moreton Island which revealed that the numerous sites recorded there previously are all derived (deflated) from a particular sand stratum. Dates for excavated sites within that stratum (5 in all) all fall within the last 200 years or so.

Postgraduate Student Research

Peter Hiscock has now completed his technological analysis of the Lawn Hill area and will submit his Ph.D. thesis in 1988. He has also been investigating a large stone artefact quarry in northwest Queensland under the auspices of the Queensland Museum.

Ian McNiven has been upgraded from M.A. to Ph.D. candidature and continues working on his mammoth Cooloola Archaeological Project which should be completed in 1988. He has excavated several coastal middens around Cooloola and Noosa as well as an inland rockshelter near Gympie.

Robert Neal, following his important Pleistocene find at Wallen Wallen Creek on North Stradbroke Island last year, continues to research that island as part of his Ph.D. research.

Sue Higgins (B.A. Hons. student) has been making some strides into the identification of starch grains (to species level) by chemical means. Her thesis research is leading to the development of laboratory techniques for identifying plant residues on artefacts (especially stone). This work came out of a desire by her supervisor (JH) to identify the residues on bevelled pounders, a stone artefact type found in S.E. Queensland thought to be associated with the processing of the root of the fern Blechnum indicum. Concurrent research by the writer has identified starch grains on these tools but it remains now for Sue's battery of techniques to be brought to bear on specific identification. We hope to resolve the question during 1988.

Bryce Barker has just completed his Hons. B.A. thesis research into bone taphonomy at the Narcurrer site on the Victoria/South Australia border which was excavated by Harry Lourandos. Bryce will continue to pursue his interests in Holocene environmental and cultural change as a postgraduate student at UQ and is presently looking to the northwest of the state for field possibilities.