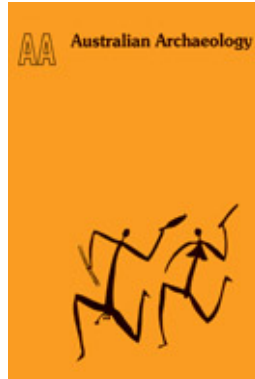


Australian Archaeology



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P.J.F. Coutts and
D.C. Witter
Victoria Archaeological Survey

SUMMARY REPORT ON CURRENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH
SUPPORTED BY THE AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF ABORIGINAL STUDIES

Grants

Grants were awarded in September 1975, April and October 1976 and March 1977. Current lists are published in AIAS Newsletters twice annually. Grants likely to be of interest to the members of the Australian Archaeological Association are listed below, in no particular order. No attempt is made to show whether the extent of support by the Institute is a major or minor contribution to the total cost of the project.

- H.J. Lourandos A study of Aboriginal subsistence and settlement in southwestern Victoria.
- R.H. Pearce An investigation of Australian small tool industries with particular reference to Western Australia.
- A. Rosenfeld A study of prehistoric rock art in the Laura area.
- Archaeological & Aboriginal Relics Officer, Victoria Library search for information relating to Aboriginal sites in Victoria.

Aboriginal & Historical Relics Administration, South Australia	Continuation of Murray Valley site recording.
National Parks & Wildlife Service, Tasmania	Site recording in Tasmania.
N.H. Scarlett	The identification of an ethnobotanical collection from northeast Arnhem Land, and the preparation of a reference herbarium collection.
C.P. Cooper	The 'Contact' Aboriginal material culture of southeastern Australia (Victoria).
R.A. Luebbers	A study of Wylie Swamp wood technology.
P.J. Trezise, E.W. Oribin & D. Roughsey	Exploration of Aboriginal rock art sites in southeastern Cape York.
J. Balme	An evaluation of mammal remains from Devil's Lair with special reference to differential bone use.
Aboriginal & Historical Relics Administration, South Australia	Photogrammetry pilot recording project of rock art in northeastern South Australia.
D. Parsons	Analysis of stone tool industries from the Grampians (Victoria).
National Parks & Wildlife Service, New South Wales	Site recorder, Sydney district (two years).
Australian Museum, Sydney	Preparation of a computerized catalogue of Aboriginal ethnographic collection in the Australian Museum.
National Museum of Victoria	Assistant to the cataloguer of the Donald Thompson collection.
G.L. Pretty	Restoration of bone from the Roonka excavation.
Dept. Aboriginal & Islander Advancement, Queensland	Employment of an archaeologist for survey and recording of Aboriginal sites.
J. Archer	Exploration and recording of Aboriginal painting sites in the Laura area.
H.R. Allen	Survey and excavation of two archaeological sites, East Alligator River and Western Arnhem Land.

Research by Institute Staff

In addition, staff at the Institute have engaged in various research projects. Of particular interest is the work of Dr M. Lorblanchet who worked in the Grampians in Victoria, concentrating on Glenisla shelter, which contains about 2650 paintings. His study, carried out at the

request of the Archaeological and Aboriginal Relics Office, Melbourne, had several aims: (a) to make a very accurate chart of a painted and weathered wall in order to provide a basis of comparison for future study and assessment of weathering and erosion; (b) to develop new and specialised recording methods suitable for the recording of faint figures superimposed in great numbers on walls which have varied natural weathering features; (c) to study the superimpositions of the figures, additions to them and their retouching with a view to assessing the accuracy of the Aboriginal information given to the first settlers in the area. Lorblanchet's study of Glenisla shelter was complemented in May by several excavations carried out by Dr P. Coutts, one at the foot of the painted wall.

During August and September 1975, Lorblanchet worked with Mr E. Virili on the Dampier engravings and commenced an in-depth study of some of those sites.

In 1976 Lorblanchet spent a further 4½ months at Dampier. His work included an excavation of the Skew Valley midden and the study of the rock engravings in Skew Valley and in Gum Tree Valley near Dampier.

Excavation of the midden: More than 10 tonnes of sediment of the midden have been thoroughly examined during the 10 week excavation. The deposit is formed of two main superimposed layers :

the top layer, of bivalve shells, has numerous artefacts of two types, some being large and obtained from rough local stones (mainly cores), the others being small (microliths and backed blades) and made from finer stones which sometimes are from a different locality. In this layer four engraved rocks were buried in the shells;

the bottom layer has gastropods and big tools only.

Several interesting observations have been made on the midden structure, on the topographic distribution of the implements, also on a ground oven, postholes, shell and charcoal lenses, etc.

About 200 engraved panels have been studied thoroughly by Lorblanchet at Dampier. He worked in six different sampling areas - in every case not only the rock engravings have been traced and photographed but also a detailed map of each of the groups of figures has been made. All the engraved boulders have been plotted on highly detailed plans prepared by E. Virili and a descriptive list of all the figures has been carried out. All the data provided by this field work will be published in a monograph written in collaboration with Virili.

An expedition to the Flinders Islands, September-October 1974, was a joint project which engaged in mapping and documenting sites known to the Aboriginal members of the expedition. The islands are situated at the foot of Princess Charlotte Bay, on the east coast of the Cape York Peninsula. Mr P. Sutton

(then linguistic research officer at the AIAS) continued his study of the local language and collected texts of stories (myths) and songs; he and Dr A. Chase mapped Aboriginal place names and clan and language boundaries. Lorblanchet and Dr Layton recorded rock art, mapped habitation sites, collected small samples from shell middens, and attempted to document the cultural context of rock painting.

A map of the area was prepared showing the size and location of each clan country and information was obtained on movement by outrigger canoe between countries at either end of Bathurst Bay (a distance of 20 miles), on the reasons for travel, and on relations of trade, warfare and ceremonial gatherings between speakers of different languages. Genealogies were collected which suggest the extent of intermarriage between coastal groups. Habitation sites (both rock shelters and open areas of foreshore) were related to clan countries. Dr D. Harris of University College, London, joined the expedition for a brief period to carry out ethnobotanical research which demonstrated that surviving food debris in the shelters represents only a small fraction of the total diet. Information available on the rock art showed that despite a uniformity of style, rock paintings were made in at least three contexts. In one instance a large painting of an ancestral figure in his animal form was found at his story-place. At another important mythological site, sorcery paintings were executed in shelters said to be the transformed remains of the heroes' bark hut. Paintings at habitation sites were said to have been put there by men to record their visits to the locality. It was possible to revisit sites recorded by Hale and Tindale in 1926, and check their sketches and photographs of paintings against the actual figures. Very little weathering had occurred during the intervening period.

Dr D. Horton is currently engaged in faunal analyses of excavation sites at Laura, Louisa Bay, Lancefield, Dampier and NW Tasmania. The Laura work is almost completed and is being written up. Bones from the first excavation at Louisa Bay have been analysed, but the much larger sample from the second excavation has not yet been done. Work at Lancefield is still in progress. A further excavation was carried out in 1977 to investigate the secondary channel deposit found in the 1976 excavations. Although it now seems unlikely that man was associated with the megafauna at Lancefield (or at least with the primary bone bed) the work on this site is of considerable significance to archaeology and palaeontology in Australia. The very large samples obtained and their excellent preservation will provide valuable evidence about the biology of megafaunal species, the reasons for their death, and the accumulation of bones at this site. Such evidence will be of great value in the interpretation of other Pleistocene sites in Australia, particularly those where there is the possibility of association between man and megafauna.