

## Australian Archaeology



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## SWASHWAY SANDBLOW

The meal is done. The hunt will soon begin.  
The hunter sits crosslegged, striking stone  
on stone. Shrewdly he studies angle, plane,  
sees through the surface to the knife within,  
ten thousand years of craft behind his eye:  
technique prised loose from nature, hardly won,  
a ritual passed from father down to son.  
Fire first of all. Beside him, ashes lie.

That hunter's gone these twenty thousand years.  
New hunters come with trowel and sieve and tape,  
From now to Pleistocene they stretch their span.  
Their tools are few: the windswept stratum clears  
some crumbs of charcoal, bones, a minute flake.  
In that one stone, the history of man.

*Ian Turner*

*Erith Island*

*22 January 1978*

## EXTINCTION

You ask me about the extinct kangaroo;  
why is it gone and what did it do  
to deserve to be expelled from God's wondrous zoo.

What we can say with little fear  
is that his ancestors did not know the end was near.  
You see, it came quite quickly near the end of the Pleistocene  
at a time when to them I think life must have seemed  
Pretty good from the standpoint of a giant marsupial  
for whom food was aplenty and enemies minimool.

For this does not matter and can be held aside  
for all that counts is that all had died.  
Where once there were many now there were none;  
the day of the giants was entirely done.

And not only the mammals but also the birds  
fell victim to this biotic purge:  
Gone was *Dinornis*, *Zelornis* and a *Macropus*,  
the latter perhaps the Lord's furred magnum opus.