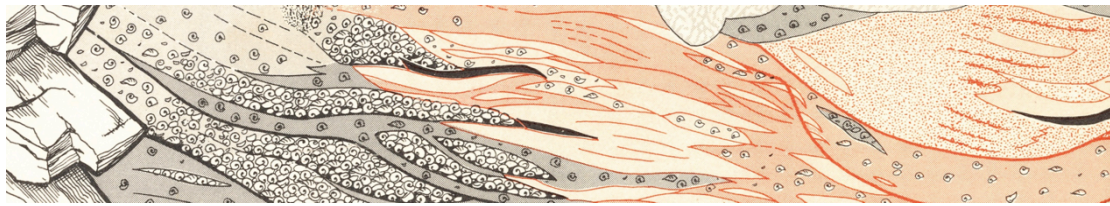
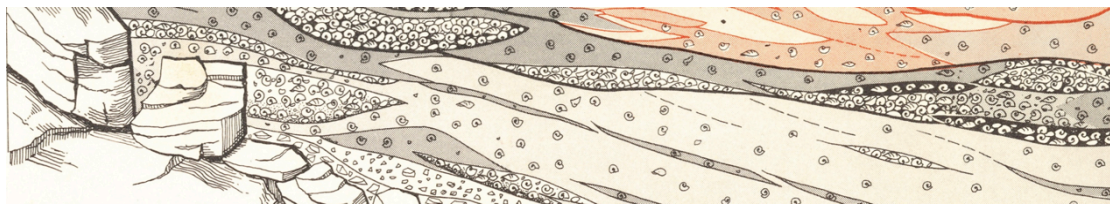


Deep Time Dreaming



Uncovering Ancient Australia



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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences,
The University of Sydney
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Statement of originality

I declare that the research presented here is my own original work and has not been submitted to any other institution for the award of a degree.

Signed:

Date: 1 June 2017

The images included on the cover page are details of Rhys Jones and Winifred Mumford's section drawing from the archaeological excavations at Rocky Cape, South Cave, 1965-67, Tasmania (Source: M Smith).

To my elders
in history and archaeology,
past and present

and

in honour
of the original discoverers,
explorers and colonists of Australia.

Abstract

This thesis charts the development of the modern discipline of Aboriginal archaeology and the shifting cultural and political climate in which it has emerged. It is a history of the people, places and ideas that have shaped our understanding of ancient Australia. Each chapter explores an individual's relationship with an archaeological site or region, beginning with John Mulvaney's excavation at Fromm's Landing (Tungawa) and Isabel McBryde's field surveys across New England. These interwoven portraits reveal the changes within the discipline from the 1950s through to the era of the *Mabo* and *Wik* decisions of 1992 and 1996. They also offer an episodic view of how archaeological insights have filtered into the public sphere.

The chapters explore the controversy that engulfed Rhys Jones with the release of the film *The Last Tasmanian* and the tragic repercussions of Richard and Betsy Gould's ethno-archaeological work in the Western Desert. They reflect on the place of the Willandra Lakes, Arnhem Land and the Franklin River in the national imagination and the powerful roles played by Aboriginal leaders such as Alice Kelly, Frank Gurrmanamana and Rosalind Langford in shaping research in these regions. The chapters also address the early history of rock art research in Australia, debates about social change over millennia and the discovery of Pleistocene dates for colonisation. Interspersed throughout are short 'interludes' that analyse the institutional development of the discipline and the rise of the parallel field of Aboriginal history.

Although influenced by international ideas, Australian archaeology is distinctive for its close engagement with the culture and politics of the first Australians and their histories of invasion, dispossession, adaptation and self-determination. This thesis argues that the richness of Indigenous history is to be found not only in its depth, but also in its dynamism and diversity over time. It makes the case for the immense archaeological story that has been uncovered and interpreted over the past sixty years to be recognised as the opening chapters of Australian history.

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I thank the Department of History for its support over many years, the University Ethics Office for its advice on this project, and Vicki Huang for fostering a positive environment in which to write my final chapters. I am grateful to Darrell Lewis, Mike Smith and Alan

Williams for allowing me to use their images in this thesis, as well as AIATSIS, Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation and the National Library of Australia for giving me permission to reproduce several others. Bob Edwards and John Tunn also kindly shared with me papers from their archives.

The early chapters of this thesis were initially workshopped in a writing group led by the late John Hirst, who was a great mentor of young historians. John read every word I wrote during the formative stages of this project and it was he who first suggested the ‘interlude’ structure I have adopted. I owe him an immense debt, and I am grateful to everyone who engaged with my words and ideas through this group, as well as outside of it. I would particularly like to thank Peter Hobbins for his thoughtful comments as a long-term member of my academic panel; Darrell Lewis for casting his attentive eye over every sentence of this thesis; June Ross for inspiring the title of my chapter seven; David Brooks and Alex Knight for their thoughtful criticisms and advice on a version of my fourth chapter; Malcolm Allbrook, Emilie Dotte-Sarout and Matthew Spriggs for their constructive comments on a version of my first chapter; Kate Fullagar for her incisive comments on my introduction; and Mick Warren for accompanying me every step of the way on this intellectual journey.

This thesis has grown out of hundreds of conversations over several years. It would not have been possible without the intellectual generosity of the Australian archaeological community and the advice and encouragement of my colleagues in history and anthropology. I am also lucky to have had the support of a wide circle of friends and family. I thank Tom, Libby, Kate and Brent, for always being open to talk about ideas (or football), and my partner, Emily, for her love and companionship throughout this whole adventure.

I thank you all. It is a great gift you have given me.

Map

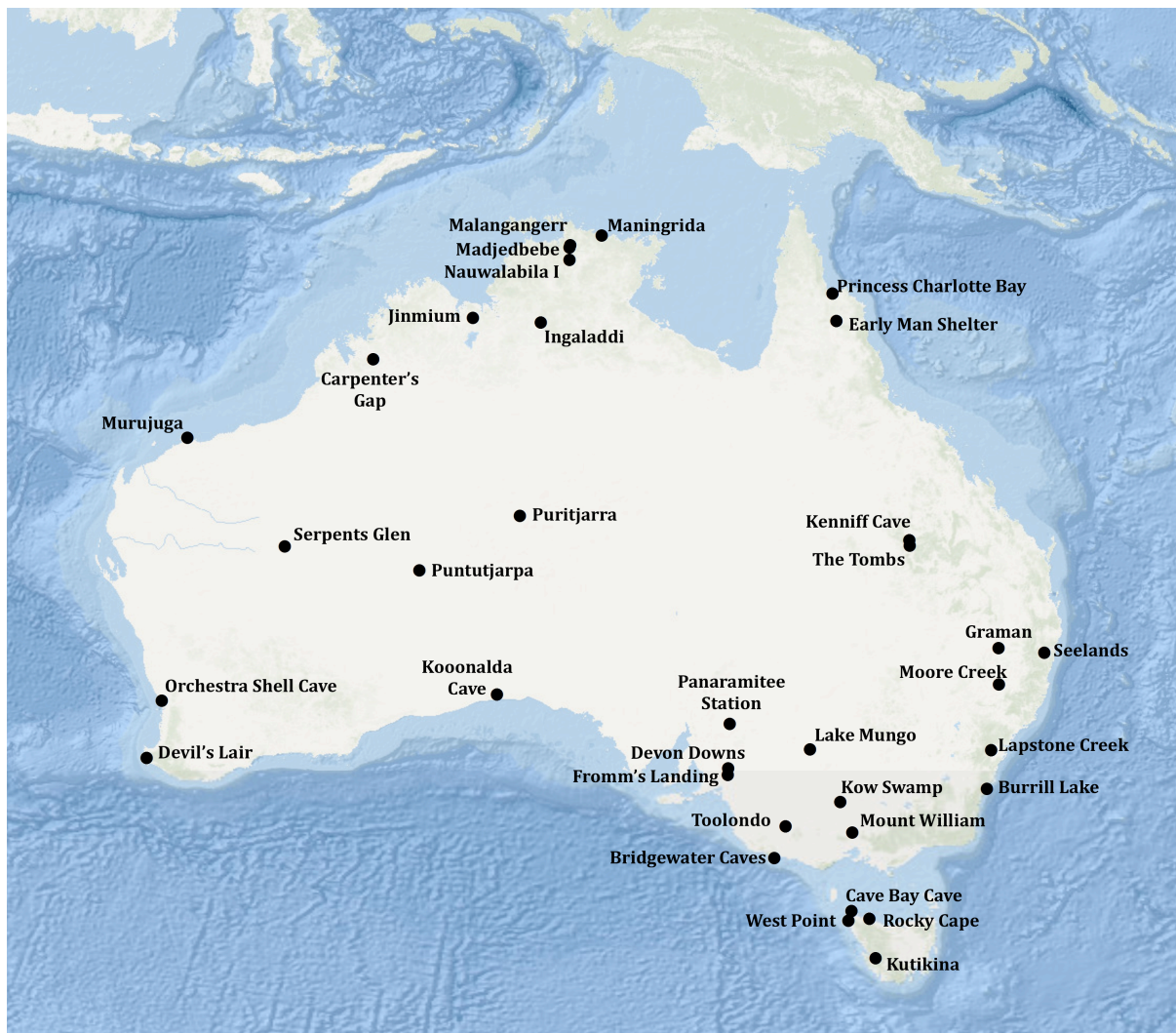


Fig. 1 A map of Australia with the main sites referred to in the text. The contours of the sea shelf provide an indication of the size of the greater continent of Sahul at times of lower sea level (Source: ArcGIS / Esri).



Fig. 2 A Toyota advertisement capitalises on the archaeological findings at Puritjarra, central Australia (Source: *Weekend Australian*, 9-10 May 1992).



Fig. 3 Mike Smith draws a section during the 1989 excavations at Madjedbebe (Malakunanja II), Arnhem Land, which uncovered the oldest dates for human occupation in Australia (Source: M Smith).



Fig. 4 Graffiti opposite Redfern Station, Sydney (Source: B Griffiths).

The Old World

Australia's human history began some sixty thousand years ago. The continent was discovered by a group of voyagers who travelled across a vast passage of water to a land where no hominid had roamed before. Over millennia, they explored and colonised every region, transforming the terrain as they moved, making the country their own through language, song and story. They harnessed flame to create new ecosystems, dug the earth to encourage crops, and built water controls to extend the natural range of their key resources. They thrived in the extreme aridity of the central deserts and hunted in the glacier-filled gorges spreading from the Tasmanian ice cap. They enjoyed times of regional abundance, endured great droughts and adapted to millennia-long floods that saw the sea level rise around 125 metres. They watched territories disappear, lakes dry, volcanoes erupt, dunefields form and species come and go. Theirs is a remarkable story of transformation, resilience and diversity. Perhaps a billion people have lived in Australia, historian and archaeologist John Mulvaney estimated to Arrernte filmmaker Rachel Perkins in the early 2000s.¹ 'Translating the concept into the lives of generations enabled me to begin to grasp the immeasurable human experience,' Perkins recalled. 'I remember his eyes twinkling as they observed me grappling with the project to which he had given his life: understanding the depth of Australia's humanity.'²

When Mulvaney began his fieldwork on Australian soil in January 1956, excavating a rock shelter at Fromm's Landing near the mouth of the Murray River, it was widely believed that the first Australians had arrived on this continent only a few thousand years earlier. They were regarded as 'primitive' – a fossilised stage in human evolution – but not necessarily ancient. After all, as Emilie Dotte-Sarout has posited in her study of Western perceptions of

¹ The evidence for this description of ancient Australia is explored in chapters nine and ten. For a deeper discussion of population estimates see John Mulvaney, "'Difficult to Found an Opinion": 1788 Aboriginal Population Estimates', in Gordon Briscoe and Len Smith (eds.), *The Aboriginal Population Revisited: 70,000 years to the present* (Canberra: Aboriginal History Monograph 10, 2002), 1-8.

² Rachel Perkins, 'A Rightful Place: Correspondence', *Quarterly Essay* 56 (Nov 2014), 82-86, 82.

Indigenous societies, how could *our* ‘prehistoric’ have a prehistory of their own?³ In the decades since that excavation, Australian history has been pushed back into the dizzying expanse of deep time. The Australian landscape has ceased to be regarded as a natural phenomenon; it is now understood to be also cultural, embedded with stories and law and shaped by the hands and firesticks of thousands of generations of Indigenous men and women.⁴ Its modern human history has been revealed to be far more ancient than that of Europe, which was colonised by *Homo sapiens* some forty thousand years ago, and the richness and depth of Aboriginal culture has repeatedly confounded Western assumptions about the nature of foraging and farming societies. The New World has become the Old.

Australians tend to have an uneasy relationship with the history of their continent. Of the three strands of our national story – the Indigenous, settler and multicultural pasts – it is the first that we most struggle to comprehend and accommodate. This is partly because of the structural marginalisation of Indigenous culture over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which has obscured cultural achievements and the violence of dispossession from the national gaze; it is partly because knowledge of the depth and diversity of Indigenous history has only been recognised by anthropologists, archaeologists, historians and linguists relatively recently; and it is partly because the magnitude of that history – the sheer antiquity of humanity in Australia – is difficult to fathom. ‘The human mind may not have evolved enough to be able to comprehend deep time,’ American writer John McPhee reflected. ‘It may only be able to measure it.’⁵

This project began out of frustration with my own failures of imagination. I am, in Judith Wright’s words, ‘born of the conquerors’.⁶ Australia is a country with which I feel a strong affinity, but to which I am still learning to belong.⁷ This is part of the reason I became a historian. Yet the written sources for Australian history are only a few centuries old. They document the voyages of the Macassans in the north, the visits of the Dutch in the west, and

³ Emilie Dotte-Sarout, ‘How Dare Our “Prehistoric” Have a Prehistory of Their Own?! The interplay of historical and biographical contexts in early French archaeology of the Pacific’, *Journal of Pacific Archaeology* 8(1) (2017), 23-34.

⁴ Lesley Head, *Second Nature: The History and Implications of Australia as Aboriginal Landscape* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000).

⁵ John McPhee, *Annals of the Former World* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998), 90.

⁶ Judith Wright, *Born of the Conquerors: Selected Essays* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1991).

⁷ Historian Peter Read has explored the question of ‘belonging’ in Australia, asking: ‘How can we non-Indigenous Australians justify our continuous presence and our love for this country while the Indigenous people remain dispossessed and their history unacknowledged?’ Peter Read, *Belonging: Australians, Place and Aboriginal Ownership* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1.

the conquest of the British in the east.⁸ But this is not where Australian history began. Keenly aware of the limitations of documents, I embarked upon an informal and self-initiated field apprenticeship in the craft of those who deal in deep time.

As I do not have an archaeology background, I earned a place on my first few excavations as the camp manager and cook. By day I would trawl through ancient kitchens, by night I would cook for a team of hungry archaeologists. The research for this thesis has taken me to archaeological sites in every state and territory in Australia. I have sieved for weeks on end beside an outcrop of the Arnhem Land escarpment, sorting stones from bones, shell from charcoal; I have excavated in a shelter on a rocky rise in the Western Desert, watching from the pit as wild camels roamed the arid plains below; and I have measured and mapped shell middens beside desiccated lakes in western New South Wales. Five years ago, I gained work with an archaeology consultancy, writing ethnographic histories, gathering Indigenous oral testimony, and digging square holes on the urban fringes of Melbourne, Perth and Sydney. In that role, I have uncovered finely worked stone tools under concrete car parks, sketched stratigraphy from the floodlit basement of a shopping mall complex, and counted fragments of butchered animal bone mixed with knapped glass and pottery shards in a sealed colonial well. Beneath a surface veneer, the evidence of ancient Australia is everywhere. ‘This landscape is howling,’ as novelist Penelope Lively put it, ‘if you listen.’⁹

But archaeology, as with all history and science, is not a simple set of answers: it is an ongoing and active enquiry.¹⁰ The ideas we have about the past are bound to the attitudes and approaches of those who formulated them. My interest in the deep past has grown to include the activities of scholars who, over the past sixty years, have dramatically enlarged Australian history. This thesis is a history of some of the people and places that have shaped our understanding of ancient Australia.

Despite my informal apprenticeship, I have sought to maintain an outsider’s perspective for the purpose of this project. This is not a history of Australian archaeology as told from within: it is an assessment from the fringes, steeped in the neighbouring discipline of history.

⁸ Historian Nick Brodie has sought to destabilise the dominant narrative that Australian history began in 1788 in his recent book *1787: The Lost Chapters of Australia’s Beginnings* (Melbourne: Hardie Grant, 2016), although his ‘lost chapters’ begin in the late Middle Ages. Historical archaeologist Alistair Paterson has charted the longer contact history in his book *A Millennium of Cultural Contact* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast, 2011).

⁹ Penelope Lively, *Making it up* (New York: Viking, 2005), 78.

¹⁰ This sentence closely paraphrases David Frankel’s words in *Remains to be seen: Archaeological Insights into Australian Prehistory* (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1991), vii.

I owe much to the conversations I have had with elders in the field of Australian archaeology, with my fellow fieldworkers, and with Indigenous custodians, all of whom have patiently answered my many questions and filled the deep history of Australia with events, trends, and people.¹¹ Every cultural, ecological and climatic insight emerging from these conversations opened a dialogue with Australia's deep past. I hope that the following chapters will do the same.

o o o

When Hilary du Cros conducted a survey of Australian archaeologists in the late 1990s, she found that the most common questions asked by members of the public were: 'Are there things old enough to be archaeological here?' and 'Have you found any treasure?'¹² Australian archaeologists deal with an unfamiliar material idiom. The 'treasure' they seek is neither gold nor silver, as novelist Nicholas Jose observes, 'but time itself.'¹³

'It is easy to forget,' archaeologist Donald Grayson remarks, 'that the antiquity of people on earth had to be discovered.'¹⁴ The Persian polymath Ibn Sina was one of the first scholars to engage with deep time, observing and describing the long-term processes of rock formation in Amur Darya Valley in the eleventh century.¹⁵ In the Western world, the revelation that earth had its own history, separate from humanity, had its origins in the late eighteenth century through the work of Scottish naturalist James Hutton and his peers.¹⁶ But it was not until the 'time revolution' of the late nineteenth century – spearheaded by Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859), Charles Lyell's *The Geological Evidences of the Antiquity of Man* (1863) and John Lubbock's *Pre-Historic Times* (1865) – that the chronology of life on earth was firmly wrested from the grip of sacred history and flung into the abyss of deep time. Until then, most geologists, like Louis Agassiz, adhered to the chronology of 'sacred

¹¹ Some of these conversations are now on the public record, and I have drawn upon them in this thesis. See, for example, my nine-hour interview with Jim Bowler for the National Library of Australia Oral History Project (ORAL TRC 6680). I am grateful to Ian Maxwell at the University of Sydney for his advice with regard to Ethics Clearance.

¹² Hilary du Cros, 'Popular notions of Australian archaeology', *Journal of Australian Studies* 23(62) (1999), 190-97, 192. Australian archaeologist Sue T Carter sought to counter one common misconception about her discipline in the title of her book on contemporary archaeological practice, *We Don't Dig Dinosaurs! What Archaeologists Really Get Up To* (Bloomington, Indiana: Xlibris, 2014).

¹³ Nicholas Jose, *The Custodians* (Sydney: Macmillan, 1997), 354.

¹⁴ Donald Grayson, as quoted in Tom Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 56.

¹⁵ Stephen Toulmin and June Goodfield, *The Discovery of Time* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 64.

¹⁶ Martin JS Rudwick, *Bursting the Limits of Time: The Reconstruction of Geohistory in the Age of Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

history'.¹⁷ Agassiz theorised the existence of Ice Ages, the movement of glaciers and crushing power of ice caps with the firm belief, in Shakespeare's words, that 'the poor world is only 6,000 years old'.¹⁸ Or, to adopt the scriptural precision of seventeenth-century Archbishop James Ussher, the history of the earth began with Creation at sunset on Saturday 22 October 4004 BC.¹⁹

There was a reason that sacred chronologies were so attractive. Not only did they place people at the centre of the universe, they provided a genealogy that knitted thousands of years into human generations, and thus retained an understanding of time as lived experience.²⁰ The time revolution within the field of geology was a frightening intellectual breakthrough that gave earth its own history, separate from humanity.²¹ In 1981, John McPhee coined the phrase 'deep time' to describe the timescale of geological events, the formation of glaciers, and the movements of tectonic plates: the rifting, crushing, carving forces that slowly sculpt the earth's surface, creating mountains, canyons, seas and continents.²² Like its twin, 'deep space', it demands that we leave behind the world we thought we knew to confront the limits of our understanding.²³

In Australia, over the past sixty years, we have had our own time revolution. The human history of Australia is now understood to have spanned three geological epochs: the Pleistocene, the vast period of cyclic glaciations in which *Homo sapiens* evolved in Africa and began to spread around the world; the Holocene, the most recent interglacial or warm period that began some 11,700 years ago; and the Anthropocene (not yet formally accepted), beginning around 1950, which marks the era in which human activity became the dominant

¹⁷ Clive Gamble and Theodora Moutsiou, 'The Time Revolution of 1859 and the Stratification of the Primeval Mind', *Notes and Records of The Royal Society* 65 (1) (2011), 43-63; Daniel Lord Smail, 'In the Grip of Sacred History', *The American Historical Review* 110 (5) (Dec 2005), 1336-1361, 1337.

¹⁸ Rosalind in William Shakespeare, *As You Like It* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 4:1:83-4; Andrew Shryock and Daniel Lord Smail, 'Introduction', in Andrew Shryock and Daniel Lord Smail (eds.), *Deep History: The Architecture of Past and Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 6-7.

¹⁹ James Ussher, *The Annals of the World* (London: E Tyler, 1658), 12.

²⁰ Anthropologist Tim Ingold defines this as a difference between 'abstract' mathematical time and 'real' time, 'associated with the flowing movement of life and consciousness'. Tim Ingold, *Evolution and Social Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 128.

²¹ Martin JS Rudwick, *Earth's Deep History: How It Was Discovered and Why It Matters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 3.

²² McPhee coined the term in *Basin and Range*, the first book in his five-volume geological history of North America, which was published together as *Annals of the Former World*.

²³ Tim Murray has argued that for much of its disciplinary history, deep time has represented a threat to archaeology: a 'yawning gulf which seemed to separate a richly-textured knowable present and a shady, insubstantial and potentially unintelligible prehistoric past'. Tim Murray, 'Archaeology, Ideology and the Threat of the Past: Sir Henry Rider Haggard and the Acquisition of Time', *World Archaeology* 25 (1993), 175-86, 176.

influence on climate and the environment.²⁴ By the time people discovered geological time, they were already beginning to shape it.

The title of this thesis, *Deep Time Dreaming*, seeks to accommodate the two intellectual traditions that shape our understanding of ancient Australia. Although my focus is on uncovering the ‘deep time’ story, my title acts as a reminder that history, far from being a ‘universal science’ or even a ‘cultural universal’, is merely one way of thinking about the relationship between the past and the present.²⁵ As Jim Bowler, the scholar behind the Mungo discoveries, observed: ‘While I, as a geologist seek to explain and understand the landscape from within my own cultural framework, my Aboriginal colleagues have an entirely different, and equally fascinating, creation account of those lands. Those perceptions then determine their relationships with the land.’²⁶ These relationships are often explained through the language of ‘the Dreaming’: a concept so subtle and pervasive that it eludes Western understandings of ‘time’, ‘history’ and ‘religion’.²⁷ Although Indigenous traditions accommodate *timing*, anthropologist WEH Stanner perceived, ‘One cannot “fix” The Dreaming *in* time: it was, and is, everywhen.’²⁸ This insight is often misinterpreted to suggest that the Dreaming is a realm of myth and legend, where ‘time is irrelevant, as in a dream’.²⁹ I use the language of the ‘Dreaming’ with respect for the diverse, contoured and continually transforming tradition that it represents. But I also draw upon it in its vernacular form: the archaeologists in this thesis are those who imaginatively inhabit the deep past, those who dream of deep time.³⁰ The Australian public, with their seemingly insatiable thirst for old sites, are also deep-time dreamers.

The concept of the Dreaming or the ‘Dreamtime’ has its origins in the anthropological work of Baldwin Spencer and Frank Gillen at the turn of the twentieth century. Historian Patrick

²⁴ Paul Crutzen and Will Steffen, ‘How Long Have We Been in the Anthropocene Era’, *Climatic Change* 61(3) (2003), 251-57; Alison Bashford, ‘The Anthropocene is Modern History: Reflections on Climate and Australian Deep Time’, *Australian Historical Studies* 44(3) (2013), 341-49.

²⁵ Hayden White, ‘Reviews: The New History’, *Rethinking History* 9 (1) (Mar 2005), 135.

²⁶ Jim Bowler, ‘Perceptions of Australia: Towards Cultural Integration’, 27 October 1992, John Mulvaney Papers, National Library of Australia, Canberra, MS 9615/1/40, Box 5.

²⁷ WEH Stanner, ‘The Dreaming (1953)’, *The Dreaming & Other Essays* (Melbourne: Black Inc. Agenda, 2009), 57-72, 57.

²⁸ Emphasis in original. Stanner, ‘The Dreaming (1953)’, 58.

²⁹ Bill Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2011), 123.

³⁰ Barry Hill adopts a similar stylistic approach in his exploration of ‘science dreaming’ in *The Rock: Travelling to Uluru* (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1994). My usage of the word also echoes Graeme Davison’s in *City Dreamers: The Urban Imagination in Australia* (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2016) and Eugene Stockton’s in *Blue Mountains Dreaming: The Aboriginal Heritage* (Winmalee, NSW: Three Sisters Productions, 1993).

Wolfe has used this history to criticise the ‘Dreamtime’ as a colonial invention, a ‘timeless ever-present’ which ‘encodes and sustains the subjugation and expropriation of the Koori population’.³¹ I recognise that the term is a colonial artefact, but I invoke it in the spirit of anthropologist Howard Morphy, who identifies the Dreaming as a useful and illuminating conceptual structure. It was a concept created to foster understanding and appreciation of the complexity of Aboriginal society, rather than force it into existing European categories. ‘Far from being an instrument of colonialism,’ Morphy argues, ‘the Dreaming was a challenge to it.’³²

The two traditions in my title overlap in a number of ways. Indigenous lore contains historical information, and stories of floods and volcanic eruptions can be dated to specific moments in time, but the Dreaming is distinct from a scientific approach to the past.³³ It conveys its own truth. The chapters that follow take the view that the Dreaming, like all cultural constructs, has a history, and that this can be explored archaeologically. Archaeologist Tim Murray has analysed the ways in which Indigenous notions of continuity have entered archaeological discourse and the public domain.³⁴ But while there is great continuity in the cultural history of Indigenous Australians, I argue against the view of a permanent and unchanging Aboriginal way of life that is suggested by the oft-used phrase ‘the oldest continuing cultures in human history’.³⁵ Such a universalising statement denies a dynamic understanding of the histories and cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It essentialises them as timeless and traditional, rather than accommodating the

³¹ Patrick Wolfe, ‘On Being Woken Up: The Dreamtime in Anthropology and in Australian Settler Culture’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 33(2) (Apr 1991), 197-224, 199.

³² Howard Morphy, ‘Empiricism to Metaphysics: In Defence of the Concept of the Dreamtime’, in Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths (eds.), *Prehistory to Politics: John Mulvaney, the Humanities and the Public Intellectual* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996), 163-189, 187.

³³ In the 1980s, anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose drew upon her work with Yarralin peoples in the Victoria River District to describe the phenomenon of ‘ordinary time’: a one-hundred-year post-Dreaming world which changed with every generation. While grandparents were generally recognised as historical individuals known within ‘ordinary time’, great-grandparents slipped into the ‘Dreaming time’. Deborah Bird Rose, ‘The Saga of Captain Cook: Morality in Aboriginal and European Law’, *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 2 (1984), 24-39; Deborah Bird Rose, *Dingo Makes Us Human: Life and Land in an Australian Aboriginal Culture* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

³⁴ Tim Murray, ‘Aboriginal (Pre)History and Australian Archaeology: The Discourse of Australian Prehistoric Archaeology’, *Journal of Australian Studies* 16(35) (1992), 1-19; Tim Murray, ‘Creating a Post-Mabo Archaeology of Australia’, in Bain Attwood (ed.), *In the Age of Mabo: History, Aborigines and Australia* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1996), 73-87.

³⁵ These are the words used by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in his apology to the stolen generations in 2008: ‘I move: That today we honour the Indigenous peoples of this land, the oldest continuing cultures in human history. We reflect on their past mistreatment. ... We embrace with pride, admiration and awe these great and ancient cultures we are truly blessed to have among us – cultures that provide a unique, uninterrupted human thread linking our Australian continent to the most ancient prehistory of our planet.’ Kevin Rudd, ‘Apology to Australia’s Indigenous peoples’, Parliament of Australia, House of Representatives, 13 February 2008.

innovative reality of their contemporary cultural lives.³⁶ It is a view that has been brought about by merging the ‘deep time’ story with the ‘Dreaming’, rather than acknowledging and respecting their differences. As Denis Byrne laments, ‘Australia’s embracing of Aboriginal heritage as part of national heritage has not, unfortunately, meant an end to treating Aboriginal culture as the Other of white Australian culture.’³⁷

The revelation at the heart of Australian archaeological research, as the chapters of this thesis demonstrate, is that Indigenous history is ancient, dynamic and diverse. Mulvaney and Peter White put it well in their introduction to the bicentennial volume *Australians to 1788*:

In 1788 the entire continent and many adjacent islands were occupied by other societies. Note the plural: these societies probably differed as much from each other as did the states and countries of Europe at the same time. They differed in language, size, economy, technology, social structure, political organisation, art and religion. Although springing from one source, their long history in the contrasting environments of Australia had allowed diversity to develop. Our most important aim is to show the diversity that comprised the unity of Aboriginal societies in 1788.³⁸

o o o

The story of Australian archaeology is inextricably bound to the cultural and political context in which it emerged and was received. Over the course of the twentieth century, there has been a gradual reassessment of Aboriginal society by settler Australians.³⁹ The evolutionary theories that dominated thinking about Indigenous people slowly lost their grip on Western scholarship, while the racial ideas that underpinned Australia’s assimilation policies were condemned by the horrors of wartime Europe. From the 1930s, a new generation of anthropologists added to the early efforts of Spencer and Gillen, giving insight into the rich social, spiritual and economic lives of Indigenous people across Australia. Linguists followed, recording traditional languages and capturing some of the complexity of Aboriginal

³⁶ As historian Ann McGrath reflects, “‘Old’ has no date; so is it more a state of mind?”. Ann McGrath, ‘Deep Histories in Time, or Crossing the Great Divide?’, in Ann McGrath and Mary Anne Jebb (eds.), *Long History, Deep Time: Deepening Histories of Place* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2015), 1-32, 7.

³⁷ Denis Byrne, ‘Deep Nation: Australia’s Acquisition of an Indigenous Past’, *Aboriginal History* 20 (1998), 82-107, 100.

³⁸ John Mulvaney and J Peter White, ‘Introduction’, in John Mulvaney and J Peter White (eds.), *Australians to 1788* (Sydney: Fairfax, Syme & Weldon Associates, 1987), xv-xvi, xv.

³⁹ This summary draws inspiration from Henry Reynolds’ concise overview in his ‘Foreword’ to Bill Gammage’s *The Biggest Estate on Earth*, xxi-xxiii, xxi-xxii. For a more detailed account see, for example, Bain Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines* (Crows News, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2003).

culture. From the 1950s, equipped with the new tool of radiocarbon dating, Australian archaeologists dramatically enlarged the human history of the continent and recast Indigenous people as its discoverers, explorers and colonists, as well as its cultivators. And in the 1970s, historians finally began to confront the violence of the Australian frontier and bring Indigenous people into the national narrative. Just as the Australian public was coming to terms with the fact that Aboriginal people had survived the invasion, they were faced with the immensity of their dispossession.

These scholarly insights filtered into the public sphere through the art, poetry and music of the Jindyworobaks in the late 1930s and 1940s, the novels and films of pioneering individuals such as Eleanor Dark and Ian Dunlop, and the extraordinary development of the Indigenous art scene in the second half of the twentieth century.⁴⁰ Eloquent Aboriginal leaders were attuned to the scholarly breakthroughs and harnessed them in their campaigns for rights and understanding. As soon as the date ‘greater than 40,000 years’ emerged from spit 17 of Mulvaney and Wilfred Shawcross’ excavation at Lake Mungo in 1974, it appeared on banners in Sydney and at the Tent Embassy in Canberra.⁴¹ Their long-standing call for rights and recognition culminated in the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act* of 1976 and the landmark *Mabo* and *Wik* decisions of 1992 and 1996. Mulvaney described the reassertion of Aboriginal cultural identity as ‘one of the most significant developments in Australian intellectual history’.⁴² It has fundamentally changed the ways in which Australians relate to their continent and their history. ‘In my own lifetime,’ novelist Tim Winton (born 1960) observed in 2015, ‘Australians have come to use the word “country” as Aborigines use it, to describe what my great-great-grandparents would surely have called territory. A familial, relational term has supplanted one more objectifying and acquisitive.’⁴³

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⁴⁰ See, for example, Brian Elliott, ‘Jindyworobaks and Aborigines’, *Australian Literary Studies* 8(1) (May 1977), 29-51; Eleanor Dark, *The Timeless Land* (London: Collins, 1941); Ian Dunlop, ‘Ethnographic Film-making in Australia: The First Seventy Years (1898–1968)’, *Aboriginal History* 3 (1979), 111-19; Howard Morphy, *Aboriginal Art* (London: Phaidon Press, 1998).

⁴¹ Wilfred Shawcross, ‘Archaeological Excavations at Mungo’, *Archaeology in Oceania* 33(3), Willandra Lakes: People and Palaeoenvironments (Oct 1998), 183-200, 185.

⁴² John Mulvaney, ‘Archaeological Retrospect 9’, *Antiquity* 60(229) (1986), 96-107, 104.

⁴³ Tim Winton, *Island Home: A Landscape Memoir* (Melbourne: Hamish Hamilton, 2015), 28-29. Mark McKenna deepens this insight in his book *This Country: A Reconciled Republic?* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2004), 13. Although there are many early examples of the word ‘country’ being employed by settlers as a general term, the change in usage observed by Winton appears to accord with the entry on ‘country’ in WS Ramson (ed.), *The Australian National Dictionary* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2008).

This thesis is a tapestry of narratives that investigates a twin revolution: the revelation of Australia's deep history and the cultural transformations behind the Aboriginal rights movement. These developments are intimately entwined, as Stephanie Moser reflects, because 'archaeologists engaged with issues concerning the Aboriginal political struggle when they were still in the process of defining their discipline.'⁴⁴ Both aspects of this 'twin revolution' have been explored before, but rarely together, and never with such scope and detail. The originality of my approach lies in its integration of internal disciplinary history with broader social, cultural and political developments, its continental framework, and its narrative exploration of ideas as an expression of the interaction between people and place. It is also the first overview of Australian Aboriginal archaeology that has been written by someone outside the field, which makes it an explicitly cross-disciplinary endeavour.

The field of Australian archaeology has been subject to regular reviews from those involved in its development. Research overviews, memoirs and festschrifts have been valuable vehicles for disciplinary reflection.⁴⁵ There has been a range of bigger picture studies on the history of Aboriginal archaeology, such as David Horton's edited collection of documents *Recovering the Tracks* and Tim Murray's work on the changing philosophies and methodologies in archaeology.⁴⁶ Stephanie Moser has tackled the growth of Australian archaeology as a discipline, exploring the emergence of an institutional infrastructure and a distinctive disciplinary culture.⁴⁷ Her portrait of Museum curators Frederick McCarthy and Norman Tindale and the academic archaeologists John Mulvaney and Isabel McBryde provides a rigorous overview of the 'professionalisation' of the field within universities. More recently, Sarah Colley, Hilary Du Cros, Laurajane Smith and Libby Riches have explored the practice, politics and ethics of Australian archaeology, teasing out the questions

⁴⁴ Stephanie Moser, 'The Aboriginalisation of Archaeology: The Contribution of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies to the Indigenous Transformation of the Discipline', in Peter J Ucko (ed.), *Theory in Archaeology: A World Perspective* (London: Routledge, 1995), 150-177, 168.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Isabel McBryde, 'Archaeology in Australia – Some Recent Developments', *The Record* 6(1) (1964), 5-7; Isabel McBryde, 'Australia's Once and Future Archaeology', *Archaeology in Oceania*, 21(1) (1986), 13-28; Ron Lampert, 'Trends in Australian Prehistoric Research', *Antiquity* 49 (1975), 197-206; Vincent Megaw, 'Australian Archaeology – How Far Have We Progressed?' *Mankind*, 6(7) (1966), 306-12; John Mulvaney, *Digging Up a Past* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2011).

⁴⁶ David Horton, 'Early Thought on Early Man in Australia', *The Artefact*, 6 (1981), 53-69; David Horton, *Recovering the Tracks: The Story of Australian Archaeology* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1991); Murray, 'Aboriginal (Pre)History and Australian Archaeology'.

⁴⁷ Stephanie Moser, 'Archaeology and its Disciplinary Culture: The Professionalisation of Australian Prehistoric Archaeology', PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 1995. See also: Jaqueline Ann Lambert, 'A History of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies 1959 -1989: An Analysis of How Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People Achieved Control of a National Research Institute', PhD thesis, Australian National University, 2011.

and ideas that have arisen from heritage debates and the struggles of Indigenous peoples for ownership and control of their land, cultural materials and ancestral remains.⁴⁸ These studies dislodge universities from the centre of the discipline and portray contemporary archaeological practice in Australia as a multi-dimensional domain and multi-representational arena.

In many ways, Peter White and Tim Murray's influential 1981 article 'Cambridge in the Bush?' remains the template for the study of Australian archaeology.⁴⁹ In a few short pages, they created an enduring overview of the development of the discipline, which has sparked vigorous debate about the origins of Australian archaeology, and the ways in which it is distinctive from other world traditions.⁵⁰ They divided the history of the field into three phases: Antiquity and racial origins (1788-1910); Classification and culture change (1911-59); and Professionalisation (1960-80). The final phase, they argued, saw the discipline move from 'the hands of untrained amateurs' into the realm of professional archaeologists. The phrase 'Cambridge in the Bush' – a popular nickname at the time for the Australian National University – has endured as a shorthand description of this era. In 1996, Tom Griffiths conveyed the complex changes in historical consciousness that underwrote White and Murray's neat categories.⁵¹ His book, *Hunters and Collectors*, reflected on the shifting intellectual traditions over the course of the twentieth century that saw Aboriginal society transform from an object of study to a people with a voice and a history. In 2005, Ian McNiven and Lynette Russell revisited this history in *Appropriated Pasts* and argued for a narrative of continuity, instead of change. Their book, which draws upon international

⁴⁸ Sarah Colley, *Uncovering Australia: Archaeology, Indigenous People and the Public* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2002); Hilary du Cros, *Much More Than Stones and Bones: Australian Archaeology in the Late Twentieth Century* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002); Laurajane Smith, *The Uses of Heritage* (London: Routledge, 2006); Libby Riches, 'Exploring Encounter: A New Relationship Between Archaeologists and Indigenous People?', in Tim Murray (ed.), *Archaeology from Australia* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2004), 151-167.

⁴⁹ Tim Murray and J Peter White, 'Cambridge in the Bush? Archaeology in Australia and New Guinea', *World Archaeology*, 13(2) (1981), 255-63.

⁵⁰ Iain Davidson, 'Beating about the Bush? Aspects of the History of Australian Archaeology', *Australian Archaeology* 17 (1983), 136-144; Peter Gathercole, 'Cambridge: History, Archaeology and Politics', in M Spriggs, DE Yen, W Ambrose, R Jones, A Thorne and A Andrews (eds.), *A Community of Culture: The People and Prehistory of the Pacific* (Canberra: Department of Prehistory, Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National University, 1993), 1-6; John Mulvaney, 'From Cambridge to the Bush', in M Spriggs, DE Yen, W Ambrose, R Jones, A Thorne and A Andrews (eds.), *A Community of Culture: The People and Prehistory of the Pacific* (Canberra: Department of Prehistory, Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National University, 1993), 18-26; Tim Murray and J Peter White, 'Cambridge in the Bush – Again?' *Australian Archaeology* 15 (1982), 100-102; Nicholas Thomas, 'In Lieu of a Critical Self-consciousness: Some Comments on Murray and White's Version of the History of Australian Archaeology', *Australian Archaeology* 14 (1982), 1-5.

⁵¹ Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors*.

perspectives, highlights the enduring ‘colonial culture’ of archaeological practice. They trace the discipline’s murky origins in ‘social evolutionism’ and its past associations with nationalist agendas to suggest that archaeology remains a tool for the objectification and subordination of Indigenous people. Even the collaborative nature of contemporary practice, they argue, is a form of ‘new appropriation’.⁵²

In this thesis, I join others in the fields of ‘big history’ and ‘deep history’ in making the case that the archaeological story of ancient Australia is a *history* with which all Australians should be familiar.⁵³ This work is underpinned by the belief that respectfully engaging with the long and varied Indigenous history of Australia is not an act of appropriation, but rather recognition. Whilst acknowledging the legacy of early archaeological fieldwork, I distinguish between the activities of early curator-anthropologists, stone tool collectors and hobbyists, and the discipline of archaeology that is practised in Australia today. This argument is embedded in the structure of this thesis. Knowledge, of course, is cumulative and I do not mean to downplay the significance of earlier research. As David Horton points out, something like archaeology was being practised as soon as the British arrived here in 1788, when Governor Arthur Phillip and his successor John Hunter opened an Aboriginal gravesite and listed its contents.⁵⁴ But if anyone who has rummaged in the earth is included in a history of archaeology, then archaeology becomes defined as rummaging. Disciplinary origins are saturated with meaning: they define the shape, scope and trajectory of a field. By beginning with Mulvaney’s first excavation on Australian soil in the 1950s, this thesis seeks to move away from early evolutionary perspectives to depict archaeology as a careful, systematic and creative craft, anchored in the belief that Aboriginal peoples have their own history and that

⁵² Ian J McNiven and Lynette Russell, *Appropriated Pasts: Indigenous Peoples and the Colonial Culture of Archaeology* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2005), 211.

⁵³ David Christian pioneered the field of ‘big history’ in the 1980s and it has grown through the scholarship of other Australian historians, such as Tom Griffiths, Alison Bashford and Ann McGrath, as well as international scholars, such as Dipesh Chakrabarty, Andrew Shryock and Daniel Lord Smail. The project of ‘big history’ forces historians beyond the boundaries of their discipline to gain a perspective of our species, it calls for cross-cultural and interdisciplinary collaboration, and, perhaps most significantly, it helps restore historicity to peoples long-regarded as without history. David Christian, *Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Tom Griffiths, ‘Environmental History, Australian Style’, *Australian Historical Studies* 46(2) (2015), 157-73; Bashford, ‘The Anthropocene is Modern History’; Ann McGrath and Mary Anne Jebb (eds.), *Long History, Deep Time: Deepening Histories of Place* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2015); Dipesh Chakrabarty, ‘The Climate of History: Four Theses’, *Critical Inquiry* 35 (2009), 197-222; Daniel Lord Smail and Andrew Shryock (eds.), *Deep History: The Architecture of Past and Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Daniel Lord Smail and Shryock Andrew, ‘History and the “Pre”’, *The American Historical Review* 118 (3) (Jun 2013), 709-737.

⁵⁴ Horton, *Recovering the Tracks*. Some scholars even suggest that the first Australians have been conducting archaeological activities for millennia. Claire Smith and Heather Burke, *Digging it up Down Under: A Practical Guide to Doing Archaeology in Australia* (New York: Springer, 2007), 5.

this can be recovered through archaeological techniques.⁵⁵

Stephanie Moser's study acknowledges the longer trajectory of archaeological research in Australia, describing the work of museum curators in the early twentieth century as 'the first stage of professional archaeology'. In particular, she has explored the 'disciplinary building strategies' of McCarthy and Tindale.⁵⁶ Both scholars, in isolation and in competition with each other, developed their own language for discussing and analysing stone tools and independently identified chronological changes in assemblages, which had previously been ascribed to differences in raw material or function. Tindale even attempted to articulate a continental approach to archaeology by connecting his cultural sequences to American anthropologist Joseph Birdsell's theory of three waves of migration into Australia.⁵⁷ He devoted decades of his life to mapping Aboriginal territories, and he drew attention to the myriad, subtle effects of Aboriginal fires on the Australian landscape, recognising 'the Australian aboriginal as an ecological agent'.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, McCarthy formulated a preliminary sequence for rock art in the Sydney basin and undertook an innovative study on the subsistence practices of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory with nutritionist Margaret McArthur.⁵⁹ These two polymaths deserve to be recognised for the pioneering roles they played in the study of Aboriginal society, as well as their contributions as advocates for the protective legislation of Aboriginal sites.⁶⁰ They both had a vision for the discipline of Australian archaeology and their efforts ensured that the subject had a future. They were joined by many others who took a long view of Aboriginal society, such as Leonhard Adam,

⁵⁵ I have also made this case elsewhere: Billy Griffiths, "'The Dawn" of Australian Archaeology: John Mulvaney at Fromm's Landing', *Journal of Pacific Archaeology* 8(1) (2017), 100-111.

⁵⁶ Moser, 'Archaeology and its Disciplinary Culture', 79-80.

⁵⁷ Herbert M Hale and Norman B Tindale, 'Notes on Some Human Remains in the Lower Murray Valley', *Records of the South Australian Museum* 4 (1930), 145-218; Norman B Tindale, 'Culture Succession in South-Eastern Australia', *Records of the South Australian Museum* 13 (1957), 1-49; Frederick D McCarthy, 'A Rock-shelter near Emu Plains: Result of Excavation', *Mankind* 1(10) (1934), 240-41; Frederick D McCarthy, 'The Lapstone Creek Excavation: Two Culture Periods Revealed in Eastern New South Wales', *Records of the Australian Museum* 22(1) (1948), 1-34.

⁵⁸ Norman B Tindale, *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia*, vol. 1, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974); Norman B Tindale, 'Ecology of Primitive Aboriginal Man in Australia', in A Keast, RL Crockerand CS Christian (eds.), *Biogeography and Ecology in Australia* (Den Haag, Netherlands: W Junk, 1959), 36-51, 49; Norman B Tindale, 'A South Australian Looks at Some Beginnings of Archaeological Research in Australia', *Aboriginal History* 6 (1982), 92-110, 93. This theme has recently re-emerged in the environmental humanities, see: Shephard Krech, *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History* (London: WW Norton, 1999).

⁵⁹ Frederick D McCarthy and Margaret McArthur, 'The Food Quest and the Time Factor in Aboriginal Economic Life', in Charles P Mountford (ed.), *Records of the American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land, Volume 2: Anthropology and Nutrition* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1960), 145-194.

⁶⁰ John Mulvaney, 'Two Remarkably Parallel Careers', *Australian Archaeology* 10 (1980), 99; Frederick D McCarthy, 'Aboriginal Relics and Their Preservation', *Mankind* 2(5) (1938), 120-26.

Elsie Brammell, Dermot Casey, Harold Cooper, Edmund Gill, Herbert Hale, Elizabeth Kennedy, Aldo Massola, Donald Thomson, William Walford Thorpe and Donald Tugby.

Some of the legacies of these pioneering researchers are explored in this thesis, but in the context of the generation that followed them. By opening with John Mulvaney, I do not wish to diminish their contributions; rather, I seek to disassociate the field from the skulduggery of some of their peers.⁶¹ John Mulvaney and Isabel McBryde both felt a similar need to assert this difference when they began their fieldwork in the late 1950s – and their degrees from Melbourne University and Cambridge University gave them the authority to do so. They were keen to change the destructive practices of the stone tool enthusiasts who dominated the field, and educate them in the systematic craft of archaeology. And they condemned the activities of less honourable individuals, such as the medical doctor and amateur anthropologist, William Crowther, who robbed Aboriginal bodies from a modern Christian cemetery at the start of the twentieth century in order to study their skulls; or the engineer, farmer and collector George Murray Black, who exhumed ‘two truckloads of skeletons’ from the banks of the Murray River for the Department of Anatomy at Melbourne University.⁶² Aboriginal activist Rosalind Langford called for a similar distinction when she acknowledged the value of ‘proper’ science in 1982 (see chapter eight).⁶³

The distinction I assert between early research and the work of ‘later serious “modern” archaeological scholars’ is reinforced by the advent of radiocarbon dating in 1949, which opened new possibilities by allowing archaeologists to date their sites.⁶⁴ In 1982, Peter White and Jim O’Connell reflected that this technology, combined with the change in techniques introduced by Mulvaney and McBryde, led most archaeologists ‘to ignore almost all the archaeological research undertaken prior to 1950.’⁶⁵ It also meant that established workers had fewer intellectual positions to defend and could welcome new breakthroughs, rather than

⁶¹ My use of the term ‘skulduggery’ echoes Tom Griffiths’ in *Hunters and Collectors*, 28-54.

⁶² By the time the Black collection arrived in Melbourne, silverfish had eaten the labels describing the context of the bones, rendering the collection useless to the Department of Anatomy. The bones were dispatched to the Institute of Anatomy in Canberra, where they remained until they were repatriated in the early 1990s. Jim Bowler conducted an interview with Black in his eighties in which he told this sorry tale. Jim Bowler, ‘Reading the Australian landscape: European and Aboriginal perspectives’, *Cappuccino Papers* 1 (1995), 9-14.

⁶³ Rosalind F Langford, ‘Our Heritage – Your Playground’, *Australian Archaeology* 16 (Jun 1983), 1-6, 6.

⁶⁴ Sue O’Connor and Marjorie Sullivan also make this distinction in: ‘Coastal Archaeology in Australia: Developments and New Directions’, *Australian Archaeology* 39 (Dec 1994), 87-96, 87.

⁶⁵ J Peter White and James F O’Connell, *A Prehistory of Australia, New Guinea and Sahul* (Sydney: Academic Press, 1982), 30.

nurse wounded egos, allowing free passage for new ideas to be developed.⁶⁶ After Rhys Jones delivered his first interpretation of the archaeology at Rocky Cape at the 1965 ANZAAS congress, for example, Tindale rose from the audience to graciously acknowledge the generational succession of archaeological ideas.⁶⁷

There is no denying that archaeology has a murky history in colonialism and social evolutionism, as McNiven and Russell vividly illustrate. But it is also a fundamentally transformative discipline. An archaeological site is not a monument in itself; it is a history that has been recovered through sweat, science and imagination. Stories that have passed beyond memory and tradition survive by virtue of archaeology. And, as David Frankel reminds us, the raw materials of archaeological investigation are inherently fragile. A fine-grained record of human occupation, sealed in the sands of a rock shelter, is under constant threat from wind and water, hooves and burrows, people and machines. Archaeologists are not digging in search of treasure, they are seeking to understand and enliven the human history of a place from the fragments that have survived the vicissitudes of time. ‘Perhaps,’ Frankel wonders, ‘we have an obligation to excavate.’⁶⁸

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This thesis takes as its subject area the modern boundaries of Australia, which formed around six or seven thousand years ago. The continent that the first Australians colonised – known as Sahul – was much vaster. The Gulf of Carpentaria was a brackish lake in the middle of a land bridge that connected Australia to Papua New Guinea; Tasmania was attached to the mainland via the Bassian Plain. There are others, such as Matthew Spriggs, who are writing about the story of Pacific and Papua New Guinean archaeology.⁶⁹ I have chosen to restrict the boundaries of this study, as it is as much about the culture and politics of modern Australia as it is about the history of Australian archaeology.

This thesis engages with a range of historical, anthropological and archaeological literature

⁶⁶ White and O’Connell, *A Prehistory of Australia, New Guinea and Sahul*, 30.

⁶⁷ ANZAAS stands for the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science. Rhys Jones, ‘A Continental Reconnaissance: Some Observations Concerning the Discovery of the Pleistocene Archaeology of Australia’, in M Spriggs, DE Yen, W Ambrose, R Jones, A Thorne and A Andrews (eds.), *A Community of Culture: The People and Prehistory of the Pacific* (Canberra: Department of Prehistory, Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National University, 1993), 97-122, 104.

⁶⁸ David Frankel, ‘The Excavator: Creator or Destroyer?’ *Antiquity* 67(257) (1993), 875-877, 877.

⁶⁹ I refer to ‘The Collective Biography of Archaeology in the Pacific’ project at the ANU. See, for example, Matthew Spriggs, ‘Thomas G. Thrum and John F.G. Stokes: Australian archaeologists in paradise in the early twentieth century’, *Journal of Pacific Archaeology* 8(1) (2017), 47-62.

on ‘narrative’ and ‘place’. I draw inspiration from the scholarship of nature writers such as Barry Lopez, Richard Nelson and Robert Macfarlane, who emphasise the role of geography in shaping culture and identity through time, as well as historians Mark McKenna, Grace Karskens and Eric Rolls, and artists Kim Mahood and Mandy Martin, who have explored the complex, cross-cultural interplay between people and place within Australia.⁷⁰ Mulvaney, too, has contributed to this genre through his book on Australian contact history, *Encounters in Place: Outsiders and Aboriginal Australians, 1606-1985*.⁷¹

My use of narrative owes much to scholars such as Inga Clendinnen, Greg Denning and Iain McCalman, who illuminate the performative power of the historian, and the ways in which structure, detail and emphasis shape meaning.⁷² I am aware of the distorting power of such narrative choices, but carefully wrought, deeply researched and reflective narrative is an analytical framework that gives voice to subtle, complex and multi-faceted arguments. It elucidates relationships and links personal experiences, as reflected in diaries and letters, to broader trends and national and international events. It helps give the past back its present, with all its ambiguities and possibilities.

The focus on ‘narrative’ and ‘place’ also brings together the two traditions evoked in my title: the historic approach of deep-time scholars and the bond between land, lore and identity articulated through the Dreaming. For both archaeologists and Indigenous Australians, the land is embedded with story. In this thesis, I have interleaved a series of portraits of ‘people in place’ to provide an episodic view of the history of Australian archaeology.⁷³ The focus on archaeological practice, in the field, in the laboratory and in the archives, highlights the interpretive dimensions of archaeology, and the political and cultural context in which ideas were formulated and received. I have also chosen to tell the drama of discovery – or

⁷⁰ See, for example, Barry Lopez, ‘Landscape and Narrative’, *Crossing Open Ground*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 61-71; Richard K Nelson, *The Island Within* (New York: Vintage, 1989); Robert Macfarlane, *The Old Ways: A Journey on Foot* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2012); Mark McKenna, *Looking for Blackfellas’ Point: An Australian History of Place* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2002); Grace Karskens, *The Colony: A History of Early Sydney* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2009); Eric Rolls, *A Million Wild Acres: 200 Years of Man and an Australian Forest* (Melbourne: Nelson, 1981); Kim Mahood, *Position Doubtful: Mapping Landscapes and Memories* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2016); Mandy Martin, Libby Robin and Mike Smith (eds.), *Strata: Deserts Past, Present and Future* (Mandurama, NSW: Mandy Martin, 2005).

⁷¹ John Mulvaney, *Encounters in Place: Outsiders and Aboriginal Australians, 1606-1985* (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1988).

⁷² Inga Clendinnen, *Dancing with Strangers* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2003); Iain McCalman, *Darwin’s Armada* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2009); Greg Denning, ‘Performing on the Beaches of the Mind: An Essay’, *History and Theory* 41(1) (Feb 2002), 1-24.

⁷³ This episodic approach means that I offer portraits of only a handful of scholars who have worked in Australia. A greater range of archaeological biographies has been collected and published in Claire Smith (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Global Archaeology* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 2014).

rediscovery – in order to capture some of the wonder that comes with thinking of the deep past and the challenge of inferring meaning from the cryptic residue of former worlds. As Greg Denning observes, ‘The history in places, especially in places of cross-cultural encounters, will take as much imagination as science to see.’⁷⁴

I open this thesis with Gordon Childe’s encounters with John Mulvaney in 1957 and take it through to the era of the *Mabo* and *Wik* decisions in 1992 and 1996. Chapter one follows Mulvaney on his first excavation on Australian soil and his attempts to overturn the social Darwinism that had gripped Aboriginal studies for nearly a century. With his 1969 *Prehistory of Australia*, he presented a long and dynamic history of Aboriginal society and posed continental questions that dominated the archaeological agenda over the following decade. I explore Isabel McBryde’s methodical regional approach to the archaeology of New England in chapter two. Her pioneering survey challenged the idea that all archaeology requires excavation and demonstrated the diversity of Aboriginal societies within her region. While Australia may be a continent, it is made up of many countries. In chapter three, I explore Rhys Jones’ Welsh heritage, his early archaeological expeditions to northern Tasmania and the controversy that engulfed him with the release of the film *The Last Tasmanian*. His poetic impulses, along with his desire to be at the frontiers of knowledge, made him a brilliant but polarising force in Australian archaeology.

In chapter four I investigate a similar political storm, teasing out the implications of Richard Gould’s ethno-archaeological work – and cultural transgressions – at Puntutjarpa in the Western Desert. His experience signalled the shifting nature of consent and Aboriginal politics in the 1960s and 1970s and presents a rare example of an Aboriginal community which regained some control over their cultural information and access to their land. Chapter five offers a portrait of Jim Bowler and the history of archaeological and geomorphological work at Lake Mungo. It reflects on the place of Mungo Lady and Mungo Man in the national imagination and the powerful roles played by Aboriginal leaders such as Alice Kelly in shaping the future of the Willandra Lakes region. In chapter six, I draw upon the work of Carmel Schrire and Betty Meehan to explore the ways in which researchers attempted to view the landscape of Arnhem Land through Aboriginal eyes. Schrire’s early dates for edge-ground axes from Malangangerr undermined colonial assumptions about the ‘primitive’

⁷⁴ Greg Denning, ‘The History in Things and Places’, in Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths (eds.), *Prehistory to Politics: John Mulvaney, the Humanities and the Public Intellectual* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996), 85-97, 97.

nature of Aboriginal society, but she was also reflective about her own complicity in the colonial project. Meanwhile, Meehan's work with the Anbarra people in the midst of the outstation movement opened a window on how remote Aboriginal communities were responding to government attempts at assimilation.

Chapter seven addresses some of the cultural and spiritual significance of landscape by analysing early attempts to study its most material manifestation: rock art. While Australian archaeology has become increasingly integrated with ethnography, many rock art specialists such as Lesley Maynard have moved in the opposite direction, reducing magnificent frescos to statistics, proportions and punch cards. Nevertheless, they appreciated the beauty and power of Aboriginal art and individuals such as Bob Edwards helped it to be recognised and celebrated around the world. In chapter eight, I explore the politics of archaeology in the heat of the Franklin River campaign. I reflect on the heritage legislation developed by 1983 and the worldviews it empowered, as well as the ways in which ideas of wilderness, alongside Aboriginal culture, were absorbed into the national debate over the Gordon-below-Franklin dam.

In the final two chapters, I probe the two areas of inquiry that have dominated the archaeological study of Australia: the dynamic changes within Aboriginal societies over the past few thousand years (chapter nine) and the colonisation of the continent and the search for the oldest sites (chapter ten). By tackling these more abstract themes, I have tried to convey the content as well as the context of the debates they have inspired. Chapter nine explores Sylvia Hallam's history of Aboriginal fire in the southwest of the continent. I compare her fine-grained local, historical, and ecological approach to a recent attempt to universalise Aboriginal burning into a continental system. The chapter also addresses the 'Great Intensification Debate', led by Harry Lourandos in the 1980s, who explored the question of social change within Aboriginal societies and probed the limitations of the categories of 'hunter-gatherer' and 'agriculturalist'. In bringing these two scholars together, who approached their work from different theoretical backgrounds, I seek to highlight the nature of theory in the field of Australian archaeology, and the primacy of careful, reflective ethnographically-driven archaeological interpretations. In chapter ten, 'Hunting the Pleistocene', I unpack the culture and politics of the search for the oldest archaeological sites in Australia, focusing in particular on the divisive finds at Jinmium in the Pilbara and Madjedbebe (formerly Malakunanja II) in Arnhem Land. In order to understand these sites,

and the global implications of their deep-time story, I sketch an outline of human migration out of Africa and into Australia. This chapter, in particular, represents a selective enquiry into the field of Australian archaeology, rather than a chronology of key events, individuals and arguments. Old dates, no matter how dazzling, demand context; and it is through narrative that they become history and are endowed with enduring meaning.

This narrative structure is broken by three interludes: ‘Before it is too late, 1961’, ‘Eaglehawk and Crow, 1974’, and ‘Australians to 1988’. These short essays analyse some of the defining themes of successive decades, as well as the institutional role of bodies like the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (now AIATSIS) and the Australian Archaeological Association in the development of the field. They also seek to provide chronological shape to a story that often jumps forwards and backwards in time.

Many of the arguments put forward in the text are reinforced through the narrative structure. By opening the chapter on Lake Mungo, for example, with its histories of erosion, I seek to frame the archaeological work there as largely salvage and recording exercises, rather than archaeological interventions. This is a nuance that eluded a recent film on the subject, *Message from Mungo* (2014).⁷⁵ Similarly, by beginning the chapter on archaeology on the Franklin River with the story of two wilderness advocates, and including in the narrative the events of local, state and federal politics, I am destabilising the common perception of the campaign against the dam as a ‘green victory’. The work of archaeologists both challenged the wilderness ideal and played a crucial behind-the-scenes role in stopping the dam.

By providing the diverse biographical backgrounds of the scholars who laid the foundations of the modern discipline of Australian archaeology, I also seek to contest Murray and White’s characterisation of the field as ‘Cambridge in the Bush’. While the intellectual influence of Cambridge University on Australian research was immense, the experiences of McBryde and Mulvaney, for example, complicate the conclusion that ‘Australian archaeology was and is archaeology first and Australian second’.⁷⁶ Both McBryde and Mulvaney studied history at the University of Melbourne, actively sought archaeological degrees from Cambridge University, and returned to develop integrated archaeological programs from within History departments that were supportive of archaeology. They advocated different archaeological practices – Mulvaney favoured excavation, while McBryde demonstrated the benefits of field

⁷⁵ Andrew Pike and Ann McGrath (dir.), *Message from Mungo* (2014), Canberra: Ronin Films.

⁷⁶ Murray and White, ‘Cambridge in the Bush?’, 262.

survey – but they shared a historical vision of their discipline. They were both keenly aware that their activities were deepening and enlarging Australian history.

From the 1980s, as archaeology became more established as a discipline in Australia, it also became more diverse and specialised. Many of the rich veins of study developed over recent decades appear only on the margins of this thesis, such as palaeoanthropology, palaeogenetics, zooarchaeology and ethnobotany, as well as the fields of historical archaeology, maritime archaeology, women’s archaeology and space archaeology.⁷⁷ Instead of overwhelming the scope of this thesis by analysing these fields in isolation, I have instead sought to incorporate some of their insights in the existing structure. Even the study of stone tools or ‘lithics’, which has played a central role in the field, is addressed only peripherally and in context.⁷⁸

In the epilogue, I reflect briefly on the central arguments of this thesis. Since Mulvaney put forward his continental vision in *Prehistory of Australia* in 1969, Australian archaeology has become more local. Instead of proposing large-scale universalising models, archaeologists now tend to emphasise the distinctive regional and temporal character of Aboriginal society. The richness of Indigenous history is to be found not only in its depth, but also in its dynamism and diversity over time.

⁷⁷ Many of these fields are explored separately in Tim Murray (ed.), *Archaeology from Australia* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2004).

⁷⁸ Robert McWilliams has canvassed this history in: ‘A History of Australian Approaches to the Analysis of Aboriginal Stone Artefacts’, MA thesis, La Trobe University, 1996.



Fig. 5 John Mulvaney at Fromm's Landing, South Australia, 1958 (Source: D Casey, NLA).

Explorers in an Ancient Land

John Mulvaney at Fromm's Landing

In the final week of his life, Vere Gordon Childe offered a blistering assessment of the state of Australian society. The Australian archaeologist liked it no better in 1957 than when he had left thirty-six years earlier, frustrated and disenchanted, to make his name in Britain. He saw twentieth-century Australia as a cultural backwater, comparing it on more than one occasion to tenth-century Iceland, and leaving little doubt as to which he preferred.¹ On Sunday 13 October 1957, in a public 'Guest of Honour' broadcast with the ABC, he urged the Australian public to turn their minds to 'the section of history ... still labelled pre-history – rather absurdly,' he added, 'for it is not a sort of prelude to history but an integral part of history itself.' He railed against the 'old dogma' that Australian history begins in 'the British Isles and Continental Europe, while the Aborigines stagnated in illiterate savagery', and pointed out that 'the archaeological sources for Australia's prehistory are less well-studied in 1957, than the sources for European prehistory were in 1857'. As his throaty, but sure voice echoed over the airways he wondered 'what a systematic investigation of archaeological documents might do for Australian history'.²

Childe was affronted by the hopeless neglect of Australian archaeology. As he wrote to his friend Mary Alice Evatt in August 1957, 'I'm sure it's something worth studying and preserving ... particularly the "Aboriginal" rock pictures.'³ But '[t]here are only 3 or 4 people working on it at all seriously with rather inadequate training and hopelessly inadequate resources.'⁴ His views oscillated in these final months. Writing to one colleague, OGS Crawford, he described Australian archaeology as 'all horribly boring unless you're a flint

¹ Jim Allen also makes this observation in: 'Perspectives of a Sentimental Journey V. Gordon Childe in Australia 1917-1921', *Australian Archaeology* 12 (1981), 1-12, 10.

² Vere Gordon Childe, 'Australian Broadcasting Commission, Guest of Honour, Broadcast Sunday 13th October, 1957 (7.15 p.m. 2FC)', *Australian Archaeology* 30 (1990), 26-28, 26-27.

³ Sally Green, *Prehistorian: A Biography of V. Gordon Childe* (Bradford-on-Avon: Moonraker Press, 1981), 149.

⁴ Green, *Prehistorian*, 149.

fan’, ‘I could not possibly get interested’.⁵ But with others, such as Laila Haglund, a young classics student he befriended in his final days, he was full of plans. Haglund remembers sitting across from his distinctive figure, with thick circular glasses, slicked-back hair and walrus moustache, talking about what had been done in Australian archaeology, who was doing it and the sorts of problems he felt should be tackled. ‘There was so much he wished to see done in Australian prehistory,’ she recalled, ‘some of this he wanted to do himself. But it was all part of a large co-ordinated scheme.’⁶ These conversations persuaded Haglund to ‘switch over to prehistory’; she went on to become one of the field’s first consultant archaeologists.⁷ Later she wrote that ‘[l]istening to him at times was rather like hovering over the continent and looking down in a godlike manner.’⁸

Childe had left Australia in 1921, having been denied academic appointments at the Universities of Sydney and of Queensland on grounds of his socialist politics. He returned to Sydney on 14 April 1957: his sixty-fifth birthday. In the intervening thirty-six years, this reclusive, awkward character rose to world fame. He became the ‘great synthesiser’ of archaeology, capable of weaving a grand narrative from the disparate material remains of a region or a continent. He championed the role of humanism in a discipline that straddles the border between the arts and the sciences, and he was a firm believer that archaeology was, above all, about people. His wide-ranging work on everything from British Prehistory to Australian Labour Politics made him, at the time, ‘probably the most prolific and the most translated Australian author’.⁹ And although John Mulvaney compared his 1925 book *The Dawn of European Civilization* – or simply *The Dawn* – with *On the Origin of Species* for the impact it had on his field, little of this fame reached his home continent.¹⁰ In the summer of 1956, Childe retired as Director of the Institute of Archaeology in London, packed up his affairs and set sail for Australia. He yearned to return to the country of his youth, to see his sisters, and to absorb the sounds and smells of his childhood in the Blue Mountains. He was feeling weary. In the last letter he wrote to his friend WF Grimes, he stated, simply:

⁵ Letter to OGS Crawford, 6 August 1957, cited in Rhys Jones, ‘Dating the Human Colonization of Australia: Radiocarbon and Luminescence Revolutions’, *Proceedings of the British Academy* 99 (1999), 37-65, 39.

⁶ Laila Haglund, letter to *Antiquity*, published in Glyn Daniel, ‘Editorial’, *Antiquity* 53(208) (Jul 1979), 85-92, 86-87.

⁷ Laila Haglund, ‘Memories of Gordon Childe’, *Australian Archaeology* 30 (Jun 1990), 33-35, 34.

⁸ Haglund in Daniel, ‘Editorial’, 86-87.

⁹ John Mulvaney, ‘V.G. Childe 1892-1957’, *Historical Studies: Australia and New Zealand* 8(29) (Nov 1957), 93-94, 93.

¹⁰ Mulvaney, ‘V.G. Childe 1892-1957’, 93.

For myself I don't believe I can make further useful contributions to prehistory. I am beginning to forget what I laboriously learned ... New ideas very rarely come my way. I see no prospect of settling the problems that interest me most ... on the available data.¹¹

On Saturday 19 October 1957, a hot spring morning in the Blue Mountains, Childe ate his breakfast at the Carrington Hotel in Katoomba, flagged down his regular taxi, and made the short journey to Govetts Leap, Blackheath. 'He did not seem to want to talk,' his driver Harry Newstead remembered.¹² Childe instead puffed away at his pipe. On arrival, he pulled his gangling frame out of the car, looked at his watch and then, picking up some papers, walked off into the bush.¹³

Newstead waited for Childe's return until midday, then became worried and followed his footsteps along the track to Evans Lookout.¹⁴ He found the coat first: a 'blue-green sports coat' on a tree beside the path. Two hundred yards further along, at a point called Luchetti Lookout, he spotted a familiar brown felt hat. The initials VGC were printed inside the brim. Nearby lay Childe's distinctive spectacles, lugs open, carefully balanced on a rock, and, less than a foot from the cliff edge, his compass. No amount of shouting could muster a reply.¹⁵

The police view was that 'misplaced spectacles caused Professor V.G. Childe to fall 900 ft to his death at Govett's Leap'.¹⁶ At the coronial inquiry, Senior Constable James Walley Morey suggested that Childe had been 'taking compass bearings of features of the locality of Luchetti Lookout ... when he either misjudged the nearness of the cliff edge owing to his short sightedness or slipped and accidentally fell over the edge to the valley below.'¹⁷ The truth, however, is more sombre. His suicide – like his homecoming – was a meticulously planned act. For the world-renowned archaeologist, it was his last performance. Two weeks before his death he wrote to his friend Grahame Clark and described in detail the entrancing

¹¹ Vere Gordon Childe, letter to WF Grimes, dated 20/10/57 (inaccurate), The Carrington, Katoomba, Blue Mountains, NSW, published in Glyn Daniel, 'Editorial', *Antiquity* 54(210) (Mar 1980), 1-3, 2.

¹² Harry Newstead at the coronial inquiry into the death of Vere Gordon Childe, as quoted in Martin Thomas, *The Artificial Horizon: Imagining the Blue Mountains* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2003), 224.

¹³ Senior Constable James Walley Morey, Black Heath, at the coronial inquiry into the death of Vere Gordon Childe, as quoted in Thomas, *The Artificial Horizon*, 220.

¹⁴ 'Archaeologist Crashes Down Cliff To Death', *The Canberra Times*, 21 October 1957, 1.

¹⁵ Harry Newstead at the coronial inquiry into the death of Vere Gordon Childe, as quoted in Thomas, *The Artificial Horizon*, 224.

¹⁶ Daniel, 'Editorial', 87.

¹⁷ Senior Constable James Walley Morey, Black Heath, at the coronial inquiry into the death of Vere Gordon Childe, as quoted in Thomas, *The Artificial Horizon*, 221.

sandstone cliffs of the Blue Mountains. He enclosed in the same envelope a personal reflection of his career to be used for obituary purposes at some future stage.¹⁸ In a letter marked '20/10/57', Childe addressed his public from beyond the grave:

Now I have seen the Australian spring; I have smelt the boronia, watched snakes and lizards, listened to the "locusts". There is nothing more I want to do here; nothing I feel I ought and could do. I hate the prospect of the summer, but I hate still more the fogs and snows of a British winter. Life ends best when one is strong and happy.¹⁹

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'Had he lived,' one obituarist mused, 'perhaps Australia would have benefited by a synthesis of Australian prehistory.'²⁰ In death, the baton passed to the author of those words: John Mulvaney.

Mulvaney was teaching Australia's only university course in Australian and Pacific prehistory when Childe returned in 1957. The two men met briefly in Childe's final month, with Mulvaney somehow managing to convince him to speak to his students at the University of Melbourne, not once but twice.²¹ Childe favoured Mulvaney's company over that of his socialist hosts in Melbourne. He was glad to find someone with whom he could *talk prehistory*. The two men passed a pleasant afternoon together in Sherbrooke Forest in the Dandenong Ranges. 'In a vain search for lyre birds,' Mulvaney later reflected, 'we must have walked through the tall timber and clambered over rocks for some two hours. As Childe balanced precariously near a waterfall, I feared that he might lose his balance.'²²

Their time together was short, but it left an impression. As Childe wrote to Peter Gathercole on 7 October 1957:

There is an urgent need out here for someone with up to date techniques and notions to make a serious study of South Pacific archaeology. There is much material here

¹⁸ Vere Gordon Childe to Grahame Clark, 1 October 1957, Sir Grahame Clark: archaeological papers, Cambridge University Library, Department of Manuscripts and University Archives, Cambridge, GBR/0012/MS Add.9409/35.

¹⁹ Childe to Grimes, 3.

²⁰ Mulvaney, 'V.G. Childe 1892-1957', 94.

²¹ Vere Gordon Childe to John Mulvaney, 16 September 1957, John Mulvaney Papers, National Library of Australia, Canberra, MS 9615/1/64, Box 8.

²² John Mulvaney, 'From "The Dawn" to Sunset: Gordon Childe in Melbourne, 1957', *Australian Archaeology* 30 (Jun 1990), 29-32, 30.

some of it rapidly deteriorating but Mulvaney is the only man with first class techniques to tackle it seriously.²³

Both men shared a sense that they were standing at the edge of an intellectual precipice in the study of Australian prehistory. They lamented the lack of general interest and specialised research into Australia's Aboriginal past. But by the time Mulvaney met Childe he had already begun the first tentative steps towards an intellectual revolution. The following decade would see Australian history undergo a radical transformation.

This chapter charts the dawn of the modern archaeological era in Australia, with particular attention to Mulvaney's excavations on the banks of the lower Murray River in South Australia and in the quartzite sandstone country of the Carnarvon Ranges in western Queensland. It moves from Mulvaney's declaration in 1961 that 'Australia remains the dark continent of prehistory' to his triumphant opening sentence of the first edition of *The Prehistory of Australia* in 1969:

The discoverers, explorers and colonists of the three million square miles which are Australia, were its Aborigines.²⁴

The immense significance of this sentence is the subject of this thesis.

o o o

John Mulvaney was a small man, with a quiet smile, large ears, compelling brown eyes, and a soft, nasal voice. He was born in the year *The Dawn* first hit the shelves, 1925. He grew up in small towns in Gippsland and the Mallee, wherever his father, a teacher and former Catholic seminarian from Ireland, was posted. It was a 'contented but isolated existence'.²⁵ He sought escape in historical novels, explorers' journals and boys' weeklies – by the age of ten he even took to writing about the grand days of exploration in Australian history. Over time he would revise his understanding of the first explorers of this ancient land. He pursued his interests in history at high school, but knew, from a young age, what was expected of him: he would follow in his father's footsteps and become a primary school teacher. His only chance of

²³ Vere Gordon Childe, as quoted in Tim Murray, 'Aboriginal (Pre)History and Australian Archaeology: The Discourse of Australian Prehistoric Archaeology', *Journal of Australian Studies* 16(35) (1992), 1-19, 4.

²⁴ John Mulvaney, 'The Stone Age of Australia', *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* 27 (1961), 56-107, 56; John Mulvaney, *The Prehistory of Australia* (New York: Praeger, 1969), 12.

²⁵ John Mulvaney, *Digging Up a Past* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2011), 13.

escape lay in the war brewing half a world away, and drawing in more and more men and women by the day. In 1943, in the week following his eighteenth birthday, and after a ‘soul destroying’ two years as a student teacher, Mulvaney received a call up to the Air Training Corps: he was to be trained as a navigator in Canada and deployed in England. ‘Whatever lay in the future for AC2 438626,’ he reflected in his memoirs, ‘I knew that I would never return to primary school teaching.’²⁶

The war changed Mulvaney. He joined the RAAF a sheltered country lad and returned two years later an adult: mature, determined and alert to his passions. It was not the violence and brutality of the war that influenced him so deeply – the conflict was over before he was needed – it was his time spent in England: a land of cathedrals, castles and hamlets. ‘My wartime-as-tourist experiences,’ Mulvaney recalled, ‘immersed me in a romantic historical mist’.²⁷ On one long summer evening, as he rode along a narrow Cotswold road, he came upon a weathered stone circle in an overgrown field. The unkempt arrangement, known as the Rollright Stones, was shrouded in mystery and intrigue, redolent of a bygone era. This incidental encounter with the deep past had a profound effect on him.²⁸

On his return to Australia, with the aid of the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme, Mulvaney enrolled in history with the Arts Faculty at the University of Melbourne, specialising in Ancient World themes.²⁹ He was enchanted by the ‘majestic’ performances of Kathleen Fitzpatrick in British history and Manning Clark’s ‘breathless’ lectures in Australian history, under whose spell ‘even banal material sounded profound’.³⁰ He was especially intrigued by the mention of Aboriginal people in Clark’s continental narrative, although they usually appeared as helpless and passive onlookers. As Clark lamented privately towards the end of his life, ‘my generation was told the Aborigines were silly children doomed to disappearance in the presence of a vastly superior power.’³¹

²⁶ Mulvaney, *Digging Up a Past*, 20.

²⁷ Mulvaney, *Digging Up a Past*, 40.

²⁸ Mulvaney, *Digging Up a Past*, 34; Tom Griffiths, ‘In Search of Australian Antiquity’, in Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths (eds.), *Prehistory to Politics: John Mulvaney, the Humanities and the Public Intellectual* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996), 42-62; Tom Griffiths, *The Art of Time Travel: Historians and Their Craft* (Melbourne: Black Inc., 2016), 61-73.

²⁹ Mulvaney, *Digging Up a Past*, 39-42.

³⁰ Mulvaney, *Digging Up a Past*, 56; John Mulvaney, ‘A Note Taker at Manning’s 1948 lectures’, in *Manning Clark by Some of his Students* (Canberra: Manning Clark House, 2002), 22-25; Mark McKenna, *An Eye for Eternity: The Life of Manning Clark* (Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press, 2011), 255.

³¹ Clark, as quoted in McKenna, *An Eye For Eternity*, 619.

The exciting intellectual environment in History at the University of Melbourne, under the charismatic head of school Max Crawford, played a lasting role in shaping Mulvaney's scholarship.³² It was John O'Brien's deep and subtle teachings on Roman Britain that gave Mulvaney 'a realization of the nature of historical method, and a sense of active participation in its study'.³³ Although much is made of Mulvaney's time at Cambridge, Isabel McBryde stresses that the influence of the Melbourne History department 'must not be discounted, as it was then a centre of vigorous and rigorous historical research and teaching'.³⁴

By 1950 Mulvaney knew he wanted to be an archaeologist, and, partly due to his lack of Greek or Latin, he was becoming increasingly curious about the prospect of doing *Australian* archaeology. He had experienced a few 'so-called' archaeological excavations at Melbourne University, which consisted of combing the surface of Phillip Island, 'randomly picking up artefacts' and presenting them to the instigator of the expedition, Leonhard Adam, to adjudicate their worth.³⁵ He enjoyed this 'daytime indiscipline', but it was O'Brien's 'unadulterated scholarship' on Roman Britain that stirred his archaeological imagination.³⁶ In these courses he grappled with the writings of archaeological luminaries RG Collingwood, OGS Crawford and Mortimer Wheeler, and boldly disagreed with all three. He pursued these critiques in his Master's thesis, which he wrote under O'Brien's guidance on ancient British society under Roman conquest. Mulvaney displayed a keen awareness of the ways in which the past is in the present, and the present in the past. Historian Ken Inglis describes the thesis as 'a devastating and gently ironic account ... of how the most eminent English scholars had invented for themselves an ancestral Teutonic people who were responsible for advances in material culture and civilisation hitherto attributed to the alien Romans.'³⁷ Racial characteristics, Mulvaney concluded, could not be used to determine events in the distant past.

As he was writing this critique in his final year of study, Mulvaney was also reading widely on Aboriginal Australia. He was shocked to find that the only significant archaeological work

³² Ken Inglis, 'John Mulvaney's Universities', in Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths (eds.), *Prehistory to Politics: John Mulvaney, the Humanities and the Public Intellectual* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996), 20-41.

³³ John Mulvaney, 'Obituary: Jack Lockyer O'Brien', *Historical Studies: Australia and New Zealand*, 12(46) (1966), 329-330, 330.

³⁴ Isabel McBryde, 'Australia's Once and Future Archaeology', *Archaeology in Oceania*, 21(1) (1986), 13-28, 17.

³⁵ Mulvaney, *Digging Up a Past*, 53-54.

³⁶ Inglis, 'John Mulvaney's Universities', 25.

³⁷ Inglis, 'John Mulvaney's Universities', 27.

on the continent had been conducted by three museum curators – Norman Tindale, Frederick McCarthy and Edmund Gill – none of whom had any formal training in archaeology. Otherwise, it seemed, the study of Aboriginal Australia was the domain of stone tool collectors – amateur scientists and humanists like Adam who confounded Aboriginal culture with the stone artefacts they left behind.³⁸ Historian Tom Griffiths has unpacked the culture and mentality of these stone tool collectors in his book *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia*. Stone tools, he argues, defined – and confined – Indigenous Australia.³⁹ In a refreshing inversion, Griffiths dubs the intellectual environment of the mid-twentieth century, ‘the stone age’. He writes of collection as a form of hunting, with stone tool enthusiasts scouring ‘collecting grounds’ in search of their prey and triumphantly displaying their ‘pickings’ in home ‘cabinets of curiosities’.⁴⁰ Aboriginal people, though regarded as ‘primitive’, were considered to be relatively recent arrivals, so collection was restricted to surface artefacts. The prevailing assumption remained, as famously expressed by Robert Pulleine, ‘that excavation would be in vain as everything points to the conclusion that [Aboriginal people] were an unchanging people, living in an unchanging environment’.⁴¹ While reading a recently published book on the topic – *Stone-Age Craftsman* – Mulvaney was struck by the similarities between the ‘dubious’ assumptions made about Aboriginal culture and those made by the English archaeologists he was critiquing in his thesis.⁴² Their views said far more about their authors than the subjects.

In 1951 he won a travelling research scholarship and enrolled in ‘Stone Age’ or ‘Palaeolithic’ archaeology at Cambridge University, as this was the closest he could come to the stone industries of Australia. And, remarkably, he used his PhD scholarship to enrol in a bachelor’s degree: ‘I needed to learn the rudiments of the discipline’.⁴³ He would become enamoured of the Cambridge model of prehistory, which put archaeology and anthropology under the same roof, and taught the benefits of cross-disciplinary field archaeology. He studied under the ‘charismatic’ Glyn Daniel and the ‘formidable’ Grahame Clark, but it was Charles McBurney’s ‘directed and enthusiastic’ lectures, packed with ideas and possibilities, that

³⁸ Tom Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 55-85.

³⁹ Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors*, 55.

⁴⁰ Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors*, 19-20.

⁴¹ Robert Pulleine, ‘The Tasmanians and Their Stone-Culture’, *Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science* 19 (1928), 294-314, 310.

⁴² The book was Stanley Robert Mitchell, *Stone-Age Craftsmen: Stone Tools and Camping Places of the Australian Aborigines* (Melbourne: Tait Book Co., 1949). Mulvaney, *Digging Up a Past*, 69.

⁴³ Mulvaney received a PhD in 1970 on the strength of his published work. Mulvaney, *Digging Up a Past*, 71.

most enchanted him.⁴⁴ He learnt the tradecraft of archaeology on McBurney's excavations in Libya and throughout Britain and Europe. And it was with the Cambridge model of field archaeology impressed firmly on his mind that he returned to Australia in 1953, eager to apply his newly acquired skills to the Australian continent.

Between his sheltered country upbringing and the intense intellectual world of Melbourne and Cambridge Universities, Mulvaney had never knowingly met an Aboriginal person. He viewed Aboriginal prehistory with the same distance as he viewed British prehistory. Both were equally remote. So his challenge to the idea that Aboriginal society was 'static' was made on intellectual grounds as much as anything else. 'Many eminent Victorians,' Mulvaney wrote in 1958, in a scathing review of the field, 'treated Australia as a museum of primeval humanity and a storehouse of fossil culture. In the great dispute between apes and angels, the Aborigines were ranged firmly on the side of the apes.'⁴⁵ He could see, even from the limited archaeological work conducted in Australia, that Aboriginal society had changed over time: that Aboriginal people, in other words, had a history. The continent was awaiting further investigation: 'I hankered after the Iron Age but knew I must return to Stone.'⁴⁶

His fellow Cambridge graduate, Jack Golson, who established the modern field of New Zealand archaeology in 1954, later reflected on the 'striking similarity of approach we took in our separate situations'.⁴⁷ Both scholars followed similar trajectories in the 1950s before coming together in 1965 to help shape the Research School of Pacific Studies at the Australian National University.⁴⁸ 'In both countries,' Golson wrote in 1986, 'we were faced with a situation where there were few well authenticated archaeological data in the terms we understood, and a fair ignorance of the methods required to get them.'⁴⁹ In New Zealand, Golson used his fieldwork campaigns to excite and educate students about the possibilities of New Zealand and Pacific archaeology. Within a year of his arrival, he had helped found the

⁴⁴ Mulvaney, *Digging Up a Past*, 70.

⁴⁵ John Mulvaney, 'The Australian Aborigines 1606-1929: Opinion and Fieldwork', *Australian Historical Studies* 8 (1958), 131-51, 297-314, 297.

⁴⁶ John Mulvaney, 'Archaeological Retrospect 9', *Antiquity* 60(229) (1986), 96-107, 98.

⁴⁷ Jack Golson, 'Old Guards and New Waves: Reflections on Antipodean Archaeology 1954-1975', *Archaeology in Oceania*, 21(1) (1986), 2-12, 4

⁴⁸ Peter Gathercole, 'Cambridge: History, Archaeology and Politics', in M Spriggs, DE Yen, W Ambrose, R Jones, A Thorne and A Andrews (eds.), *A Community of Culture: The People and Prehistory of the Pacific* (Canberra: Department of Prehistory, Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National University, 1993), 1-6; LM Groube, "'Dig Up Those Moa Bones, Dig": Golson in New Zealand, 1954-1961', in M Spriggs, DE Yen, W Ambrose, R Jones, A Thorne and A Andrews (eds.), *A Community of Culture: The People and Prehistory of the Pacific* (Canberra: Department of Prehistory, Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National University, 1993), 6-17.

⁴⁹ Golson, 'Old Guards and New Waves', 3.

New Zealand Archaeological Association and reviewed the possibilities for dating New Zealand's human past.⁵⁰ By the end of the decade, he had published a theory-oriented survey of New Zealand prehistory and helped recruit 'another renegade historian from Cambridge', Peter Gathercole, to the University of Otago.⁵¹ In 1961 – on Mulvaney's recommendation – Golson was appointed to establish what became the Department of Prehistory at the Australian National University, where embarked on a regional study of Australia, Melanesia and the Pacific.⁵² Like Mulvaney, he approached his archaeological work from a historical framework, whilst highlighting, in the vein of Clark, the value of interdisciplinary expertise.⁵³ Mulvaney also reflected on their parallel careers, noting: 'I was slower off the mark'.⁵⁴

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It is fitting that the first modern archaeological excavation in Australia took place on the banks of the Murray River. The rivers and rivulets of the Murray-Darling system spread like a root pattern across one-seventh of the continent, collecting the monsoonal rains from Queensland and the meltwaters from the Australian Alps as the watercourse wends its way south, then west through the semi-arid interior.⁵⁵ Once a wide, cold, fast-flowing stream, the Murray has developed into a narrow, sinuous, seasonal river. In the last thirteen thousand years, the water has slowed and warmed, forming swamps, low sand dunes and small lakes along the channel, and seasonal wetlands in the wider riverine plain. Plants, fish and game thrived in these new conditions, and, in turn, so did people.⁵⁶ The societies that were drawn to the banks of the Murray wove elaborate nets to trap fish, ducks and large game; they travelled in canoes cut from the bark of the mighty river red gums and patrolled short stretches of the river, rarely straying from the banks any further than a skin of water would allow; they

⁵⁰ Jack Golson, 'Dating New Zealand's Prehistory', *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 64 (1955), 113-136; Jack Golson, 'New Zealand Archaeological Association', *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 64 (1955), 349-352.

⁵¹ Jack Golson, 'Culture Change in Prehistoric New Zealand', in JD Freeman and WR Geddes (eds.), *Anthropology in the South Seas* (New Plymouth: Avery, 1959), 29-74; Golson, 'Old Guards and New Waves', 4.

⁵² Jack Golson, 'Archaeological Research at Canberra: Its Role and Scope (1962)', AIAS Doc. 1193/1962, Mulvaney Papers, NLA, MS 9615/1/106, Box 13; Peter J Ucko, 'Jack Golson: A Personal Appreciation of his Institutional Role', in M Spriggs, DE Yen, W Ambrose, R Jones, A Thorne and A Andrews (eds.), *A Community of Culture: The People and Prehistory of the Pacific* (Canberra: Department of Prehistory, Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National University, 1993), 32-34.

⁵³ Jack Golson, 'New Zealand Archaeological Association: First Annual Conference', *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 65 (1956), 77-81; John Mulvaney and Jack Golson (eds.), *Aboriginal Man and Environment in Australia* (Canberra: ANU Press, 1971).

⁵⁴ John Mulvaney, 'Grahame Clark in the Antipodes', in Arkadiusz Marciniak and John Coles (eds.), *Grahame Clark and His Legacy* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 27-46, 32.

⁵⁵ Edmund Gill, *Rivers of History* (Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1970), 12.

⁵⁶ John Mulvaney and Johan Kamminga, *Prehistory of Australia* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1999), 303-6.



Fig. 6 Fromm's Landing, South Australia, 1956 (Source: J Mulvaney, NLA).



Fig. 7 Grahame Clark at Fromm's Landing, 1964 (Source: J Mulvaney).



Fig. 8 Gordon Childe (left) receiving an honorary degree at the University of Sydney in 1957 with HV Evatt (right) and AP Elkin (centre) (Source: J Tanner, NAA).



Fig. 9 Norman Tindale (right) and Aldo Massola at Shelter 2, Fromm's Landing, 1956 (Source: D Casey, NLA).

camped, cooked and told stories on the river banks, and, with great ceremony, they buried their dead in shelters and dunes nearby. Winters were lean times; droughts were long and bitter. But the almost annual spring floods ensured seasons of plenty. When the European settlers arrived, the lower Murray and the lower Darling were perhaps the most densely populated areas of the continent.⁵⁷ In archaeological terms, the Murray River is Australia's Nile.⁵⁸

The sandy banks of the lower Murray had long loomed large in John Mulvaney's imagination. Since his return to Australia in 1953, he had continued to read widely about existing research into Australia's Indigenous past. He published a review of the literature in a seminal two-part article in *Historical Studies*, 'The Australian Aborigines 1606-1929: Opinion and Fieldwork', which ranged from the observations of seventeenth-century Dutch voyagers through to the work of early twentieth-century anthropologists. Archaeologist Denis Byrne has called the article as 'an almost ritualistic cleaning of the slate before "modern" archaeology began', in which he 'held the cultural evolutionism of ethnology to account for the damage it had done to Aborigines'.⁵⁹ Historian Greg Denning described it as 'being about the marginal space between prehistory and history', or, as he later named it, 'the ethnographic moment': 'that moment in which confrontation with otherness leads to depiction not only of the other but of self.'⁶⁰ For Mulvaney, however, there was a more pressing purpose to his historical review: he was sifting through the archives in search of sediment to sink his trowel. Where better to apply new field techniques than a site with established archaeological potential? He found what he was looking for at Devon Downs and Tartanga on the Murray River.

In a pioneering archaeological excavation conducted in 1929 Herbert Hale and Norman Tindale of the South Australian Museum had uncovered Aboriginal artefacts twenty feet below the surface at Devon Downs and the nearby island of Tartanga. Their report on the excavation documented rich layers of cultural and environmental change on the river bank at

⁵⁷ Mulvaney and Kamminga, *Prehistory of Australia*, 303-6.

⁵⁸ John Mulvaney, 'Archaeological Excavations at Fromm's Landing on Lower Murray River, South Australia', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria* 72(2) (1960), 53-85, 56.

⁵⁹ Denis Byrne, 'Deep Nation: Australia's Acquisition of an Indigenous Past', *Aboriginal History* 20 (1998), 82-107, 92.

⁶⁰ Greg Denning, 'The History in Things and Places', in Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths (eds.), *Prehistory to Politics: John Mulvaney, the Humanities and the Public Intellectual* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996), 85-97, 88.

both sites, and the depth intimated a substantial antiquity.⁶¹ Perhaps this was another dawn for Australian archaeology? Mulvaney certainly believed so, describing Hale and Tindale as ‘the founding fathers of Aboriginal prehistory’.⁶² It was the first stratigraphic excavation on the continent. Australian naturalist Charles Barrett was one of the few that enthused about the finds at Devon Downs and Tartanga. ‘This is the opening chapter of the Romance of Excavation in Australia,’ he declared in the *Herald*, ‘It should stimulate research and may lead to a series of expeditions [in] the quest of prehistoric man in our country.’⁶³ Yet, with the exception of a handful of ‘rough and ready’ excavations, mostly conducted for the purpose of collecting artefacts, ‘the quest for prehistoric man’ stalled.⁶⁴ The results of these early stratified excavations were easily forgotten or ignored. Surface collecting prevailed.

It is worth probing the assumptions of these pioneering curators-turned-excavators. Tindale believed that the Devon Downs excavation ‘directly contradicted’ the contemporary consensus ‘that no cultural changes were evident, and that the residence of the Australian Aborigines had not extended far enough back to have affected the ecology of the land.’⁶⁵ But despite the emphasis he placed on cultural change in Aboriginal society, his views remained tangled in the same racial thinking of the collectors. He used the artefacts from Devon Downs to help devise a five-stage cultural sequence for Aboriginal Australia, in which each ‘culture’ (recognisable by artefact-types) was of a different racial origin, and in which the succession of ‘cultures’ – or cultural change – was due to the arrival of the next ethnic group. In other

⁶¹ Herbert M Hale and Norman B Tindale, ‘Notes on Some Human Remains in the Lower Murray Valley’, *Records of the South Australian Museum* 4 (1930), 145-218.

⁶² Mulvaney, ‘The Stone Age of Australia’, 65.

⁶³ Charles Barrett, ‘Ancient Man in Australia; Relics found in rocks; Tartanga fossils will be world famous’, *Melbourne Herald*, 18 July 1930.

⁶⁴ The most systematic of the excavations conducted over the following decades were led by Frederick McCarthy of the Australian Museum at Lapstone Creek in 1936 and in Arnhem Land in 1948. Others were conducted by ethnologist William Walford Thorpe at Burrill Lake in 1930, American anthropologist Daniel Sutherland Davidson on Willeroo and Delamere stations in the early 1930s, anthropologist Donald Thomson in Arnhem Land in 1935 and 1937 and physical anthropologist Neil ‘Black Mac’ Macintosh at the Tandandjal shelter in 1949. There were varying degrees of rigour to these early excavations. Amateur anthropologist CC Towle, for example, wrote disapprovingly of the ‘rough and ready methods’ used by ‘the local anthropological “experts”’ who were digging at Emu Plains on the Nepean River in 1935, but his own fifteen foot trench, which he ‘carefully’ excavated in a day, with finds recorded by the ‘shovelful’, produced little enduring information. CC Towle to AS Kenyon, 9 December 1935, Dermot Casey Papers, AIATSIS Library, Canberra, MS 1326/A/f/1/I, Box 1; Frederick D McCarthy, ‘A Rock-shelter near Emu Plains: Result of Excavation’, *Mankind* 1(10) (1934), 240-41; Frederick D McCarthy, ‘The Lapstone Creek Excavation: two culture periods revealed in eastern New South Wales’, *Records of the Australian Museum* 22(1) (1948), 1-34; William Walford Thorpe, ‘A rock shelter at Lake Burrill, N.S. Wales,’ *Mankind* 1(3) (1931), 53-59; Daniel Sutherland Davidson, ‘Archaeological Problems of Northern Australia’, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute Of Great Britain and Ireland* 65 (1935), 145-183.

⁶⁵ Norman B Tindale, ‘A South Australian Looks at Some Beginnings of Archaeological Research in Australia’, *Aboriginal History* 6 (1982), 92-110, 93.

words, Tindale's cultural sequence – like McCarthy's similar scheme – still considered Aboriginal culture to be essentially static; but instead of one static 'culture', he proposed a series of static 'cultures', with change coming only from the succession or intermixture of these cultures, as 'a series of palaeolithic hunting tribal communities' were 'drawn off from the whole seething cauldron of Asia at various intervals of time'.⁶⁶ It was a cultural, historical perspective that remained embedded in the prevailing evolutionary framework. Mulvaney, on the other hand, adopted an historical approach. He believed cultural change to be the result of the diffusion of ideas and local adaptations, not racial characteristics. Equipped with the new tool of radiocarbon dating, he hoped to find a site that would help clarify these differences.⁶⁷

In early 1955, a chance encounter with the amateur anthropologist Charles Mountford brought Mulvaney news of a promising rock shelter only ten kilometres from Devon Downs, with a flat, sandy floor beneath tall limestone cliffs.⁶⁸ It was known as Fromm's Landing, after the European landholders, the Fromms, who once used the river bank as a port for the local paddle steamer.⁶⁹ It now bears its Indigenous name, Tungawa. Although Mountford had combed the surface of the site for artefacts in 1951 and geographer Archibald Grenfell Price had led a student 'dig' in one of the shelters in 1952, the deposit remained largely intact.⁷⁰ Mulvaney visited the site at the earliest opportunity and was struck by the similarities it shared with Haua Fteah in Libya. The shelter presented a rare opportunity: he relished the possibility of comparing his archaeological findings with Tindale and Hale's 1929 excavation. In the early days of 1956, with piecemeal equipment and a motley crew of field assistants, Mulvaney bundled himself into a friend's overcrowded car and drove overland from Melbourne to the site of Fromm's Landing.

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⁶⁶ Norman B Tindale, 'Ecology of Primitive Aboriginal Man in Australia', in A Keast, RL Crocker and CS Christian (eds.), *Biogeography and Ecology in Australia* (Den Haag, Netherlands: W Junk, 1959), 36-51, 39. Norman B Tindale, 'Culture Succession in South-Eastern Australia', *Records of the South Australian Museum* 13 (1957), 1-49; McCarthy, 'The Lapstone Creek excavation', 1-34.

⁶⁷ Mulvaney, 'Archaeological Excavations at Fromm's Landing', 53-56.

⁶⁸ John Mulvaney, 'Digging in the Archaeology Archives', *Australian Archaeology* 50 (2000), 1-6.

⁶⁹ Mulvaney, *Digging Up a Past*, 95.

⁷⁰ Mulvaney, 'Digging in the Archaeology Archives'; Archibald Grenfell Price, 'St Mark's College Scientific Work at Fromm's Landing', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society Australasia, South Australian Branch*, 53 (1952) 25-27.

Just shy of his thirtieth birthday, Mulvaney found himself in ‘a daunting and lonely position’ in 1956.⁷¹ The sole university-trained prehistoric archaeologist in the country, with few funds, little field experience, and very few people to consult for advice, he faced challenges every way he went.⁷² He understood the importance of uncovering the environmental story of the river banks, not just the cultural materials, so he tried to persuade an earth scientist and specialists in shell, bone and pollen to join him.⁷³ He was rebuffed by all but the pollen analyst, Sue Duigan, who had been a fellow student at Cambridge. As for field assistants, he recruited an eclectic team of historians, classicists, scientists and adventurers – five women, nine men – most of whom were affiliated with the History and English departments at the University of Melbourne, where he was teaching Greek and Roman history. The team included Dermot Casey, a skilled photographer and surveyor who had excavated with Mortimer Wheeler on sites in Britain, Vivienne Rae-Ellis, who went on to write the controversial 1976 book *Trucanini: Queen or Traitor?*, and the historians Geoffrey Blainey and Ray Ericksen.⁷⁴ Mulvaney’s wife, Jean, was one of the few members of the field team who had any personal experience of Aboriginal culture. She had met John while he was studying in Cambridge, soon after she had completed a two-year cycling trip around Australia, mostly alone, and funded along the way through work as fruit picker, waitress, fish packer, cook, babysitter, labourer, nurse and pearler, amongst other things. During this trip she had spent time in the Northern Territory with Aboriginal people, shooting crocodiles from a paperback raft on the Daly River and hunting buffalo from horseback.⁷⁵ Sadly, she never wrote of these experiences.

In 1956 there was no legislation in place that defined the legal status and ownership of artefacts once excavated, no protocols for arranging land access, and very few specialist labs to test samples. Mulvaney even faced difficulties publishing the results of his excavation – there were so few journals interested in Australian material. He jumped these hurdles one at a time. He gained a £200 grant from his head of school, Max Crawford, who became an

⁷¹ Mulvaney, *Digging Up a Past*, 96.

⁷² Mulvaney found local support in Dermot Casey, who was an important source of information and advice for a number of archaeologists, such as Harry Allen, Peter White and Isabel McBryde. See Dermot Casey Papers, AIATSIS Library, Canberra, MS 1326/A/a/i, Box 1. Mulvaney also consulted his Cambridge mentors as he was analysing the finds from Fromm’s Landing. See, for example, John Mulvaney to Grahame Clark, 22 May 1958, Sir Grahame Clark: archaeological papers, Cambridge University Library, Department of Manuscripts and University Archives, Cambridge, GBR/0012/MS Add.9409/78.

⁷³ Mulvaney, *Digging Up a Past*, 97, 101.

⁷⁴ John Mulvaney, ‘Fromm’s Notebook I, 1956’, Mulvaney Papers, NLA, MS 9615/8.1/2, Box 61.

⁷⁵ In his autobiography, Mulvaney described this trip as lasting three years; he later revised this to two (pers. comm. 2016); Mulvaney, *Digging Up a Past*, 76.

important champion of Mulvaney's 'unorthodox' archaeological activities.⁷⁶ He borrowed cars from friends and charged his field assistants ten shillings for every day on site.⁷⁷ He arranged for all the finds from Fromm's Landing to go to the South Australian Museum.⁷⁸ And he formed a relationship with the European landholders in order to access the site. It never occurred to him to ask the traditional owners of the land – after all, the Fromms hadn't encountered any Aboriginal people in the lower Murray since they arrived in 1906.⁷⁹

'An archaeological dig', in the words of Greg Dening, one of Mulvaney's field assistants from the 1958 season at Fromm's Landing, 'is a very public and total event. It is not like sitting in a library or archive. It is full of negotiations – with government and local authorities, with landowners, with sponsors, with those who have special knowledge about the site, with other scientists and disciplines, with volunteer workers, with students for whom it is a learning experience. There is discomfort, anxiety, camaraderie and small moments of triumph in an archaeological dig.'⁸⁰ As Mulvaney negotiated these complexities, he relied heavily on his experience with McBurney in Libya.⁸¹

The modern era of archaeological investigation in Australia began on Friday 13 January 1956. It was an inauspicious start. 'Our 1st day,' Mulvaney wrote in his field notes, 'Instruction in trowelling, sieving and sorting resulted in slow progress.'⁸² The field team camped on the top of the colourful eroded limestone cliffs and each day they clambered down to the shelter below on a track cut into the soft limestone by the site's European namesake. The delays in these opening days were frustrating, but necessary. Mulvaney was determined to distinguish this dig from the amateur excavations which so far constituted Australian archaeological history. He insisted on teaching 'Cambridge methods'. He was dismayed on the third day of the dig when an 'unskilled excavator' found a large grinding stone and removed it from position.⁸³ Context is everything in archaeology.

On site the team dispersed. A grid had been laid down over the shelter, and two or three 'excavators' worked slowly on one square at a time, purposefully scraping the sand with their

⁷⁶ Mulvaney, *Digging Up a Past*, 98, 113.

⁷⁷ Mulvaney, 'Digging in the Archaeology Archives', 1-6.

⁷⁸ John Mulvaney to Herbert Hale, Director of the South Australian Museum, undated, in 'Fromm's 6, 1963', Mulvaney Papers, NLA, MS 9615/8.1/6, Box 61.

⁷⁹ Mulvaney, 'Fromm's Notebook I, 1956', 19 January 1956.

⁸⁰ Dening, 'The History in Things and Places', 87.

⁸¹ Mulvaney, *Digging Up a Past*, 83-84.

⁸² Mulvaney, 'Fromm's Notebook I, 1956', 13 January 1956.

⁸³ Mulvaney, 'Fromm's Notebook I, 1956', 15 January 1956.

trowels. A little distance away, and further along the production line, the ‘sieves’ tipped buckets through a fine steel mesh, shaking the dust out and squatting over the residue, separating bones from stones, shell from charcoal. All finds were recorded according to their location and then packed in white paper bags and labelled.⁸⁴ At calculated intervals, Mulvaney would halt proceedings to collect a radiocarbon sample, using a silver spoon to avoid contamination. After negotiating the tricky top levels, which were riddled with rabbit burrows – their tunnels of yellow sand creating a ‘honeycomb’ of the ashy deposit – they descended into layers of shell middens and hearths and other signs of ‘intensive occupation’.⁸⁵ At night they returned, tired and dirty, to a fire of chopped Mallee roots, an unexciting meal, and the latest chapter of Howard Spring’s *Fame is the Spur*, which Geoffrey Blainey read aloud in serial form.⁸⁶

As they dug, they noticed gradual changes in the deposit and, occasionally, they glimpsed a moment in time: a rough scattering of charcoal and bone marked the site of a hearth, a place where people had once prepared and cooked food; a scattering of ‘flakes’ – stone-tool debris – surrounded the spot where a craftsman had once chipped – or ‘knapped’ – a rock into shape; and piles of blackened shells spoke of an ancient feast held by the river bank. It took four weeks for them to reach bedrock. In the final days, Mulvaney stood at the base of the five-metre pit, sketching the finely layered sand surrounding him on three sides: an archive of cultural and environmental change. After the relentless ‘century heat’ of the last four weeks, he mused that perhaps the site had been used ‘as a shelter from sun, rather than from rain’.⁸⁷ Looking at the shells scattered in the lowest layers, he wondered whether the site marked a ‘former shoreline?’⁸⁸ Sue Duigan attempted to collect pollen samples from the trench wall – to no avail – while others recorded the art and engravings on the rockshelter. They resolved to return to the site the next year and covered the trench with timber.

They had frequent visitors in that first field season. On 23 January 1956, Norman Tindale came to the site. He stayed for three days, helping excavate during the day and at night sharing his views on the Devon Downs site and his proposed model of cultural succession in Australia. Mulvaney listened attentively, but cautiously. Since his return to Australia in late 1953, he had been navigating challenging disciplinary terrain. As the sole university trained

⁸⁴ Mulvaney, ‘Archaeological excavations at Fromm’s Landing’, 58-59.

⁸⁵ Mulvaney, ‘Fromm’s Notebook I, 1956’, 19 January 1956.

⁸⁶ Mulvaney, *Digging Up a Past*, 99.

⁸⁷ Mulvaney, ‘Fromm’s Notebook I, 1956’, 1 February 1956.

⁸⁸ Mulvaney, ‘Fromm’s Notebook I, 1956’, 4 February 1956.

archaeologist working on Australia, his peers became the handful of Museum ethnologists interested in Australian prehistory and the notorious stone tool collectors.⁸⁹ Mulvaney was often as dismayed by practices of the so-called ‘professionals’ as he was by the amateur enthusiasts. One curator ‘sieved’ his sites by shovelling excavated material onto the metal mesh of a bedstead; another discarded everything except ‘finished’ stone tools, ignoring food debris, shells and ‘waste flakes’.⁹⁰ Many of the stone tool collectors considered themselves ‘gatekeepers’ of Aboriginal sites, refusing to disclose a site’s location until they had plundered its contents.⁹¹ But since these were the individuals who claimed possession of Aboriginal sites, Mulvaney actively worked with them, seeking to learn what he could while educating them about new techniques. He tried to disrupt the ‘finders-keepers’ mentality of the collectors and drew their attention to the science of stratigraphy. ‘This was the start of his political activism,’ David Frankel observes, ‘which was later to become ever more important in his life and to Australian society.’⁹² Mulvaney paid tribute to the most rigorous of his predecessors, and although he disagreed with much of what McCarthy and Tindale did, he was a friend to both, and acted as a broker to their professional rivalry.⁹³ Tindale left Fromm’s Landing in 1956 feeling impressed by the ‘keenness and attention to detail’ of the field team. ‘The equipment they are using is new and good and several ideas on excavation aids which they have put into practice should be incorporated into any new equipment we may obtain ourselves,’ he wrote back to the South Australian Museum.⁹⁴ Tindale also offered plenty of advice to the young team, much of which Mulvaney later ‘decided against’.⁹⁵

The biggest flood in recorded history inundated the lower Murray in late 1956. It was devastating for the local communities and the South Australian economy, destroying hundreds of kilometres of crops and flooding whole towns.⁹⁶ The river lapped at the edge of the trench and caused Mulvaney to postpone the next field season. But he returned in 1958, and again in 1960 and 1963, using the Fromm’s Landing area as an archaeological training

⁸⁹ Griffiths, ‘In Search of Australian Antiquity’, 52-57.

⁹⁰ Carmel White, ‘Plateau and Plain: Prehistoric Investigations in Arnhem Land, Northern Territory’, PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1967, 471-75.

⁹¹ Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors*, 78.

⁹² David Frankel, ‘The Archaeologist as Tribal Elder: John Mulvaney 1925-2016’, *Australian Archaeology* 82(3) (2016), 286-89, 88.

⁹³ John Mulvaney, ‘ANU: Proposal for Honorary Degrees: F.D. McCarthy and N.B. Tindale, 1979-1980’, Mulvaney Papers, NLA, MS 9615/7/25, Box 60.

⁹⁴ Norman Tindale to Herbert Hale, 1 February 1956, in: Mulvaney, ‘Digging in the Archaeology Archives’, 4.

⁹⁵ See, for example, Mulvaney, ‘Fromm’s Notebook I, 1956’, 23 January 1956, 1 February 1956; John Mulvaney, ‘Fromm’s 2 Notebook, 1958’, Mulvaney Papers, NLA, MS 9615/8.1/3, Box 61, 18 February 1958.

⁹⁶ Emily O’Gorman, *Flood Country: An Environmental History of the Murray-Darling Basin* (Melbourne: CSIRO Publishing, 2012), 135-136.

ground for students and staff from the University of Adelaide.⁹⁷ Geomorphologists Rowley Twidale and GH Lawton, who co-authored the 1964 report on Fromm's Landing with Mulvaney, were instrumental in establishing the connection with the University of Adelaide and helping to turn the site into an archaeological training ground. 'This revival of excavation work with such intense activity is very interesting and should provide some extremely useful and much needed information,' South Australian anthropologist TD Campbell wrote to Casey in 1963.⁹⁸

Like most archaeological sites, the story of Fromm's Landing emerged slowly, in the aftermath of the dig, through the laborious processes of counting, categorising, and testing. It is not the one exciting find that defines a site, but the endless hours of routine recording. Since there was no radiocarbon laboratory functioning in Australia at the time to date the site, Mulvaney drew on the family connections of a member of his field team, Dermot Casey. It is a little-known fact that Minister for External Affairs RG Casey (Dermot's brother) helped obtain the first Australian dates from a stratified Aboriginal site. When he next flew to New York for a meeting at the United Nations, he travelled with four radiocarbon samples from Fromm's Landing in his luggage.⁹⁹ These precious samples were passed on to a Harvard archaeologist, Hallam Movius, who sent the results back in 1959, revealing that the site had been occupied since the time of the Pyramids, almost five thousand years ago.¹⁰⁰

The Fromm's Landing excavations yielded a jaw of a Tasmanian devil and a tooth of a Tasmania tiger, both of which must have been living on mainland Australia between 3900 and 3300 years ago. The skeleton of a dingo – an introduced species – was found at the 3000 year level at Fromm's Landing, leaving Mulvaney to wonder if the arrival of the dingo caused the mainland extinction of these native carnivores. In later seasons, Twidale uncovered evidence of an enormous flood around 3000 years ago, in which the river swelled a metre higher than the record-breaking 1956 flood. 'After I delivered a public lecture

⁹⁷ Mulvaney, *Digging Up a Past*, 114.

⁹⁸ TD Campbell to Dermot Casey, 26 September 1963, Dermot Casey Papers, AIATSIS Library, Canberra, MS 1326/A/h/1-3, Box 1.

⁹⁹ John Mulvaney to John Callow, 9 April 1963, 'Kenniff C14 Official Date Sheets', Mulvaney Papers, NLA, MS 9615/8.4/8, Box 62; Mulvaney, *Digging Up a Past*, 100-101.

¹⁰⁰ Though, as Mulvaney is quick to point out, geomorphologist Edmund Gill 'deserves credit for being the first field worker to date Aboriginal occupation', collecting 1800 year old samples from unstratified middens in 1954. Mulvaney, *Digging Up a Past*, 322-323.

disclosing this evidence,' Mulvaney later wrote, 'I was deluged (for that is the appropriate term) by people asking if this was Noah's Flood!'¹⁰¹ Such was the grip of sacred history.¹⁰²

The Fromm's Landing excavation report, which combined environmental data about river levels with archaeological information, history and ethnography, has become standard research methodology in Australian archaeology.¹⁰³ Mulvaney drew upon documents and material evidence to reconstruct a picture of how people lived on the Murray River over the past five thousand years, what they ate, what technology they used, and how they adapted to the changing environment. The artefacts he uncovered at Fromm's Landing underpinned his landmark overview of the field, published in the *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* in 1961, in which he reviewed existing research and posed the large, continental questions that would dominate the next decade of archaeological investigation.¹⁰⁴ As Rhys Jones wrote: 'Mulvaney's 1961 paper, steeped as it was in the concepts and controversies of the previous forty years, can in some ways be seen as the last major contribution of the older style, and yet in terms of its critical approach ... it heralded a new tradition in Australian studies, which it itself did much to stimulate.'¹⁰⁵ The excavation of Fromm's Landing marked the dawn of a new phase of archaeological research in Australia: 'an approach,' in Isabel McBryde's words, 'based on controlled stratigraphic excavation and systematic survey work, rather than random digging and collecting.'¹⁰⁶ Australian archaeology was beginning to emerge, Mulvaney reflected, 'from the byways of antiquarianism and the haphazard fringes of lunacy, into a vigorous and exciting discipline.'¹⁰⁷

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After the first season at Fromm's Landing, Mulvaney led a range of excavations in his home state of Victoria. With Dermot Casey by his side, he surveyed the Glenelg River for stratified cave deposits, searched the small shelters at Glen Aire on the Otway coast and assessed the

¹⁰¹ Mulvaney, *Digging Up a Past*, 114.

¹⁰² Daniel Lord Smail, 'In the Grip of Sacred History', *The American Historical Review* 110(5) (Dec 2005), 1337.

¹⁰³ Mulvaney, 'Archaeological Excavations at Fromm's Landing', 53-85.

¹⁰⁴ Mulvaney, 'The Stone Age of Australia'.

¹⁰⁵ Rhys Jones, 'Rocky Cape and the Problem of the Tasmanians', PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1971, 52.

¹⁰⁶ Isabel McBryde, 'Archaeology in Australia – Some Recent Developments', *The Record* 6(1) (Mar 1964), 5-7, 5.

¹⁰⁷ John Mulvaney, 'Prehistory from Antipodean Perspectives', *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* 37(2) (1971), 228-252, 229.

archaeological potential of the basalt plains of western Victoria.¹⁰⁸ But he yearned to travel further afield. ‘One of the essential requirements for an objective prehistory,’ he stressed, ‘was the excavation of stratified sequences in other regions.’¹⁰⁹ He was eager to gain a broad outline of the chronology and cultural sequence of ancient Australia: how long had people been in Australia? Where did they come from and where did they first settle? How fast did they colonise the Australian continent and what routes did they take on their journeys? In 1960, these questions led him to the Carnarvon Ranges in western Queensland, almost two thousand kilometres north of Fromm’s Landing, but part of the same great river system. It takes three months for water to flow from the tributaries around Kenniff Cave to the mouth of the Murray.¹¹⁰

As Mulvaney roamed the Carnarvon Ranges periodically over four years, sifting through its material archive, he became increasingly aware that he was walking through inscribed country. The land held stories he could not understand. It was on his first fieldtrip to Queensland, in 1960, that he finally knowingly met an Aboriginal person. It was an incidental encounter in a pub in the remote town of Mitchell – he would not work closely with Aboriginal people until three years later at Yirrkala in Arnhem Land.¹¹¹ ‘I felt like an explorer in this ancient landscape,’ he wrote in his memoirs; but he yearned to learn more about its original explorers.¹¹²

One cold morning in August 1960, while his colleagues were on a supply run, Mulvaney made his way alone across a sandy flat in the Carnarvon Ranges towards a weathered sandstone outcrop. He was aiming for a shadow in the wall: a vast concavity in the rock.¹¹³ In the distance he could hear the meandering flow of Marlong Creek. As he approached, on either side of the cavern, he made out handprints on the white, flaking sandstone: red and yellow ochre forcefully blown onto flesh. Hands reaching out across time. The stencils followed him into the cavern, where he came face-to-face with a ‘striking’ red figure: a five-

¹⁰⁸ John Mulvaney, ‘Research into the Prehistory of Victoria: A Criticism and a Report on a Field Survey’, *Historical Studies: Australia and New Zealand* 8(29) (1957), 32-43; John Mulvaney, ‘Archaeological Excavations on the Aire River, Otway Peninsula, Victoria’, *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria* 75(1) (1962), 427-432; John Mulvaney, ‘Prehistory of the Basalt Plains’, *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria* 77(2) (1964), 1-15.

¹⁰⁹ John Mulvaney and EB Joyce, ‘Archaeological and Geomorphological Investigations on Mt Moffat Station, Queensland, Australia,’ *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* 31 (1965), 147-212, 149.

¹¹⁰ Gill, *Rivers of History*, 12.

¹¹¹ Inglis, ‘John Mulvaney’s Universities’, 38.

¹¹² Mulvaney, *Digging up a Past*, 109.

¹¹³ John Mulvaney, ‘Kenniff/Tombs notebook, 1960’, Mulvaney Papers, NLA, MS 9615/8.4/2, Box 62, 10 August 1960.



Fig. 10 Rollright Stones, near Long Compton, England, where John Mulvaney had his first encounter with the deep past. (Source: B Griffiths).



Fig. 11 Excavation at Kenniff Cave, 1962 (Source: J Mulvaney).

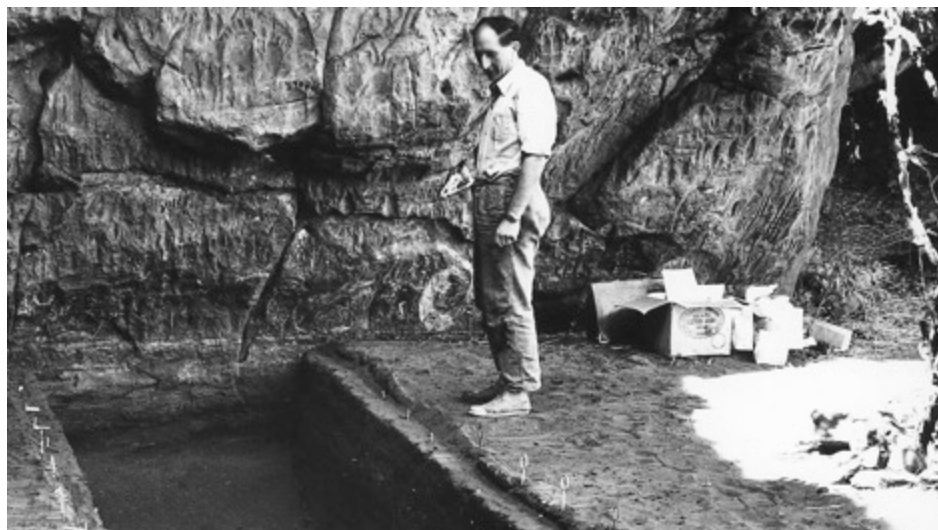


Fig. 12 John Mulvaney at Ingaladdi, Northern Territory, 1966 (Source: *The Australian*, 24 June 2016).

foot nine person, vividly outlined in red ochre, arms outstretched, ‘guarding the entrance’ to the shelter.¹¹⁴ ‘In the eerie silence of the dark and frigid cave,’ Mulvaney later wrote, ‘I felt a strange sensation, for surely this was a ceremonial site of profound significance. It was not a place in which to be alone’.¹¹⁵ He made his way around the shelter slowly, systematically photographing the art, allowing himself to become absorbed in the task. He counted at least 181 stencilled hands, and carefully recorded the red figure, ‘three-dimensional in the shadows’.¹¹⁶ In his blue-lined exercise book, he also made notes about the more recent ‘European scrawlings’ over the surface of the stencil, casual graffiti defacing ‘this undoubted sacred place’.¹¹⁷

The shelter had been abused in other ways, too. Local Europeans knew it as ‘The Tombs’, for it had once been a burial chamber. Over many generations people had come here to farewell their dead. The bodies, wrapped in bark, bound with hides and decorated with ochre, were carefully placed in the natural tunnels in the rock. But by the time Mulvaney visited in 1960, little evidence remained of this elaborate mortuary culture. The graves had been plundered, the bodies souvenired or sold.¹¹⁸ Archaeologists, with trowels in hand and eyes on the earth, are often accused of such destructive activities. But archaeology, Mulvaney believed, is a fundamentally creative exercise. Through a careful and systematic program of recording and excavation, he hoped to piece together the history of those who had lived in this region before the arrival of the British.

He had been drawn to the Carnarvon Ranges after looking at some photographs he had been sent in late 1959 by Reg Orr, a radio operator for the Royal Flying Doctor Service who spent his free time searching the mountainous region for Aboriginal art.¹¹⁹ As Mulvaney rifled through the box of photos on his desk at the University of Melbourne, his eyes were drawn to a shelter with level sandy floors and ornately decorated walls. ‘Chance, linked with a hunch, would not constitute a respectable research design today,’ Mulvaney reflected in 1984, ‘yet that combination sufficed to discover a major site which both solved and posed problems of

¹¹⁴ Mulvaney and Joyce, ‘Archaeological and Geomorphological Investigations on Mt Moffat Station’, 204.

¹¹⁵ Mulvaney, *Digging Up a Past*, 109.

¹¹⁶ Mulvaney and Joyce, ‘Archaeological and Geomorphological Investigations on Mt Moffat Station’, 195, 204.

¹¹⁷ Mulvaney and Joyce, ‘Archaeological and Geomorphological Investigations on Mt Moffat Station’, 204; Mulvaney, *Digging Up a Past*, 109.

¹¹⁸ Mulvaney and Joyce, ‘Archaeological and Geomorphological Investigations on Mt Moffat Station’, 204

¹¹⁹ RB Joyce to John Mulvaney, 21 September 1959, in: Mulvaney, ‘Digging in the Archaeology Archives’, 4.

continental application.’¹²⁰ The site he referred to was Kenniff Cave, a 300-foot long deep depression in a quartzite sandstone ridge near Meteor Creek, with hand stencils on the walls and bat guano plastered on the grey, gritty floor. It was named after the ‘gun-toting cattle-duffers’ Patrick and James Kenniff, who supposedly used it as a hideout after murdering a policeman and a station-manager deputy in Lethbridge Pocket in 1902. They ‘are to Queensland’, Mulvaney explained in his report, ‘what the Ned Kelly gang is to Victoria.’¹²¹ But for archaeologists, Kenniff Cave is famous for the deep Indigenous history it preserves. The rich and finely stratified structure of the deposit allowed Mulvaney to advance his ‘new approach’ to archaeology.¹²²

He was re-excavating the site on 27 July 1962 when he heard the radiocarbon results from his first field trip.¹²³ His wife Jean relayed a list of dates over the scratchy Royal Flying Doctor Service radio: sample six dated to 12,300 ago.¹²⁴ At first Mulvaney thought there must have been a transmission error. Surely Jean had accidentally added a zero? Jean tersely informed him she had not. But still Mulvaney had difficulty believing the dates. There were no sites in Australia older than the Holocene. On his return he formally questioned the lab about the date. The response was apologetic: the site was actually 12,600 years old. ‘I thought it rash to claim 12,300 [years] for the age of Aboriginal occupation in Australia,’ Mulvaney wrote back excitedly, ‘Now I am delighted to find that it is pushed back a further 300 years.’¹²⁵ When site was published in 1965 the date was revised to 16,000 years ago, which was recalibrated in 1971 to 19,000 years ago, meaning the cave had been occupied at the height of the last Ice Age.¹²⁶ Mulvaney was exhilarated to learn that the first Australians had a Pleistocene past and he called the ABC with the dates, thinking it might become a big news story. He was dismissed with the response that this would be of ‘no interest’ to the general public.¹²⁷

Mulvaney was also excited about the technological story he had uncovered at Kenniff Cave. The depth of the site and the variety of stone tools it contained allowed him to identify ‘a

¹²⁰ John Mulvaney, ‘Foreword: Archaeology in Queensland’, *Queensland Archaeological Research* 1 (1984), 4-7, 5

¹²¹ Mulvaney and Joyce, ‘Archaeological and Geomorphological Investigations on Mt Moffat Station’, 147.

¹²² Mulvaney and Joyce, ‘Archaeological and Geomorphological Investigations on Mt Moffat Station’, 172.

¹²³ John Mulvaney, ‘Mt Moffatt, Kenniff notebook, 1962’, Mulvaney Papers, NLA, MS 9615/8.4/6, Box 62, 27 July 1962.

¹²⁴ John Callow to John Mulvaney, 20 July 1962, Mulvaney Papers, NLA, MS 9615/8.4/8, Box 62.

¹²⁵ John Mulvaney to John Callow, 5 December 1962, Mulvaney Papers, NLA, MS 9615/8.4/8, Box 62.

¹²⁶ See John Mulvaney to Dermot Casey, 18 May 1971, Dermot Casey Papers, AIATSIS Library, Canberra, MS 1326/A/a/i, Box 1.

¹²⁷ John Mulvaney, pers. comm., 2014.

dramatic change' in technology over the past five or six thousand years. The upper (younger) layers were rich with delicately reworked small stone tools: tiny points and backed blades, which appeared to have once been hafted to a wooden grip or handle. The lower (older) layers were dominated by a range of larger, steep-edged, 'non-hafted' artefacts, many of which Mulvaney identified as 'core-scrapers'.¹²⁸ He resisted the common practice of proposing cultural labels for the Kenniff Cave sequence and instead published the results with statistical tables and illustrations to document the changing composition of the tool kit. He later drew together his finds in Queensland, Victoria and South Australia with other archaeological work that was emerging to present an enduring 'two-part' technological sequence for the continent. The conceptual scheme filled a void and was immediately used, critiqued and elaborated upon by his colleagues.¹²⁹ American archaeologist Richard Gould recognised that innovation, not hafting, was the technological marker in this 'two-part' scheme, and in 1969 dubbed the younger tool kit 'The Australian Small Tool Tradition'.¹³⁰ In 1970, archaeologists Harry Allen and Rhys Jones named the older toolkit 'The Australian Core Tool and Scraper Tradition'.¹³¹

Mulvaney outlined this technological story in his landmark continental synthesis, *The Prehistory of Australia*, which he wrote from the ANU. The book revolutionised the conventional narrative of Australian history by painting a rich picture of Aboriginal occupation prior to European settlement and asserting, repeatedly, that Aboriginal people were the 'first Australians'. Indeed, historian Bain Attwood argues that Mulvaney further displaced Europeans in his narrative by considering the history of earlier 'non-European landfalls on the continent', such as the Macassans who visited and traded with Indigenous societies along Australia's northern coast for generations.¹³² In the opening to his bestselling history *Triumph of the Nomads*, Geoffrey Blainey acknowledged the dramatic shift in perspective Mulvaney inspired:

¹²⁸ Mulvaney and Joyce, 'Archaeological and Geomorphological Investigations on Mt Moffat Station', 176.

¹²⁹ Richard A Gould, 'Australian Archaeology in Ecological and Ethnographic Perspective', *Warner Modular Publications* 7 (1973), 1-33, 3.

¹³⁰ Richard A Gould, 'Puntutjarpa Rockshelter: a Reply to Messrs Glover and Lampert', *Archaeology and Physical Anthropology in Oceania* 4 (1969), 229-37.

¹³¹ Rhys Jones and Harry Allen in JM Bowler, R Jones, H Allen and AG Thorne, 'Pleistocene Human Remains from Australia: A Living Site and Human Cremation from Lake Mungo, Western New South Wales', *World Archaeology* 2(1) (1970), 39-60, 48.

¹³² Bain Attwood, 'Making History, Imagining Aborigines and Australia', in Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths (eds), *Prehistory to Politics: John Mulvaney, the Humanities and the Public Intellectual* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996), 98-116, 99.

I used to begin a course on Australian economic history in the accepted manner with the European explorations of the eighteenth century until one day the archaeologist, John Mulvaney, enquired what I said about the earlier 99 per cent of time embraced by the human history of Australia.¹³³

From 1965, Mulvaney worked alongside Golson at the Research School of Pacific Studies. They divided the region between them, with Mulvaney leading and supervising much of the research in Australia and Golson managing archaeological investigations in the South Pacific and New Guinea. After over a decade pioneering field archaeology in Australia, Mulvaney shifted his attention to the institutions and legislation that had formed around him.¹³⁴ As a public advocate for Indigenous heritage, he sought to protect and preserve sites like Fromm's Landing, the Tombs and Kenniff Cave. He also continued to pose research questions and document emerging developments in his three editions of *The Prehistory of Australia*.¹³⁵ 'John was now moving into the role of tribal elder,' Frankel reflects, 'affecting and directing, even while observing.'¹³⁶

In 2012, in his late-eighties, Mulvaney described his role in Australian archaeology as that of an 'organiser', rather than an 'expert'.¹³⁷ The distinction speaks volumes for how much Australian archaeology has transformed over the past sixty years, from a historical enterprise into a specialised craft. It also reflects Mulvaney's earnest, practical style, which was what allowed him to lay the foundations of the modern discipline. He introduced rigorous excavation techniques and an historical vision to a field that was languishing in the hands of amateurs and at the mercy of archaic evolutionary assumptions. And like Childe, his breakthroughs were with the pen as much as the trowel.¹³⁸ He sought to understand the human drama of ancient Australia, using his disciplined imagination to bring past societies to life, and drawing their stories together into a powerful – and empowering – continental narrative.

¹³³ Geoffrey Blainey, *The Triumph of the Nomads: A History of Ancient Australia* (South Melbourne: Macmillan, 1975), viii.

¹³⁴ Griffiths, 'In Search of Australian Antiquity', 56.

¹³⁵ Mulvaney, *The Prehistory of Australia* (1969); John Mulvaney, *The Prehistory of Australia* (Ringwood, Vic: Penguin Books, 1975); Mulvaney and Kamminga, *Prehistory of Australia* (1999).

¹³⁶ Frankel, 'The Archaeologist as Tribal Elder', 288.

¹³⁷ John Mulvaney interviewed by Bronwyn Hanna, 18 September 2012, National Library of Australia, sound recording, ORAL TRC 6265/15.

¹³⁸ This sentence echoes Mulvaney's obituary of Childe. Mulvaney, 'V.G. Childe 1892-1957', 94.



Fig. 13 Point Lookout, New England, looking north towards 'Darkie Point'. Isabel McBryde's regional archaeological survey identified this escarpment country as a cultural divide between coastal communities those that inhabited the tableland (Source: B Griffiths).



Fig. 14 Isabel McBryde (centre) with Richard Roberts and Sharon Sullivan at the Yarrowick art site complex, 1966 (Source: *Many Exchanges*).

Two

Haunted Country:

Isabel McBryde in New England

Mist billows up the cliff face, merging with the low cloud, shrouding the valley in a thick white blanket. This is often the view from Point Lookout, a high spur of the New England tableland, northeast of Armidale, near the headwaters of the Styx and Serpentine Rivers. On a clear day, the view stretches over the high country in the west and eastwards out to sea, and sharp rays of light pierce the canopy of the rainforest below, setting the wet understory of moss and ferns and staghorns aglow. Today, as the clouds heave across the granite escarpment, the snowgums become lost in the white.

I am here on the trail of the archaeologist Isabel McBryde, who roamed the landscape of northern New South Wales in the 1960s in search of rock art and ceremonial grounds, scarred trees and surface scatters, middens and massacre sites, rock shelters and quarries. ‘We aim at a complete, systematic and objective record of all archaeological features in an area,’ McBryde wrote of her survey team in 1962, ‘not only the most spectacular’.¹ Her study area extended from the high plateau country of the tablelands, with ‘its western edge sloping gently to the black soil plains’ of the Darling Basin, to the broad rivers of the subtropical coastal plains in northern New South Wales. Sites on the escarpment, such as Point Lookout, marked the divide between these dramatically different environmental zones.² She hoped, through her survey, to understand the cultural implications of these varying climates and environments: she yearned to understand ‘the personality of New England’.³

But as I make my way through the undergrowth on this cool, damp May morning, I am haunted by the words of the great Australian poet Judith Wright, who came here often as a

¹ Isabel McBryde, ‘Archaeological Field Survey Work in Northern New South Wales’, *Oceania* 33(1) (Sep 1962), 12-17, 14.

² Isabel McBryde, *Aboriginal Prehistory in New England: An Archaeological Survey of Northeastern New South Wales* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1974), 2-4.

³ Jack Golson, ‘The Personality of New England: Isabel McBryde and the dimensions of her regional archaeology’, in I Macfarlane, MJ Mountain and R Paton (eds.), *Many Exchanges: Archaeology, History, Community and the Work of Isabel McBryde* (Canberra: Aboriginal History Inc., 2005), 13-34.

child. She lived on the tablelands and camped at Point Lookout on holidays with her father, as he had with his mother before her. She remembered being mesmerised by the splendour of the cliffs, the mystery of the thickly forested valley and the ‘the great blue sweep of the view from the Point to the sea’.⁴ But she saw a darkness here, too. To the north of Point Lookout, jutting out from the plateau and dropping in sheer cliffs into the thick rainforest below is a place once known as Darkie Point. Wright’s father told her the story of how it got its name: how ‘long ago’ a group of Aboriginal people were driven over those cliffs by white settlers as reprisal for spearing cattle. Their sickening plunge was inscribed with Gothic flair in one of Wright’s early poems, ‘Niggers’ Leap, New England’ (1945).⁵ It was later revealed to be an ‘abstracted and a-historicised’ account of a documented event.⁶

Through her poetry, and especially in her later histories, Wright sought to confront the violence in Australian settler history and to reimagine it through the eyes of the first Australians.⁷ Her words breathed sorrow and compassion into the early encounters between settlers and Indigenous people, evoking the tragedy of the Australian frontier. Her love of the New England highlands was bound to a creeping uneasiness about its past, and all that it once was. She lived in ‘haunted country’. In another early poem, ‘Bora Ring’ (1946), she mourned the passing of the dynamic world of the first Australians:

The hunter is gone; the spear
is splintered underground; the painted bodies
a dream the world breathed sleeping and forgot.
The nomad feet are still.⁸

In seeking out such stories, Wright was fighting against what anthropologist WEH Stanner described in 1938 as ‘a mass of solid indifference’ in Australian culture about Indigenous

⁴ Judith Wright, ‘The Broken Links’, in *Born of the Conquerors: Selected Essays* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1991), 29-30, 29.

⁵ Judith Wright, ‘Niggers’ Leap: New England’, *Meanjin* 4(2) (Winter, 1945), 85.

⁶ Georgina Arnott, *The Unknown Judith Wright* (Perth: UWA Publishing, 2016), 161. There is a lore and literature of Aboriginal people being driven off prominent bluffs. See, for example, David Roberts, ‘The Bells Falls Massacres and Oral Tradition’, in Bain Attwood and Stephen Foster (eds.), *Frontier Warfare: The Australian Experience* (Canberra: National Museum of Australia, 2003), 150-57.

⁷ Historian Georgina Arnott cautions against the tendency of postcolonial scholars to merge Wright’s early, passive laments with her later work, which recognised the complicity of her forebears in land-taking and the destruction of Aboriginal lives. Poems like ‘Nigger’s Leap’ and ‘Bora Ring’, Arnott argues, are as much about meeting the stylistic demands Victorian Gothicism as they are about confronting dispossession. While Wright was a progressive thinker, she was also a product of her historical context: ‘It is enough to say that Judith wanted to know about colonial violence during the 1940s.’ Arnott, *The Unknown Judith Wright*, esp, 160-68.

⁸ Judith Wright, ‘Bora Ring’, in *The Moving Image* (Melbourne: Meanjin Press, 1946), 12.

Australia.⁹ In his 1968 ABC Boyer Lectures, Stanner coined the phrase ‘the great Australian silence’ to describe the phenomenon, which could not be explained by mere ‘absent-mindedness’:

It is a structural matter, a view from a window which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape. What may have begun as a simple forgetting of other possible views turned into habit and over time into something like a cult of forgetfulness on a national scale.¹⁰

The ‘silence’ to which he referred was largely a phenomenon of the twentieth century, rather than colonial Australia.¹¹ And its mist was clearing by the time he spoke those words.¹² Despite a tempestuous and harrowing history, Aboriginal people had survived the invasion, and they were making their voice heard. The fog was lifting from Darkie Point.

When Isabel McBryde came to New England in 1960, she expected to encounter the haunted landscape of Wright’s early poems: a land stripped from its first inhabitants, their culture and tradition ‘splintered underground’. She had been led to believe that her study would be a ‘matter of archaeology and the distant past’.¹³ In her role as Lecturer in Prehistory and Ancient History at the University of New England, she began a survey of the highland country and the coastal plains, searching for traces of Aboriginal culture in the landscape. She found a series of stone arrangements to the southwest of Point Lookout, near the Serpentine River, and recorded the cairns, walls, and standing stones that protruded from the steadily encroaching bush.¹⁴ Across the tablelands she found carved trees and surface scatters; she mapped axe quarries on the ridgelines and excavated campsites under towering granite boulders; she recorded ancient middens on the coastal plains and she wandered through old bora grounds in the river valleys. She formed relationships with locals, absorbing their intimate knowledge of the country, its history and traditions, and working with

⁹ WEH Stanner, ‘The Aborigines’, in *The Dreaming & Other Essays* (Melbourne: Black Inc. Agenda, 2009), 123-145, 124.

¹⁰ Stanner, ‘The Boyer Lectures: After the Dreaming’, in *The Dreaming & Other Essays*, 172-224, 189.

¹¹ Stanner argued that the ‘great Australian silence’ began with the establishment of a colony in Sydney in 1788. Henry Reynolds, among others, has argued persuasively that colonial Australia was not as captive to this ‘silence’ as the Australian nation has been. See, for example, Reynolds, *Why weren’t we told?* (Ringwood, Vic: Penguin, 1999), 92.

¹² Ann Curthoys, ‘Stanner and the Historians’, in Melinda Hinkson and Jeremy Beckett (eds.), *An Appreciation of Difference: WEH Stanner and Aboriginal Australia* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2008), 233-50, 235.

¹³ Isabel McBryde interviewed by Martin Thomas, 17-19 August 2004, National Library of Australia, sound recording, ORAL TRC 5194/2.

¹⁴ Isabel McBryde, ‘An Unusual Series of Stone Arrangements near the Serpentine River, Ebor District New South Wales’, *Oceania* 34(2) (Dec 1963), 137-146.

landholders, teachers, historians, field naturalists, and Indigenous people. And as she surveyed this vast region, and imbibed the lore of the land, she stopped thinking of the Aboriginal past as ‘a dream the world breathed sleeping and forgot’ and started seeing it as a living heritage, sustained through powerful connections to country, ‘preserved faithfully by a small community’, and ‘now the focus of a revival of interest in traditional culture and values.’¹⁵

This quiet revelation, experienced by many researchers throughout the 1960s, would forever alter the course of Australian Aboriginal archaeology. As McBryde reflected in 2004, ‘it gave a whole new dimension [to the field] and also made new demands’: no longer were scientific priorities the only priorities.¹⁶ Archaeologists were compelled to be cultural scholars as well as researchers, and they were faced with an ongoing conflict of obligations: ‘your obligation to investigate and record and your obligation to respect the wishes of the members of the creating culture.’¹⁷ The story of Australian archaeology – and Isabel McBryde’s career – is inextricably entwined with that seismic shift in Australian historical consciousness.

o o o

Isabel McBryde is an enigmatic character in Australian archaeology. She is at once conservative and radical, gentle and passionate, modest and visionary. She has quietly, patiently transformed the way we relate to the Aboriginal history of Australia. One of her students, Sharon Sullivan, described her as ‘a real lady’: ‘kind’, ‘courteous’ and ‘thorough’, with a ‘powerful intellect’ and a ‘steel-edged, or should I say stone-edged view, of what is “proper”.’¹⁸ Her conservative demeanour belied her innovative and often subversive ideas and practices. The significance of her early contributions to Australian archaeology remains understated. If John Mulvaney is the so-called Father of Australian Archaeology (a term with which he was uncomfortable), then McBryde is undoubtedly its Mother.

McBryde had no direct contact with Aboriginal people as a child. She grew up in a seafaring family and moved constantly, living in Fremantle, Adelaide, Sydney and Melbourne before

¹⁵ Isabel McBryde, ‘Introduction’, in Isabel McBryde (ed.), *Records of Times Past: Ethnohistorical Essays on the Culture and Ecology of the New England Tribes* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1978), 1-4, 3.

¹⁶ McBryde interviewed by Thomas, ORAL TRC 5194/3.

¹⁷ McBryde interviewed by Thomas, ORAL TRC 5194/3.

¹⁸ Sharon Sullivan, ‘Out of the Box: Isabel McBryde’s Radical Contribution to the Shaping of Australian Archaeological Practice’, in I Macfarlane, MJ Mountain and R Paton (eds.), *Many Exchanges: Archaeology, History, Community and the Work of Isabel McBryde* (Canberra: Aboriginal History Inc., 2005), 83-94, 87, 92.

the age of nine. She was used to her father, a merchant seaman from Scotland, being away at sea, and she took great comfort in his steady stream of letters. She and her older sister were cared for by their mother, who had worked as a secretary before her marriage. Occasionally her mother talked of the Aboriginal people she had known when she lived in Kalgoorlie, but, for the most part, the not-too-distant past was submerged in fog. ‘Why,’ McBryde reflected in her seventies, ‘didn’t I pick up that dissonance in the reporting of Australian history?’¹⁹ Her experience, growing up in white, middle-class Australia in the 1930s and 1940s, speaks to the heart of ‘the great Australian silence’ that Stanner described in 1968. Even ‘socially conscious’ Australians were captive to the structural marginalisation of Indigenous Australians.²⁰

McBryde recalled a childhood of writing and reading poetry, practising the violin, and ‘devouring’ books on the train as she commuted to school. She developed a fascination with the classical world at an early age, especially ancient Rome, and when she matriculated in 1952, she enrolled in Latin and History at Melbourne University. Like Mulvaney, she envisaged a career in school teaching, and also like Mulvaney, her first glimpse of another career path came under the tutelage of the historian John O’Brien.²¹ In his lectures on the classical world, delivered in a precise, even style, he urged his students to query accepted wisdom, to return to the primary sources, and develop their own interpretations of the past from the evidence available. It was an empowering approach and it encouraged an innovative eye and a broad interpretation of what constituted a ‘primary source’. McBryde wrote her honours thesis on the Roman poet Lucan, who raised questions of liberty and power in his epic on civil war, before falling foul of his friend, the mad emperor Nero; she pursued similar themes in her Master’s thesis on cultural and political expressions of resistance to the Roman government at the end of the first century.²² Spurred on by her passion for the ancient world, and the encouragement of her teachers, McBryde decided to pursue a career in the academy.

When she graduated from Melbourne University in 1957, the possibility of a career in archaeology seemed no more than a dream.²³ As curator Frederick McCarthy put it drily in 1959, archaeology remained ‘a non-career course’ in Australia: there were ‘no jobs in the

¹⁹ McBryde interviewed by Thomas, ORAL TRC 5194/1.

²⁰ Stanner, ‘The Boyer Lectures’, 186.

²¹ McBryde interviewed by Thomas, ORAL TRC 5194/1.

²² Isabel McBryde, ‘Imperium et Libertas: The Roman Opposition under the Flavian Principate 69-96 A.D.’, MA thesis, University of Melbourne, 1959.

²³ McBryde interviewed by Thomas, ORAL TRC 5194/2.

universities’, ‘no funds’ to finance excavations, and no disciplinary infrastructure to implement research programmes.²⁴ But McBryde had heard of Mulvaney’s work at Fromm’s Landing in South Australia, and as enamored as she was with the classical world, she could see the importance of his pursuit of Australia’s ancient past. Australian archaeology, she decided, would be ‘more worthwhile and realistic than classical archaeology’.²⁵ But the only way to study prehistoric archaeology was to travel abroad and McBryde faced further hurdles because of her gender: all the scholarships of the day were designated for ‘young men’. She would have to pay her own way. She lectured at the University of New England in Ancient History for six months in 1958 and then, with the support of her parents, she sailed to the United Kingdom.²⁶

For an Australian graduate seeking to study prehistoric archaeology, Cambridge University seemed to her an ‘obvious choice’.²⁷ It had a strong archaeology department under the guidance of Grahame Clark, and postgraduates had the privilege of small classes, fieldwork opportunities and ready access to leading figures in the archaeological world. Clark’s concern for writing *world* prehistory made Cambridge especially attractive. His desire to fill in the gaps of global knowledge – to gain an outline of the diverse ‘cultural endowment of mankind’ – led him to encourage and facilitate research abroad and to equip his students with the archaeological expertise necessary to pioneer a new field.²⁸ In his office, he had a map of the world covered in colourful pins: a physical manifestation of his vision for Cambridge’s international role. Each pin represented an archaeologist from the Cambridge diaspora, from Louis Leakey’s ground-breaking excavations in Kenya and the Rift Valley to Jack Golson’s pioneering work in New Zealand.²⁹ When McBryde arrived in 1958, a lone pin pierced the heart of Melbourne, representing John Mulvaney’s Australian contribution to the ‘Cambridge archaeological empire’.

²⁴ Frederick D McCarthy, ‘Methods and Scope of Australian Archaeology’, *Mankind* 5(7) (Apr 1959), 297-316, 297.

²⁵ McBryde interviewed by Thomas, ORAL TRC 5194/2.

²⁶ McBryde lectured in Ancient History at UNE from March to August 1958 and returned from Cambridge to take up an advertised lectureship in Prehistory and Ancient History in March 1960. Isabel McBryde to Grahame Clark, 3 November 1986, Sir Grahame Clark: archaeological papers, Cambridge University Library, Department of Manuscripts and University Archives, Cambridge, GBR/0012/MS Add.9409/31.

²⁷ Isabel McBryde, ‘Australia’s Once and Future archaeology’, *Archaeology in Oceania* 21(1) (Apr 1986), 13-28, 16.

²⁸ Grahame Clark, *World Prehistory: An Outline* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 260. See also Brian Fagan, *Grahame Clark: An Intellectual Biography of an Archaeologist* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001).

²⁹ A version of this map appears in Grahame Clark, *Prehistory at Cambridge and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 100.

The archaeology and anthropology department was located in a gloomy Edwardian building in Downing Street which also housed the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology.³⁰ Lectures were held in an unattractive and uncomfortable theatre alongside cabinets filled with antiquities from all parts of the world. But the department had a ‘compelling atmosphere’ and McBryde found her time there to be ‘intellectually, very, very stimulating.’³¹ These were the heady post-war years and she recalls feeling an exciting sense of possibility about what could be achieved in the new era.³² Many of the major discoveries in European and British prehistory had been made in McBryde’s lifetime. As Golson reflected in a volume honouring John Mulvaney, ‘The discipline to which we had apprenticed ourselves was young and the opportunities it offered seemed limitless.’³³ And the importance of archaeology at Cambridge was undisputed. Clark described it as being ‘as necessary to civilized man as bread itself’.³⁴

The intellectual influence of Cambridge University was immense for McBryde, as it had been for Mulvaney and Golson before her. But this is not to suggest that Australian archaeology can be reduced to a simple vision of ‘Cambridge in the bush’, as Tim Murray and Peter White proposed in 1981.³⁵ Such a characterisation denies the hybridisation that occurred throughout the field in the 1960s and 1970s, in which a new generation of researchers drew upon local experience as well as other international influences to develop what Jim Allen and Rhys Jones have described as ‘an Australian school’ of archaeology.³⁶ There is, however, no denying the influence of Clark’s Cambridge vision. Throughout the 1960s, the Cambridge diaspora in Australia rapidly expanded with the arrival of Richard Wright, Wilfred Shawcross, Rhys Jones, Peter Bellwood, Peter White, John Clegg, Josephine Flood, Judy Birmingham, and Sylvia Hallam. And the vying schools of archaeological thought at Cambridge continued to play a key role among this new generation of researchers in Australia.³⁷

³⁰ John Mulvaney, *Digging Up a Past* (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2012), 77.

³¹ McBryde, ‘Australia’s Once and Future Archaeology’, 16.

³² McBryde interviewed by Thomas, ORAL TRC 5194/2.

³³ Jack Golson, ‘Old Guards and New Waves: Reflections on Antipodean Archaeology 1954-1975’, *Archaeology in Oceania* 21(1) (Apr 1986), 2-12, 2.

³⁴ Grahame Clark, *Aspects of Prehistory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 52.

³⁵ Tim Murray and Peter White, ‘Cambridge in the Bush? Archaeology in Australia and New Guinea’, *World Archaeology* 13(2) (1981), 255-263, 257.

³⁶ Jim Allen and Rhys Jones, ‘Facts, Figures and Folklore’, *Australian Archaeology* 16 (Jun 1983), 165-167, 166-67.

³⁷ Clark also kept a close eye on the developments in Australia, corresponding with his former students about the evolving discipline, visiting a number of Australian sites in person, and keeping detailed files on the range of evidence emerging from Australia. See Clark’s ‘Australia notebook’, Sir Grahame Clark: archaeological papers,

The Cambridge model of archaeology in the 1950s was dominated by the excavation principles of the eminent archaeologist, Mortimer Wheeler. Archaeology was seen as inextricably entwined with excavation, while other forms of archaeology, such as field surveys and site recording, were considered to be, in McBryde's words, 'the province of the non-digging amateur'.³⁸ Mulvaney had imbibed these principles at Cambridge and returned to Australia advocating the importance of systematic stratified excavation.³⁹ McBryde gained her first field experience conducting stratigraphic excavations at an Iron Age farmstead and two Roman forts on Hadrian's Wall. But she was also drawn to another strain of archaeological thought at Cambridge. She found Clark's ecological approaches – which drew from a broad base of literary, artefactual and botanical evidence – 'eminently translatable' to the Australian context.⁴⁰ And she was intrigued by the work of OGS Crawford and Cyril Fox, who approached an entire landscape as an archaeological site: 'the history of the part', Crawford argued, 'cannot be divorced entirely from the history of the whole.'⁴¹

By studying a region, not simply a site, and by focusing on landscape-society interactions, Crawford was able to read the English countryside in a new light, finding Roman roads and Celtic fields, barrows and quern-quarries, megalithic monuments and medieval castle mounds. 'The surface of England is a palimpsest,' he wrote in 1953, 'a document that has been written on and erased over and over again; and it is the business of the field archaeologist to decipher it.'⁴² His method was to look for patterns in the landscape, to study maps and aerial photography, paying particular attention to topography, and then to walk the country, searching for the cultural in the natural. This was his primary source. Secondary sources, 'such as local histories' or seeking out 'the old-time local antiquary' were useful, but 'walking', he believed, was 'preferable to talking'.⁴³ Cyril Fox took a similar approach. He sought to understand the 'personality of Britain': how the nature of the landscape had effected 'the distribution and fates of her inhabitants and her invaders.'⁴⁴ Different environmental zones, he concluded, had unique implications for cultural development.

Cambridge University Library, Department of Manuscripts and University Archives, Cambridge, GBR/0012/MS Add.9409/78.

³⁸ McBryde, 'Australia's Once and Future Archaeology', 17.

³⁹ John Mulvaney, 'Antiquity of Man in Australia: Prehistory', in H Sheils (ed.), *Australian Aboriginal Studies: Conference on Aboriginal Studies, May 1961* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1963), 33-51, 37.

⁴⁰ McBryde, 'Australia's Once and Future Archaeology', 17.

⁴¹ OGS Crawford, *Archaeology in the Field* (London: Phoenix House Ltd., 1953), 36.

⁴² Crawford, *Archaeology in the Field*, 51.

⁴³ Crawford, *Archaeology in the Field*, 51-52.

⁴⁴ Cyril Fox, *The Personality of Britain* (Cardiff: National Museum of Wales, 1938), 9.

McBryde gained firsthand experience with these geographically oriented methods in the last few months of 1959, when she took a scholarship to work in the British School of Archaeology in Athens after finishing her Diploma at Cambridge. There she studied sites across a whole landscape, asking why they were where they were, what connections they had with other sites, and exploring the relationships between history and landscape. It was a fusion of two of her longest-held passions, Classics and Geography. It was also her introduction to understanding the sacred and the mythic in the landscape.⁴⁵

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Isabel McBryde's return to Australia in 1959, after a year abroad, doubled the number of professionally trained Australian archaeologists. She dived immediately into Australian fieldwork, joining her colleague, John Mulvaney, in excavating rock shelters at Glen Aire, Cape Otway, in January 1960. By that stage, Mulvaney already had a vision of the key questions in Australian archaeology. The best way to approach them, he believed, was through careful, systematic excavation of deep stratified sites: 'the cornerstone of prehistory is stratigraphy, and in this pioneering phase of Australian research, precedence must be given to the spade (or preferably the trowel).'⁴⁶

From the University of New England, McBryde began to articulate a different vision for Australian archaeology. 'In Australia,' she wrote in 1962, 'where we have a large continent whose prehistory is still almost unknown, the most worthwhile procedure seems to be regional field surveys, combined with stratigraphic excavation to give cultural and chronological depth to the material recorded.'⁴⁷ Echoing Crawford, she argued that systematic field surveys and site recording should 'form the backbone of any archaeological programme'.⁴⁸ 'Objective prehistory,' McBryde wrote in *The Aboriginal Prehistory of New England*, 'should involve both the far-reaching synthesis, and the minutiae of local, regional research.'⁴⁹ She was fortunate to find a like-minded head of department in the Professor of History, Mick Williams, a 'quiet, almost diffident' character 'temperamentally unsuited to the role of god professor'.⁵⁰ Regional research was part of the ethos of the University of New

⁴⁵ Golson, 'The Personality of New England', 17.

⁴⁶ Mulvaney, 'Antiquity of Man in Australia: Prehistory', 37.

⁴⁷ McBryde, 'Archaeological Field Survey Work in Northern New South Wales', 12.

⁴⁸ McBryde, 'Archaeological Field Survey Work in Northern New South Wales', 12.

⁴⁹ McBryde, *Aboriginal Prehistory in New England*, 15.

⁵⁰ Don Beer, 'A History of History', in JS Ryan (ed.), *The Arts from New England: University Provision and Outreach 1928 to 1998* (Armidale: University of New England, 1999), 74-92, 77.

England: the departments of Geology and Geography both had strong regional programs, and Williams had already established connections with local historical societies and field naturalists by the time McBryde arrived in 1960. He also firmly believed, in McBryde's words, 'that within history there could be room for the study of prehistory.'⁵¹

McBryde was the first female lecturer in the Department of History, and she was alone amongst her colleagues in using material culture as a historical source. When introduced as an 'archaeologist', she was often asked by those outside the University: 'What is there for you to do here?' She sensed the same question on the lips of her colleagues.⁵² Due to the lack of awareness of Indigenous history, she devoted much of her time to community outreach. She advertised the potential of the field, giving public talks at schools and regional societies across northern New South Wales and introducing concepts such as 'antiquity' and 'cultural change' to lay understandings of Aboriginal Australia.⁵³ Through these talks, and in an early film on archaeological techniques, she sought to rein in the persistent culture of surface collecting and educate the broader public of the importance of recognising and protecting Aboriginal sites: 'Occupation sites in Australia (middens, rock shelters and open stations) are not so numerous that we can afford to be prodigal with them, to allow them to be destroyed ... to be dug carelessly by treasure-hunters whose sole interest is the collection of curious relics for the family mantelpiece.'⁵⁴

These public meetings also allowed her to conduct valuable research. Unlike Crawford, McBryde prioritised talking, alongside walking. She sought out and interviewed members of the local Aboriginal communities on the tablelands and the coastal plains, and fostered interest and involvement among locals. A conversation over a cup of tea could yield as much historical insight as a week in the field. In the Clarence Valley, especially, McBryde formed connections with Indigenous communities that maintained a strong sense of cultural

⁵¹ McBryde interviewed by Thomas, ORAL TRC 5194/2.

⁵² Iain Davidson, Isabel McBryde and Graham Connah, 'Archaeology and Palaeoanthropology at U.N.E.: Prehistory and History, 1959-1999', in JS Ryan (ed.), *The Arts from New England: University Provision and Outreach 1928 to 1998* (Armidale: University of New England, 1999), 194-207, 194, 196.

⁵³ John Mulvaney, 'Isabel McBryde: From Regional Research to National Reconciliation and Global Heritage', in I Macfarlane, MJ Mountain and R Paton (eds.), *Many Exchanges: Archaeology, History, Community and the Work of Isabel McBryde* (Canberra: Aboriginal History Inc., 2005), 3-12, 4.

⁵⁴ Isabel McBryde, 'Archaeology in Australia – Some Recent Developments', *The Record* 6(1) (Mar 1964), 5-7, 7. McBryde described making 'a short 16mm. cine film on the excavation of the Seelands rock shelter, primarily for use as a teaching film in the department, but also to show local historical societies'. See Isabel McBryde, 'Report on Archaeological Work in New England District of N.S.W. January to June 1964', 1964, AIATSIS Library, Canberra, PMS 2281, Doc. 64/167, 2.

continuity despite the social and cultural ravages of dispossession.⁵⁵ Over time, her views on site protection became more sensitive to the social aspect of archaeology. She continued to argue against the destruction of sites by ‘treasure hunters’, but she also urged an inclusive approach: ‘If we argue for conservation of sites for protective legislation, and acknowledge the very real concerns of the Aboriginal people, then we should also argue for Aboriginal involvement in decisions of site management, on conservation policy and on research.’⁵⁶ If the deep past was a living heritage, then engaging with Indigenous communities, and making the insights of archaeology accessible to them, seemed to be fundamental to any archaeological program:

Unless archaeology, in the present, addresses social questions, unless it is ‘peopled’ archaeology, its representations will lack dimensions of meaning as pasts, as history. If it fails to interact with other groups within society, it is not accessible to their poetics, it denies to them aspects of their past. Archaeology will be enriched and enriching if it is oriented both to the study of social questions and to working in partnership with social communities.⁵⁷

The landscape of northern New South Wales lent itself to field survey. The thin soils of the tablelands meant that stratified rock shelters were few and far between, while the coastal plains were dominated by recent shell middens: the cultural artefacts of ‘the unremitting efforts of woman the gatherer’.⁵⁸ But McBryde was also aware of the importance of stratigraphy and she was keen to establish a sequence and chronology for every part of her region.⁵⁹ On her initial survey in February 1960 she came across a series of overhangs in a low outcrop overlooking the Clarence River at Seelands near Grafton. The sandstone walls bore clusters of cryptic engravings, the roof of the main shelter was stained by smoke, and

⁵⁵ Isabel McBryde, “‘Worth a Thousand Words’?: Words, Images and Material Culture’, in P McConvell and N Evans (eds.), *Archaeology and Linguistics: Aboriginal Australia in Global Perspective* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1997), 311-340, 313.

⁵⁶ McBryde, ‘Australia’s Once and Future Archaeology’; see also Isabel McBryde, ‘Educational Goals of University Schools of Prehistory and Archaeology: Mechanick Trades in the Ivory Tower?’, *Australian Archaeology* 11 (Dec 1980), 72-80.

⁵⁷ Isabel McBryde, ‘Past and Present Indivisible? Archaeology and Society, Archaeology in Society’, in Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths (eds.), *Prehistory to Politics: John Mulvaney, the Humanities and the Public Intellectual* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996), 65-84, 84.

⁵⁸ Sandra Bowdler, ‘Hook, Line and Dilly Bag: An Interpretation of an Australian Coastal Shellmidden’, *Mankind* 10(4) (1976), 248-258, 256.

⁵⁹ McBryde expressed disappointment about the lack of stratified sites and sought advice from other scholars who knew the area, such as Dermot Casey. Isabel McBryde to Dermot Casey, 20 December 1964, Dermot Casey Papers, AIATSIS Library, Canberra, MS 1326/A/a/i, Box 1.

animal bones, shell fragments and debris from tool-making lay scattered on the sloping sandy floor.⁶⁰ She returned to Seelands in August, and again the next year, to excavate the site, uncovering a dynamic history of occupation over the past six thousand years. She also continued to survey the surrounding area, finding axe-grinding grooves and rock art nearby, and collecting the stories and stone tools amassed by the landowner, Mr O'Grady, during his time in the area.⁶¹ In this slow, thorough way she progressed across the coastal plains, excavating middens, recording rock art, and mapping stone working sites at Evans Head, Station Creek and Moonee, before taking the survey onto the tablelands and western slopes where she dug sites at Bendemeer, Graman and Moore Creek.⁶² She could be ambitious about the scope of the survey as she intended it as an open-ended collaborative departmental program: a year into the survey she took it on as her PhD under the supervision of John Mulvaney and Russel Ward.

Excavation and survey work took place in the university vacations and on weekends. McBryde relied on her students and her colleagues (especially Mary Neeley) as field assistants, and marvelled at their intellectual and physical ability: 'They could drive trucks, mend fences and dissuade curious bulls from exploring the trenches ... All this, of course, provided there was a transistor radio between the sieves and the trenches so no one missed an episode of [the American soap opera] "Portia faces life"'.⁶³ McBryde gained a reputation among her students for her warmth and kindness, as well as her 'nerve and nous'. She was hands-on and hard-working, with the uncanny ability to emerge from a day in a dusty trench, in Sharon Sullivan's words, 'clean, well groomed, with lippy in place and radiating energy and goodwill.'⁶⁴ Her field notebooks are similarly immaculate, filled with detailed observations and ideas, executed in impeccable handwriting.⁶⁵ She was organised, precise

⁶⁰ McBryde, *Aboriginal Prehistory in New England*, 91-3, 168-171.

⁶¹ Isabel McBryde, 'An Archaeological Survey of the New England Region, New South Wales', PhD thesis, University of New England, 1966, 245-46.

⁶² Isabel McBryde, 'Report on Archaeological Work Carried Out in the New England Area of New South Wales', 1963, AIATSIS Library, PMS 2279, Doc. 63/76; 'Report on Archaeological Work in New England District of N.S.W. Jul.-Dec. 1964', 1964, AIATSIS Library, PMS 2282, Doc. 65/224; 'Report on Archaeological Work Northeastern N.S.W.', 1965, AIATSIS Library, PMS 2283, Doc. no.66/412.

⁶³ Attrib. McBryde in Davidson *et al*, 'Archaeology and Palaeoanthropology at U.N.E.', 197. Fieldwork was an intensely cross-disciplinary affair, involving zoologist David Horton, geologist Ray Binns, geographer Ellis Thorpe, sociologist Mary Jackes and English professor John Ryan.

⁶⁴ Sullivan, 'Out of the Box', 87.

⁶⁵ Ingereth Macfarlane, 'Preface: Connections, Complexity and Diversity', in I Macfarlane, MJ Mountain and R Paton (eds.), *Many Exchanges: Archaeology, History, Community and the Work of Isabel McBryde* (Canberra: Aboriginal History Inc., 2005), xix-xxxv, xxii.



Fig. 15 An archaeological odyssey, 1963: (l-r) Sharon Sullivan, Mary Neely, Isabel McBryde, Evan Tully and Mick Moore on a survey of Yandama/Hewent Downs. They are standing in front of McBryde's Land Rover, 'Telemachus' (Source: *Many Exchanges*).



Fig. 16 Archaeologists Mark Moore and June Ross with Indigenous elder Bob Faulkner at Moore Creek Axe Quarry, 2014. Bob Faulkner was part of Isabel McBryde's survey team in 1964 (Source: B Griffiths).

and thorough, and she understood that good food was essential to the success of any fieldwork. She purchased a Rice Bros horse float and refitted it as a mobile field lab, with a sink, a stove, a cupboard, a drawing board, water tanks and material to transform it into a darkroom for developing photos.⁶⁶ It became known as ‘the soup kitchen’ and she towed it along the small, winding New England roads behind her Land Rover, ‘Telemachus’.⁶⁷ She called on a colleague, Professor Ian Turner, to look up the rations for the British Army in Mesopotamia in World War I, and she used that as a catering guide for fieldwork.⁶⁸

Alongside the field survey, McBryde and her students pored over regional historical records, analysed early photographs, and trawled through word lists for insights into Aboriginal culture and traditions. Her perspective was ‘archaeological’, but the mode was ‘cross-disciplinary, and the exercise ethnohistorical.’⁶⁹ ‘It seemed unwise when attempting to reconstruct culture history,’ McBryde reflected in 1978, ‘to ignore the evidence of observers of tribal life at the time of its passing, in the last few decades of its prehistory.’⁷⁰ Her focus on ethnohistory can be seen in her later work on the early anthropologist Mary Bundock and photographers John William Lindt and Thomas Dick, as well as in her students’ honours and masters’ theses on New England, from Sharon Sullivan’s study of the ethnography of the Richmond and Tweed River valleys to Brian Harrison’s work on the Myall Creek massacre.⁷¹ Many of these were brought together in the 1978 book *Records of Times Past*.⁷² Whilst illuminating, she also acknowledged the limitations of these ethnographic sources when interpreting the deep past: ‘The ethnographic present may always haunt the archaeologist in this continent, both inspiring and constraining interpretation.’⁷³

What emerged from her study was a clear, cultural distinction over the last nine thousand years between the societies that lived in the coastal river valleys and those that roamed the tablelands and western slopes.⁷⁴ The differences in rock art, ethnography and artefact assemblages underlined the isolation of the two cultural groups, with the steep escarpment of

⁶⁶ Isabel McBryde, ‘Interim Report on Archaeological Work in the New England District of N.S.W. from May to December 1963’, 1964, AIATSIS Library, PMS 2280, Doc. no.64/99, 4.

⁶⁷ Macfarlane, ‘Preface’, xxii-xxiii.

⁶⁸ Sullivan, ‘Out of the Box’, 87.

⁶⁹ McBryde, “‘Worth a Thousand Words’?”, 311.

⁷⁰ McBryde, ‘Introduction’, 3.

⁷¹ Isabel McBryde (ed.), *Records of Times Past: Ethnohistorical Essays on the Culture and Ecology of the New England Tribes* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1978)

⁷² McBryde, *Records of Times Past*.

⁷³ McBryde, ‘Australia’s Once and Future Archaeology’, 14.

⁷⁴ McBryde, *Aboriginal Prehistory in New England*, 334-40.

the plateau and the poor high country of the tablelands acting as a ‘barrier’ between them.⁷⁵ It showed that while Australia may be a continent, it is made up of many countries.

Yet despite this barrier, McBryde found some rare raw materials – such as andesitic greywacke stone axes – scattered across the whole region. Along with geologist Ray Binns, she investigated the origin, distribution and composition – or petrology – of these stone axes, and together they unravelled a remarkable map of how people had moved and traded across the landscape over several thousands of years. They were able to trace, for example, greywacke stone axes found in excavations at Graman in northern New South Wales to a large axe quarry 200 kilometres away on Mount Daruka, Moore Creek, where greywacke lies cracked in heaps along the ridgeline in sight of Tamworth.⁷⁶ McBryde’s breakthrough was to view these trade routes as more than ‘purely mechanisms for the distribution of raw rare materials’.⁷⁷ By considering the social and ceremonial aspects of the stone axe trade, and the ‘ritual cycles of exchange’, she could glimpse an ancient cultural landscape, with its webs of connections and interactions, its past social affinities and mythology. She had found the shadow of a complex system of exchange that was intimately entwined with the symbolic construction of the landscape.

‘Nobody,’ Mulvaney reflected in 2005, ‘had previously traced and explained the dynamics and social determinants of exchange networks using science, linguistics, anthropology and ethnohistory.’⁷⁸ It was ground breaking international work, coming alongside Colin Renfrew’s famous study of obsidian networks in the Aegean, and it ‘opened new windows on Australian prehistory’.⁷⁹ McBryde later continued her work with axes at Mount William quarry in Victoria, where she mapped a great network of exchange that saw greenstone axes travelling over a thousand kilometres across south-eastern Australia.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Isabel McBryde, ‘Determinants of Assemblage Variation in New England Prehistory’, in RVS Wright (ed.), *Stone Tools as Cultural Markers: Change, Evolution and Complexity* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1977), 225-250, 229, 249.

⁷⁶ Ray Binns and Isabel McBryde, *A Petrological Analysis of Ground-Edge Artefacts from Northern New South Wales* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1972), 63-65.

⁷⁷ Binns and McBryde, *A Petrological Analysis*, 5.

⁷⁸ Mulvaney, ‘Isabel McBryde’, 6.

⁷⁹ Colin Renfrew, JR Cann and JE Dixon, ‘Obsidian in the Aegean’, *The Annual of the British School at Athens* 60 (1965), 225-247.

⁸⁰ Isabel McBryde, ‘Kulin Greenstone Quarries: The Social Contexts of Production and Distribution for the Mt William Site’, *World Archaeology* 16 (1984), 267-85. McBryde records the distribution network as extending over one thousand kilometres in: ‘Continuity and Discontinuity: Wurundjeri Custodianship of the Mt William Quarry’, in S Kleinert and M Neale (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 247-51, 247.

The significance of such vast, sprawling ‘chains of connection’ cannot be overstated. ‘In theory,’ Mulvaney mused, ‘it was possible for a man who had brought pituri from the Mulligan River and ochre from Parachilna to own a Cloncurry axe, a Boullia boomerang and wear shell pendants from Carpentaria and Kimberley.’⁸¹ The exchange networks brought to the fore the intimate knowledge Aboriginal people had of the land and its resources, and the interconnectedness of their societies across the continent. They also provided an archaeological signature for an oral phenomenon: the travels of ancestral beings in the Dreaming, and the songlines they left in their wake.⁸²

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By the time McBryde finished her thesis in 1966, archaeological investigations were being carried out in every Australian state and Australian Aboriginal archaeology was being taught as a university subject in Melbourne, Armidale, Sydney and Brisbane. Amidst this rapid expansion of the field, ‘Miss McBryde’s vigorous one-woman band’ gradually gained the attention of the growing archaeological community.⁸³ ‘There was a need for a regional perspective,’ archaeologist Rhys Jones reflected on the early 1960s, ‘and at that time, only in the southeastern part of South Australia, namely along the lower Murray River were there local assemblages from more than a single site.’⁸⁴ Mulvaney also recognised the significance of regional surveys, announcing in 1964: ‘I feel that the model for us to follow is provided by Miss McBryde’s patient survey and record of all aspects of New England prehistory.’⁸⁵

At the ANU, Mulvaney and Jack Golson fostered a strong program of regional and stratigraphic research. Surveys were conducted across Australia, from Burrill Lake and Wylie Swamp to the Darling Basin and the Carnarvon Ranges.⁸⁶ These regional PhD theses drew

⁸¹ John Mulvaney, ‘“The Chain of Connection”: The Material Evidence’, in Nicolas Peterson (ed.), *Tribes and Boundaries in Australia* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1976), 72-94, 80.

⁸² Isabel McBryde, ‘Goods from Another Country: Exchange Networks and the People of the Lake Eyre Basin’, in John Mulvaney and J Peter White (eds.), *Australians to 1788* (Sydney: Fairfax, Syme & Weldon Associates, 1987), 253-273, 268.

⁸³ Megaw, ‘Australian Archaeology’, 311.

⁸⁴ Rhys Jones, ‘A Continental Reconnaissance: Some Observations Concerning the Discovery of the Pleistocene Archaeology of Australia’, in M Spriggs, DE Yen, W Ambrose, R Jones, A Thorne and A Andrews (eds.), *A Community of Culture: The People and Prehistory of the Pacific* (Canberra: Department of Prehistory, Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National University, 1993), 97-122, 110.

⁸⁵ John Mulvaney, ‘Australian Archaeology, 1929-1964: Problems and Policies’, *Australian Journal of Science* 27(2) (1964), 39-44, 42.

⁸⁶ Harry Allen, ‘Where the Crow Flies Backwards: Man and Land in the Darling Basin’, PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1972; John M Beaton, ‘Dangerous Harvest: Investigations in the Late Prehistoric Occupation of Upland South-East Central Queensland’, PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1977; Michael J Morwood, ‘Art and Stone: Towards a Prehistory of Central Western Queensland’, PhD thesis,

inspiration from the same geographically-oriented schools of thought that had so enchanted McBryde, as well as being driven by the continued emphasis on large-scale excavations and the recovery of assemblages.⁸⁷ But despite these efforts, in the opening pages of *The Prehistory of New England* McBryde lamented that most archaeology in Australia continued to be ‘based on the evidence of a small number of excavated sites, widely separated in both space and time’ while ‘regional studies had been neglected’.⁸⁸ Questions of antiquity, origins, and routes of colonisation continued to dominate research, leaving detailed regional surveys to become ‘the province of the contract archaeologist surveying ahead of development or of the post-graduate student in search of a safe topic.’⁸⁹

Why, we must wonder, did large-scale regional surveys not take on in Australia, considering the insights into land use that McBryde had demonstrated with her work on New England? Was gender a factor? Certainly survey work carried little prestige, while the search for the oldest and most spectacular finds was caught up in the machismo of ‘cowboy archaeology’.⁹⁰ Sylvia Hallam, another pioneer of the regional model, raised this point in 1982, when reviewing Josephine Flood’s survey of the south-eastern highlands, asking: ‘Are only women sufficiently tough, conscientious and foolhardy to collect and analyse such a mass of trivia, and hammer it into meaning and shape?’⁹¹ Feminist scholars such as Joan Gero and Alison Wylie have established the significance of gender in shaping archaeological practice, and the implications this has had for reconstructions of the past.⁹² Yet gender alone gives us limited insight into the division of labour in Australian archaeology: men also mapped landscapes (take, for example, Harry Allen’s sophisticated survey of the Darling Basin), and women also led grand stratified excavations (Carmel Schrire’s pioneering work in Arnhem Land

Australian National University, 1979; Roger Luebbers, ‘Meals and Menus: A Study of Change in Prehistoric Coastal Settlements in South Australia, PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1978; and Josephine Flood, ‘The Moth Hunters: Investigations Towards a Prehistory of the South-Eastern Highlands of Australia’, PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1973.

⁸⁷ Isabel McBryde, ‘Rich Heritage: The Transformation of Archaeological Knowledge of the Human Past in Oceania’, *Australian Archaeology* 37 (1993), 54-57, 5; Laurajane Smith, *Archaeological Theory and the Politics of Cultural Heritage* (New York, Routledge, 2004), 40.

⁸⁸ McBryde, *Aboriginal Prehistory in New England*, 14.

⁸⁹ McBryde, ‘Australia’s Once and Future Archaeology’.

⁹⁰ Stephanie Moser, ‘Science, Stratigraphy and the Deep Sequence: Excavation versus Regional Survey and the Question of Gendered Practice in Archaeology’, *Antiquity* 70(270) (Dec 1996), 813-823; Sandra Bowdler, ‘Review of Recovering the Tracks: The Story of Australian Archaeology by David Horton’, *Australian Archaeology* 37 (Dec 1993), 68.

⁹¹ Sylvia Hallam, ‘Review of *The Moth Hunters: Aboriginal Prehistory of the Australian Alps* by Josephine Flood’, *Aboriginal History* 6 (1982), 154-159, 154.

⁹² Joan Gero, ‘Gender Bias in Archaeology: Here, Then, and Now’, in S Rosser (ed.), *Feminism Within the Science and Health Care Professions: Overcoming Resistance* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1988), 33-43; Alison Wylie, ‘Gender Theory and the Archaeological Record: Why is There No Archaeology of Gender?’, in Joan Gero and Margaret Conkey (eds.), *Engendering Archaeology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell., 1991), 31-54, 34-35.

produced, for a short time, the oldest dates in Australia and the oldest axe in the world).⁹³ The regional model presented greater challenges to archaeologists because of the changing political landscape of the 1960s and 1970s, the dramatic shift in control that followed the rise of Aboriginal land rights, and the difficulties archaeologists faced in negotiating access to sites on Aboriginal land, let alone surveying large swathes of country.

In 1974, McBryde moved to the ANU, where she initiated a new phase of her work, focused on cultural landscapes, networks of trade, and Aboriginal connections to country. Her retreat from field archaeology reflected her changing priorities. She saw an urgent need to empower Aboriginal people to tell their own stories and to manage their heritage. ‘As prehistorians,’ she argued in her application for the ANU Prehistory Chair, ‘we should be sharing our knowledge, training and skills. As well, we should show ourselves willing to recognise the concerns of Aboriginal people for their sites.’⁹⁴ She was active in the creation of the Australian Archaeological Association in 1974 and she served as its first secretary; she was similarly instrumental in founding the interdisciplinary journal *Aboriginal History* in 1977.⁹⁵ From 1982, through her roles on the Australian Heritage Commission, the World Heritage Program Committee and the UNESCO advisory body, she argued the case for ‘cultural landscapes’ to be considered as a part of the world’s heritage, and for greater respect and control to be given to creating cultures.⁹⁶ Her advocacy of an integrated legislative approach to Indigenous heritage, which recognised the significance of whole landscapes, the inseparability of natural and cultural heritage, and the intangible values of sacred country, continues to shape Australia’s heritage conservation practice. But when she reflects on her proudest achievement, she points to the number of Aboriginal students she has helped become Australian archaeologists.⁹⁷

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In 1991, McBryde returned to New England and walked the land as she once had done. She revisited familiar places on the tablelands and across the coastal plains, and met and talked

⁹³ For further discussion of this see: Sandra Bowdler and Genevieve Clune, ‘That Shadowy Band: The Role of Women in the Development of Australian Archaeology’, *Australian Archaeology* 50 (Jun, 2000), 27-35; Wendy Beck and Lesley Head, ‘Women in Australian Prehistory’, *Australian Feminist Studies* 5(11) (1990), 29-48.

⁹⁴ McBryde, 12 September 1985, as quoted in Mulvaney, ‘Isabel McBryde’, 8.

⁹⁵ These developments are explored with more detail in interludes II and III, as well as in chapter eight.

⁹⁶ Mulvaney, ‘Isabel McBryde’, 9.

⁹⁷ Peter Read, ‘Many Exchanges, Many Ripples: The Work of Isabel McBryde’, *Aboriginal History* 29 (2005), 138-141, 140.

with residents, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous.⁹⁸ As she moved across the landscape, wandering through ‘country of subtropical brilliance, of rich valleys and densely forested steep terrain’, she was followed by a story.⁹⁹ Helpful locals told her of a woman who had come to look at the archaeology in the region long, long ago, ‘maybe last century’.¹⁰⁰ She gradually recognised the woman as herself. Her work had merged in local memory with that of another pioneer: nineteenth century anthropologist Mary Bundock. She had entered the lore of the land.

McBryde first encountered Bundock’s name in 1968 whilst trawling through the Australian ethnographic collection at the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde in Leiden: ‘With intense excitement I began to realise, working through registers and cabinets, that its collection included a comprehensive regional group of artefacts from my own research area of north-eastern New South Wales.’¹⁰¹ The carefully documented artefacts, which had been donated to the museum between 1885 and 1892, led her to their collector: the little known figure of Mary Bundock. Information about Bundock’s life was sparse, yet McBryde was intrigued by one surviving fragment of her writing: an eleven page document titled ‘Notes on the Richmond River Blacks’. Bundock’s ethnographic notes bore the stamp of someone who had formed close bonds with the Indigenous community on the upper Richmond River and who had a knowledge of the local dialect of Bandjalang: ‘The Aborigines in her account are people, not exemplars of a stage of human existence long past in the civilised European world.’¹⁰² McBryde also detected in the modest, non-judgmental observations what she has described as ‘an inheritance of concern’: ‘a response to the challenges of living on the pastoral frontier, of facing the responsibility of being dispossessors.’¹⁰³ That same inheritance, in a new context, has shaped the life and values of McBryde: it underwrites the inclusive, social approach to archaeology she has advocated since the 1960s. She has left a defining mark on the field of Australian archaeology, and on the region of New England. Her routes across the landscape linger today, sustained in fragments of text and memory, casting light upon the shadows of a haunted country.

⁹⁸ Isabel McBryde, ‘Miss Mary, Ethnography and the Inheritance of Concern’, in Julie Marcus (ed.), *First in Their Field: Women and Australian Anthropology* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1993), 15-45, 160-167.

⁹⁹ McBryde, ‘Miss Mary, Ethnography and the Inheritance of Concern’, 15.

¹⁰⁰ Macfarlane, ‘Preface’, xxiv.

¹⁰¹ McBryde, ‘Miss Mary, Ethnography and the Inheritance of Concern’, 15.

¹⁰² McBryde, ‘Miss Mary, Ethnography and the Inheritance of Concern’, 29.

¹⁰³ McBryde, ‘Miss Mary, Ethnography and the Inheritance of Concern’, 45.

Before it is too late

The early 1960s ushered in a new age for the study of Aboriginal Australia. 1961, in particular, has become seen as ‘the Dreamtime year for Prehistory’,¹ ‘the *annus mirabilis* of Australian archaeology’.² In that year Jack Golson transferred from Auckland to the first archaeological post at the Australian National University, where he was joined in 1964 by Wal Ambrose and Ron Lampert; Richard Wright and Vincent Megaw became the first prehistorians at the University of Sydney, soon joined by rock art specialist John Clegg; and Ian Crawford was appointed as curator at the Western Australian Museum.

What was behind this explosion of research? There were, of course, deeply rooted underlying causes, such as the discovery of radiocarbon dating in 1949: that ‘radical new technology of archaeological investigation’.³ Hilary Du Cros attributes the boom to the expansion of universities in the early 1960s and the arrival of Cambridge-trained archaeologists.⁴ Sandra Bowdler highlights the role of Mulvaney’s announcement of a Pleistocene date for human occupation at Kenniff Cave, which ‘attracted a new interest to the subject’.⁵ Ron Lampert also identifies Mulvaney’s work – and especially his critical review of the field in 1961 – as a trigger for research, alongside the growing number of university appointments, and the formation of an archaeological community.⁶ But at the heart of this new wave of research was a shift in thinking about Aboriginal Australia which was manifested in the foundation of the Australian Institute for Aboriginal Studies (AIAS).

¹ John Mulvaney, ‘Section III’, in *Prehistory and Heritage: The Writings of John Mulvaney* (Canberra: Department of Prehistory, ANU, 1990), 149-150, 149.

² Vincent Megaw, ‘Australian Archaeology – How Far Have We Progressed?’, *Mankind* 6(7) (Jun 1966), 306-312, 306.

³ Rhys Jones, ‘A Continental Reconnaissance: Some Observations Concerning the Discovery of the Pleistocene Archaeology of Australia’, in M Spriggs, DE Yen, W Ambrose, R Jones, A Thorne and A Andrews (eds.), *A Community of Culture: The People and Prehistory of the Pacific* (Canberra: Department of Prehistory, Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National University, 1993), 97-122, 108.

⁴ Hilary du Cros, *Much More Than Stones and Bones: Australian Archaeology in the Late Twentieth Century* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002), 22.

⁵ Sandra Bowdler, ‘Prehistoric Archaeology in Tasmania’, *Advances in World Archaeology* 1 (1982), 1-49, 18.

⁶ Ron Lampert, ‘Trends in Australian Prehistoric Research’, *Antiquity* 49 (1975), 197-206, 197.

On a cool morning on Monday 15 May 1961, an unusual convergence of scholars met at University House in Canberra. The eclectic group of anthropologists, linguists, archaeologists, ethnomusicologists, physical anthropologists, historians and curators had gathered from all corners of the continent to discuss the culture and heritage of the first Australians.⁷ This was the first time many of the attendees had met their direct colleagues, let alone those in other disciplines.⁸ The organiser of the event, anthropologist WEH Stanner, had brought them together with the belief that ‘fields of study are not cut off from one another but mingle, just as people do’.⁹

Among the fifty-five researchers who huddled in University House on that May morning was Isabel McBryde, who had been designated as representative for ‘Prehistory’ while John Mulvaney was away in London working at the Institute of Archaeology. It was her first conference, and she recalled being ‘quite daunted’ by the experience.¹⁰ There was a great sense of occasion: it was a grand coming together of people and ideas. At the conference dinner on 17 May McBryde found herself sitting between the eminent anthropologists Charles Mountford and Donald Thomson: ‘they talked very nicely over my head.’¹¹

The conference, in McBryde’s words, was a ‘salvage job’.¹² It was inspired by a submission Liberal Minister WC Wentworth had made to the Commonwealth Government in 1959 proposing an urgent redirection of funds to research on Indigenous Australia.¹³ His nine-page paper, titled ‘An Australian Institute for Aboriginal Studies’, agitated for the Institute with a keen awareness of ‘the development of interest in coloured peoples throughout the world, and the significance this can have for Australia’s treatment of its own coloured people’.¹⁴ But his enthusiasm for Aboriginal culture was tinged with archaic thinking about confronting the primordial: ‘We are not just studying aborigines ... We are studying man and man’s

⁷ A full list of AIAS members can be found in Dermot Casey Papers, AIATSIS Library, Canberra, MS 1326/A/a/2, Box 1.

⁸ David Horton, ‘Editorial’, *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 1 (1986), 1; David Horton, ‘The 1961 Conference’, *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 1 (1986), 83-84.

⁹ WEH Stanner, ‘Introduction’, in H Sheils (ed.), *Australian Aboriginal Studies: Conference on Aboriginal Studies, May 1961* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1963), xi-xviii, xiii.

¹⁰ Isabel McBryde interviewed by Martin Thomas, 17-19 August 2004, National Library of Australia, sound recording, ORAL TRC 5194/3.

¹¹ McBryde interviewed by Thomas, ORAL TRC 5194/3.

¹² McBryde interviewed by Thomas, ORAL TRC 5194/3.

¹³ WC Wentworth, ‘An Australian Institute for Aboriginal Studies’, undated, WEH Stanner Papers, AIATSIS Library, Canberra, MS 3752 19/1(c).

¹⁴ WC Wentworth, ‘Revised Proposals for An Australian Institute for Aboriginal Studies’, Cabinet submission 700/38, 1960, National Archives of Australia, A452, 1961/7988.

nature'.¹⁵ He considered a record of Aboriginal culture and heritage to be 'one of the priceless treasures of mankind', and he stressed 'the urgency of the matter' given 'the rapid disintegration of aboriginal culture': 'Within ten years there will be nothing but a fraction of a fraction left. It must be recorded now, or it will go unrecorded for ever'.¹⁶ Wentworth, like many others at the conference, espoused the colonial belief that traditional culture was 'dying out', not transforming. He also emphasised the importance of Indigenous people to Australia's standing internationally: 'If Australia were to allow the Aboriginal culture to evaporate unrecorded, she would run the risk of incurring the perpetual reproach of the world of scholarship'.¹⁷ Nicolas Peterson highlights the 'explicit nationalism' of WC Wentworth's proposal: 'he perceived that Aboriginal people and their cultures were a crucial icon of an independent Australian identity'.¹⁸

Acting Prime Minister John McEwen saw the utility of such a conference, and gave it reserved encouragement: 'a thorough study [of Aboriginal culture and heritage] could have some practical significance for our domestic policy and for some aspects of our international relations. Viewed thus, it can be regarded as a national responsibility'.¹⁹ It was with such a brief that Stanner, as Convenor and Chairman, invited his colleagues 'to assess the state of scientific knowledge' in their fields, 'to appraise the gaps', and to suggest 'concrete' proposals to fill those gaps with future research.²⁰ He, too, regarded the study of Aboriginal Australia to be an important aspect of 'our duty to posterity' and 'to scientific understanding'.²¹ And he hoped the development of a specialised research institute would contribute 'to the sympathetic understanding of the aborigines and their culture by the community as a whole'.²² 'Archaeological research,' he found in the Report on the Conference, 'not only throws light on the origins and past history of these people, but also

¹⁵ WC Wentworth, Commonwealth of Australia, *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard) Session 1964*, 1st Session of the 25th Parliament, Vol. H. or R. 42 (new series), 21 April 1964–20 May 1964, Second reading, 2167.

¹⁶ Wentworth, 'An Australian Institute for Aboriginal Studies', 2-3.

¹⁷ Wentworth, 'Revised Proposals for An Australian Institute for Aboriginal Studies'.

¹⁸ Nicolas Peterson, "'Studying Man and Man's Nature": The History of the Institutionalisation of Aboriginal Anthropology', *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 2 (1990), 3-19, 16.

¹⁹ John McEwen, Acting Prime Minister, 'For Cabinet: Proposed Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies', 24 May 1960, Cabinet submission 700/38, National Archives of Australia, A452, 1961/7988.

²⁰ WEH Stanner to EJ Bunting, Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, 23 May 1961, in 'Establishment of Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1961-1963', National Archives of Australia, A452, 1960/2944.

²¹ WEH Stanner, 'Report on the Conference on Aboriginal Studies, 23 May 1961', National Archives of Australia, A452, 1960/2944, 1, 7.

²² Stanner, 'Report on the Conference on Aboriginal Studies', 1.

contributes to the understanding of the contemporary status of the aboriginal population and the problems of its assimilation.’²³

As an afterthought, in 1962, Wentworth suggested that when the permanent council for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies is established, ‘consideration should be given to adding one or two aborigines as [council] members’.²⁴ But here Wentworth was ahead of council thinking. There were no Aboriginal people present at the 1961 conference, and in the years that followed enthusiasm for the Institute waned.²⁵ Wentworth’s original scheme, which envisaged the AIAS as a research hub as well as a coordinating body, was deemed ‘too elaborate’.²⁶ Although Prime Minister Robert Menzies ‘accepted the argument that aboriginal studies deserve some special encouragement, particularly because of rapidly vanishing source material, and because they represent a unique field of research in themselves’, he felt it was also a ‘limited’ field and that funding should be kept ‘in proportion’. The Institute, he decided, ‘should be primarily a co-ordinating and sponsoring body’.²⁷ It was with this scope that the Interim Council of the Institute was made permanent on 2 June 1964 through an Act of Parliament, with Frederick McCarthy as its first principal.²⁸ Kim Beazley (Snr), who co-sponsored the Bill with Wentworth, celebrated that: ‘for the first time officially in Commonwealth history the Commonwealth is recording its appreciation of aboriginal life, and of the aboriginal people’.²⁹

The impact of the AIAS on archaeological research was instantaneous. Archaeologists harnessed the Institute’s resources to build the foundations of their discipline. It became, in Vincent Megaw’s words, ‘our Federal fairy godmother’.³⁰ AP Elkin described it as ‘[t]he most significant stimulus to archaeology in Australia’.³¹ One of the first acts of the AIAS was to fund a radiocarbon laboratory at the Australian National University, so that researchers

²³ Stanner, ‘Report on the Conference on Aboriginal Studies’, 7.

²⁴ Item 6 in WC Wentworth, ‘Minutes of the Interim Council’, 10 March 1962, as quoted in John Mulvaney, ‘WEH Stanner and the Foundation of the Australian Institute for Aboriginal Studies, 1959-1964’, in Melinda Hinkson and Jeremy Beckett (eds.), *An Appreciation of Difference: WEH Stanner and Aboriginal Australia* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2008), 58-75, 67-68.

²⁵ Jaqueline Ann Lambert, ‘A History of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies 1959 -1989: An Analysis of How Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People Achieved Control of a National Research Institute’, PhD thesis, Australian National University, 2011, 54.

²⁶ McEwen, ‘For Cabinet: Proposed Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies’.

²⁷ Robert G Menzies, 1 June 1963, ‘For Cabinet: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies’, Cabinet submission 711/37, National Archives of Australia, A452, 1961/7988.

²⁸ Frederick D McCarthy, ‘A Coat of Paint’, *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 2 (1984), 72-81, 80-81.

²⁹ Kim Beazley, Commonwealth of Australia, *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard) Session 1964*, 1st Session of the 25th Parliament, Vol. H. or R. 42 (new series), 21 April 1964 – 20 May 1964, 2161.

³⁰ Megaw, ‘Australian Archaeology’, 306.

³¹ AP Elkin, ‘A New Venture’, *Archaeology & Physical Anthropology in Oceania* 1(1) (Apr 1966), 1-4, 2.

could date their sites in Australia.³² And the first round of grants in 1962 allowed John Mulvaney, Isabel McBryde and Rhys Jones to conduct systematic excavations in, respectively, Kenniff Cave, New England and Rocky Cape.³³ Despite ongoing conflicts over the purpose and function of AIAS, archaeologists seized upon it as an organising body, using the Institute's conferences, general meetings and newsletters to discuss the concerns and development of their own field. In the 1960s the AIAS, along with the ANZAAS congresses, became an active forum to exchange ideas, discuss research agendas, and debate questions of terminology and classification.³⁴ As Stephanie Moser argues in her PhD on archaeology and its disciplinary culture, the AIAS helped institutionalise Australian archaeology.³⁵

The Institute 'revolutionized research' in the field, in McCarthy's words, creating 'a great body of information, about the Aborigines and their culture, of which Aboriginal people should be proud.'³⁶ Though, he added, 'their real significance in Australia's cultural history was not ... officially recognized until the 1960s when protective legislation was enacted in every State.'³⁷ The unforeseen impact of Wentworth's proposal, and the development of the Institute, was to create a space in which, over time, Indigenous Australians could develop a strong political voice.³⁸

³² Stephanie Moser, 'Archaeology and its Disciplinary Culture: The Professionalisation of Australian Prehistoric Archaeology', PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 1995, 198.

³³ Frederick D McCarthy, 'The Institute's Work, 1961 to 1970', *Newsletter of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies* 3(1) (1970), 1-17, 14-15.

³⁴ Rhys Jones and Betty Meehan, 'A Crucible of Australian Prehistory: The 1965 Hobart ANZAAS Conference', in Atholl Anderson and Tim Murray (eds.), *Australian Archaeologist: Collected Papers in Honour of Jim Allen* (Canberra: Coombs Academic Publishing, 2000), 40-61, 42.

³⁵ Moser, 'Archaeology and its Disciplinary Culture', 73.

³⁶ McCarthy, 'A Coat of Paint', 80-81.

³⁷ McCarthy, 'A Coat of Paint', 79.

³⁸ Stephanie Moser, 'The Aboriginalisation of Archaeology: The Contribution of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies to the Indigenous Transformation of the Discipline', in Peter J Ucko (ed.), *Theory in Archaeology: A World Perspective* (London: Routledge, 1995), 150-177.



Fig. 17 Rhys Jones at Sisters Beach, c. 1964 (Source: Archives Office of Tasmania).

Three

The First Tasmanians

Rhys Jones at Rocky Cape

There is a photo of the archaeologist Rhys Jones sitting alone on the ridge behind Sisters' Beach in northwestern Tasmania, surrounded by quartzite boulders, native grasses and *Banksia serrata*. It was taken in the early 1960s and Jones is boyish, bearded, and good-looking, with his Dai cap tipped to the side and big black boots emerging from the undergrowth. But it is his gaze that dominates the image. He leans back on the rock with his hands folded in front of him and his head raised, staring intensely across the choppy waters of Bass Strait in the far distance. He is posing, yes, performing for the camera; but I also imagine that he is dreaming: travelling through time in his mind's eye, as he so often did, and watching the sea before him recede, the torrid waters give way to a low land bridge, the landscape return to its form at the end of the last Ice Age, when the polar ice caps bulged and Tasmania was still attached to the Australian mainland.

Jones had the imaginative capacity for time travel. He spent so much of his time dreaming of the deep past that he believed he had 'in a sense absorbed into my skin a feeling of what it was like to live in Tasmanian society' through time.¹ He used this intuitive understanding to conjure an image of the past which he could then study: 'It is only a still photograph and it rapidly fades, but in the meantime we can count the people, observe their social groups, analyse their economic activities.'² Over three archaeological field seasons along the northern coast of Tasmania he camped behind the ridge in this photo. At night he would walk along the beach, sometimes alone, sometimes with others, admiring the glow of the moon on the inky black water of Bass Strait. 'At that time,' Jones reflected, 'we weren't sure how old anything was.'³ Bass Strait provided the climatic key to Australia's Ice Age past. The land bridge between Tasmania and the mainland had been sundered at the end of the last Ice Age,

¹ Rhys Jones to Robert Sessions, 21 October 1980, Rhys Jones Papers, National Library of Australia, Canberra, MS ACC 03/250, Folder 72, Box 14.

² Rhys Jones, 'The Tasmanian Paradox', in RVS Wright (ed.), *Stone Tools as Cultural Markers: Change, Evolution and Complexity* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1977), 189-204, 189.

³ Rhys Jones interviewed by Mike Smith, 12 April 1991, National Library of Australia, sound recording, ORAL TRC 2677/1.

around twelve thousand years ago. Had the first Tasmanians voyaged to an island? Or had they watched from the peninsula as the tide encroached and the land bridge was drowned, isolating them for millenia? These were the questions that loomed in Jones' mind as he wandered Sisters' Beach gazing out across the stormy strait. To the west he could make out the jagged saw-tipped edge of the Rocky Cape peninsula, where he sought answers in his archaeological excavations. To the east, high, perched sea cliffs stood sentry over the strait, evoking the Ice Age landscapes of the north African coast and La Cotte de St Brelade off Normandy: 'it was a classic Paleolithic terrain.'⁴

In 1978, after fifteen years of working in the state, Jones was commissioned by the publishing house Thomas Nelson to write a popular book on Tasmanian history and archaeology. It was supposed to tie in with a film he had made with director Tom Haydon, *The Last Tasmanian: a story of genocide*, and Jones hoped to capture that filmic quality in his prose. He wanted to write of the past as if he were there relaying his observations like 'a radio correspondent', conveying intimate sensuous details 'that could draw the reader in, so that in his guts he has a feeling of what this life was like.'⁵ Writing to his publisher Bob Sessions on 21 October 1980, he outlined a series of 'scenes' he and Haydon envisaged for the book: the formation of the 'Gondwana Supercontinent and the southern rain forest'; the first human crossing of the swept Bassian plains towards the ice cap of the Tasmanian peninsula; the smells and sounds of camp life at Sundown Creek in 1800; 'the deck of Baudin's ship in the summer of 1802 going up D'Entrecasteaux Channel'; François Péron's experiences with 'the Tasmanian girl he fancied', Ouré Ouré; the climate of fear in 'a shepherd's hut on the upper Clyde River c. 1826'; 'the Black Line' spreading across Tasmania in 1830; 'the decimation of the Pieman River band due to disease'; and the 'rounding up' of survivors to be shipped off to the Bass Strait islands. In the penultimate scene he envisaged an image of Truganini, the so-called 'last Tasmanian', whose skeleton was 'strung up' and displayed in 'a dusty museum' for a century. But his final scene was reserved for a more positive – and rather heroic – story: 'the new archaeology and discovery of the Tasmanian past – ie my first expedition'.⁶

⁴ Jones interviewed by Smith, ORAL TRC 2677/1.

⁵ Jones to Sessions, 21 October 1980.

⁶ Jones to Sessions, 21 October 1980.

The book was never written. *The Last Tasmanian* and its makers became embroiled in controversy almost as soon as the contract was signed.⁷ The film confronted the violence and tragedy in Tasmania's past, marketing itself as 'more than a film ... an historic document of major importance'.⁸ It delved deep inside what Bernard Smith would call 'the locked cupboard of our history' and made an early argument for the forcible dispossession of Tasmanian Aboriginal people to be understood as 'genocide'.⁹ It was a critical and commercial success in Australia and around the world, and for many Australians it came as a grim and disturbing revelation about their all-too-recent past.¹⁰ Yet, with its very title, Haydon and Jones were accused of undermining those who had survived this harrowing history. A resurgent Tasmanian Aboriginal community, led by those who had lived for years on the Bass Strait islands, attacked the film, and the flamboyant archaeologist at its centre, for denying their political existence and for perpetuating a nineteenth-century 'dying race' myth. *The Last Tasmanian* was painted as a part of the legacy it was trying to overturn.

The uproar surrounding the film delayed the writing process; but the book was also fated by Jones' intellectual restlessness. He found the writing slow and he struggled to convey 'the Tasmanian Aborigines as themselves ... and not as some cyphers of cardboard cut-out caricatures of humanity in the explorers note books.'¹¹ There are a few fragments of the manuscript buried away in his personal archive. They are raw, 'totally and utterly uncorrected', and were obviously committed to the page in bursts, with sentences written and rewritten as Jones played with rhythm, poetry and imagery.¹² The rough pages of the discarded manuscript have been typed and retyped, edited in scrawls of blue and black pen, with long passages of handwriting between typed pages. It is a messy manuscript, but vivid

⁷ Tom Haydon to Tim Curnow, 12 January 1979, Rhys Jones Papers, NLA, MS ACC 03/250, Folder 72, Box 14.

⁸ Artis Film Productions, 'Information: The Last Tasmanian', Rhys Jones Papers, NLA, MS ACC 03/250, Folder 75, Box 15, 6.

⁹ Bernard Smith, *The Spectre of Truganini: The 1980 Boyer Lectures* (Sydney: ABC, 1980), 10. Ann Curthoys, James Boyce and Lyndall Ryan also argue that the Tasmanians suffered genocide. Henry Reynolds has illuminated the process of Indigenous erasure with deliberate intent in Tasmania, but he questions the broad assumptions of genocide. See: Ann Curthoys, 'Genocide in Tasmania: The History of an Idea', in Dirk Moses (ed.), *Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation, and Subaltern Resistance in World History* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 292-52; James Boyce, *Van Diemens Land* (Melbourne: Black Inc., 2008), 259-313; Lyndall Ryan, *Tasmanian Aborigines: A History Since 1803* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2012), 215; Henry Reynolds, *An Indelible Stain? The Question of Genocide in Australia's History* (Ringwood, Vic: Viking, 2001), 29-85.

¹⁰ Artis Film Productions, 'The Impact of The Last Tasmanian', Rhys Jones Papers, NLA, MS ACC 03/250, Folder 75, Box 15.

¹¹ Rhys Jones to Robert Sessions, March 1980, 'Progress Report on the Last Tasmanian', Rhys Jones Papers, NLA, MS ACC 03/250, Folder 72, Box 14.

¹² Rhys Jones as quoted in Tom Haydon to Bob Sessions, 4 September 1981, Rhys Jones Papers, NLA, MS ACC 03/250, Folder 73, Box 14.

and imaginative. He takes us ‘in our mind’s eye’ to an Aboriginal camp on the west coast of Tasmania beside steep dunes and with majestic views, and then we are propelled on a journey up the Gordon River through the ancient southern forests where ‘dark squalls of rain and low cloud sweep in from the south west ocean, and mist hangs in skeins around the tree tops and river-side rocky bluffs.’¹³

Jones loved the rigour and precision of archaeology. He had a mathematical mind and was at home working through masses of quantitative data. But he also sought to create images which could carry his ideas. As much as he was an archaeologist or a scientist, he was also a poet. He yearned to re-animate the past and capture the texture of a lost world, rather than reduce it to a tendentious list. As he wrote to his increasingly exasperated publisher, ‘these are the small episodes, the minutiae of history, but they exemplify great events, like a personal human life is both intimate and is the product of and in some way affects the great currents of history.’¹⁴

Jones, too, was both the product of, and an actor in, the great currents of history. He had a unique impact on the field of Australian archaeology. John Mulvaney readily cedes him the title of ‘the most significant archaeologist to work in Australia’.¹⁵ He was irrepressible: restless and romantic, boastful and brilliant. He courted controversy and provoked debate. ‘Although he never wrote a book,’ Mulvaney reflects, ‘several of his articles throw up more ideas than many volumes.’¹⁶ His breathless manner and penchant for performance made him a gift to journalists seeking to understand the emerging story of ancient Australia. Novelists thinly fictionalised his rugged, larrikin persona; *Australian Playboy* devoted a seven-page feature to his vision of ancient Australia; and he was heralded in the press as ‘Australiana Jones’, the ‘prehistory cowboy’ and, due to his diminutive stature, the ‘Welsh Leprechaun’.¹⁷ As I sift through his papers in the National Library of Australia, his larger-than-life character overflows from every page, from the witty asides buried amongst his conference notes,

¹³ Rhys Jones, ‘Gondwana Supercontinent and the Southern Rain Forest’, undated manuscript, Rhys Jones Papers, NLA, MS ACC 03/250, Folder 72, Box 14.

¹⁴ Jones to Sessions, 21 October 1980.

¹⁵ John Mulvaney, ‘Reflections’, *Antiquity* 80(308) (Jun 2006), 425-434, 433.

¹⁶ Mulvaney, ‘Reflections’, 433.

¹⁷ Rhys Jones is the clear inspiration for Ralph Kincaid in Nicholas Jose, *The Custodians* (Sydney: Macmillan, 1997) and Janos Belcredi in Keith Thomas, *Idlers in the land* (London: Hutchinson, 1979); Russell Deiley, ‘The First Australians’, *Australian Playboy* (Sep 1979), 50-56; Cheryl Jones, ‘Australiana Jones and the last crusade’, *The Bulletin* (19 June 2001), 36-37; Lenore Nicklin, ‘The prehistory cowboy strikes again’, *The Bulletin*, 12 June 1990, 94-95; Mick Barnes, ‘He digs up the past... and stirs up the present’, *Women’s Day*, 8 Jan 1979, 16-17.

evidently intended for another distracted audience member, to his personal file on ‘L’Homme Sauvage’, in which he documented, tongue-in-cheek, the ‘savage’ within us all.¹⁸ He pioneered the study of Tasmania’s Indigenous past, challenging expectations and preconceptions of Indigenous people across the continent; and yet he found himself frequently associated with the archaic views he sought to upend. As historian Rebe Taylor has shown in her series of articles on the restless Welshman, ‘Jones’s ability to give poetic power to academic ideas left him vulnerable to being misread.’¹⁹

This chapter returns to the dreamer sitting on Sister’s Beach in the early 1960s. It follows Jones’ early life in Wales and unpacks the archaeological breakthroughs he made in his exploration of the first Tasmanians. Finally, it reflects on the furore that embroiled Jones’ archaeological work and the film *The Last Tasmanian*.

o o o

From a young age Rhys Jones was drawn to the mysterious relationship between geography and history. He was born into a Welsh-speaking family during World War II on 26 February 1941 and grew up with an acute sense of being in an ethnic minority – even within Wales. His middle name – Maengwyn – evokes the standing stones of Ynys y Maengwyn which rise from hard ground in the coastal wetlands in south-west Meirion. When his ancestors moved from rural Meirionydd and Maldwyn into the industrial slate-quarry towns of northern Wales they carried their traditions and language with them, naming their children after totemic sites of their own *bro* or country. Maengwyn translates literally as ‘Island of the white, shining or magical stone’. Rhys shared the name with his father, Griffith Maengwyn Jones, and he wore it, and the lineage it symbolised, with pride. ‘Not every archaeologist has the good fortune to be named after a megalith.’²⁰

¹⁸ Rhys Jones, ‘Notes from ANZAAS, 1968’, Rhys Jones Papers, NLA, MS ACC 08/042, Item 10-17, Box 1; Rhys Jones, ‘L’Homme Sauvage’, Rhys Jones Papers, NLA, MS ACC 04/142, Item 215, Box 19.

¹⁹ Rebe Taylor, ‘Reliable Mr Robinson and the Controversial Dr Jones’, in Anna Johnston and Mitchell Rolls (eds.), *Reading Robinson: Companion Essays to Friendly Mission* (Hobart: Quintus, 2008), 111-28. See also Rebe Taylor, ‘The Polemics of Eating Fish in Tasmania: The Historical Evidence Revisited’, *Aboriginal History* 31 (2007), 1-26; Rebe Taylor, ‘The Polemics of Making Fire in Tasmania: The Historical Evidence Revisited’, *Aboriginal History* 32 (2008), 1-26; Rebe Taylor, ‘Archaeology and Aboriginal Protest: The Influence of Rhys Jones’s Tasmanian Work on Australian Historiography’, *Australian Historical Studies* 45(3) (2014), 331-349. This work has been consolidated in Taylor’s recent book *Into the Heart of Tasmania: A Search For Human Antiquity* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2017).

²⁰ Rhys Jones, ‘Sylwadau Cynfrodor Ar Gôr Y Cewri; or a British Aboriginal’s Land Claim to Stonehenge’, in Christopher Chippendale *et al* (eds.), *Who Owns Stonehenge?* (London: BT Batsford Ltd, 1990), 62-87, 66.



Fig. 18 Rhys Jones and Jim Allen filming a scene from *The Last Tasmanian*, Bruny Island, 1977 (Source: AIATSIS).



Fig. 19 Blaenau Ffestiniog, Meirionethshire, northern Wales: the landscape which stirred Rhys Jones' archaeological imagination. There is a memorial to Jones and his parents near this spot. The inscription reads: 'Rhys Maengwyn Jones, Archaeolegwr, Geni 1941 Cymru, Marw 2001 Awstralia.' (Source: B Griffiths).

These deep historical resonances are a key to his character. It was no coincidence, Jones believed, that Welsh society began and ended on the fringes of the upland zone. ‘As a Welshman myself, I feel a loss that my country has suffered, in its marginal place on the edge of a dominant England.’²¹ Jones was proud to call himself an indigenous Briton. As his colleague Carmel Schrire reflected in 2001, ‘He understood what it felt like to look out across a grey sea, whether from Bangor or Burnie, and feel your back pressing against the wall of what you thought was your own land. ... It was a measure of his genius that he converted this personal sense of loss into a universal sense of suffering, that transformed not only the way people thought about Tasmania, but the way they understand their own deep past.’²² He enjoyed hamming up his Welsh heritage in field, often smearing his face with dirt to achieve the look of a Welsh miner – a profession his grandfather, William Rhys Watkin, pursued as a teenager. And he continued to speak and write Welsh throughout his life, publishing his Tasmanian research in Welsh academic journals and even narrating a Welsh-language version of *The Last Tasmanian* for BBC Wales: the ‘first Welsh feature film’, according to the Guinness Book of Records.²³

Jones moved often as a child, staying in towns of stone and slate, following the work of his father, who was a physicist by training. In 1949 they settled in Blaenau Ffestiniog in Meirionethshire in northern Wales, Jones’ father’s ancestral town. It was this ‘great, grey, cold and wet place’, surrounded by ‘a wall of rugged peaks clothed, almost always, in mist’ that became home.²⁴ And it was the ancient landscape that surrounded Blaenau Ffestiniog that ignited Jones’ archaeological imagination. Roman roads ‘totally intact with stone paving’ traversed the country behind his backyard at ‘Bryn Offeren’; megalithic monuments (stone arrangements) were scattered throughout the damp, green fields; and mournful Norman castles lined the nearby ridgelines, telling in their ruin stories of glorious defeat.²⁵ These

²¹ Jones, ‘Sylwadau Cynfrodor Ar Gôr Y Cewri’, 86.

²² Carmel Schrire, ‘Betrayal as a Universal Element in the Sundering of Bass Strait’, in Atholl Anderson, Ian Lilley and Sue O’Connor (eds.), *Histories of Old Ages: Essays in Honour of Rhys Jones* (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2001), 25-33, 30.

²³ The film was titled *Y Tasmaniad Olaf*. See Patrick Robertson, *The Guinness Book of Film Facts and Feats* (Enfield: Guinness Books, 1985), 146. Jones also narrated a French language version of the film: *Les Derniers Tasmaniens*. He published his first article in Welsh in 1965 with help from Alice Powell: Rhys Jones, ‘Pwy oedd y Tasmaniad? Ymchwiliadau archaeolegol’, *Y Gwyddonydd* 3 (1965), 30-36. After a visit to Wales in 1968 he made a greater effort to learn academic Welsh and continued to publish in his native tongue throughout his career.

²⁴ Betty Meehan, ‘The Early Life of a New Chum, 1941-1969’, in Atholl Anderson, Ian Lilley and Sue O’Connor (eds.), *Histories of Old Ages: Essays in Honour of Rhys Jones* (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2001), 1-16, 4.

²⁵ Jones interviewed by Smith, ORAL TRC 2677/1.

ancient monuments became Jones' 'fantasy world', and it was in their shadows that he kindled a lasting passion for historical re-enactment.²⁶ He built Neolithic turf huts and a pit house in his overgrown garden at 'Bryn Offeren' and made makeshift armour and bows and arrows with his friends, reliving the bloody conflicts between the Welsh and the Normans, the Celts and the Romans. In the evenings, he remembers listening intently to his family's stories of the Druids in Welsh history and watching the popular BBC television show *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral*, on which the archaeological luminaries Glyn Daniel, Mortimer Wheeler and Gordon Childe appeared.²⁷ 'All my early childhood memories,' he reflected in 1991, 'are in a sense archaeological'.²⁸

In 1954, his father died suddenly from a brain tumour. Rhys was twelve years old. His mother Enid Watkin Jones moved the family to Cardiff to be closer to her parents and Rhys was enrolled in Whitchurch Grammar School along with his two cousins, where the three of them found themselves speaking 'Welsh in a sea of English'.²⁹ Enid taught French in Cardiff and in the summers took Rhys and his sister across the channel to Brittany, where they learnt French and snippets of the Celtic Breton. A school assignment from this time survives in his personal archive. He filled a neat exercise book titled 'Geography: Form III A' with colourful maps of Australian geography and brief historical summaries of the states. 'Tasmania,' he wrote in 1954, '...is a mountainous island about 3 times the size of Wales.'³⁰

The decision to become an archaeologist came naturally to Jones. His father's influence ensured that he pursued physics, maths and chemistry at school, but it was the ancient landscape of his youth that drew him in: 'My deep core interests were still that landscape history, but I saw in archaeology a way in which you could use the physical methods to create history, so that these two actually welded together.'³¹ In 1958 he met Dr Hubert Savory, Keeper of Archaeology at the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff, and he was fortunate enough to be involved in excavating a Bronze Age barrow at Sant-y-Nyll in the Vale – eventually dated to 1500 BCE. As a sixteen year-old, he rode out to the site every day on his bicycle to help with the excavation. As the summer wore on, other volunteers dropped off and Jones often worked on the site alone, under the direction of Savory. They dug a big

²⁶ Rhys Jones and Vincent Megaw, 'Confessions of a Wild Colonial Boy: Rhys Jones in conversation with Vincent Megaw', *Australian Archaeology* 50 (2000), 12-26, 16.

²⁷ Jones and Megaw, 'Confessions of a Wild Colonial Boy', 16; Meehan, 'The Early Life of a New Chum', 4.

²⁸ Jones interviewed by Smith, ORAL TRC 2677/1.

²⁹ Rhys Jones in Meehan, 'The Early Life of a New Chum', 4

³⁰ Rhys Jones, 'Geography: Form III A' (1954), Rhys Jones Papers, NLA, MS ACC 08/042, Item 1, Box 1.

³¹ Jones interviewed by Smith, ORAL TRC 2677/1.

trench across the barrow, and followed the layers of the site down, uncovering human cremations and postholes at the base. His report on the excavation caught the eye of the host of *Animal, Vegetable, Mineral*, Glyn Daniel, and won him the Trevelyan Scholarship to Emmanuel College at Cambridge University.

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Jones studied 'Natural Sciences' at Cambridge University for two years before seeking to enrol in Archaeology and Anthropology. Within a fortnight of his application, on 26 May 1961, he received a personal note from the Disney Professor of Archaeology, Grahame Clark, who enthusiastically accepted his enrolment and apologised profusely for the slightly delayed response. 'I wonder if you are free by any chance about 9.30 on Monday morning. ... We are always very keen to get people with Natural Science background to read archaeology.'³²

Clark's eagerness to recruit Jones is telling of the changes the discipline had been undergoing since John Mulvaney finished his studies in 1953. A 'new wave' of archaeologists, as Jack Golson has described them, had begun challenging the 'old guard'.³³ Traditional modes of archaeology, which centred on artefacts and typology, cultures and landscapes, were being incorporated into complex and interleaving questions about subsistence strategies, ecological adaptations, and settlement patterns. The central focus of these 'new waves' was on socio-economic responses to climate and environment: the relationships between 'man and his resource base'. In America, these ideas found expression in books such as Gordon Willey's and Philip Phillips' *Method and Theory in American Archaeology* (1958) and Lewis Binford's influential series of articles leading up to the edited volume, *New Perspectives in Archeology* (1968).³⁴ These self-described 'new archaeologists' or 'processual archaeologists' advocated a more anthropological approach to an archaeological deposit and urged greater application of scientific methodologies. At Cambridge, ecological archaeology was in the ascendant. Emerging scientific methods, such as radiocarbon dating, had opened

³² There was a fourteen-day delay between letters. Grahame Clark to Rhys Jones, 26 May 1961, Rhys Jones Papers, NLA, MS ACC 05/191, Item 74, Box 11. Clark later examined Jones thesis, see: Grahame Clark, 'Report on Dissertation by Mr. Rhys Jones on Rocky Cape and the Problems of the Tasmanians', 15 March 1972, Sir Grahame Clark: archaeological papers, Cambridge University Library, Department of Manuscripts and University Archives, Cambridge, GBR/0012/MS Add.9409/78.

³³ Jack Golson, 'Old Guards and New Waves: Reflections on Antipodean Archaeology 1954-1975', *Archaeology in Oceania* 21(1) (1986), 2-12.

³⁴ Gordon Willey and Philip Phillips *Method and Theory in American Archaeology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958); Sally R Binford and Lewis R Binford (eds.), *New Perspectives in Archeology* (Chicago: Aldine Pub. Co., 1968).

new windows onto the deep past: the discipline was in need of science-literate recruits who could conduct interdisciplinary scientific research. Don Brothwell and Eric Higgs outlined the impetus for change in their landmark book *Science in Archaeology: A Comprehensive Survey of Progress and Research* (1963): ‘It becomes clear that not to use the scientific methods now available to archaeology, is to commit the worst of archaeological crimes, to ignore available evidence or during excavation to destroy it.’³⁵

Rhys Jones kept a semi-regular diary during his years at Cambridge University. It was a heady time, full of social and intellectual adventures. Most entries were bracketed with an exuberant ‘Wake!’ and an exhausted ‘Bed’.³⁶ He was surrounded by fierce intellects who would later join him in Australia, such as Peter White and Carmel Schrire, with whom he developed an ‘aggressive and somewhat acerbic mode of “discussion”’.³⁷ Jones was already full of self-belief. His experience at Sant-y-Nyll had given him a taste for excavation, and he threw himself into the fieldwork opportunities available at Cambridge, joining Charles McBurney at La Cotte de St Brelade in Jersey in 1962 and Ogof Coygan in Wales in 1963, travelling to the Caspian Sea and northeast Iran, and accompanying Eric Higgs on his first Palaeolithic expedition to northwest Greece ‘as the official geologist’.³⁸ ‘Clearly I was educated in a global tradition’, he later reflected, acknowledging the influence of Clark’s ‘world history’ approach. In particular, he was drawn to the world of the last Ice Age – the Palaeolithic – and the movements and activities of *Homo sapiens*, who he referred to in short-hand simply as ‘hunters’. He was fascinated by the common humanity of hunters across the globe. ‘In deep prehistory,’ he wrote in 1989,

there is no place for racial or ethnic pride. The salient fact that emerges from a global perspective is how similar were the lives, the artefactual remains, the casual by-products of human actions of all of us humans on all continents. Perhaps this is the greatest contribution that prehistory can make to the modern human condition. If this

³⁵ Don Brothwell and Eric Higgs (eds.), *Science in Archaeology: A Comprehensive Survey of Progress and Research* (Bristol: Thames and Hudson, 1963), 15.

³⁶ Rhys Jones, ‘Journals and Diaries, 1960-1962’, Rhys Jones Papers, NLA, MS ACC 08/42, Box 1.

³⁷ Meehan, ‘The Early Life of a New Chum’, 6

³⁸ Meehan, ‘The Early Life of a New Chum’, 7.

were not to be the case, that we were to revert to palaeo-tribalism, then I would give up the game.³⁹

Much to his mother's chagrin, Britain was covered in ice forty thousand years ago and thus held few prospects in Palaeolithic archaeology: Jones would have to pursue his career abroad. The question of where seemed a moot point, so long as he could study the ancient hunting way of life. He simultaneously applied for work in Nova Scotia, the Upper Volta, and Australia, resolving to take the first job he was offered. On 12 March 1963, his fate was decided: 'Got letter from Richard Wright offering me a job in Sidney. Feel highly chuffed.'⁴⁰ The job seemed like a wild adventure to the twenty-three year old; he knew little about Australia outside of explorers' stories and school geography: 'I didn't even know how to spell Sydney in those days.'⁴¹

Jones' acceptance of a Teaching Fellowship at the University of Sydney marked the arrival of the 'new waves' of archaeology on Australian shores. Jack Golson has described the almost simultaneous impact of 'new archaeology' on Australia and New Zealand as a 'radical, indeed revolutionary change of paradigm'.⁴² But perhaps 'evolution' is a more fitting term. The new mode of practice that emerged in Australian archaeology in the 1960s enlarged, rather than replaced, the existing work of Mulvaney, Golson and Isabel McBryde. It enriched and complicated an established tradition with new questions and technologies. And it is difficult to classify the changes that took place in Australian archaeological practices as 'new archaeology', considering they grew out of the distinctive geological and environmental histories of Australia as much as international influences. It was a tradition that remained fieldwork-oriented, rather than theory-bound.

The shift towards a distinctive Australian archaeological tradition was driven by many individuals, but, as Golson wrote in 1986, 'The locus of change ... can be readily identified as the seminar room of the Department of Anthropology at the University of Sydney. The dominant figure was Rhys Jones'.⁴³ That seminar room also included staff such as

³⁹ Rhys Jones, 'The Coming of the Aborigines', in John Hardy and Alan Frost (eds.), *Studies from Terra Australis to Australia*, Occasional Paper no. 6 (Canberra: Australian Academy of the Humanities and Highland Press, 1989), 10-24, 23.

⁴⁰ Rhys Jones, 'Diary and Notes, Feb 6 – Jun 16, 1963', Rhys Jones Papers, NLA, MS ACC 08/042, Item 10-17, Box 1.

⁴¹ Jones interviewed by Smith, ORAL TRC 2677/1.

⁴² Golson, 'Old Guards and New Waves', 2.

⁴³ Golson, 'Old Guards and New Waves', 5

anthropologists Les Hiatt and Mervyn Meggitt and archaeologists Vincent Megaw and Richard Wright (who happened to be Eric Higgs' son-in-law). It also became a testing room for the ideas of a group of students who would come to shape the Australian archaeological tradition, including Harry Allen, Jim Allen, Annie Bickford, Sandra Bowdler, Emily Coleman, Ian Glover, Jo Kamminga, Harry Lourandos, Leslie Maynard, Betty Meehan and Alan Thorne.⁴⁴ Each of these researchers would play major roles in what Jones and Jim Allen have described as the 'cowboy' phase of Australian archaeology.⁴⁵

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Jones arrived in Australia on a warm, clear day in late August 1963. The light was 'bright and brazen'⁴⁶ and as he descended from the plane he was immediately 'struck by the smell of gum'.⁴⁷ His new colleague Richard Wright, with whom he would share a teaching load, met him at the airport in an old pink Peugeot: 'he had desert boots, khaki trousers and an open-necked shirt, and I thought "this is great"'.⁴⁸ They got off to a good start when Wright offered him the choice of going to sleep or visiting a nearby excavation. 'Naturally,' Jones said, 'I wanted to see the excavation.'⁴⁹ Within an hour or so of landing in Australia, he was investigating a shell midden on the shores of Botany Bay, near where Captain Cook had moored in 1770. The site was unlike anything he had seen before. He recalled being overwhelmed by the knowledge that 'Hunters lived in this landscape until yesterday.'⁵⁰

The excavation, run by Vincent Megaw at Curracurrang rockshelter in the Royal National Park, was where many of his colleagues and students at the University of Sydney cut their archaeological teeth. And as a shell midden, not a traditional stratified deposit, it presented completely different challenges to the sites Jones had worked on during his time at Cambridge. Instead of a series of layers, the archaeologist had to decipher a complex stratigraphy of interleaving lenses of shell, ash and sand, in which a meal lasting a few minutes could sit beside another separated by a thousand years.⁵¹ Within a few months he

⁴⁴ See Stephanie Moser, 'Archaeology and its Disciplinary Culture: The Professionalisation of Australian Prehistoric Archaeology', PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 1995, 179-183.

⁴⁵ Rhys Jones and Jim Allen, 'Caveat Excavator: A Sea Bird Midden on Steep Head Island, North West Tasmania', *Australian Archaeology* 8 (1978), 142-145, 144.

⁴⁶ Rhys Jones in Meehan, 'The Early Life of a New Chum', 9.

⁴⁷ Jones interviewed by Smith, ORAL TRC 2677/1.

⁴⁸ Jones interviewed by Smith, ORAL TRC 2677/1.

⁴⁹ Jones and Megaw, 'Confessions of a Wild Colonial Boy', 14.

⁵⁰ Jones interviewed by Smith, ORAL TRC 2677/1.

⁵¹ Jones and Megaw, 'Confessions of a Wild Colonial Boy', 14.

would become intimately familiar with the sculptural structure of a midden, working his way across ‘a complex of practically continuous midden’ along the northern Tasmanian coastline.⁵²

Alongside his teaching duties, Jones’ new position required that he enrol to do a PhD. Today, a PhD topic in archaeology might consist of the analysis of a specific aspect of a site, such as the faunal remains or the shells: in 1963, Jones was invited to write his PhD on the history and archaeology of an entire state. ‘There were political reasons why the next person to arrive would need to do Tasmania,’ Jones later reflected.⁵³ Little was known of the archaeology of the region and John Mulvaney had been growing increasingly concerned about the ‘finders-keepers’ mentality that prevailed on the island state. On a visit to Mount Cameron West in May 1962, he had been shocked to find an iconic Aboriginal carving site severely damaged and surrounded by crumbling debris: the carvings had been sawn off the rock face to make a display in the Hobart Museum.⁵⁴ The Interim Council of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies resolved to cease all funding for research in the state until a trained archaeologist was able to do a reconnaissance of existing Aboriginal sites.

Jones, excited by the sheer lack of archaeological research on the island, was happy to fulfil the role.⁵⁵ He applied for a grant with the AIAS and was provided with funds and a Land Rover to carry out a reconnaissance expedition during the summer of 1963-64. He was keen to find out how long people had been in Tasmania and whether they had arrived there before the sundering of Bass Strait: ‘This is essentially the setting up of a sequence’.⁵⁶ He also hoped to excavate a variety of sites across the region in order to ask questions about subsistence patterns, seasonal movements, and the ways in which the archaeology can be interpreted in light of the ethnographic evidence, ‘flimsy though it is’.⁵⁷ He assembled a team of young men from the archaeology department at the Sydney University to accompany him: Jim Allen, Ian Glover, Ron Wild, and Bob Reece. Campbell McKnight from the ANU joined the team in January 1964, bringing with him the dramatic news of Mulvaney’s Kenniff Cave

⁵² Rhys Jones, ‘Archaeological Reconnaissance in Tasmania, 1963/64’, Rhys Jones Papers, NLA, MS ACC 03/250, Folder 57, Box 11, 3.

⁵³ Jones interviewed by Smith, ORAL TRC 2677/1.

⁵⁴ John Mulvaney, *Digging up a Past* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2011), 116-117.

⁵⁵ Jones had read little other than Mulvaney’s 1961 article, ‘The Stone Age of Australia’ and Clark’s 1961 subchapter in *World Prehistory*.

⁵⁶ Rhys Jones, ‘Second Archaeological Report for Field Season in Tasmania, Summer 1964-65’, Report to AIAS, October 1965, Rhys Jones Papers, NLA, MS ACC 03/250, Folder 115, Box 24, 3.

⁵⁷ Jones, ‘Second Archaeological Report for Field Season in Tasmania, Summer 1964-65’, 3.

date: the first Australians had a Pleistocene past. ‘That night,’ Allen recalled, ‘as we gazed northwards over Bass Strait, we knew the answer to Flinders’ conundrum, although the final proof would require years more research to demonstrate. People had walked, dry-shod, to Tasmania, at a time when lowered sea levels exposed dry land, at a minimum, more than 8,000 years ago.’⁵⁸

In advance of the expedition, Jones had sought advice about Aboriginal sites from colleagues in Geology at the University of Tasmania. He was warned about the paucity of deep stratified archaeological sites on the island. ‘Search might produce something,’ wrote JL Davies on the eve of Jones’ departure, ‘but don’t build any hopes too high in this direction.’⁵⁹ The warning underlined how little was known about the island’s archaeology. ‘The major problem in Tasmania,’ Jones soon discovered on arrival, ‘was not how to find a site, but how out of hundreds, to choose one or two on which to concentrate.’⁶⁰

One of the few sites Jones knew about before his arrival in Tasmania was Rocky Cape, and it was a site he was determined *not* to dig on this first expedition. Rocky Cape was a familiar name to archaeologists around the world. It had long been regarded as ‘the key to Tasmanian Prehistory’ as well as holding answers to evolutionary questions about the origins of the Tasmanians.⁶¹ The South Cave had been dug dozens of times in the twentieth century by treasure-seekers, amateurs and well-meaning curators. It was even looted between Jones’ brief visits in January and March 1964. ‘The site looked a shambles,’ Jones reported back to the AIAS, ‘...collapsing holes, disturbed deposit, tin cans, beer bottles, and other non Aboriginal artefacts attest to enthusiastic though somewhat less scientific interest.’⁶² He took a charcoal sample from one of the exposed pits to find out how long people had lived there, but resolved not to add to the destruction of the cave site in that first field season. Instead he decided to test his methods ‘and perhaps make my initial mistakes’ at a similar coastal cave site ten kilometres west of Rocky Cape.⁶³ ‘There was a feeling that before we could tackle, or

⁵⁸ Jim Allen, ‘Hunter Gatherers as Colonisers: The First Humans East of the Wallace Line’, The Mulvaney Lecture, Australian National University, 24 March 1999.

⁵⁹ JL Davies to Rhys Jones, 29 November 1963, Rhys Jones Papers, NLA, MS ACC 03/250, Folder 61, Box 12.

⁶⁰ Rhys Jones, ‘Rocky Cape and the Problem of the Tasmanians’, PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1971, 58.

⁶¹ Robert Pulleine, ‘The Tasmanians and Their Stone-Culture’, *Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science* 19 (1928), 294-314, 310.

⁶² Jones, ‘Second Archaeological Report for Field Season in Tasmania, Summer 1964-65’, 8.

⁶³ Jones, ‘Rocky Cape and the Problem of the Tasmanians’, 59.

even comment on the established Australian controversies, we had to learn the archaeological alphabet in Australia.’⁶⁴

On 21 December 1963 he followed a steep track behind Sisters’ Beach to the low, wide mouth of ‘Blackman’s Cave’ which was perched high above sea level in the side of a Pre-Cambrian quartzite cliff.⁶⁵ His notes on the day were brief: ‘Looked at cave at Sister’s Creek – Beauty!’⁶⁶ He was especially excited because the cave had preserved a rich variety of animal bones, which would allow him to answer questions about what people were hunting and gathering, cooking and eating: to apply ‘the economic approach to prehistory.’⁶⁷ He started excavation on 1 January 1964, exposing a thirty-foot long section and gaining a glimpse of an ancient society: ‘people sitting in the mouth of the cave, chipping and using their tools, and then dumping their shells and animal bones further inside.’⁶⁸

To put the site ‘into some sort of archaeological perspective’, the team embarked on a survey of sites along the north coast.⁶⁹ They struggled through a contemporary midden at an abandoned oyster cannery at St Helens, explored eroding middens in the sand dunes of Anson’s Bay, and in the Bay of Fires they excavated a stone arrangement, exposing another stone arrangement in the same place, one foot below the surface: a powerful demonstration of deep ceremonial connections to place.⁷⁰ They investigated the inland sandstone country, recording more than thirty rock shelters in Murderer’s Gully, and at Trial Harbour on the west coast, found dozens of clay pipes mixed in with Aboriginal artefacts ‘in a dune beneath several feet of sand’.⁷¹ The weather was ‘bloody awful’, Jones wrote in his distinctive scrawl, but the sites were ‘bloody rich!’⁷² The most promising site they came across was a large, grassed-over midden near West Point lighthouse, which stood ‘in the teeth of the Westerly gales, on the low rocky shore, with numerous off-shore reefs in front, and backed by coastal sedge land.’⁷³ A sample pit turned up thousands of animal bones and artefacts amidst the

⁶⁴ Jones, ‘Rocky Cape and the Problem of the Tasmanians’, 57.

⁶⁵ Jones, ‘Archaeological Reconnaissance in Tasmania, 1963/64’, 3-5.

⁶⁶ Rhys Jones, torn note page, dated 21st [December 1963], Rhys Jones Papers, NLA, MS ACC 05/191, Item 55, Box 5.

⁶⁷ Jones, ‘Archaeological Reconnaissance in Tasmania, 1963/64’, 1, 4, 9.

⁶⁸ Jones, ‘Second Archaeological Report for Field Season in Tasmania, Summer 1964-65’, 5.

⁶⁹ Jones, ‘Second Archaeological Report for Field Season in Tasmania, Summer 1964-65’, 3.

⁷⁰ Rhys Jones, ‘Excavations on a Stone Arrangement in Tasmania’, *Man* 62 (May-Jun, 1965), 78-79.

⁷¹ Jones, ‘Archaeological Reconnaissance in Tasmania, 1963/64’, 2, 5.

⁷² Rhys Jones, ‘West Point I, Book 1’, December 1964-January 1965, Field Journals, AIATSIS Library, Canberra, MS 5040/1/6; Rhys Jones, ‘West Point I, Book 2’, 1965, Field Journals, AIATSIS Library, MS 5040/1/7.

⁷³ Jones, ‘Second Archaeological Report for Field Season in Tasmania, Summer 1964-65’, 4.

cracked and blackened shells, as well as a human molar.⁷⁴ This single, dated tooth became a crucial piece of evidence back in Sydney: it was all physical anthropologists Alan Thorne and Neil ‘Black Mac’ Macintosh needed to overturn the nineteenth-century belief that the Tasmanians were a separate race to continental Aboriginal people.⁷⁵ It demonstrated that the first Tasmanians and the first Australians shared a common ancestry in the Pleistocene past.

The stories from this first expedition have entered archaeological folklore. As Jones’ wife, Betty Meehan, later reflected, ‘He took a seedy-looking bunch of males on his first expedition and received quite a bit of flak for not including any women!’⁷⁶ Most locals regarded the group of twenty-something, bearded academics with some contempt, not least because ‘we were dealing with the Aboriginal question’: ‘We were seen as a kid expedition and we didn’t look right. We were dirty and got drunk and ran around with women and things like that.’⁷⁷ On more than one occasion the expedition was stopped by the police, who suspected them of stealing the Z-plated Land Rover they had received from the AIAS.⁷⁸ They camped in army tents, worked long hours in wet, windy conditions, and drank late into the night at the local pubs. The atmosphere in the group was often tense, with the ‘big, burly and rather gruff’⁷⁹ Jim Allen playing Fletcher Christian to Jones’ Captain Bligh: ‘I had lots of mutinies and stuff, partly because I was a Captain Bligh and I didn’t tolerate mutinies.’⁸⁰ The only visible Aboriginal presence Jones encountered on this first expedition was at the 1964 Burnie Show, when he and Allen were invited to ‘come up and punch a Darkie’ outside Jimmy Sharman’s boxing tent.⁸¹ (They declined.)

Jones returned in December 1964 with a more gender-balanced excavation team, as well as more focused questions about the geology, ecology and zoology of the region.⁸² His tattered field journals, caked in dirt, are full of complex equations, rough geological sketches, and

⁷⁴ Jones, ‘West Point I, Book 2’.

⁷⁵ NWG Macintosh and BCW Barker, *The Osteology of Aboriginal Man in Tasmania* (Sydney: Australasian Medical Publishing Co., Oceania Monographs No. 12, 1965), 56-68; Alan Thorne, ‘The Racial Affinities of Tasmanian Aborigines: Some New Skeletal Evidence’, MA thesis, University of Sydney, 1967.

⁷⁶ Meehan, ‘The Early Life of a New Chum’, 10-11.

⁷⁷ Jones interviewed by Smith, ORAL TRC 2677/1.

⁷⁸ Jones and Megaw, ‘Confessions of a Wild Colonial Boy’, 15.

⁷⁹ Jones interviewed by Smith, ORAL TRC 2677/1.

⁸⁰ Jones interviewed by Smith, ORAL TRC 2677/1. See also Rhys Jones and Betty Meehan, ‘A Crucible of Australian Prehistory: The 1965 Hobart ANZAAS Conference’ in Atholl Anderson and Tim Murray (eds.), *Australian Archaeologist: Collected Papers in Honour of Jim Allen* (Canberra: Coombs Academic Publishing, 2000), 40-61, 44.

⁸¹ Jones and Meehan, ‘A Crucible of Australian Prehistory’, 55.

⁸² The team over the eleven-week field season included Annie Bickford, Dorothy Bingham, Josephine Flood, Stuart Hume, Harry Lourandos, Donald Miller, Jeanette Partridge, Grote Reber, William Rodman and Alan Thorne.

lists of vegetation with notes on the taste of local nuts, leaves and flowers.⁸³ He saw in the West Point site an opportunity to understand the structure of a midden, not only stratigraphically, layer-by-layer, but spatially across a living floor: How was the mound formed? Where did people cook? Where did they work? Where did they sleep? He decided to excavate the site as if it were a Bronze Age barrow, driving two large trenches through the middle of the mound in the form of a cross. Over six weeks they dug, sieved and sorted through sixty tons of deposit, uncovering the material remains of a society with a high protein diet of seals and whales, wombats and wallabies, shellfish and mutton birds.⁸⁴ In the middle of the mound, they found stone flakes, cooking hearths, and burnt bones, surrounded on the edges by piles of Abalone shells. Thirty years later, Jones lamented his large-scale approach: 'I had this lust: that I wanted "it", whatever "it" was. ... I had more material than I could possibly ever analyse.' It was a 'euphoric experience' to work on such a rich site, but in retrospect, he reflected, 'West Point was discovered too early'.⁸⁵ He would not make the same mistakes at Rocky Cape.

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The field season at Rocky Cape was comparatively short. Jones started work at the South Cave in February 1965 with a reduced team. The chamber was narrow and deep, with a rough, sloping roof. The vandalism of the site – the many holes that riddled the cave floor – gave Jones a rare three-dimensional view of the deposit: he was able to read the exposed stratigraphy from the side, whilst trowelling his way from the top-down. It was a process Jones described as 'a kind of sculpture in reverse'.⁸⁶ Winifred Mumford's published illustrations of these 'interleaved and intercut elliptical hearths and shell lenses' are stunning works of art.⁸⁷ While Jones drew stratigraphy in the South Cave, Annie Bickford, Harry Lourandos and Don Miller began excavating in the North Cave on the opposite side of the peninsula.⁸⁸ It quickly became apparent that they were working on two distinct sites.⁸⁹

⁸³ Rhys Jones, 'Rocky Cape Book A', 5 June-14 July 1967, Field Journals, AIATSIS Library, MS 5040/1/17.

⁸⁴ Jones, 'Second Archaeological Report for Field Season in Tasmania, Summer 1964-65', 1.

⁸⁵ Jones interviewed by Smith, ORAL TRC 2677/1.

⁸⁶ Jones interviewed by Smith, ORAL TRC 2677/1.

⁸⁷ Details of this section drawing are included on the cover of this thesis. Rhys Jones vividly describes the image in: 'Hunting Forbears', in M Roe (ed.), *The Flow of Culture: Tasmania studies* (Canberra: Australian Academy of the Humanities, 1987), 14-49, 31-32.

⁸⁸ Rhys Jones, 'Rocky Cape II', 1965, Field Journals, AIATSIS Library, MS 5040/1/9.

⁸⁹ Rhys Jones, 'Rocky Cape South Cave', February 1965, Field Journals, AIATSIS Library, MS 5040/1/11.



Fig. 20 Fieldworkers at West Bay, Tasmania, 17 June 1967: (l-r) Elizabeth Weaver, Rex Wells, Mrs Wells, Betty Meehan (Hiatt), Harry Allen, Jack Wells, Peter Johnstone, Harry Lourandos and Rhys Jones (sitting in front) (Source: Archives Office of Tasmania).



Fig. 21 West Point Midden, 1964-65, which Jones' team excavated as if it were a Bronze Age barrow (Source: R Jones, AIATSIS).

Although only seven minutes apart, there were dramatic differences in diet, technology and trading patterns of the societies that lived in the two caves. The difference, Jones realised as they dug deeper, was chronological: combined, the two cave sites provided a continuous record of occupation. After four weeks of excavation, on 1 March 1965, the perplexed team packed the finds into orange cases to be taken back to Sydney for analysis.⁹⁰ Six months later, Jones returned to Tasmania to announce a speculative sequence at the 1965 ANZAAS congress in Hobart.⁹¹

The first Tasmanians, he argued, walked across the Bassian Bridge from mainland Australia sometime during the last Ice Age.⁹² As the ice caps melted and the sea levels rose, Rocky Cape was transformed from an inland ridge to a coastal cave; heath and sedgeland replaced the surrounding moorlands and rainforest. Almost as soon as the sea shore lapped at the base of Rocky Cape around eight thousand years ago, people started to occupy the caves, leaving behind them thousands of shells, fish bones and stone tools. They hunted fur and elephant seals, killing and butchering them away from the caves, and harvested vegetables from the surrounding coastal heath, softening them with stone and cooking them in small kitchen fires. Around five thousand years ago new raw materials began to appear on the living floor, reflecting an expansion of trade patterns and regional movements along the north coast: ‘an enlargement of the ecological space of the Aborigines.’⁹³ The South Cave, where Jones had begun excavating, gradually began to fill up and, around 3500 years ago, was abandoned. At the same time a dramatic change occurred in the society living at Rocky Cape: scale fish suddenly and completely disappeared from their diet. ‘In archaeological terms,’ Jones wrote in his thesis, ‘this was an instantaneous event and in actual historic terms, the time period referred to, could not have been more than the order of a hundred years.’⁹⁴ Bone tools and some variants of stone technology also dropped out of use; simple spears, throwing sticks, and unhafted and unground stone tools were all that remained.⁹⁵ People continued to use the North Cave into recent times, living off wallabies and bandicoots, seals and shellfish, birds and vegetables: but fish did not return to the diet of the Tasmanians living at Rocky Cape.

⁹⁰ Jones, ‘Second Archaeological Report for Field Season in Tasmania, Summer 1964-65’, 1.

⁹¹ Jones and Meehan, ‘A Crucible of Australian Prehistory’.

⁹² Rhys Jones, ‘A Speculative Archaeological Sequence for North-West Tasmania’, *Records of the Queen Victoria Museum* 25 (Dec 1966), 1-12.

⁹³ Rhys Jones, ‘Man as an Element in a Continental Fauna: The Case of the Sundering of the Bassian Bridge’, in Jim Allen, Jack Golson and Rhys Jones (eds.), *Sunda and Sahul* (London: Academic Press, 1977), 318-386, 345.

⁹⁴ Jones, ‘Rocky Cape and the Problem of the Tasmanians’, 603.

⁹⁵ Jones, ‘The Tasmanian Paradox’, 196.

Why did the Tasmanians stop eating fish? The abrupt change of diet and technology, Jones argued, could not be explained by a transforming ecology or climate; it was part of a broader cultural shift: ‘the internal evolution of a single, historically related technological tradition.’⁹⁶ At first he characterised the simplification of technology as ‘a gradually improving exploitation of an environment’: a trend towards efficiency by a highly agile society.⁹⁷ In later papers he imagined the Tasmanians as castaways, stranded from the cultural dynamism of mainland Australia, in social disarray and economic stagnation. The cessation of fish eating became evidence of ‘devolution’: an ‘economic maladaptation’.⁹⁸ He argued that the sundering of the Bassian Bridge, and the resulting millennia-long isolation, had forced a slow cultural decline. ‘Like a blow above the heart,’ he wrote in 1977 in heightened prose, ‘it took a long time to take effect, but slowly but surely there was a simplification of the tool kit, a diminution in the range of foods eaten, perhaps a squeezing of intellectuality. The world’s longest isolation, the world’s simplest technology.’⁹⁹

While no one disputed the archaeological findings, Jones’ devolution thesis sparked one of the longest and most heated debates in Australian archaeology.¹⁰⁰ It was the first argument for cultural degeneration in the world.¹⁰¹ Jones’ colleagues and students searched around for alternative explanations to the archaeological evidence. Sandra Bowdler disputed the representative nature of Rocky Cape and argued that fish had never been a staple of the Tasmanian diet.¹⁰² Harry Allen tackled Jones’ thesis with an optimal foraging argument: why eat fish when you can harvest higher-energy foods like seals?¹⁰³ Harry Lourandos suggested the changes and expanded territories were triggered by a drier, cooler climate.¹⁰⁴ Ron Vanderwal and David Horton argued for the shift to be understood as ‘adaptation’ rather than ‘degeneration’.¹⁰⁵ And Nicholas Thomas critiqued the ideology behind Jones’ ‘cultural’ explanation, triggering a lasting discussion about social theory and drivers of change in

⁹⁶ Jones, ‘Rocky Cape and the Problem of the Tasmanians’, 607.

⁹⁷ Jones, ‘A Speculative Archaeological Sequence for North-West Tasmania’, 9.

⁹⁸ Jones, ‘Man as an Element in a Continental Fauna’, 343.

⁹⁹ Jones, ‘The Tasmanian Paradox’, 203.

¹⁰⁰ See, for example, Rhys Jones, ‘Why Did the Tasmanians Stop Eating Fish?’ in Richard Gould (ed.), *Explorations in Ethno-Archaeology* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1978), 11-47; Robin Sim, ‘Why the Tasmanians Stopped Eating Fish: Evidence for Late Holocene Expansion in Resource Exploitation Strategies’, in J Hall and I McNiven (eds.), *Australian Coastal Archaeology* (Canberra: ANU, 1999), 263-69; Taylor, ‘The Polemics of Eating Fish in Tasmania’.

¹⁰¹ Tim Murray, ‘Tasmania and the Constitution of “The Dawn of Humanity”’, *Antiquity*, 66 (1992), 730-43.

¹⁰² Sandra Bowdler, ‘Hunter Hill, Hunter Island’, PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1979.

¹⁰³ Harry Allen, ‘Left out in the Cold: Why the Tasmanians Stopped Eating Fish’, *The Artefact* 4 (1979), 1-10.

¹⁰⁴ Harry Lourandos, ‘10,000 Years in the Tasmanian Highlands’, *Australian Archaeology* 16 (1983), 39-44.

¹⁰⁵ Ron Vanderwal, ‘Adaptive Technology in Southwest Tasmania’, *Australian Archaeology* 8 (1978), 107-127; David Horton, ‘Tasmanian Adaptation’, *Mankind* 12 (1979), 28-34.

ancient Australia (see chapter nine).¹⁰⁶ The charged nature of debate brought an exasperated Richard Wright to exclaim in 1982, ‘Any journal editor who sees a title which includes the words “Tasmania” and “Fish” should reach for a gun.’¹⁰⁷

In her recent book *Into the Heart of Tasmania*, historian Rebe Taylor seeks to defuse this debate through a close rereading of the ethnographic sources. She weaves documentary evidence of fishing with contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal testimony to suggest that the stark dietary transformations in the archaeology at Rocky Cape were localised. Regardless of the evidence of economic change in ancient Australia, she concludes, scale-fish retain an important place in Tasmanian Aboriginal cultural memory.¹⁰⁸

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The 1965 conference, where Jones gave his first version of the Rocky Cape sequence, proved to be especially influential for another reason. It was there that Jones and Betty Meehan (then Hiatt) gained access to an advance copy of NJB (Brian) Plomley’s transcription of George Augustus Robinson’s journals, which offered by far the richest account of Aboriginal life in Tasmania at the point of contact.¹⁰⁹ Meehan drew heavily upon the new transcriptions for her Honours thesis on the historical information about Aboriginal diets and subsistence in Tasmania, while Jones searched the journals for insights into the Tasmanians’ sudden ‘ichthyophobia’.¹¹⁰ ‘I felt that I could not proceed with my archaeological analysis until I had read and digested this information, and had attempted to organise it into a cultural synthesis in my own mind at least.’¹¹¹ Jones empathised with Robinson, who must have felt the ‘cruel irony ... that his efforts in conciliating the Aborigines probably hastened their final extinction’; but he also developed a deep admiration for the ways in which Aboriginal people

¹⁰⁶ Nicholas Thomas, ‘Social Theory, Ecology and Epistemology: Theoretical Issues in Australian Prehistory’, *Mankind* 13 (1981), 165-177.

¹⁰⁷ Attrib. Wright, 1982, in David Horton, ‘Here be Dragons: A View of Australian Archaeology’, in MA Smith, M Spriggs and B Fankhauser (eds.), *Sahul in Review: Pleistocene Archaeology in Australia, New Guinea and Island Melanesia* (Canberra: Department of Prehistory, ANU, 1993), 11-16, 13.

¹⁰⁸ Taylor, *Into the Heart of Tasmania*, 185-186. For a more thorough review, see Taylor, ‘The Polemics of Eating Fish in Tasmania’, 1-26

¹⁰⁹ Jones and Meehan, ‘A Crucible of Australian Prehistory’, 52-53; NJB Plomley, *Friendly Mission: That Tasmanian Journals and Papers of George Augustus Robinson 1829-1834* (Hobart: Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 1966).

¹¹⁰ Betty Hiatt ‘The Food Quest and the Economy of the Tasmanian Aborigines’, *Oceania* 38 (2) (Dec 1967), 99-133; Betty Hiatt, ‘The Food Quest and the Economy of the Tasmanian Aborigines’, *Oceania* 38 (3) (Mar 1968), 190-219; Betty Meehan, ‘Irreverent Recollections of the Making of an Anthropologist’, in Francesca Merlan, John Morton and Alan Rumsey (eds.), *Scholar and Sceptic: Australian Aboriginal Studies in Honour of L. R. Hiatt* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1997), 11-28.

¹¹¹ Jones, ‘Rocky Cape and the Problem of the Tasmanians’, 63.

had responded to the turbulent moment of contact, seamlessly incorporating dogs (new arrivals from the mainland) into their hunts, learning to handle and maintain guns, knapping glass and ceramics for tools, painting with rust instead of ochre.¹¹² ‘It would be wrong to see the Tasmanians as passive observers at their own funeral,’ he wrote in 1971, ‘A society which had retained its fundamental integrity since at least early postglacial times, managed to adapt rapidly to new conditions.’¹¹³

Jones was especially intrigued by Robinson’s observations of deliberate burning and Tasmanian ‘fire sticks’. ‘The Tasmanian Aborigines are dead.’ Jones concluded in 1967, ‘...however, [they] have left their own mark on the Tasmanian landscape.’¹¹⁴ Robinson’s journals, and those of other early colonists, were rich with stories of Aboriginal burning and vivid descriptions of grasslands and open-canopy woodlands that were now being closed in by rainforest. Since the 1965 ANZAAS Congress, Jones had been fascinated by the idea of Aboriginal people as ecological agents.¹¹⁵ In an influential paper, the botanist Bill Jackson had drawn attention to how ‘a long history of firing by the Tasmanian natives’ had fundamentally altered the coastal vegetation; he attributed recent ecological changes to ‘the lower incidence of fire in the regions following the extinction of the aboriginals.’¹¹⁶ If the sedgeland surrounding Rocky Cape was ‘pyroptic in origin’, Jones wondered, then how deliberately, how systematically had the first Australians manipulated the natural environment?¹¹⁷ In 1966, on a short visit to Jim Allen’s excavation at Port Essington in the Northern Territory, Jones gained his first glimpse through a plane window of Aboriginal fires moving across a landscape: ‘smoke from fires extending over fronts of scores of miles.’¹¹⁸ He contrasted the mosaic ecological patchwork in Arnhem Land with the ‘empty’ landscape of Tasmania, where traditional burning had stopped more than a century earlier, and he began to think of the Australian landscape ‘as a human artefact, in the same way that a cleared field is

¹¹² Jones, ‘Rocky Cape and the Problem of the Tasmanians’, 16; Rhys Jones, ‘Tasmanian Aborigines and Dogs’, *Mankind* 7 (1970), 256-71.

¹¹³ Jones, ‘Rocky Cape and the Problem of the Tasmanians’, 13.

¹¹⁴ Rhys Jones, ‘Middens and Man in Tasmania’, *Australian Natural History* (Sep 1967), 359-364, 359.

¹¹⁵ David Harris, ‘People, Land, Fire and Food: Comments on Two Jonesian Themes’, in Atholl Anderson, Ian Lilley and Sue O’Connor (eds.), *Histories of Old Ages: Essays in Honour of Rhys Jones* (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2001), 55-59, 56.

¹¹⁶ WD Jackson, ‘Vegetation’, in JL Davies (ed.), *Atlas of Tasmania* (Hobart: Lands and Surveys Department, 1965), 30-35, 30, 33; JL Davies, ‘A Vegetation Map of Tasmania’, *Geography Review* 54 (1964), 249-253.

¹¹⁷ Jones, ‘Second Archaeological Report for Field Season in Tasmania, Summer 1964-65’, 4.

¹¹⁸ Rhys Jones, ‘The Geographical Background to the Arrival of Man in Australia and Tasmania’, *Archaeology and Physical Anthropology in Oceania* 3(3) (Oct 1968), 186-215, 206.

one.’¹¹⁹ ‘Perhaps’, he suggested provocatively in 1969, ‘we should call what the Aborigines did “fire-stick farming”?’¹²⁰

Jones was not alone in drawing attention to the ‘pyro-management’ of Indigenous people, but he was the first in Australia to conjure an image and a phrase that ignited academic debate. It was a theme taken up immediately by historians such as Noel Butlin and Keith Hancock, and fully developed by Sylvia Hallam in her masterful study of Aboriginal society on the Swan River, *Fire and Hearth*.¹²¹ Jones’ ideas about fire evolved further when he and Betty Meehan lived for a year in Arnhem Land in 1972-73, where they learnt the Gidjingarli tongue and recorded the burning and subsistence practices of the Anbarra people of the Blyth River (see chapter six). On these expeditions, Jones aspired to be a ‘mini Robinson’: ‘not the evangelism, nor the enormous courage of that man, but still as an observer’.¹²² He hoped, like Robinson had been in his time, to be a ‘floating eye ball’, noting in his journal the mundane details that were ‘so obvious that nobody else bothered to record’ them. In this spirit, on his preliminary fieldtrip with Nicolas Peterson in May 1970 he made an inventory of his belongings, documenting ‘the artefacts of mid 20th C technological man’.¹²³

The friendships he formed during his time living with the Anbarra people, and the cultural insights they afforded him, gave him a more integrated understanding of the subtleties and complexities of Aboriginal life. ‘Up until then, I’d played the fool a bit. It was like a Boy’s Own story. But when you learn an Aboriginal language, you see the landscape quite differently. You see it through their eyes. You have to try to cross the boundary.’¹²⁴ Although he still regarded the first Australians as ‘hunters’ of the Ice Age world, his time living with the Anbarra allowed him to appreciate the immutable links in their society between land and people, language and ecology, the natural and the supernatural.¹²⁵ Seasonal burning, he was taught, was a vital part of the natural and spiritual management of the land. He observed first-hand the routine of Anthropogenic fire, timed to biological and climatic cycles and staggered

¹¹⁹ Jones, ‘Rocky Cape and the Problem of the Tasmanians’, 77.

¹²⁰ Rhys Jones, ‘Fire-stick Farming’, *Australian Natural History* 16 (1969), 224-228, 227.

¹²¹ See WK Hancock, *Discovering Monaro: A Study of Man’s Impact on his Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 25-26; Sylvia Hallam, *Fire and Hearth: A Study of Aboriginal Usage and European Usurpation in South-Western Australia* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1975).

¹²² Rhys Jones, ‘A Trip to Mirngadja, NE Arnhem Land with Nic Peterson’, 15-27 May 1970, Field Journals, AIATSIS Library, MS 5040/1/29.

¹²³ Jones, ‘A Trip to Mirngadja’.

¹²⁴ Rhys Jones quoted in Cheryl Jones, ‘Australiana Jones and the Last Crusade’, 36.

¹²⁵ Rhys Jones, ‘Landscapes of the Mind: Aboriginal Perceptions of the Natural World’, in John Mulvaney (ed.), *The Humanities and the Australian Environment* (Canberra: Australian Academy of the Humanities, 1991), 21-48.

geographically so that the burned mixed with the unburned. He was in awe of the complex system that had been developed over hundreds of generations by ‘hunting gardeners’.¹²⁶

But despite his intimate understanding of Aboriginal uses of fire, Jones relied too heavily on one interpretation offered by the editor of Robinson’s journal, Plomley: that the Tasmanians could not make fire. There are no eye-witness accounts of Aboriginal people actively making fire in Tasmania before the 1840s, leading Plomley and, in turn, Jones to conclude that ‘Fire was carried ... in smouldering slow burning fire-sticks, but the Tasmanians did not know how to make it.’¹²⁷ This supposition fitted neatly into Jones’ argument for cultural devolution – and surely must have encouraged it – but it was another provocative statement that would come to haunt him.¹²⁸ As anthropologist Beth Gott has argued persuasively, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence: ‘Fire-making was difficult in the damp Tasmanian climate, and the preference was to carry fire from place to place, but the Tasmanians did know how to make fire.’¹²⁹

Jones synthesised his archaeological insights in his 1971 PhD thesis, ‘Rocky Cape and the Problem of the Tasmanians’, which he finished in a ten-week writing surge from his new position at the ANU. The ‘problem’ in his title alluded to the long-running debates over the Tasmanians’ origins and their ‘place within the evolutionary sequence of human societies’.¹³⁰ But Jones also set out two new ‘problems’: the effects of isolation on Tasmanian Aboriginal culture, which he addressed with his ‘regression’ argument, and the horrific violence and ‘deep guilt’ attached to Tasmanian colonial history, which he would explore more fully in the 1978 film *The Last Tasmanian*. ‘Within their terrible lifetime,’ Jones wrote in his introduction, ‘an entire people with a distinctive history going back to the end of the Ice Age, was snuffed out. For the Australian nation, and perhaps for humanity, this will be the problem of the Tasmanians.’¹³¹

Jones felt the need, as ‘a global citizen’, to confront this colonial crime, and, as a Welshman, he empathised, in Schrire’s words, ‘with what it is like to be on the receiving end of cultural

¹²⁶ Rhys Jones, ‘The Neolithic, Palaeolithic and the Hunting Gardeners: Man and Land in the Antipodes’, in RP Suggate and M Cresswell (eds.), *Quaternary Studies* (Wellington: Royal Society of New Zealand, 1975), 21-34.

¹²⁷ Jones, ‘The Tasmanian Paradox’, 196.

¹²⁸ Taylor, ‘The Polemics of Making Fire in Tasmania’.

¹²⁹ Beth Gott, ‘Fire-Making in Tasmania: Absence of Evidence Is Not Evidence of Absence’, *Current Anthropology* 43(4) (Aug-Oct 2002), 650-656, 655.

¹³⁰ Jones, ‘Rocky Cape and the Problem of the Tasmanians’, 17.

¹³¹ Jones, ‘Rocky Cape and the Problem of the Tasmanians’, 16.

drowning, and cultural loss.¹³² As Rebe Taylor has argued, the idea of extinction shaped the way in which Jones approached and analysed sources about the Tasmanian past.¹³³ The culmination of his immersion in Robinson's journals was his contribution to Norman Tindale's *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia* (1974), in which he drew together all the available ethnographic information into a masterful and mournful synthesis of Aboriginal society in Tasmania at the point of contact.¹³⁴ This book, along with the accompanying map of tribal territories, is still used today, often by Indigenous Australians, to illustrate the diversity and complexity of Aboriginal society.¹³⁵

Jones was profoundly affected by the violence he read about in Robinson's journals and in his thesis he drew comparisons between Tasmania's colonial history and the atrocities of Buchenwald and My Lai:

one's gorge rises at this sorry tale – of psychopathic sadism, of punitive parties and concentration camps, of Sunday afternoon man hunts, of sexual mutilation, of cutting flesh off living bodies and feeding it to dogs, of burying a baby up to its neck in sand and kicking its head off in front of its mother, of tying the severed head of a husband around the neck of the raped spouse. Floating above this, was the cynical hypocrisy of officialdom, the simpering of apologists, the great covering up of truth. Torn diaries and documents in the archives, witness a deep guilt that has yet to be expiated from the cool Georgian landscape of old Tasmania.¹³⁶

That terrible history and those Georgian landscapes, along with Jones' archaeological ideas, were brought to life in Tom Haydon's ambitious and controversial documentary *The Last Tasmanian* (1978).

The idea for the film grew out of a conversation in a Sydney pub, when a fellow drinker turned to Haydon and asked, 'Tell me Tom, what *did* happen to the Tasmanian

¹³² Schrire, 'Betrayal as a Universal Element in the Sundering of Bass Strait', 30.

¹³³ Taylor, 'Reliable Mr Robinson and the Controversial Dr Jones'.

¹³⁴ Tindale initially decided to exclude Tasmania from his mapping project because, he reasoned, the first Tasmanians were 'extinct' and therefore 'no significant field information could be gathered about [their] former tribal structure'. Rhys Jones, 'Appendix: Tasmanian Tribes', in Norman B Tindale, *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia*, vol. 1, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 319-54.

¹³⁵ See, for example, Rachel Perkins, 'A Rightful Place: Correspondence', *Quarterly Essay* 56 (Nov 2014), 82-86, 83.

¹³⁶ Jones, 'Rocky Cape and the Problem of the Tasmanians', 9.

Aborigines?’¹³⁷ Haydon felt that the history of Tasmania had been ‘deliberately hidden from people’ and he recruited Jones to co-write a film about ‘the life and death of the Tasmanian Aborigines’.¹³⁸ The ‘infectiously enthusiastic’ Jones, now older and stouter than he was when we met him on Sisters’ Beach, stars in the film as explorer and explainer.¹³⁹ In one scene he and Jim Allen build a bark hut beside the water, cook abalone on the beach, and talk about the simple technology and delicious diet of the first Tasmanians. In another Jones whittles a spear with a stone tool and then uses it to stalk Allen, who shelters fearfully in a shepherd’s hut. In yet another, Jones lands heroically on the shore of Cape Barren Island, his face wet from sea spray, and goes mutton birding with the Aboriginal Tasmanians who live there. His breathless performances are interspersed with sweeping vistas of the Tasmanian landscape and solemn statements by the narrator, Leo McKern: ‘By 1876, when Truganini died, Tasmania was empty of Aborigines. It’s the swiftest and most complete case of genocide on record.’¹⁴⁰

The poetic tension of the film came from the collision of the archaeological story, of a gradually simplifying society, with the dramatic ‘extinction’ of the Aboriginal Tasmanians ‘within a generation’. In this stylistic rendering of the story, Jones’ arguments for a slow cultural decline over thousands of years were all too easily conflated with the devastating impact of European settlement. ‘Even if Abel Tasman had not sailed the winds of the Roaring Forties in 1642,’ Jones wondered in 1977, ‘were they in fact doomed – doomed to a slow strangulation of the mind?’¹⁴¹ Jones couldn’t resist the lyricism of this phrase: the dramatic convergence of archaeology and history and the terrible fate of Tasmanian Aboriginal society. He couldn’t anticipate the grief these words would cause. In his rush to romantic realisation he had made himself a glaring target.

The film was applauded in the press as ‘a remarkable and haunting documentary’, ‘a rare achievement’ that was ‘likely to severely jolt the national conscience’.¹⁴² Jones gave over 120

¹³⁷ Rhys Jones, ‘Obituaries: Tom Haydon (1938-1991): Film Interpreter of Australian Archaeology’, *Australian Archaeology* 35 (1992), 51-64, 63.

¹³⁸ Tom Haydon, ‘Interview with I. Stocks’, *Cinema Papers* 12 (1977), 304-6, 372, 377.

¹³⁹ Artis Film Productions, ‘Information: The Last Tasmanian’, 10.

¹⁴⁰ Tom Haydon (dir.), *The Last Tasmanian* (1978), Sydney: Artis Film Productions.

¹⁴¹ Jones, ‘The Tasmanian Paradox’, 203. In the film Jones used similar words: ‘Tasmanian history ... ends in catastrophe... in a sense their doom was sealed by that event’. Haydon, *The Last Tasmanian*.

¹⁴² Many critics wrote of tearful audiences lingering in the cinema long after the film had ended in ‘silent mourning’. These representative quotes come from Bev Tivey, *Daily Telegraph*, 6 October 1978; Penny Valentine, *Time Out*, 19-25 May 1978; *ANU Reporter*, 12 May 1978. The press responses were collated in Artis Film Productions, ‘The Impact of The Last Tasmanian’.

interviews on radio, television and in the press to generate public interest in the film and its subject.¹⁴³ But even while *The Last Tasmanian* was in production it was targeted by a resurgent Aboriginal community, who accused Jones and Haydon of ‘dancing on the graves of Aboriginal people’.¹⁴⁴ Soon after the film’s release, promotional posters around the country were plastered with a bright blue banner, declaring: ‘Racist! This film denies Tasmanian Aborigines their LAND RIGHTS’.¹⁴⁵ ‘The name of the film alone,’ wrote Aboriginal activist Michael Mansell, ‘leaves us with a sick taste in our mouths. At a time when Aboriginal people in Tasmania are fighting to maintain their existence in a racist white society, this film really attempts to undermine us.’¹⁴⁶ The criticism was sharpened by the fact that the filmmakers had sought advice and information from the Tasmanian Aboriginal Community. ‘We trusted and were betrayed,’ Rosalind Langford later said, ‘We weren’t consulted, our stories were edited, a particular line was advanced, and we helped portray the story which denied our existence.’¹⁴⁷

The backlash from the Aboriginal community found support amongst some of Jones’ colleagues. Archaeologists such as Annie Bickford and Sandra Bowdler, who had worked with Jones in Tasmania, condemned the film for perpetuating archaic racist ideologies; Bickford even helped make the ‘Racist!’ banners that were plastered over the film posters.¹⁴⁸ There was a feminist element to these critiques: a denunciation of Jones’ ‘cowboy’ bravado and the film’s all-male archaeological cast. Both Bowdler and Bickford took issue with Jones’ boyish and heroic performance in the film, associating him with the tarnished and interlinking ideas of imperialism, machismo and racism. In her review, ‘The Last Tasmanian: Superb Documentary or Racist Fantasy?’, Bickford especially attacked Jones’ devolution thesis and his heightened prose: ‘we learn in the film that the Tasmanians were already on the way to extinction long before their conquest. The doom of the Tasmanians was merely

¹⁴³ Moser, ‘Archaeology and its Disciplinary Culture’, 161.

¹⁴⁴ These are Beryl Phillips’ words in letter to the *Age* on behalf of Aboriginal Action, 29 March 1977, in Artis Film Productions, ‘Cuttings etc re the controversy’, Rhys Jones Papers, NLA, MS ACC 04/142, Item 252, Box 19.

¹⁴⁵ Artis Film Productions, ‘The Last Tasmanian’, film poster, Rhys Jones Papers, NLA, MS ACC 04/142, Item 252, Box 19.

¹⁴⁶ Michael Mansell, State Secretary of the Aboriginal Information Service in *Survival International*, October 1977, in Artis Film Productions, ‘Cuttings etc re the controversy’.

¹⁴⁷ Rosalind F Langford, ‘Our Heritage – Your Playground’, *Australian Archaeology* 16 (Jun 1983), 1-6, 5.

¹⁴⁸ Bickford linked the film with ‘19th century racist ideology’, while Bowdler compared its theoretical basis to social Darwinism. Rebe Taylor records the details of Bickford’s protest. Anne Bickford, ‘The Last Tasmanian: Superb Documentary or Racist Fantasy?’, *Filmnews* (Jan 1979), 11-14; Sandra Bowdler, ‘Fish and Culture, a Tasmanian Polemic’, *Mankind* 12(4) (1980), 334-40, 335; Taylor, *Into the Heart of Tasmania*, 198.

consummated by the coming of the Europeans.’¹⁴⁹ This was certainly how Keith Windschuttle chose to interpret Jones’ work when writing his 2002 polemic, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History*.¹⁵⁰ Haydon responded to the criticism in sheer disbelief: ‘how can a film be damned as “racist” when its main burden is an indictment of the whites for what they did to the Tasmanian blacks?’¹⁵¹ While the film exposed long-suppressed colonial crimes, its extinction narrative did not allow space for survivors to speak for their own cultures and histories.

The irony of *The Last Tasmanian* is that it features the survivors: the descendants of the Aboriginal people who were rounded up on Tasmania and forced to live on islands in the Bass Strait. ‘We’re not Aboriginals,’ says Annette Mansell, an Indigenous woman representing the Cape Barren Island community in the film: ‘There’s no tradition of Aboriginals in Tasmania.’¹⁵² And yet, as she says these words, she is plucking the feathers from a mutton-bird, an evocative display of cultural continuity. This was the dramatic image Haydon hoped to conjure: ‘The people looked and acted like Aborigines, yet what they said had within it ambiguity and doubt.’¹⁵³ As Rebe Taylor reflects, ‘Haydon manipulated the contemporary Aboriginal voices in his film not to absolve white guilt but to shock; a story of survival would have dulled the impact.’¹⁵⁴ Haydon and Jones were aware of the treacherous semantic terrain they were treading in calling the film *The Last Tasmanian*, and Meehan, who had worked closely with Aboriginal communities, urged them to adopt a different title. In early correspondence with Jones, Haydon keeps the crucial word – ‘last’ – in inverted commas.¹⁵⁵ They also discussed the best terminology to refer to the Aboriginal people on Cape Barren Island, dismissing names such as ‘part-Aboriginal’ or ‘half-caste’, and eventually settling on ‘islanders’, ‘descendants’ and ‘Straitsmen’.¹⁵⁶ Jones later lamented the lack of a question mark in the title.¹⁵⁷

¹⁴⁹ Bickford, ‘The Last Tasmanian: Superb Documentary or Racist Fantasy?’, 13.

¹⁵⁰ Keith Windschuttle, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History. Vol. 1, Van Dieman’s Land 1803-1847* (Sydney: Macleay Press, 2002), 378; Shayne Breen, ‘Reinventing Social Evolution’, in Robert Manne (ed.), *Whitewash: On Keith Windschuttle’s Fabrication of Aboriginal History* (Melbourne: Black Inc. Agenda, 2003), 139-159, 142-3.

¹⁵¹ Tom Haydon, ‘The Last Tasmanian: A Witness to History’, *Film News* (Apr 1979), 12-14.

¹⁵² Annette Mansell, as in Haydon, *The Last Tasmanian*.

¹⁵³ Rhys Jones, ‘Obituaries: Tom Haydon (1938-1991)’, 57.

¹⁵⁴ Taylor, *Into the Heart of Tasmania*, 195.

¹⁵⁵ Tom Haydon to Rhys Jones, 11 March 1975, Rhys Jones Papers, NLA, MS ACC 03/250, Folder 75, Box 15.

¹⁵⁶ Tom Haydon to Rhys Jones, 24 June 1976; Rhys Jones to Tom Haydon, 25 July 1976, Rhys Jones Papers, NLA, MS ACC 03/250, Folder 74, Box 14.

¹⁵⁷ Taylor, *Into the Heart of Tasmania*, 195.

Despite Jones' injudicious words about a 'doomed' society and the uproar that surrounded the title, the invective leveled at *The Last Tasmanian* can only be understood in its unique social-political context.¹⁵⁸ After over a century in which their identity was suppressed, Aboriginal Tasmanians were experiencing a cultural renaissance in the 1970s. In the wake of the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act* in 1976, long-running debates over social identity moved onto questions of ownership and control. A Land Rights march – the first of its kind in Tasmania – filled the streets of Launceston in November 1976. When the Queen visited Hobart in early 1977 she was confronted by Aboriginal activists waving a land rights petition.¹⁵⁹ Historian Lyndall Ryan documented this transformative period in her 1981 book *The Aboriginal Tasmanians*. Over ten years she sought out Aboriginal communities, recorded oral histories and dredged the colonial archives to weave together a story of resistance: 'The Tasmanian Aborigines,' she wrote in 1981, 'have survived.'¹⁶⁰ *The Last Tasmanian* was written by two left-wing intellectuals who sympathised with this movement and wanted to expose the atrocities of the colonial past. Instead, the film became a rallying point, around which Tasmanian Aboriginal people could assert their collective identity.

The hostile reaction from the Tasmanian Aboriginal community haunted Jones for the rest of his life. From the 1980s, he was effectively banished from conducting field research in Tasmania. 'Sadly,' John Mulvaney lamented in 2000, 'their invective was directed against the person who did more than any other non-indigenous person to demonstrate the antiquity, cultural significance and humanity of their ancestors.'¹⁶¹ Jones felt wounded by this vilification: he wrestled with it, in Tim Flannery's words, like 'a puzzle he simply could not solve.'¹⁶² In a pique of anger in 1999, Jones vented his frustration to Rebe Taylor in a statement as arrogant as it was true: 'I gave them their history!'¹⁶³ But, as Taylor reflects, in seeking to give the first Tasmanians a history, Haydon and Jones had unwittingly denied them a present and a future.

¹⁵⁸ Film and television historian James Findlay argues that *The Last Tasmanian* played a pivotal role in generating public awareness of colonial frontier violence and its legacy for contemporary race relations. See James Findlay, 'Caught on screen: Representations of the convict experience in film and television', PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 2017.

¹⁵⁹ Jones, 'Obituaries: Tom Haydon (1938-1991)', 58.

¹⁶⁰ Lyndall Ryan, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1981), 257.

¹⁶¹ John Mulvaney, 'Peopled Landscapes: From Prehistoric Tasmania to Contemporary Arnhem Land', in Atholl Anderson, Ian Lilley and Sue O'Connor (eds.), *Histories of Old Ages: Essays in Honour of Rhys Jones* (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2001), 19-22, 21.

¹⁶² Tim Flannery, 'Obituary: Brief Life of Clarity and Compassion: Rhys Maengwyn Jones', *Australian Archaeology* 53 (2001), 39-40, 40.

¹⁶³ Taylor, 'Archaeology and Aboriginal Protest', 342.

In his 2014 *Quarterly Essay* 'A Rightful Place', Aboriginal scholar Noel Pearson returned to the tragedy of Truganini. He recalled learning Truganini's name at primary school in the 1970s 'and the awful meaning of her distinction': 'it was one of those salient facts that every child absorbed' and it filled him with 'emotional convulsions of identification and memory'. He wonders whether it is harder today 'to face the question of Truganini's moral legacy'.¹⁶⁴

I don't know if they teach Truganini today. ... Maybe the scale of the horror diminished as the country accepted the fact of the continued survival of Tasmania's Aboriginal community.¹⁶⁵

Pearson struggles with these questions in the essay, both 'as an Aboriginal and an Australian'.¹⁶⁶ And while he urges Australians to confront the story of the 'last' Tasmanian, he is also cautious about the implications of this narrative: 'The fact that a descendant community survived this history does not negate or reduce the profundity of the loss... I mean not to return to the mind-frame of racialist eugenics that has so tangled the history that I wish untangled. I just do not want to deny or diminish the tragedy of Truganini and the old people of Tasmania.'¹⁶⁷ They were people, he adds, using a date from a phase of archaeological work triggered by Jones, who 'had occupied that land for more than 35,000 years.'¹⁶⁸

o o o

Over the Christmas holidays of 1966, four children were scrambling up the ragged side of Rocky Cape when one of them noticed an opening in the rock.¹⁶⁹ Rhys Jones had marked it on his 1964 field sketch of the South Cave and dismissed as a 'badger hole': 'a naive reference to wombats which were still novelties to me then.'¹⁷⁰ The children resolved to investigate. One of the boys, Seamus Campbell, crawled into the opening while his sister,

¹⁶⁴ Noel Pearson, 'A Rightful Place: Race, Recognition and a More Complete Commonwealth', *Quarterly Essay* 55 (2014), 11-12.

¹⁶⁵ Pearson, 'A Rightful Place', 12.

¹⁶⁶ Pearson, 'A Rightful Place', 16-17.

¹⁶⁷ Pearson, 'A Rightful Place', 16-17.

¹⁶⁸ Pearson, 'A Rightful Place', 16.

¹⁶⁹ The children were Jo Anne and Dooley Burke and Theresa and Seamus Campbell. Margery Godfrey, 'Digging Through Time at Rocky Cape', *The Advocate*, 8 July 1967, in Rhys Jones Papers, NLA, MS ACC 03/250, Folder 61, Box 12.

¹⁷⁰ Jones, 'Rocky Cape and the Problem of the Tasmanians', 164.



Fig. 22 Excavations at Cave Bay Cave, Hunter Island, Bass Strait, 28 August 1975, where Sandra Bowdler found evidence of occupation dating back 23,000 years (Source: M Jenson, NLA).



Fig. 23 Rhys Jones crawling into the secret chamber at Rocky Cape, 1967 (Source: AIATSIS).

Theresa, held his feet.¹⁷¹ The hole turned into a low tunnel that continued seven feet into the rock before opening out into a cavern, thirty feet long and thirteen feet wide at its widest part.¹⁷² The air in the hidden chamber was still and warm. The cave floor was covered in bones and shells and ash that had been coated in a fine white powder: a lacework of calcium carbonate crystals. In one corner, a grinding stone had been left in position on its bed stone, like a mortar and pestle, to await use on the next visit.¹⁷³ The children reported their find to their father and eventually it drew the attention of the new archaeologist at the Tasmanian Museum, Harry Lourandos, who recognised its significance and sealed the narrow entrance with a large rock until it could be properly studied.

By the time Rhys Jones arrived on the scene, the rock seal had been broken, the cave entered, and several bones had been removed. But, for the most part, the hidden chamber remained untouched.¹⁷⁴ It was a remarkable find: here was an ancient campsite – a time capsule – that had been preserved for 6700 years.¹⁷⁵ The discovery made the front page of the local papers and the *Canberra Times*. Jones excavated the site from May to August 1967, with hundreds of locals ‘who had never previously thought about archaeology’ visiting for ‘impromptu “seminars” at the cave mouth’.¹⁷⁶ He regarded the hidden chamber as ‘something that is found once a generation’ and he was determined to keep it intact: ‘If you walked on it you destroyed it.’¹⁷⁷ He elaborately cantilevered planks into the confined space to make a platform on which the team could stand. They were digging ‘across space’ inside the hidden chamber and ‘through time’ with a small trench outside the cave mouth.

After carefully sampling the inner cave and arranging for students to individually study the stone tools, the faunal remains and the coprolites – fossilised turds of Tasmanian Devils that were feeding off the remains of the camp – Jones resealed the chamber ‘for future scientific work’.¹⁷⁸ Inside he left the best bottle of port he could afford, one glass and a note wrapped

¹⁷¹ Front page story: ‘Cave inhabited about 8000 years ago: expert claims’, *The Advocate*, 22 May 1967 in Rhys Jones Papers, NLA, MS ACC 05/191, Item 57, Box 5.

¹⁷² Jones, ‘Rocky Cape and the Problem of the Tasmanians’, 558-64.

¹⁷³ Jones, ‘Rocky Cape and the Problem of the Tasmanians’, 558-64.

¹⁷⁴ Rhys Jones, ‘Rocky Cape, Book 2’, June 1967, Field Journals, AIATSIS Library, MS 5040/1/19.

¹⁷⁵ Jones, ‘Rocky Cape and the Problem of the Tasmanians’, 558-64.

¹⁷⁶ Godfrey, ‘Digging Through Time at Rocky Cape’; ‘Cave find 8,000 years old’, *The Canberra Times*, 22 May 1967, in Rhys Jones Papers, NLA, MS ACC 05/191, Item 57, Box 5.

¹⁷⁷ Jones interviewed by Smith, ORAL TRC 2677/1.

¹⁷⁸ The entrance was barred by a thick iron-reinforced cement wall and buried under back fill. In Jones’ words: ‘you would have to use gelignite to get in’. Jones, ‘Rocky Cape and the Problem of the Tasmanians’, 558-64.

in tin foil: a message through time. In resealing the hidden cave, Jones was highlighting the destructive nature of archaeology as well as its creative potential.

Since Jones' initial Tasmanian reconnaissance, new archaeological excavations have increased our understanding of the history of the Tasmanians. Sandra Bowdler's discovery of human occupation on Hunter Island 23,000 years ago confirmed in 1974 what Jones and Allen had intimated in 1963: that the first Tasmanians had a Pleistocene past.¹⁷⁹ This insight into the Ice Age world was consolidated in the 1980s and 1990s by archaeological work in the southern forests and the dramatic finds on the Franklin River, which extended the occupation of Tasmania to over thirty-five thousand years. That story – and Rhys Jones' contribution – will be explored in chapter eight.¹⁸⁰

The debate continues over the effect of isolation on the first Tasmanians. The main change, as Richard Cosgrove observes, has been a shift of emphasis: from a narrative of loss to one of replacement and transformation.¹⁸¹ Most archaeologists suggest that Aboriginal society became more expansive, increasingly dynamic and innovative over the last 3000 years with the development of new trade networks, the introduction of rock engravings along the west coast, and the emergence of new social practices (including a prohibition on fish).¹⁸² But there remain some scholars, such as Jared Diamond, Tim Flannery and Joseph Henrich, who have returned to Jones' thesis of an isolation-induced cultural devolution.¹⁸³ 'The simple survival of the Tasmanians through such an extraordinary exile,' wrote Flannery in 1994, 'is testimony to their ingenuity and durability.'¹⁸⁴ For the most part, however, the new discoveries have enlarged, rather than eclipsed, the speculative sequence Jones first gave voice to in 1965. This is a testament to his ability to create meaning out of the complex

¹⁷⁹ Sandra Bowdler, 'An Account of an Archaeological Reconnaissance of Hunter's Isles, North-West Tasmania, 1973/74', *Records of the Queen Victoria Museum* 54 (1974), 1-22; Sandra Bowdler, *Hunter Hill, Hunter Island: Archaeological Investigations of a Prehistoric Tasmanian Site* (Canberra: Australian National University, Research School of Pacific Studies, Department of Prehistory, 1984).

¹⁸⁰ Jim Allen, *Report of the Southern Forests Archaeological Project* (Melbourne: School of Archaeology, La Trobe University, 1996), 154.

¹⁸¹ Richard Cosgrove, 'Forty-Two Degrees South: The Archaeology of Late Pleistocene Tasmania', *Journal of World Prehistory* 13(4) (Dec 1999), 357-402, 359.

¹⁸² See, for example, Sim, 'Why the Tasmanians Stopped Eating Fish'; Peter Hiscock, *Archaeology of Ancient Australia* (London: Routledge, 2008), 140-144.

¹⁸³ Jared Diamond, 'Ten Thousand Years of Solitude', *Discover* 14(3) (1993), 48-57; Tim Flannery, *The Future Eaters: An Ecological History of the Australasian Lands and People* (Sydney: Reed New Holland, 1994), 263-70; Joseph Henrich, 'Demography and Cultural Evolution: How Adaptive Cultural Processes can Produce Maladaptive Losses: The Tasmanian Case', *American Antiquity* 69(2) (Apr 2004), 197-214.

¹⁸⁴ Flannery, *The Future Eaters*, 270.

structure of a shell midden, to identify changes, and to find beginnings and endings in a mass of archaeological data.

Archaeological knowledge, as Greg Denning reminds us, ‘is hard won, full of claims and counter claims, zigzagging through a dozen disciplines. It is never static. There are no short cuts. It is a brilliant experience to be out there on the frontiers of knowledge. But it is a dangerous place to be.’¹⁸⁵ In the wake of *The Last Tasmanian*, Jones turned his mind to northern Australia and a two-decade long search for the oldest archaeological sites on the continent (chapter ten). He paid a high price for living on the frontiers of knowledge and dreaming of deep time. But for the self-described ‘cowboy archaeologist’, there was nowhere else he wanted to be.

¹⁸⁵ Greg Denning, ‘Living in and with Deep Time’, *Journal of Historical Sociology* 18(4) (2005), 269-281, 270.

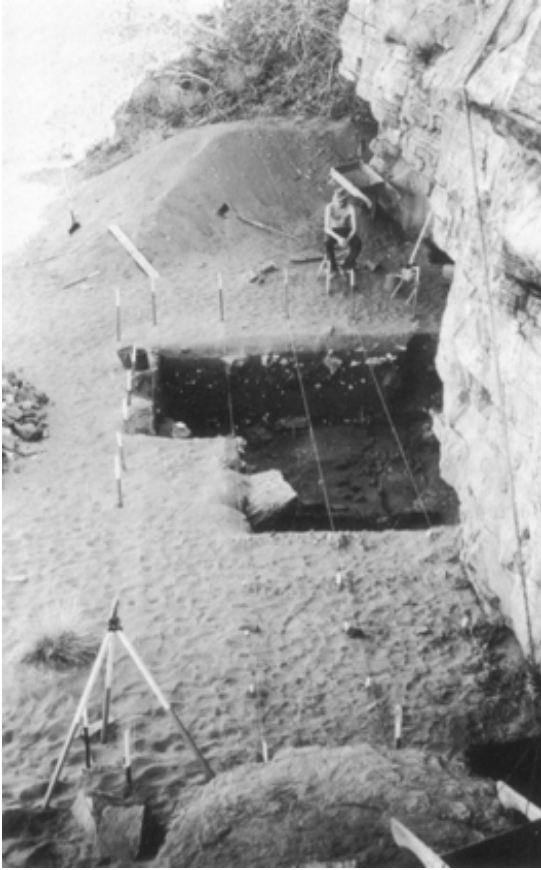


Fig. 24 A fieldworker rests during the 1970 excavation of Puntutjarpa (Source: R Gould).



Fig. 25 The re-excitation of Puntutjarpa, May 2014 (Source: A Williams).



Fig. 26 An aerial view of Puritjarra rock shelter in the Cleland Hills, central Australia, where archaeologist Mike Smith uncovered a human history extending over 35,000 years in the heart of the arid zone (Source: M Smith).

Tracks in the Desert

Richard and Betsy Gould at Puntutjarpa

‘Yiwara’ is the word used by the Gibson Desert Aborigines to mean ‘track’ ... it means the track left by an animal across the sand ... the tracks left by people ... the track of a mythical totemic being in the ‘dreamtime’, when such beings are believed by the Aborigines to have transformed themselves into present landmarks of the desert. And, finally, yiwara has come to mean the white man’s road or track into the desert, with all the implications this has for change.

Richard Gould, *Yiwara*, 1969¹

From above, the ranges twist across the arid zone, thin dry riverbeds reach for water, and dunes, endless dunes, corrugate the landscape. I gaze through my small plane window on a shifting mosaic of stones and saltpans, scrub and sand: a desiccated palette of purples, whites, oranges and reds. Australia’s deserts are diverse. The texture of each landscape speaks of a unique history of wind and water, basin and range.

Australia’s deserts are ancient, but they took their current shape during the Holocene – the last 11,700 years. People have lived here far longer. Mike Smith’s archaeological excavations at Punitjarra, a cavernous rockshelter in the west of central Australia, give us a glimpse of this deep past.² There are hints – a few flakes, a core and some red ochre – of early, fleeting visits around 45,000 years ago, but the rockshelter came into heavy use 35,000 years ago as the global climate cooled and freshwater became scarce. It was the beginning of an age of extreme aridity. The Australian coastline expanded as the polar ice caps bulged. Ephemeral lakes dried, to be sealed by salt crusts. Strong winds caused huge sand dunes in central Australia to become active, moving across the interior. The sand ridges that stripe the

¹ Richard A Gould, *Yiwara: Foragers of the Australian Desert* (New York: Scribner, 1969), 5.

² Mike Smith, *The Archaeology of Australia’s Deserts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 89.

Simpson Desert, over which we fly, align with the dominant wind patterns at the peak of the Last Glacial Maximum, around 21,000 years ago.³ At that time, rainfall in the interior was half what it is today.⁴ Global temperatures were cooler by 6-10 degrees Celsius.⁵ But at Puritjarra, as in many parts of the arid zone, people remained, stepping out across the desert hinterland from soak to spring, adapting to the changing climate. The first Australians didn't colonise today's deserts, as Peter Hiscock and Lynley Wallis, reflect; in many important ways the modern arid zone formed around them.⁶

Today, the desert interior spreads across nearly seventy per cent of the Australian landmass. The Gibson Desert, where we are bound, makes up part of the 'Western Desert', a cultural region which stretches from the Nullarbor in the south to the Kimberley in the north, and from the Percival Lakes in the west through to the lands of the Pintupi people in the Northern Territory. Far from 'timeless' or 'empty', Smith encourages us to think of these arid landscapes 'as a palimpsest of different deserts, stratified in time, stacked one above another, each with its climates, physical landscapes and environments; each with its social landscapes and people.'⁷ A dynamic history of cultural and climatic change is inscribed in the earth.

I am on my way to the Gibson Desert to help re-excavate Puntutjarpa, a small rockshelter embedded in the quartzite Brown range near Warburton, surrounded by spinifex and sandhills. Puntutjarpa was the first archaeological site to be dug in Australia's deserts and for many years it has provided the master sequence for Western Desert archaeology. It is still the largest dig ever undertaken in a desert rockshelter, one of the most remote sites in Australia, and one of the best reported. But there remain questions and complications about the

³ Mike Smith, 'Australian Deserts, Deserts Past: The Archaeology and Environmental History of the Australian Deserts' in Mike Smith and Paul Hesse (eds.), *23°S: Archaeology & Environmental History of the Southern Deserts* (Canberra: National Museum of Australia Press, 2005).

⁴ Peter Hiscock and Lynley Wallis, 'Pleistocene Settlement of Deserts from an Australian Perspective', in Peter Veth, Mike Smith and Peter Hiscock (eds.), *Desert Peoples: Archaeological Perspectives* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2005), 34-57, 45; Peter Veth, *Islands in the Interior: The Dynamics of Prehistoric Adaptations within the Arid Zone of Australia* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: International Monographs in Prehistory, 1993).

⁵ Some estimates for this temperature change suggest a drop of 8-9 degrees Celsius based on amino acid racemisation analyses undertaken on emu eggshell. I have opted for the broader temperature range used by Peter Hiscock in *Archaeology of Ancient Australia* (London: Routledge, 2008), 56-57. See also Kathryn E Fitzsimmons, Timothy J Cohen, Paul P Hesse, John Jansen, Gerald C Nanson, Jan-Hendrik May, Timothy T Barrows, David Haberlah, Alexandra Hilgers, Tegan Kelly, Joshua Larsen, Johanna Lomax and Pauline Treble, 'Late Quaternary Palaeoenvironmental Change in the Australian Drylands', *Quaternary Science Reviews* 74 (2013) 78-96, 90.

⁶ Hiscock and Wallis, 'Pleistocene Settlement of Deserts', 42; Philip J Hughes, Marjorie E Sullivan and Peter Hiscock, 'Palaeoclimate and Human Occupation in Southeastern Arid Australia', *Quaternary Science Reviews* 163 (2017), 72-83.

⁷ Mike Smith, 'Reading Puritjarra', in Mandy Martin, Libby Robin and Mike Smith, *Strata: Deserts Past, Present and Future* (Mandurama, NSW: Mandy Martin, 2005), 19-24, 19.

chronology and sedimentary history of the site. And until these are resolved, Puntutjarpa remains, in Ian Johnson's words, the 'bête noire' of Australian archaeology.⁸ Our team is returning to the site to recover a small sample of the deposit to clarify what Puntutjarpa tells us about ancient Australia. But my interest extends beyond the archive of the earth. I am curious about the people who first dug Puntutjarpa in 1966-67 and again in 1969-70.

American anthropologist-archaeologist Richard 'Dick' Gould and his wife and collaborator Betsy (Elizabeth, neé Barber), lived in the Western Desert with Ngaanyatjarra people for almost two years. They revelled in the experience, formed deep connections, and developed a profound scholarly and personal appreciation of the land and its people. But the Goulds' story is marked by controversy and tragedy. Their time in the Western Desert has become a parable of the changing notions of consent and the shifting climate of Aboriginal politics in the 1960s and 1970s. A year after his work at Puntutjarpa was completed, Richard Gould was forbidden to return to the region. When he attended a conference in Alice Springs in 1974, a spearing party drove 1500 kilometres from Laverton in the Western Desert to meet him. They missed each other by a matter of days. Gould came very close to being the first archaeologist in Australia to get speared.⁹

The same floodtide that would surge around Rhys Jones with *The Last Tasmanian* (chapter three) engulfed Gould a decade earlier. The history of this early desert site gives a fresh perspective on this transformative period of Australian history and the implications it had for archaeologists and other researchers across the continent.

As the seatbelt sign comes on and we make our final approach to Alice Springs, a new colour comes to define the landscape below. The recent rain has turned the red centre a lush green. It is May 2014, and last week the wide sandy bed of the Todd River flowed. The town is abuzz with the news. Water still defines life in the desert.

Our small team, led by Alan Williams and June Ross, and under the remote guidance of Mike Smith, pack our gear in Alice Springs, pick up a Toyota from the Ngaanyatjarra Council, and drive west into the desert.

⁸ Ian Johnson, 'The Getting of Data: A Case study From the Recent Industries of Australia', PhD, Australian National University, 1979.

⁹ Mike Smith, "'The Compleat Archaeologist'": Mike Smith, Desert Archaeology and Museums', National Museum of Australia, Canberra, 8 February 2013.

Betsy Gould was accustomed to travelling for her husband's work. She had accompanied him around the northwest Californian coast over vacations, summers, and weekends throughout his PhD research into the history of Tolowa Indians.¹⁰ As a team, between February 1963 and April 1965, they had gathered oral testimony from the living Tolowa, Tututni, and Yurok Indians in the belief that Indigenous knowledge and oral traditions, 'if carefully checked for accuracy and detail', could dramatically enlarge historical knowledge.¹¹ Their interviews generated a range of new insights into the history of the Tolowa Indians, whose ancestors had left the site of Point Saint George in the 1850s.¹² When paired with archaeological evidence, the oral testimony told the story of a thriving coastal settlement that had been abruptly ravaged by an epidemic, most likely cholera, as well as a series of violent episodes with the white usurpers, such as the 1853 Burnt Ranch Massacre at Yonktakutin.¹³ The white accounts of the massacre tended to focus on the events leading up to it, Richard Gould wrote in 1966, 'The Indian versions of this event all begin with the actual massacre.'¹⁴ Gould used the testimony to ask questions about cultural continuity and change in the archaeological record.

Gould had learnt the craft of archaeology under the tutelage of the celebrated American archaeologist Jessie D Jennings. Over 1961 and 1962, he joined a team recording and excavating sites along the Colorado River in advance of the construction of Glen Canyon Dam.¹⁵ Working with Jennings left him inspired by the science and intellectual rigour of archaeology, and his experience with the Tolowa Indians opened his eyes to how effectively Indigenous testimony could be used to shape his archaeological research. Although the Tolowa Indians had never lived in the area he was studying, they immediately guided him to the richest occupation sites and helped him classify and understand the stone tools that he excavated. It made him wonder what it would be like to live amongst a people who were still

¹⁰ Richard A Gould, 'The Wealth Quest among the Tolowa Indians of Northwestern California', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 110(1) (Feb 1966), 67-89, 87.

¹¹ Richard A Gould, 'An Introduction to Tolowa Prehistory: Archaeology and Ethnology Along the Northwestern California Coast', PhD (Anthropology), University of California, Berkeley, 1966.

¹² Gould published on gender dynamics within Tolowa society and the 'seagoing canoes' they once built to trade along the coast. Gould, 'The Wealth Quest among the Tolowa Indians'; Richard A Gould, 'Seagoing Canoes among the Indians of Northwestern California', *Ethnohistory* 15(1) (Winter, 1968), 11-42, 12.

¹³ Richard A Gould, 'Archaeology of the Point St. George Site, and Tolowa Prehistory', *University of California Publications in Anthropology* 4 (1966), 1-107, 5.

¹⁴ Richard A Gould, 'Indian and White Versions of "The Burnt Ranch Massacre": A Study in Comparative Ethnohistory,' *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 3(1) (Jun 1966), 30-42, 38.

¹⁵ David L Conlin, 'Gould, Richard A.', in Claire Smith (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Global Archaeology* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 2014), 3100-02, 3100.

occupying their traditional sites and how they might inform his archaeological eye. He brought up the topic with anthropologists Catherine and Ronald Berndt when they visited the University of California, Berkeley, in April 1964 and they encouraged him to pursue work in Australia.¹⁶ AP Elkin, the doyen of the old guard of Australian anthropology, also supported the idea: 'I think it is important that archaeologists concerned with prehistoric man in Europe or in Australia, should do some field work with so-called Stone Age Man while this is still possible.'¹⁷

In 1965, at the age of twenty-six, Gould submitted his PhD on the history of the Tolowa Indians and, with Betsy at his side, left for the Western Desert. At a time when archaeological activity hugged the coast, Gould chose the most remote part of Australia for his area of study. He was guided to his work with the Ngaanyatjarra people of the Gibson Desert by Ronald Berndt's 1963 article 'Groups with minimal European Associations'.¹⁸ It was here, in the heart of the arid zone, that he hoped to find a 'living archaeological experience'.

Although the Goulds were embarked on an exercise in extreme cultural immersion, the insights they sought were of a universal flavour. In the wake of the Second World War, anthropologists turned away from questions of 'race' and difference to adopt a language of unity and universality: of populations and processes, social organisation and diets, hunting and mobility.¹⁹ Of people, not 'types'. This search for shared human attributes led to a surging academic interest in 'surviving hunter-gatherer societies'. It also inspired collaboration between the disciplines of anthropology and archaeology.²⁰ The deep past, like the ethnographic present, was ransacked for insights into the human condition. This burgeoning period of biological humanism culminated in the landmark symposium *Man the Hunter*, which took place in Chicago while Gould was in Australia in April 1966.²¹

¹⁶ AP Elkin to Richard Gould, 23 November 1965, in AP Elkin Papers, University of Sydney Archives, 5/4/38, Box 220.

¹⁷ Elkin to Gould, 23 November 1965.

¹⁸ Ronald M Berndt, 'Groups with Minimal European Associations' in H Shiels (ed.), *Australian Aboriginal Studies: A Symposium of Papers Presented at the 1961 Research Conference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 385-408.

¹⁹ This shift was not limited to anthropology. Biologists like Julian Huxley, historians like Lucien Febvre and archaeologists like Gordon Childe were involved with the UNESCO project on the History of Humanity's Technological and Technical 'Progress'. Poul Duedahl, 'Selling Mankind: UNESCO and the Invention of Global History, 1945-1976', *Journal of World History* 22(1) (Mar 2011), 101-133.

²⁰ Lewis R Binford, 'A Consideration of Archaeological Research Design', *American Antiquity* 29 (4) (Apr 1964), 425-441; Lewis R Binford, 'Archaeology as Anthropology', *American Antiquity* 28 (2) (Oct 1962), 217-225.

²¹ Richard B Lee and Irven Devore (eds.), *Man the Hunter* (Chicago: Aldine, 1968).

The conference was an intensely multi-disciplinary venture that brought together scholars from around the world to investigate and discuss the geographic and biological expertise of hunter-gatherer societies. The emphasis on ‘universality’ was both a vision of promise and threat. There was a powerful sense among those who attended that a way of life that had existed for most of human history was rapidly fading away. And if ‘man’ was a ‘hunter’, would he cope in the nuclear age?²² ‘Of the estimated 80,000,000,000 men who have ever lived out a life span on earth,’ wrote Richard B Lee and Irven DeVore, the conference organisers,

over 90 per cent have lived as hunters and gatherers; about 6 per cent have lived by agriculture and the remaining few per cent have lived in industrial societies. ... It is still an open question whether man will be able to survive the exceedingly complex and unstable ecological conditions he has created for himself.²³

The conference came at a time of agitation and unrest in the United States. Protests against the Vietnam War and the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement were both readily invoked by attendees. Another flourishing movement, feminism, critiqued the masculinist nature of the proceedings and responded with another conference: ‘Woman the Gatherer’.²⁴ The sense of political and cultural upheaval seeped into the proceedings and fuelled more romantic notions about the simpler, ‘essential’ nature of hunter-gatherer behaviour and what it might reveal about the human condition. But the organisers insisted that such an enquiry was merely a ‘logical exercise’, and that ‘there is no assumption that living hunter-gatherers are somehow living relicts of the Pleistocene.’²⁵

Although the conference title suggests it was narrowly concerned with ‘man’ and ‘hunting’, the speakers developed a range of analyses, from the dynamics of female gender roles in hunter-gatherer societies to overturning the lingering idea, propagated by many nineteenth century social evolutionary thinkers, that the hunter-gatherer lifestyle was, by its very

²² Tom Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 86-87, 94.

²³ Richard B Lee and Irven Devore, ‘Problems in the Study of Hunters and Gatherers’, in Richard B Lee and Irven Devore (eds.), *Man the Hunter* (Chicago: Aldine, 1968), 3-12, 3.

²⁴ Frances Dahlberg (ed.), *Woman the Gatherer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

²⁵ Irven DeVore and Richard B Lee to AP Elkin, 7 March 1966, in AP Elkin Papers, University of Sydney Archives, 5/2/38, Box 221.

essence, dictated by the economics of scarcity.²⁶ But the central theme of *Man the Hunter*, to which Gould reacted directly, was the importance of collaboration between anthropology and archaeology. Lewis Binford was the most vocal on this point, calling on his colleagues to harness ethnographic observation to help interpret archaeological evidence.

In Australia, Norman Tindale offered a similar challenge to archaeologists at the 1965 ANZAAS Congress in Hobart. He was frustrated by his colleagues' reluctance to use ethnographic analogy. He derided them as 'Emus with their heads in the spinifex' and urged them to come out 'from their cave holes to study at first hand the data provided by living peoples.'²⁷ Donald Thomson pioneered the field of ethno-archaeology in Australia when he wrote of his experience living with hunting and gathering societies in Cape York in the late 1920s. On the prompting of Grahame Clark, he published an influential paper in 1939 on the seasonal nature of Indigenous life.²⁸ Archaeologists Jack Golson and Peter White were also attuned to the developments and published a range of studies on the material culture of communities in Papua New Guinea.²⁹ Gould called such a practice 'living archaeology'.³⁰

Gould received support from his institution, the American Museum of Natural History, to live in the Western Desert, but this was a personal as much as a professional undertaking. He yearned 'to experience the tempo and detail of the hunting and foraging way of life.'³¹ And, as he wrote in his research proposal, he wanted to approach this very anthropological task 'from the point of view of an archaeologist'.³² He was keen to observe contemporary hunting and butchering activities and develop a systematic understanding of stone technology, to study camp layouts and living floors and compare these with their ancient counterparts, to live with a society still painting and singing and dancing as they had for generations, and to

²⁶ See especially Marshall Sahlins, 'Notes on the Original Affluent Society', in Richard B Lee and Irven Devore (eds.), *Man the Hunter* (Chicago: Aldine, 1968), 84-89.

²⁷ Norman B Tindale, 'Stone Implement Making among the Nakako, Ngadadjara and Pitjandjara of the Great Western Desert', *Records of the South Australian Museum* 15 (1) (1965), 131-64, 162-63.

²⁸ Donald Thomson, 'The Seasonal Factor in Human Culture', *The Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* 5 (1939), 209-221.

²⁹ J Peter White, 'Ethno-Archaeology in New Guinea: Two Examples', *Mankind* 6 (1967), 409-14; Jack Golson, 'Australian Aboriginal Food Plants: Some Ecological and Culture-Historical Implications', in John Mulvaney and Jack Golson (eds.), *Aboriginal Man and Environment in Australia* (Canberra: ANU Press, 1971), 196-238.

³⁰ Richard A Gould, 'Living Archaeology: The Ngatjatjara of Western Australia', *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 24 (2) (Summer, 1968), 101-122; Richard A Gould, *Living Archaeology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

³¹ Gould, *Yiwara*, 4.

³² Richard Gould, 'Research Proposal', sent to AP Elkin, 28 October 1965, in AP Elkin Papers, University of Sydney Archives, 5/4/38, Box 220, 2.

record these activities in photos, records and film. He would look for a ‘patterning’ to their archaeological remains that reflected ‘basic rules of behaviour within the culture.’³³

On their way to Australia, the Goulds passed through England and made the pilgrimage to the ancient standing stones of Stonehenge.³⁴ The visit aroused mixed feelings of excitement and apprehension. In the shadow of this enigmatic monument, Gould wondered openly about what lay in store for him in the Australian deserts, now that he was ‘irrevocably committed’ to his project. Would he arrive in Australia to see such stone arrangements still in use?

Would it be possible to see Aborigine artists making rock paintings? Or would the monuments and paintings of these Aborigines keep their mysteries as Stonehenge and the European cave paintings have done?³⁵

At the heart of his expedition was the idea that what he learnt in fieldwork had meaning beyond that immediate moment and place. He hoped to gain insight into the human story of the deep past.

o o o

When Richard Gould came to Warburton in 1966 he recalls a Ngaanyatjarra man, Tommy Simms, buying one of the first cars in the region, a three-and-a-half ton Bedford Truck that made long trips across the desert overloaded with relatives and with tyres stuffed full of spinifex.³⁶ Such cars had ‘short, hard lives’ and quickly expired on the rough bush tracks around the mission. ‘On our last trip out in the Land-Rover,’ Gould wrote in 1969, ‘we counted four of these hulks abandoned along the road between Warburton and Laverton.’³⁷ In our short time in the Western Desert in 2014, we encountered hundreds of such wrecks. The road to Warburton is lined on both sides by old cars, upturned, gutted and torched, their rusted hulks in the grip of scrub and sand. Kim Mahood has compared these abandoned vehicles with the steady stream of whitefellas (kartiya) who come to work in remote

³³ Gould, ‘Living Archaeology’, 120

³⁴ Gould, *Yiwara*, 135.

³⁵ Gould, *Yiwara*, 137.

³⁶ Gould, *Yiwara*, 171.

³⁷ Gould, *Yiwara*, 172.

Indigenous communities. ‘Kartiya are like Toyotas,’ she records one Western Desert woman remarking, ‘When they break down we get another one.’³⁸

We veer off the main road near the rubbish dump and loop back through the mulga towards the sandy spinifex country. Thick red dust billows and hangs in our wake. We are taking the long way out to the site in order to avoid culturally sensitive areas of country. Every inch of this landscape is embedded with meaning. The earth, rock, sky and scrub pulse with the life force of the Tjukurpa (the Dreaming). The circuitous route to work each day reminds us of the power of these associations. Our quarters in the old Police Station sit on a Kangaroo Dreaming.³⁹ And the rockshelter we have come to work on, Puntutjarpa, nestles into the Brown Range, which evokes the muscular body of the ancestral perentie lizard, *ngintaka*. Country is story.

We first visited Puntutjarpa with senior traditional owner Mr Cyril Simms, Warburton elder Mr Phillip West and anthropologist David Brooks. (There is a naming convention in the Western Desert that confers formal titles on senior Indigenous individuals, which endows conversations about local happenings with the tenor of a Jane Austen novel.) The rockshelter sits on a slight slope, commanding a spectacular view across the valley towards Warburton Township. Over the coming days, June Ross insists we eat our lunch with this view in the shade of the shelter: the archaeologist can learn a lot from quietly absorbing a landscape.

Mr Simms and Mr West amble up the sandy slope ahead of us to inspect the small overhang. They are quick to point out the lacework of perentie (*ngintaka*) tracks on the shelter floor – ‘he’s been here’ – and a small patch of light grey ash further along the range: the archaeological signature of Mike Smith, who visited the site in July 2013 to consult with the community in advance of this visit. ‘We left him and he camped here, made himself a cup of tea,’ Mr West explains. Later, when more of the community visit us at the site, they laugh at ‘that other one doctor’s’ choice of firewood.⁴⁰

The surface of the site is scattered with artefacts from the earlier excavations. I fumble over some rusted tins, a gas wheel and an old pot pie left here by Gould. Mr West worked on the original excavation of Puntutjarpa in the late 1960s and remembered ‘Dr Gould’ well. He

³⁸ Kim Mahood, ‘Kartiya are like Toyotas: White Workers on Australia’s Cultural Frontier’, *Griffith Review* 36: *What is Australia for?* (2012), 43-59.

³⁹ RG Kimber, ‘Reflections on “Living Archaeology”’, *Australian Archaeology* 13 (Dec 1981), 12-15, 14.

⁴⁰ ‘Puntutjarpa Notebook I’, May 2014, in possession of the author.



Fig. 27 Puntutjarpa during the May 2014 excavation (Source: B Griffiths).

asked after him. This is only the second time Mr West has visited the rockshelter since that time. (The first was with Smith last year.)

We struggle to locate Gould's original trench beneath the spinifex and introduced buffel grass, and have to refer to old photographs and stylised site drawings. The site is almost unrecognisable in the photos: a gaping hole with a rugged rocky base, sieves hanging from the escarpment and a small white sign with the American and Australian flags sticking out of the spoil heap.

Even the rockwall is different. In 1967 Gould photographed Aboriginal artists using charcoal, dung and emu fat to adorn the shelter with paintings of snakes and emu tracks and the ancestral perentie. These have almost completely disappeared. Over the coming days, June Ross and Samantha Keats, painstakingly replicate these and other images along the range, while Alan Williams and I descend into the earth, carefully trowelling our way through time. We are acutely aware that our presence marks the first archaeological excavations in the Warburton region since Gould departed in 1970. We, too, are casting tracks in the desert.

o o o

Since the late nineteenth century, intermittent intrusions by explorers, surveyors, prospectors, pastoralists, doggers and missionaries had established a white presence in the Western Desert.⁴¹ But the pace of contact quickened in the mid-twentieth century with the construction of the Woomera Rocket Range in 1946.⁴² Germany's bombardment of London with V1 pilotless flying bombs and V2 rockets during the Second World War stirred fear and disbelief throughout the Commonwealth. 'It was the harbinger of a new kind of warfare,' writes military historian Peter Morton, 'a war of technicians, not soldiers; a war where an aggressor could sit snugly at home and point his finger of force against another country.'⁴³ The British needed to develop their own rocket program and they turned to Australia, with its wide 'unpopulated' space, for help. The task of finding a stretch of desert in Australia even 1600 kilometres long did not seem onerous in comparison to testing rockets in the British

⁴¹ Sue Davenport, Peter Johnson and Yuwali, *Cleared Out: First Contact in the Western Desert* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2005), 143-153.

⁴² Richard A Gould, 'Subsistence Behaviour among the Western Desert Aborigines of Australia', *Oceania* 39 (1969), 253-74, 255-56.

⁴³ Peter Morton, *Fire across the Desert: Woomera and the Anglo-Australian Joint Project 1946-1980* (Canberra: AGPS Press, 1989), 3.

Isles.⁴⁴ But the Anglo-Australian Joint Project needed first to ensure the land was uninhabited. From 1958 to 1963 missile recovery roads were graded out across the Western Desert and government patrols were regularly sent to locate people living in the estimated impact zones, and then to re-settle them on missions and reserves.⁴⁵

As these patrols infiltrated the desert, many of the Indigenous inhabitants were moving in the opposite direction. In an extraordinary series of migrations in the mid-twentieth century, Aboriginal people ‘cleared out’ of the Western Desert and moved into settled areas.⁴⁶ In many ways these migrations resembled historic population movements, coinciding as they did with drought periods – the late twenties, early forties, mid-fifties, early sixties (and into the mid-eighties).⁴⁷ But the mass exodus was unquestionably a response to the presence and actions of European Australians.⁴⁸ Families were drawn to settlements by curiosity, trade and access to food. ‘They came because they were hungry,’ a spokesman for the Pintupi people put it, ‘They didn’t know they could not go back.’⁴⁹ When Gould arrived in 1966 most of the Aboriginal people he encountered lived on or near reserves and missions, such as the one Will Wade set up in Warburton in 1932.⁵⁰ The Aboriginal people at the Warburton Mission would speak to him of the desert where they once lived as being ‘too lonely’.⁵¹ Gould described the Gibson Desert as ‘the loneliest place on earth’, for ‘What can be lonelier than a place where people have lived their lives and then left forever?’⁵²

Richard and Betsy Gould encountered a society in flux. They moved through the desert communities in Laverton, Tika-tika, and Clutterbuck Hills before settling in the Warburton region, where they remained for almost a year living with the Ngaanyatjarra (Ngatatjara) community.⁵³ Ngaanyatjarra country lay directly under the flight path of the Blue Streak (non-atomic) missiles, and on a few occasions Gould joined the patrols that searched the

⁴⁴ Morton, *Fire across the Desert*, 12.

⁴⁵ Davenport *et al*, *Cleared Out*, 143-153.

⁴⁶ Davenport *et al*, *Cleared Out*, 143-153.

⁴⁷ Fred R Myers, *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self: Sentiment, Place, and Politics among Western Desert Aborigines* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1986), 28; TGH Strehlow, ‘Culture, Social Structure and Environment’, in Ronald Berndt and Catherine Berndt (eds.), *Aboriginal Man in Australia* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1965), 121-45.

⁴⁸ Myers, *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self*; Pam Nathan and Dick Leichleitner Japanangka, *Settle Down Country – Pmere Arlaltyewe* (CAAC: Kibble Books, 1983); Fred R Myers, ‘Locating Ethnographic Practice: Romance, Reality, and Politics in the Outback’, *American Ethnologist* 15 (4) (Nov 1988), 609-624.

⁴⁹ Myers, *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self*, 25.

⁵⁰ Gould, ‘Living Archaeology’, 103.

⁵¹ Gould, *Yiwara*, 167.

⁵² Gould, *Yiwara*, 192.

⁵³ Gould, ‘Living Archaeology’, 101.

desert for families still living a traditional way of life. Once, on a Joint Government Desert Patrol, he came across the fresh footprints and campsite of a group of eleven Tjilantjara-speaking people, but he did not meet them until he returned to Warburton in November 1969. 'These were the people filmed by Mr Ian Dunlop of the Australian Commonwealth Film Unit in 1967,' Gould records, 'and they were returned to the Warburton Mission at the conclusion of the filming.'⁵⁴ A Woomera Rocket Range Patrol encountered a group of 'Ngatjara-speaking Aborigines' in the Mt Madley region in November 1969. Gould spent a week with them in April 1970 and described them as 'the only group of Aborigines we have met which still continues to follow a fully nomadic life in the desert at this time.'⁵⁵

It was an exciting, but also a melancholy time for Gould. He found that he was able 'almost simultaneously' to satisfy his curiosity about the hunter-gatherer way of life 'and to observe the essential changes being brought about by white contact.'⁵⁶ He became fluent in the local language and was regularly invited to ceremonies, where he took notes on social structures, kinship relations, mythology and spiritual life.⁵⁷ He struggled 'with the haunting problem of how to do justice to the richness and complexity' of Ngaanyatjarra society, and he was reflective about his own role in colonisation.⁵⁸ He recognised the 'sharp irony' that the same Western technology and specialisation that had 'invaded' and transformed this remote part of the world had also produced anthropologists and archaeologists and enabled them to learn about the people who lived there, their traditions and their histories.⁵⁹

Gould became a chronicler of this immense collision of cultures, and he recorded contact artefacts with fascination: blunted steel rods taken from abandoned windmills and used as digging sticks, old petrol tins and hubcaps which had been carefully hammered into bowls, and worn chisel-blades that had been hafted with kangaroo or emu sinew onto wooden handles. Despite the changes of material, Gould reasoned, 'the functions and motor-patterns associated with their use have remained basically unchanged.'⁶⁰ They were evidence of

⁵⁴ Richard A Gould, 'Uses and Effects of Fire among the Western Desert Aborigines of Australia', *Mankind* 8 (1) (1971), 14-24, 15; Ian Dunlop, 'Ethnographic Film-making in Australia: The First Seventy Years (1898-1968)', *Aboriginal History* 3 (1979), 111-119, 117.

⁵⁵ Gould, 'Uses and Effects of Fire among the Western Desert Aborigines of Australia', 15.

⁵⁶ Gould, *Yiwara*, 191.

⁵⁷ John Mulvaney, Acting AIAS Principal, to Peter Howson, Minister for the Environment, Aborigines and the Arts, 12 August 1971, 'Gould R.A. - Yiwara', AIATSIS Library, Canberra, File 65/19(a).

⁵⁸ Richard A Gould, *Recovering the Past* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990), 28.

⁵⁹ Gould, *Yiwara*, 191.

⁶⁰ Richard A Gould, Dorothy A Koster and Ann HL Sontz, 'The Lithic Assemblage of the Western Desert Aborigines of Australia', *American Antiquity* 36(2) (Apr 1971), 149-169, 165.

entangled cultures and of traditions transforming.⁶¹ ‘Having brushed against both cultures,’ writes historian Philip Jones of objects that span the frontier, ‘they wear a double patina, of ochre and rust.’⁶²

Over the course of his fieldwork, Gould developed a profound respect for the Ngaanyatjarra people and their culture. He had not come to Australia with any ‘built-in sympathies’ or quixotic notions of ‘the noble savage’, but he left with a deep appreciation for the Ngaanyatjarra peoples’ ‘rewarding and satisfying’ approach to life.⁶³ He made strong friendships and was quick to admit that he had ‘misjudged’ aspects of the culture:

Gradually I experienced the central truth of Aboriginal religion: that it is not a thing by itself but an inseparable part of a whole that encompasses every aspect of daily life, every individual, and every time – past, present, and future. It is nothing less than the theme of existence, and as such constitutes one of the most sophisticated and unique religious and philosophical systems known to man.⁶⁴

He was absorbed into the existing cultural landscape and became identified as belonging to ‘panaka’, and his wife, Betsy, necessarily belonged to ‘tjaruru’.⁶⁵ In this way he was ‘related’ to everyone he worked with and met. Gould received the name ‘mingkultjara’ (he who has tobacco), as he was constantly exchanging tobacco for goods, information and favours, such as being allowed to observe a ceremony or being taught a song: ‘I was, in fact, the Aborigines’ chief source of supply’.⁶⁶ These skin names brought him rights as well as responsibilities and obligations towards maintaining and observing customs and laws.

In August 1966, Gould was led out to a small overhang set in the quartzite of the Brown Range. This ‘minor sacred site’, he learnt, was known as ‘Puntutjarpa’. The shelter surface showed the signs of recent activity and, he judged, could provide the archaeological ballast for his ethnographic work. He returned in 1967 with a party of men ‘affiliated with this sacred tradition’ to seek and obtain permission to excavate. These men would return on other

⁶¹ Denis Byrne, ‘Deep Nation: Australia’s Acquisition of an Indigenous Past’, *Aboriginal History* 20 (1998), 82-107, 82-84, 92.

⁶² Philip Jones, *Ochre and Rust: Artefacts and Encounters on Australian Frontiers* (Kent Town, SA: Wakefield Press, 2007), 1.

⁶³ Lee and DeVore, *Man The Hunter*, x.

⁶⁴ Gould, *Yiwara*, 103-104.

⁶⁵ Gould, *Yiwara*, 108.

⁶⁶ Gould, *Yiwara*, 181.



Fig. 28 The 1969-70 excavation team at Puntutjarpa (Source: B Wright, AIATSIS).



Fig. 29 Richard Gould (left) oversees the 1970 excavation. The 2014 pit was opened directly in front of where Gould is standing, overlapping with the original trench (Source: B Wright, AIATSIS).



Fig. 30 A fieldworker searches through residue in a wooden sieve mounted onto the rock wall, 1970 (Source: B Wright, AIATSIS).

visits ‘both while excavations were in progress and afterward, to satisfy themselves that no sacred landmarks were being violated.’⁶⁷

The preliminary excavation at Puntutjarpa was conducted in 1967 by Richard and Betsy Gould with the assistance of Aboriginal people, such as Mr West, who helped ‘in moving backdirt and other tasks’.⁶⁸ Gould was excited by the site because the ceiling of the rockshelter had collapsed on numerous occasions, potentially ‘sealing’ the deposit – preserving a series of ancient living surfaces in time. The deposit was littered with the refuse of daily camp life: stone tools, red ochre, hearths, and scraps of butchered bone. The rock walls were decorated with paintings, ‘some of which were put there during our stay’.⁶⁹ He found a well in the western cave, and he learnt from his Ngaanyatjarra guides that in recent times the site had been used as a hunting trap, with hunters using fire to drive kangaroos and wallabies off the cliff above.⁷⁰

Gould excavated 707.6 cubic feet of fill from this exploratory trench, none of which was sieved. He proceeded by arbitrary six-inch levels and used a sledgehammer to remove the rock fall. When published, these methods incurred the wrath of the Australian archaeological community.⁷¹ Ian Glover and Ron Lampert led the charge, accusing Gould of destroying the site simply to ‘satisfy his curiosity’. ‘[I]f time and labour are limited,’ they implored, ‘dig a small hole carefully rather than a big hole quickly; if you cannot screen the deposit from a cave site, do not dig it.’⁷² Gould was also attacked for his identification of ‘microliths’ (small stone tools), early claims for backed blades, dating techniques and his use of ethnography to interpret the archaeological evidence. Some of the hostility derived from the fact that he was an American and that he had imported the theories and terminology he was familiar with, rather than anchoring his research in existing Australian debates. But despite this criticism, the Holocene technological change he proposed, which he named ‘the Small Tool Tradition’,

⁶⁷ Richard A Gould, ‘Puntutjarpa Rockshelter and the Australian Desert Culture’, *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History* 54 (1), 1-187 (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1977), 49-50; Richard A Gould, ‘Preliminary Report on Excavations at Puntutjarpa Rockshelter near the Warburton Ranges, Western Australia’, *Archaeology and Physical Anthropology in Oceania* 3 (1968), 161-85.

⁶⁸ Richard A Gould, ‘Puntutjarpa Rockshelter: A Reply to Messrs. Glover and Lampert’, *Archaeology and Physical Anthropology in Oceania* 4 (1969), 229-37, 230.

⁶⁹ Richard A Gould, ‘Summary Report of Field Activities, November 1966 – June 1967’, AIATSIS Library, Canberra, PMS 671, Doc. 68/686.

⁷⁰ Gould, ‘Puntutjarpa Rockshelter and the Australian Desert Culture’, 49.

⁷¹ He was criticised for similar practices in his excavation of Point St. George in 1963-65. See FJ Allen, ‘Archaeology of the Point St. George Site and Tolowa Prehistory by Richard A Gould (Book Review)’, *Archaeology & Physical Anthropology in Oceania* 3(3) (Oct 1968), 236-237, 236.

⁷² Ian Glover and Ron Lampert, ‘Puntutjarpa Rockshelter excavations by RA Gould: A critical review’, *Archaeology and Physical Anthropology in Oceania* 4 (1968), 223-28, 222-3.

became an important refinement of Mulvaney's two-part technological sequence.⁷³ By the late 1970s the appearance of points, backed blades, and tulas – the 'small tool tradition' – seemed to be able to be dated with precision to four to five thousand years ago. The technological shift also seemed to occur alongside other changes, such as the arrival of dingo and the introduction of plant detoxifying technologies, suggesting a common and perhaps external origin.⁷⁴ Although the utility of this broad category has been recently called into question, John Beaton, a fellow American working in Australia, described it in 1993 as 'the single most important marker of change in the Australian archaeological record.'⁷⁵

Gould returned to Puntutjarpa in 1969-70 to conduct a systematic large-scale excavation of the site and defend his preliminary results. He found some resistance to his attendance at ceremonial activities on this second field season, so he focused on the archaeological work.⁷⁶ His core team of seven worked full-time for nine weeks, exposing an enormous area of the shelter. Gould read continuity and conservatism in the archaeological record at Puntutjarpa. He argued that a 'distinctive' society emerged ten thousand years ago with 'the onset and persistence' of harsh arid conditions, and, remarkably, that it had maintained a stable cultural and economic system through to the present day. He proposed the term 'Australian Desert Culture' for this 'resourceful' society, with its hallmarks of high mobility, 'risk minimising opportunism', and a mobile toolkit.⁷⁷ Their successful adaptation, he believed, 'must surely stand as one of the most dramatic cases of cultural conservatism on record'.⁷⁸

These were bold ideas to come out of a pioneering exploratory dig, and in many ways they paralleled the contemporary interpretations of his mentor, Jesse Jennings, at Danger Cave in Utah. But the concept of a stable, narrowly adapted 'desert culture' never gained support in Australia.⁷⁹ Further work on the Puntutjarpa collections undermined the claims of a consistent technology throughout the deposit, while later studies on climatic change

⁷³ Gould, 'Puntutjarpa Rockshelter: A Reply to Messrs Glover and Lampert', 235.

⁷⁴ Peter Hiscock, 'Technological Responses to Risk in Holocene Australia', *Journal of World Prehistory* 8(3) (Sept 1994), 267-292, 271.

⁷⁵ John M Beaton, 'The Riches of Ancient Australia: An Indispensable Guide for Exploring Prehistoric Australia (Book Review)', *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 2 (1993), 101-103, 102.

⁷⁶ Malcolm Griffiths, 'Report on Gould Case for AIAS', 1970, 'Gould R.A. – Yiwara', AIATSIS Library, Canberra, File 65/19(a), 14.

⁷⁷ Richard A Gould, 'The Archaeologist as Ethnographer: A Case from the Western Desert of Australia', *World Archaeology* 3 (2) (Oct 1971), 143-177, 175.

⁷⁸ Gould, 'Puntutjarpa Rockshelter and the Australian Desert Culture', 182.

⁷⁹ The interpretations at Danger Cave in Utah were eventually rejected for the same reasons. Smith, *The Archaeology of Australia's Deserts*, 157-158.

suggested that aridity ameliorated, not intensified, at the start of the Holocene.⁸⁰ But Gould's interpretations provided the framework for the questions and hypotheses of the next generation of desert archaeologists.

'The project was successful beyond our expectations', Gould wrote in his report back to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, which had offered him financial support to rent a Land Rover: 'It was a rewarding fieldtrip, both personally and scientifically.'⁸¹ In his final months, he gained access to a plane (a Cessna 182), which he piloted accompanied by Aboriginal interlocutors. He conducted aerial surveys within a 200-mile radius of Warburton, identifying sacred sites, rock alignments and rockshelters, all of which he was eager to revisit and investigate. But this would be his last time in the Gibson Desert.

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Throughout the course of his fieldwork, Gould was aware of a major ethnographic filmmaking program commissioned by the recently formed Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (AIAS). Working in the 'before it is too late' documentary mode, a genre with which Gould was familiar, a film unit recorded a range of ethnographic activities in the Western and Central Deserts from 1964-69, including stone knapping, burning regimes and restricted men's business. The resulting films, *People of the Western Desert* and *Desert People*, remain influential.⁸² The Aboriginal participants allowed filming to continue with the firm assurance that the images would not return to the community.⁸³ Gould arranged a similar verbal contract with the Ngaanyatjarra people.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ For further research on technological change see, for example, Peter Hiscock and Peter Veth, 'Change in the Australian Desert Culture: A Reanalysis of Tulas from Puntutjarpa', *World Archaeology* 22 (1991), 332-45; Mike Smith, 'The Antiquity of Seed Grinding in Arid Australia', *Archaeology in Oceania* 21(1) (1986), 29-39; Sue O'Connor and Peter Veth, 'A Preliminary Report on Recent Archaeological Research in the Semi-Arid/Arid Belt of Western Australia', *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 2 (1996), 42-50. For work on climatic change see JM Bowler, GS Hope, JN Jennings, G Singh and D Walker, 'Late Quaternary Climates of Australia and New Guinea', *Quaternary Research* 6 (1976), 359-394; Gurdip Singh, 'Late Quaternary Pollen Records and Seasonal Paleoclimates of Lake Frome, South Australia', *Hydrobiologia* 82 (1981), 419-30.

⁸¹ Richard A Gould, 'Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies: Fieldwork Report', 1970, AIATSIS Library, Canberra, PMS 668, Doc. 70/1017.

⁸² Ian Dunlop (dir.), *Desert People (Parts 1 and 2)* (1966), Sydney: Film Australia; Ian Dunlop (dir.), *People of the Australian Western Desert (Parts 1-19)* (1966-70), Sydney: Film Australia; Ian Dunlop, 'Technical and Production Problems of Ethnographic Films: Some Aspects of Filming in Australia's Western Desert', Round Table on Ethnographic Film in the Pacific Area (Sydney: Australian National Advisory Committee for UNESCO, 1966), 34-45, 40.

⁸³ Frederick D McCarthy, 'Ethnographic Research Films', Round Table on Ethnographic Film in the Pacific Area (Sydney: Australian National Advisory Committee for UNESCO, 1966), 80-85, 84.

⁸⁴ Gould to Gare, 7 December 1970.



Fig. 31 Richard Gould uses a mattock to break up rock-fall at Puntutjarpa. Note the fresh paintings of snakes, emu tracks and the ancestral perentie on the rock wall, which were made with charcoal, dung and emu fat in 1967. These had almost completely disappeared by 2014 (Source: B Wright, AIATSIS).

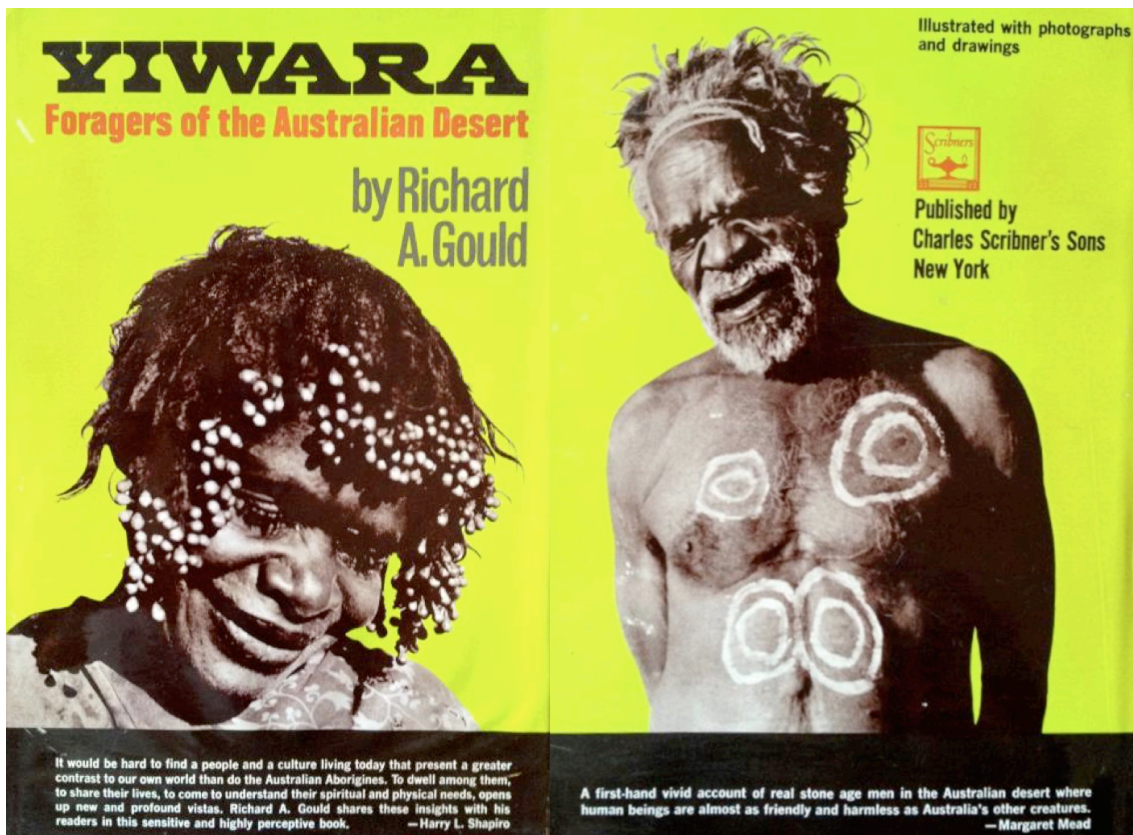


Fig. 32 The dust jacket of Richard Gould's controversial book about his 1966-67 field season in the Western Desert, *Yiwarra: Foragers of the Australian Desert* (Scribner, 1969).

It was in this climate that Gould wrote *Yiwara: Foragers of the Australian Desert*, a popular account of his 1966-67 field trip. ‘Yiwara’, Gould explained, roughly translates as ‘track’: ‘This book is itself a track of the Aborigines’ destiny from the nomadic existence of the desert to the more settled and westernized existence on reserves and missions.’⁸⁵ In lucid, mournful prose he wrote of his observations and experiences in the Western Desert. The book included fifty-two photographs, eleven of which showed restricted ceremonial places, objects and activities.⁸⁶ The accompanying text allowed the identification of the people from whom he obtained this secret-sacred material.⁸⁷ It was an unwise and even rash decision to include these images in the book, given he intimately understood their restricted nature. But it was still common practice in his field.⁸⁸ Such a practice relied on a separation between the world of the subject and the professional world of academia. But, as anthropologist Fred Myers reflects, the divide between ‘us’ and ‘them’ was shrinking.⁸⁹ The changes Gould had been documenting were catching up with him.

On 16 May 1971, a Ngaanyatjarra schoolgirl returned to her home in Laverton with a copy of *Yiwara*.⁹⁰ She had seen the book on a recent trip to Perth and bought it when she recognised the woman on the front cover as a close relative. She showed the book to many women, but when her father saw it he became very angry. The book revealed information that was

⁸⁵ Gould, *Yiwara*, vii.

⁸⁶ Nicolas Peterson, ‘The Changing Photographic Contract: Aborigines and Image Ethics’, in Christopher Pinney and Nicolas Peterson (eds.), *Photography’s Other Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 119-145, 135.

⁸⁷ John Mulvaney, *Digging up a Past* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2011), 173.

⁸⁸ There were a number of contemporaneous books which published secret-sacred images, including: Ronald M Berndt (ed.), *Australian Aboriginal Art* (Sydney: Ure Smith, 1964); Ronald M Berndt and Catherine H Berndt, *The World of the First Australians* (Sydney: Ure Smith, 1964); AP Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines: How to Understand Them* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1964); Walter Gill, *Petermann Journey* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1968); Charles P Mountford, *Winbaraku and the Myth of Jarapiri* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1968); Charles P Mountford, *The Aborigines and Their Country* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1969); Norman B Tindale and HA Lindsay, *Aboriginal Australians* (Brisbane: Jacaranda Press, 1963).

⁸⁹ Fred Myers, ‘We Are Not Alone: Anthropology in a World of Others’, *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology* 71 (2) (2006), 233-264.

⁹⁰ My account of this story draws on archival sources from AIATSIS as well as the following general overviews: RMW Dixon, *Searching for Aboriginal Languages: Memoirs of a Field Worker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 38-39; Leith Duncan, ‘Book Review: Diprotodon to Detribalization: Studies in Change Among Australian Aborigines by Arnold R Pilling and Richard A Waterman’, *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 83 (1) (Mar 1974), 112-114, 113; Barry Hill, *Broken Song: TGH Strehlow and Aboriginal Possession* (Milsons Point, NSW: Vintage Books, 2003), 741-49; Jaqueline Ann Lambert, ‘A History of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies 1959-1989: An Analysis of How Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People Achieved Control of a National Research Institute’, PhD thesis, Australian National University, 2011, 108-26; Pamela Faye McGrath, ‘The “Gould Controversy”: A Cautionary Tale about Photography and Consent’, 2010, AIATSIS Library, Canberra, PMS 6397, 1-14; George Marcus, ‘Censorship in the Heart of Difference’, in Robert Post (ed.), *Censorship and Silencing: Practices of Cultural Regulation* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 1998), 221-242, 230; John Mulvaney, ‘Reflections’, *Antiquity* 80 (308) (Jun 2006), 425-434, 426; Mulvaney, *Digging up a Past*, 173-174; Myers, ‘We Are Not Alone’, 249; Peterson, ‘The Changing Photographic Contract’, 135.

restricted to initiated men. She had seen what she was not supposed to see. By having it in her possession, there was concern the schoolgirl had breached customary law, and that she would be ritually speared for the transgression. The men swore ‘they would kill Gould if he ever returned.’⁹¹

The details of this tragic incident remain sensitive and disputed.⁹² Over time the story has been liberally embellished. In some secondary accounts, the schoolgirl is killed as punishment for seeing the secret-sacred material; in others she is speared and ‘barred from matrimony’.⁹³ Another account suggests it was the woman on the cover and at least one male interlocutor who were to be punished as a result of the book.⁹⁴ I have condensed and simplified the account of the incident for the sake of sensitivity. The schoolgirl was not speared, but the anger the book generated was potent.

The news of the incident quickly spread throughout the desert communities.⁹⁵ Four young men found the book, which had been hidden by the girl’s father, and travelled through the night and the next day to reach Warburton, 565 km away, to spread the news.⁹⁶ The District Officer of Warburton reported on 24 May 1971:

Aborigines very upset and angry re Gould’s book ‘Yiwara’ ... Elders adamant no further cooperation with anthropologists.⁹⁷

When Noel Wallace visited Amata in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands on behalf of the AIAS in May 1971, he was surprised by the new restrictions placed on his work. For the first time old friends asked him to put away his notebook during certain ceremonies. And he unexpectedly found himself embroiled in tensions between groups: his decision to cancel a fieldtrip so as not to exacerbate the sensitive situation caused great ‘distress’ for those who relied on his vehicle to visit country. Wallace’s report shows the diversity of reactions within desert communities: from general indifference to acute anger at the initiated

⁹¹ Marcus, ‘Censorship in the Heart of Difference’, 230.

⁹² Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, ‘Conference on the Aborigines and the Anthropologist: Problems of Field Access’, Canberra, 9th-10th August, 1971, Transcript of proceedings, Vol 1 (Canberra, ACT: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1971), 118.

⁹³ Myers, ‘We Are Not Alone’, 249; Carleton S Coon, ‘Overview’, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 6 (1977), 1-10, 6.

⁹⁴ This is according to Noel Wallace. See Lambert, ‘A History of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies 1959-1989’, 113.

⁹⁵ AIAS, ‘Problems of Field Access’, 118.

⁹⁶ Malcolm Griffiths, Department of Native Welfare, in AIAS, ‘Problems of Field Access’, 120.

⁹⁷ AIAS, ‘Problems of Field Access’, 14.

men who allowed such a situation to happen.⁹⁸ But he too received a message for the AIAS: ‘tell those Canberra fellers they have got to stop other white fellers doing the same as Dr Gould’.⁹⁹

By 23 June 1971 the situation in Warburton remained ‘very disturbed’.¹⁰⁰ Attitudes towards outsiders were already tense after the shooting death of an Aboriginal man by a Laverton police officer in 1970 and the theft of some sacred boards from a local cache.¹⁰¹ Pamela McGrath and David Brooks have also highlighted the residual sensitivity about images that lingered after the 1957 ‘Warburton range controversy’.¹⁰² During a heated public debate about remote Aboriginal health and welfare, William Grayden focused national attention on the township through exaggerated reports of Indigenous malnutrition and disease. His documentary film, *Their Darkest Hour*, has had long lasting local effects, with recent research on the attitudes of Ngaanyatjarra people revealing ‘a general distrust of strangers with cameras and considerable anxiety about the viewing of images that may cause others distress.’¹⁰³ But despite these local contingencies, there is no doubt, in Ian Crawford’s words, that the ‘Gould book caused a very great hardening of attitudes.’¹⁰⁴ The situation was exacerbated in July when a journalist from the *Sunday Australian* caught wind of the story and made it front page news: ‘Tribal Threat to Spear School Girl’.¹⁰⁵

John Mulvaney, then Acting Principal of AIAS, first heard of the developments in Canberra and was concerned for the girl’s safety and alarmed by the anger the book was generating throughout desert communities. He decided ‘as a prudent initial step, to recall all fieldworkers with AIAS grants from the desert region.’¹⁰⁶ He also urged the AIAS to call a

⁹⁸ Noel Wallace, ‘Field report, May-August 1971’, AIATSIS Library, Canberra, PMS 2431, Doc. 71/1146; AIAS, ‘Problems of Field Access’, 144. Bob Edwards was also in Central Australia as news of the ‘Gould incident’ rippled across the desert. On 26 May 1971 he had a discussion with David Hope, the superintendent at Amata, about the role of ‘secret-sacred’ material in contemporary anthropological studies and he experienced obstacles to his normal photographic practices at Mt Agnes on 1 June. Robert Edwards, ‘Uprange Ministerial Anthropological Expedition, 19 May to 12 June, 1971’, 24 June 1971, AIATSIS Library, Canberra, PMS 547, 22, 25.

⁹⁹ AIAS, ‘Problems of Field Access’, 144.

¹⁰⁰ Ian Crawford reporting on the observations of Mr Lock and Mr Warwick Deitch in AIAS, ‘Problems of Field Access’, 119.

¹⁰¹ Mulvaney to Howson, 12 August 1971.

¹⁰² Pamela Faye McGrath and David Brooks, ‘Their Darkest Hour: the films and photographs of William Grayden and the history of the “Warburton Range controversy” of 1957’, *Aboriginal History* 34 (2010), 115-141, 134.

¹⁰³ McGrath and Brooks, ‘Their Darkest Hour’, 134.

¹⁰⁴ AIAS, ‘Problems of Field Access’, 81.

¹⁰⁵ Don Lipscombe, ‘Tribal Threat to Spear School Girl’, *Sunday Australian*, 4 July 1971.

¹⁰⁶ Mulvaney, *Digging up a Past*, 173; John Mulvaney to Richard A Gould, 21 July 1971, ‘Gould R.A. – Yiwara’, AIATSIS Library, Canberra, File 65/19(a).

major conference to discuss the controversy. The conference, held on 9-10 August 1971 and chaired by Neil ‘Black Mac’ Macintosh, included deep discussion of permits and Aboriginal consultation, but its largely academic focus was betrayed by the title: ‘The Aborigines and the Anthropologists: Problems of Field Access’. The Federal Minister in charge of Aboriginal affairs, Peter Howson, attended, along with around sixty academics and administrators, almost all white. Mulvaney reflected that, in hindsight, he should have acted more positively to involve Aboriginal people in the proceedings.¹⁰⁷

The Institute was faced with the challenge of balancing its image as a place of scientific research whilst recognising the very serious concerns being voiced by a number of Aboriginal communities. The *Yiwara* affair simmered throughout the conference and was variously alluded to as ‘the Gould case’, ‘the schoolgirl incident’, ‘the episode in the western desert’, ‘what happened in Warburton’ and, simply, ‘the hooha’. In this meeting of white intellectuals the story came to represent ‘the Aboriginal viewpoint’ and ‘Aboriginal opinion’.¹⁰⁸ The conference was wide-ranging and occasionally heated. Attendees shared stories about the growing need to seek permission across Australia. Macintosh regarded consultation as ‘automatic’. He recalled seeking permission from his watchful guides to excavate two caves in the Northern Territory in 1949: ‘they only had one restriction’ – not to remove anything from the rock crevices.¹⁰⁹ Ian Crawford described a similar experience in the Kimberley where ‘I was told I was too close to a site of significance and had to stop.’¹¹⁰ There were some at the conference who expressed frustrations at being restricted from accessing sites, while others, such as Nicolas Peterson, despaired at the ‘puritanical hard-line libertarianism’ being expounded by some attendees:

[There is no] overriding right of scientific enquiry to intrude into a very fragile culture and contribute to its destroying in the name of scientific investigation. We are privileged as anthropologists to be able to go along and work with Aborigines and they accept us.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Mulvaney, *Digging up a Past*, 174.

¹⁰⁸ AIAS, ‘Problems of Field Access’, 17, 50.

¹⁰⁹ AIAS, ‘Problems of Field Access’, 54.

¹¹⁰ AIAS, ‘Problems of Field Access’, 51.

¹¹¹ AIAS, ‘Problems of Field Access’, 128.

Mulvaney described the meeting as representing ‘a faltering step’ towards the positive dialogue fostered at the AIAS under the leadership of Peter Ucko in the 1970s and his push to ‘Aboriginalise’ the Institute (see Interlude II).¹¹² Even before the controversy, the AIAS had changed to a much more restrictive policy on the distribution of ceremonial films made by its film unit. In the wake of the *Yiwara* affair, aware of the damage such films could cause, it adopted a buy-back policy.¹¹³ Among the six resolutions that were passed at the conference was the recommendation:

That while recognising the wish of Aborigines to use the permit system to protect their privacy this conference urges a more satisfactory protection of Aboriginal privacy will come from the holding of titles to land by Aborigines.¹¹⁴

In this rather dry statement we see something of the new political landscape that was emerging in the 1960s and 1970s. The Aboriginal rights movement, operating in the shadow of contemporary racial movements in Africa and America, was giving urgency to questions of ownership and control, Aboriginality and power.¹¹⁵

The *Yiwara* controversy became a flashpoint in this movement – a rare example where an Aboriginal community was able to regain some control over their cultural information and access to their land. In the wake of the incident, an embargo was placed on permits for all researchers who wanted to work in Western Australian communities. The controversy would ultimately force dramatic changes to the permit system, involving Aboriginal communities for the first time in decisions over who could conduct research on their land.¹¹⁶ This was a significant shift, as Sharon Sullivan reminds us, because ‘whoever controls research into such sites controls, to some extent, the Aboriginal past.’¹¹⁷

¹¹² John Mulvaney, ‘Archaeological Retrospect 9’, *Antiquity* 60 (229) (1986), 96-107, 105; Stephanie Moser, ‘The Aboriginalisation of Archaeology: The Contribution of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies to the Indigenous Transformation of the Discipline’, in Peter J Ucko (ed.), *Theory in Archaeology: A World Perspective* (London: Routledge, 1995), 150-177, 152.

¹¹³ Peterson, ‘The Changing Photographic Contract’, 133.

¹¹⁴ As quoted in Peterson, ‘The Changing Photographic Contract’, 137.

¹¹⁵ Bain Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines* (Crows News, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2003); Jennifer Clark, ‘“The Wind of Change” in Australia: Aborigines and the International Politics of Race, 1960-1972’, *International History Review* 20 (1) (1998), 89-117, 105; Heather Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in New South Wales, 1770-1972* (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1996).

¹¹⁶ Lambert, ‘A History of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies 1959-1989’, 111-12.

¹¹⁷ Sharon Sullivan, ‘The Custodianship of Aboriginal Sites in Southeastern Australia’ in Isabel McBryde (ed.), *Who Owns the Past?: Papers from the Annual Symposium of the Australian Academy of the Humanities* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1985), 139-56, 139.

From America, Gould was shocked and upset by what had happened. He believed that members of the Native Welfare Department, who had been aware of the book before the ‘schoolgirl incident’, had unnecessarily inflamed tensions by showing the book and its sensitive images to those who might not otherwise have seen it.¹¹⁸ This was also how Bruce Gouldthorp, the headmaster at Warburton, saw the situation.¹¹⁹ The Native Welfare Department was certainly incensed with the popular nature of *Yiwara*.¹²⁰ But Gould was also remorseful about the promises he had made to stop ‘secret-sacred’ material from returning to Warburton.¹²¹ He hoped to visit the communities and apologise for his offence, but the Western Australian authorities refused to sanction his visit.¹²² He called on the Australian publishers of *Yiwara*, Collins, to withdraw the book from the Australian market, and requested his American publisher, Scribner, remove the offending images, but his contract offered him no immediate power over these matters.¹²³ He shared his correspondence with the publishers with the Department of Native Welfare and asked that they communicate his positive actions to the communities of Laverton and Warburton.¹²⁴ He also recorded a twenty-one minute interview about the controversy with the ABC and asked for a taped copy to be sent to the Warburton Ranges Mission, so that the Ngaanyatjarra men could hear him explain his actions.¹²⁵ Eventually, in 1973, the book was withdrawn and some copies were removed from the shelves of libraries around the country.¹²⁶ Gould has recently expressed a willingness to repatriate the images from his time in the Western Desert.¹²⁷

¹¹⁸ Richard Gould to Ron Berndt, 29 September 1971, ‘Gould R.A. – Yiwara’, AIATSIS Library, Canberra, File 65/19(a); Richard Gould to Kenneth Heuer, Science Editor: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 16 September 1971, ‘Gould R.A. – Yiwara’, AIATSIS Library, Canberra, File 65/19(a).

¹¹⁹ Bruce Gouldthorp, Headmaster of the WA Government School at Warburton, to Richard A Gould, 29 August 1971, ‘Gould R.A. – Yiwara’, AIATSIS Library, Canberra, File 65/19(a).

¹²⁰ Griffiths, ‘Report on Gould Case for AIAS’, 9-18; Ronald Berndt to Bruce A McLarty, A/Commissioner of Native Welfare, 24 February 1971, ‘Gould R.A. – Yiwara’, AIATSIS Library, Canberra, File 65/19(a).

¹²¹ Richard A Gould to NGW Macintosh, 8 March 1972, ‘Gould R.A. – Yiwara’, AIATSIS Library, Canberra, File 65/19(a).

¹²² John Mulvaney to Ian Crawford, 15 August 1972, ‘Gould R.A. – Yiwara’, AIATSIS Library, Canberra, File 65/19(a).

¹²³ Gould to Heuer, 14 July 1971.

¹²⁴ Richard A Gould to Frank Gare, Commissioner Department of Native Welfare, 22 February 1972, ‘Gould R.A. – Yiwara’, AIATSIS Library, Canberra, File 65/19(a).

¹²⁵ Richard A Gould to John Mulvaney, 26 July 1971, ‘Gould R.A. – Yiwara’, AIATSIS Library, Canberra, File 65/19(a).

¹²⁶ Nevertheless, it remains widely accessible today. KW Wilder, Managing Director of Collins Publishers, to Miss M Manning, AIAS Librarian, 27 March 1973, ‘Gould R.A. – Yiwara’, AIATSIS Library, Canberra, File 65/19(a).

¹²⁷ McGrath, ‘The “Gould Controversy”’, 4. There is a growing movement to repatriate of images from this era, see: Jane Lydon, ‘Introduction: The Photographic Encounter’ in Jane Lydon (ed.), *Calling the Shots: Aboriginal Photographies* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2014) 1-18, 7-8.

At the height of the controversy, a book burning (a curiously western protest) was staged in Warburton with multiple copies of *Yiwara* set alight in a 44-gallon drum.¹²⁸ A similar protest took place in Wingellina in 1979 when Gould's recordings of Western Desert songs, published in 1968, made their way back to the community.¹²⁹ Anthropologists working in the Western Desert such as Annette Hamilton in 1971 and Fred Myers in 1973 encountered ongoing problems stemming from the *Yiwara* affair.¹³⁰ Ronald Berndt responded to the incident by removing all sacred photographs from his 1974 edition of *The First Australians*. (Though he included photos of a secret and ceremonial nature in an international publication the same year, along with a special statement entitled 'Reader's in Australia Please Note'.)¹³¹ Anthropologist TGH Strehlow adopted a similar policy to Berndt, but was caught out when secret-sacred images published in the German magazine *Stern* made their way back to Australia in 1978 against his will.¹³² Barry Hill has explored the angst this caused him in the masterful biography *Broken Song*. Having been born and raised on Hermannsburg mission, Strehlow considered himself 'the last Aranda man' and believed he had every right to share secret-sacred knowledge. What he failed to realise was that he had been overruled by the culture he had devoted his life to understanding and empowering.

Not all field workers, however, recognised the shifting political landscape. The publication in 1976 of Charles Mountford's *Nomads of the Australian Desert*, which contained images of restricted places, objects and activities taken in the 1930s and 1940s, was a blatant breach of Aboriginal customary law.¹³³ It stirred outrage amongst the Pitjantjatjara community and would ultimately see the *Yiwara* precedent come into law.

Soon after the 1976 *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act* was introduced, *Foster v Mountford* was heard in the Federal Court in Darwin. Inspired by the success of getting *Yiwara* off the market, the Pitjantjatjara people won an injunction in the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory to prevent the further publication of Mountford's *Nomads of the*

¹²⁸ McGrath, 'The "Gould Controversy"', 7.

¹²⁹ Kim Akerman, 'John Tregenza and Ushma Scales burning copies of Dick Gould's records', 7 March 1979, Wingellina, Central Reserve, WA, AIATSIS Library, Canberra, Photo 3615.

¹³⁰ Annette Hamilton, 'Yiwara: Foragers of the Australian Desert (Book Review)', *Mankind* 8 (2) (Dec 1971), 156-57; Myers, 'We are not alone'; Lambert, 'A History of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies 1959-1989', 108-26.

¹³¹ Hill, *Broken Song*, 743.

¹³² Hill, *Broken Song*, 741-49.

¹³³ Christopher Anderson, 'The Economics of Sacred Art: The Uses of a Secret Collection in the South Australian Museum', in Christopher Anderson, *Politics of the Secret*, Oceania Monograph 45 (Sydney: Oceania Publications, University of Sydney, 1995), 97-107, 99.

Australian Desert.¹³⁴ Justice Muirhead found that the sacred information in the book had ‘deep religious and cultural significance’ and that the revelation of secrets to the women, children and uninitiated men ‘may undermine the social and religious stability of their hard-pressed community.’¹³⁵ For the first time, Aboriginal cultural secrets were considered alongside commercial or trade secrets in the eyes of the law. As historian Michael Davis reflects, it was an important ‘recognition by the Australian courts of a deep and profound sacredness to Aboriginal peoples’ cultural life.’¹³⁶

The irony of the *Yiwara* affair is that Gould was one of the first archaeologists to seek permission and consult with relevant elders about access to sites. As Nicolas Peterson comments, ‘It is a reflection of the growing awareness of photographic ethics that Gould provided the name of the woman on the cover of the book.’¹³⁷ Even the name he was given, Mingkultjara (he who has tobacco), tells of the rituals he went through in order to gain information. So while he accepted a degree of responsibility, Gould also believed he had been made a scapegoat at a time when many other researchers were also publishing secret-sacred images.¹³⁸ The Ngaanyatjarra took pride in their culture and had gone out of their way to share details about their technology and economy, plants and game, and even aspects of their sacred life. ‘On many occasions,’ Gould wrote in 1969, ‘I was even reprimanded for apparent inattention to something they were showing or telling me, because I was not immediately writing it all down in my notebook.’¹³⁹ In 1972, in the wake of the *Yiwara* affair, he wrote an open letter, in which he defended his actions:

Each time I attended a ceremonial event, I did so with the approval of everyone present, with the understanding that I would publish my observations but would keep sacred/secret material from getting back into the area.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁴ Charles P Mountford, *Nomads of the Australian Desert* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1976). Around two thousand copies had been sold by the time the book was withdrawn. A warehouse fire destroyed several hundred copies and the Aboriginal Arts Board purchased the remainder of the edition. Christoph Antons, ‘Foster v Mountford: Cultural Confidentiality in a Changing Australia’, in Sam Ricketson (ed.), *Landmarks in Australian Intellectual Property Law* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 110-125, 118.

¹³⁵ Michael Davis, ‘Law, Anthropology, and the Recognition of Indigenous Cultural Systems’, in R Kuppe and R Potz (eds.), *Law and Anthropology: International Yearbook for Legal Anthropology*, Volume 11, (The Hague: Brill, 2001), 298-320, 311.

¹³⁶ Davis, ‘Law, Anthropology, and the Recognition of Indigenous Cultural Systems’, 311.

¹³⁷ Peterson, ‘The Changing Photographic Contract’, 135.

¹³⁸ Gould to Macintosh, 8 March 1972.

¹³⁹ Gould, *Yiwara*, 75.

¹⁴⁰ Gould as quoted in McGrath, ‘The “Gould Controversy”’, 7.

But permission to take the images is not the same as permission to use them. Gould's characterisation of the exchange of information fails to take into account the highly controlled nature of knowledge in Aboriginal societies. Peterson develops this concept further in his essay 'The Changing Photographic Contract':

Seeing and knowing about an object or performance does not authorise a person to speak to others about it: the information is only for their own benefit and only those acknowledged as the rightful controllers of knowledge can disseminate it to others.¹⁴¹

Gould tragically misjudged this relationship and overestimated his ability to control the circulation of the images. The expansion of white civilisation had engendered a new reality, for both Aboriginal people and researchers.

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Near the end of the 2014 dig, we photograph the pit, draw our neat sections and then riddle them with sample tubes. We have dug a 'telephone booth' shaft into the earth. The pioneering phase of archaeology in Australia relied on excavating such pits. It allows an exhilarating glimpse into a layered landscape: an opportunity to see the refuse of past worlds, and all throughout, evidence of the people who inhabited them. A well-placed pit is the fundamental ingredient for what Rhys Jones liked to term the 'who was where, when and what was the weather like?' school of Australian archaeology.¹⁴² Half of our pit overlaps with Gould's earlier trench, the other half cuts through undisturbed deposit. The contrast between the two is stark: on one side the jumbled rubble and sediment of the backfill of the earlier excavation, on the other a fine grained, tightly compacted archive of climatic and cultural change: a historical document waiting to be read, once and once only.

Betsy Gould returned from the Western Desert to work as the Program Director for the New York City Commission to the United Nations.¹⁴³ Meanwhile, Richard Gould stepped away from Australian archaeology to work on other fields, first in his mother's homeland of Finland, then to more general interests in underwater archaeology, forensic anthropology and disaster archaeology. In the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, he led trial

¹⁴¹ Peterson, 'The Changing Photographic Contract', 129.

¹⁴² Rhys Jones, 'Different Strokes for Different Folks: Sites, Scale and Strategy', in Ian Johnson (ed.) *Holier than Thou: Proceedings of the 1978 Kiola Conference on Australian Prehistory* (ANU, 1980), 151-171.

¹⁴³ Gould to Gare, 7 December 1970.

forensic recoveries at the World Trade Centres.¹⁴⁴ But he maintained an interest in Australian archaeology over the following decades and made the most of the material he had gathered during his time with the Ngaanyatjarra people. He hoped his work at Puntutjarpa would ‘one day be of use’ to the Ngaanyatjarra community. In his 1977 site report, he underlined the political dimensions of his work. By demonstrating an ancient and ‘continuous’ history of occupation, he wrote, ‘this report provides support, should it be needed, for future Aboriginal land claims in the courts.’¹⁴⁵ But he also hoped his findings would encourage, among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people alike, ‘an informed appreciation of the nature and success of traditional Aboriginal culture under difficult physical conditions.’¹⁴⁶ He regarded the history he had helped uncover at Puntutjarpa as ‘a tribute’ to the Aboriginal people who had established and maintained a ‘dignified and rewarding way of life under what were perhaps the most rigorous environmental conditions ever encountered by any historic or prehistoric hunters and gatherers.’¹⁴⁷

Although Gould’s work framed questions and debates that are still the subject of robust discussion, it is important not to overstate the importance of Puntutjarpa in the history of Australian archaeology. The site discouraged, as much as encouraged, research into the desert. For many years it remained a lone dot in the centre of the continent, while archaeological research around the coastline flourished.¹⁴⁸ And while Gould wanted his work on Puntutjarpa to speak for great expanses of the arid interior, the next generation of archaeologists have focused on the diversity of these desert landscapes and the changes over time in Aboriginal societies. Every desert has a distinct history of vegetation, formation and rainfall, which, in turn, shapes the rhythm of life of its inhabitants. And as Mike Smith has explored, deserts, with their boom and bust ecology, are characterised by transient richness as much as scarcity.¹⁴⁹ Desert research has moved away from Gould’s reading of cultural ‘continuity’ to explore complex changes in the arid interior over the past ten thousand years.

After the extreme aridity of the Last Glacial Maximum, as the sea level stabilised and the deserts took their modern form, desert people experienced the best living conditions in thirty

¹⁴⁴ Conlin, ‘Gould’, 3101.

¹⁴⁵ Gould, ‘Puntutjarpa Rockshelter and the Australian Desert Culture’, 6.

¹⁴⁶ Gould, ‘Puntutjarpa Rockshelter and the Australian Desert Culture’, 6.

¹⁴⁷ Gould, ‘Puntutjarpa Rockshelter and the Australian Desert Culture’, 182.

¹⁴⁸ Sandra Bowdler, ‘Valla Madness: Australian Archaeological Association Conference on Coastal Prehistory in Australia’, in Sandra Bowdler (ed.), *Coastal Archaeology in Eastern Australia* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1982), v-ix, v.

¹⁴⁹ Smith, *The Archaeology of Australia’s Deserts*, 8.

millennia.¹⁵⁰ From 8000 years ago, desert populations boomed; new sites were added to itineraries and old sites were reclaimed. Around 5000 years ago, a rockshelter at Serpents Glen in the Carnarvon Range in the Western Desert was reoccupied after 23,000 years of abandonment.¹⁵¹ But this population expansion brought new pressures. Desert people lived in a much larger social world. They could no longer always rely on relocating when resources became scarce. The result was a burst of technological and economic change from 4000 to 3000 years ago: an ‘intensification’ that reverberated across Australia.¹⁵² The emergence, for example, of the specialised seed grinder, which has been naturalised in the mythology and totemic geography of the desert, tells us something of the scale of the cultural and economic change at this time.¹⁵³ Perhaps this was when the Pama-Nyungan language family spread throughout the desert interior.¹⁵⁴ The uniformity of this language family stands in stark contrast to the linguistic mosaic in the north and northwest of the continent. As Mike Smith reflects in *The Archaeology of Australia’s Deserts*, a ‘new desert society did, in fact, form in the Holocene’ as Gould suggested. But much more recently. And this new society represented a distinctive adaptation to arid conditions, ‘much as Gould proposed’. But this was only the latest change in a history of occupation and adaptation that stretches across more than forty millennia.¹⁵⁵

The excavations at Puntutjarpa can be seen to have opened research into the Australian desert, but it took many years for this thread to be continued. And when it was, Gould’s work lay outside the central debate in desert archaeology: when and how the deserts were colonised. The second generation of Australian archaeologists, led by those who Gould affectionately described as ‘the desert mob’ – Peter Veth, Mike Smith, Sue O’Connor and Peter Hiscock – have deepened our understanding of the arid interior and given us insight into the rich and dynamic cultures that have called these landscapes home.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁰ Smith, *The Archaeology of Australia’s Deserts*, 208.

¹⁵¹ Sue O’Connor, Peter Veth and Colin Campbell, ‘Serpent’s Glen Rockshelter: Report of the First Pleistocene-aged Occupation Sequence from the Western Desert’, *Australian Archaeological Association* 46 (1998), 12-22.

¹⁵² Discussion of ‘intensification’ debate in chapter nine.

¹⁵³ Smith, *The Archaeology of Australia’s Deserts*, 208-211.

¹⁵⁴ Mike Smith, ‘Desert Archaeology, Linguistic Stratigraphy and the Spread of the Western Desert Language’, in Peter Veth, Mike Smith and Peter Hiscock (eds.), *Desert Peoples: Archaeological Perspectives* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2005), 222-242; Smith, *The Archaeology of Australia’s Deserts*, 203-11.

¹⁵⁵ Smith, *The Archaeology of Australia’s Deserts*, 211.

¹⁵⁶ Richard A Gould, ‘Islands in the Interior: The Dynamics of Prehistoric Adaptations within the Arid Zone of Australia by Peter Marius Veth (Book Review)’, *American Antiquity* 60 (3) (Jul 1995), 562-563.

We backfill the pit in the late afternoon and restore the site as best we can, smoothing the sandy shelter floor and re-sowing clumps of spinifex. We leave it like this. Without the paraphernalia of the dig – buckets, sieves, tape and dumpy – Puntutjarpa resumes its unimposing place in the landscape: a small overhang set into an undulating quartzite range of boulders and hollows.



Fig. 33 A sculpted remnant dune or 'residual' on the Walls of China, Lake Mungo (Source: B Griffiths).



Fig. 34 Russell Drysdale, Walls of China, 1945 (Source: Art Gallery NSW).

A Desiccated Garden of Eden

Jim Bowler at Lake Mungo

We move from the sealed road onto the red Mallee earth without dropping a kilometre. The low blue-grey scrub, cracking clay soils, and wide, untrammelled horizon create the impression that we are not moving at all. It is October 2013 and I am making a pilgrimage to the Willandra Lakes, arguably the most iconic archaeological landscape in Australia. It was here in 1968, on the southern end of the Lake Mungo lunette, that geomorphologist Jim Bowler stumbled upon the cremated bundle of human remains that became known as ‘Mungo Lady’ and, almost six years later, the complete and ritually anointed skeleton of ‘Mungo Man’. These two individuals lay buried within five hundred metres of each other for over forty thousand years. The discoveries made headlines around the world and symbolically announced the coming of age of Australian archaeology. This was the first archaeological site to grip the nation. Indeed, this eerily beautiful chain of dry lakes continues to haunt the Australian imagination. ‘It has come to represent,’ in the words of historian Kirsty Douglas, ‘a fertile site for beginnings, a desiccated Garden of Eden.’¹

‘What kind of effect have the archaeological breakthroughs had on the community here?’ I ask my companion, Darryl Pappin, a Mutthi Mutthi man with a broad smile and a mop of black hair perpetually buried under a Richmond Tigers beanie.

‘Good question,’ he responds. ‘Give me a minute. I know what I’m going to say, but it’s like an essay – I need to figure out how to say it.’ We listen to the road rumbling beneath us as Darryl chooses his words. Eventually he lifts a hand off the steering wheel and counts down with three fingers. ‘It’s made people recognise that Australian Aboriginals have a past.’ Two fingers. ‘It’s changed the community, what with the archaeologists and tourists we have now. And I don’t mind that.’ One finger. ‘It’s been good, but it’s caused all these tensions ...’ He trails off and returns his hand to the steering wheel.

¹ Kirsty Douglas, *Pictures of Time Beneath: Science, Heritage and the Uses of the Deep Past* (Collingwood, Vic: CSIRO Publishing, 2010), 128.

A little later on, trying to prompt him further, I talk about how the discoveries at Mungo pushed the human history of Australia to the limits of radiocarbon dating and presented, for a time, the oldest evidence for modern humans outside of Africa: ‘It’s amazing how the dating of Aboriginal occupation in Australia went from a few thousand years in the 1950s to 25,000 years in the 1960s, then 40,000 years, and now maybe even 60,000 years.’

‘And it’s a lot more than that.’ Darryl smiles at me. ‘It goes up and up and up until forever.’

‘Isn’t 60,000 years pretty much forever?’ I reply. ‘I find it hard to even fathom that number.’

Darryl drives silently, as if to say, ‘Well, no, 60,000 years isn’t forever.’ I gaze out across the vast, flat landscape and make a mental note: I need to start thinking on a different scale.²

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The shores of Lake Mungo loomed large in the Australian imagination long before Jim Bowler gave the lake its name. In late 1944, artist Russell Drysdale and journalist Keith Newman made a three thousand mile trek into inland New South Wales and Victoria to document the ‘drought of the century’ for the *Sydney Morning Herald*. They were horrified with what they found. The land had been stripped to its very skeleton. The natural rate of erosion had been exacerbated by a combination of long droughts and rabbit plagues, overstocking and inexperience, land clearing and the collapse of Aboriginal burning regimes.³ Twisted trees teetered on their exposed roots, the carcasses of cattle and sheep littered the landscape, and when the wind blew, sediment blocked out the sun. Drysdale’s haunting images, spread across the pages of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, brought home the tragedy of the drought that was paralysing New South Wales during the Second World War.⁴ They caused a national sensation.⁵ His paintings and sketches of isolated structures on barren hills and stoic, solitary figures in an ancient and distressed landscape became etched onto the Australian psyche. ‘It was the most important event in Drysdale’s career as an artist,’ his biographer Lou Klepac reflected, ‘...he was plunged into a devastating reality more

² A version of this opening passage was published in Billy Griffiths, ‘Uncovering Ancient Australia: A Meditation on Lake Mungo’, *History: Magazine of the Royal Australian Historical Society* 119 (Mar 2014), 4-6.

³ Harry Allen, ‘Where the Crow Flies Backwards: Man and Land in the Darling Basin’, PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1972, 16.

⁴ Keith Newman, ‘An Artist’s Journey Into Australia’s “Lost World”: Western Inferno’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 Dec 1944, 5.

⁵ Christopher Heathcote, *Russell Drysdale: Defining the Modern Australian Landscape* (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2013), 14-18.

frightening than any surrealist could have imagined.⁶ ‘With a few brief exceptions,’ his companion Newman reported in his series of articles on the drought, ‘it has been one long tragedy-track over scorched earth ... Here the wind does not sweep the country – it came down hard on the unshielded land and scrubbed it.’⁷

Some locals know this country as ‘the land where the crow flies backwards’. Archaeologist Harry Allen, who used this phrase in the title of his PhD on the Darling Basin, explained that the totemic crow did this, ‘To keep the dust out of his eyes.’⁸ The erosion is relentless. At Lake Mungo, archaeological finds were not excavated: they were revealed. The lakes haven’t been full for 18,000 years, yet there are freshwater mussel shells and blackened fish bones scattered throughout the arid landscape, as if they had been cooked and discarded yesterday. In one part of the World Heritage area, a fossilised lakebed has preserved hundreds of human footprints. That most ephemeral of human traces has survived, buried, in this landscape for around twenty thousand years.⁹ Wind and rain have exposed the trackways of two groups: a family walk across a drying lakebed, while a child scampers through the mud; and, crossing their path, a hunting party, including a one-legged man, sprint in pursuit of game. When archaeologists called on Indigenous trackers to interpret the footprints, the two Pintupi men had a chuckle at an ancient hunter: ‘he missed’.¹⁰

One night in mid-December 1944, Drysdale’s party camped on the Mungo Pastoral Station on the sandhills of the ‘Walls of China’, a remarkable landform possibly named after the Chinese labourers who built the nearby Mungo woolshed in 1869. ‘Sitting by the fire on a brilliant moonlit night,’ Klepac wrote of Drysdale, ‘he found it one of the most extraordinary places in the world. ... This revealed another reality and a new way of looking at the Australian landscape ... in terms of endless time, of geological activity and the presence of immense forces of nature which have shaped the land over millions of years.’¹¹ The party recognised the parched landscape as an ancient lakebed once fed by a mighty river. Newman was especially struck by the sculpted remnant dunes or ‘residuals’ for which Lake Mungo has since become famous: ‘pillars of rich soil up to 12ft high among the sand, held in place by the

⁶ Lou Klepac, *The Life and Work of Russell Drysdale* (Sydney: Bay Books, 1983), 79.

⁷ Newman, ‘An Artist’s Journey Into Australia’s “Lost World”’.

⁸ Allen, ‘Where the Crow Flies Backwards’, iii.

⁹ Steve Webb, ‘Further Research of the Willandra Lakes Fossil Footprint Site, Southeastern Australia’, *Journal of Human Evolution* 52 (2007), 711-715.

¹⁰ As in Martin Butler and Bentley Dean (dir.), *First Footprints* (2013), Sydney: Contact Films.

¹¹ Klepac, *The Life and Work of Russell Drysdale*, 81-82.

skeletons of great trees which died on guard duty against the desert.¹² The party was in awe of the geological story encrypted in the landscape, but they were also aware of the human history buried in the dunes. As Newman reported back for the *Sydney Morning Herald*,

erosion is disturbing the dead as well as menacing the living. The wind's giant hand has scooped away the earth from aboriginal burial grounds, to reveal skeletons of long dead men. How long, nobody knows. ... the anthropologists will have to hurry.¹³

Ancient bones were coming to light and turning to dust.

Newman urged Australians not to be indifferent to the erosion that was devastating the inland. There was an 'urgent need for scientific assault' to salvage the ancient landscape that was disappearing into the wind: 'For, however far from the great cities, this land was part of our heritage and our future.'¹⁴

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It would be more than two decades before major research was carried out in the desiccated lakes system. On a flight from Broken Hill to Sydney in the mid-1960s, geomorphologist Joe Jennings spotted a series of curved ridges through his aeroplane window. Back at the ANU, he traced the flight line and identified the features in aerial photographs as an interconnected chain of basins: a fossil remnant of an ancient flow from the Lachlan River. He reported the find to his student and colleague Jim Bowler, who was studying inland closed lake systems as rain gauges of past wet-dry climatic oscillations: sensitive indicators of major climatic change.

Bowler had spent his life studying the land, first as a potato farmer, then mustering cattle through the Snowy Mountains, and finally as a geologist and geomorphologist. He is a philosopher and a dreamer, and from a young age was drawn to big questions about humanity, landscapes and the cosmos. He became restless growing up on a farm in the small country town of Leongatha, where his great-grandfather had emigrated from the west coast of Ireland in the late nineteenth century. 'There's a big wide world out there,' he exclaims to me

¹² Keith Newman, 'Riddle of the Sands: Erosion Solution May Be Buried There: Urgent Need for Scientific Assault', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 Dec 1944, 5.

¹³ Newman, 'An Artist's Journey Into Australia's "Lost World"'.

¹⁴ Newman, 'An Artist's Journey Into Australia's "Lost World"'.

in 2015, ‘and I’m stuck here with these bloody cows!’¹⁵ As a fifteen-year-old he turned his back on farming life and entered the seminary at Corpus Christi. It was an intensely intellectual time of learning and self-reflection. His reading moved beyond theology into the fields of evolution and, in the wake of Hiroshima, nuclear energy. He recalls being scolded at the seminary for possessing a clandestine essay on Charles Darwin.¹⁶ But while he remains an Irish Catholic, his search for origins and understanding ultimately led him to geology. Deep time became the scale on which he viewed the world, and he quickly realised that water was the key to unlocking its secrets.

‘A history of Australia,’ Bowler wrote in 1988, ‘could well centre on water resources. The environmental historian can read these landscapes as other scholars read documents in archives, finding new understanding of the continent both before people inhabited it and in its early stages of human occupation.’¹⁷ Bowler’s career has been shaped by water. As a junior lecturer at Melbourne University his first geological investigations were into the climatic history of Port Phillip Bay. In his scuba gear, sitting on the sea floor below a scallop boat with a winch, Bowler hammered fifty cores across Port Phillip Bay in 1963-64.¹⁸ As recently as six thousand years ago, this sea floor had been a fertile hunting plain and the Yarra River had flowed out through the heads of Portsea and Queenscliff onto the Bassian Plain. Through coring, Bowler hoped to find out how Port Phillip Bay had filled up. It was a ‘dangerous and murky exercise’, particularly when working near the shipping channel, and Bowler was eager to move on to other climatic archives when the coring was finished.¹⁹ His work on the active lakes of western Victoria – Colac, Purrumbete, Bullen Merri and in particular the volcanic crater lake of Keilambete – allowed him to map past shorelines, to see when the lakes shrank or overflowed, and to compare the sandy sediment that lapped onto the slopes of the craters with the clay that gathered on the lake bed. He wanted to find out how changing water levels in southeastern Australia tied into ‘worldwide climatically controlled events.’²⁰ This was

¹⁵ Jim Bowler interviewed by Billy Griffiths, 12-14 October 2015, National Library of Australia, sound recording and timed summary available for public use, ORAL TRC 6680/1.

¹⁶ Bowler interviewed by Griffiths, ORAL TRC 6680/1.

¹⁷ Jim Bowler, ‘Water and Sand: Climate in Ancient Australia’, in John Mulvaney and Peter White (eds.), *Australians to 1788* (Sydney: Fairfax, Syme & Weldon Associates, 1987) 24-45, 25.

¹⁸ Jim Bowler, ‘Port Phillip Survey 1957-1963: Geology and Geomorphology’, *Memoirs of the National Museum of Victoria* 27 (Nov 1966), 19-67, 20-21.

¹⁹ Bowler interviewed by Griffiths, ORAL TRC 6680/1.

²⁰ His coring revealed a big fall in lake levels at Lake Keilambete, beginning around the 1850s-1880s, which, in 1971, he interpreted as ‘the first sign of the Industrial Revolution.’ Jim Bowler and Tatsuji Hamada, ‘Late Quaternary Stratigraphy and Radiocarbon Chronology of Water Level Fluctuations in Lake Keilambete, Victoria’, *Nature* 232(5309) (1971), 330-332, 330; Bowler interviewed by Griffiths, ORAL TRC 6680/1.

pioneering work. Bowler's careful reconstruction of lake levels filled in vast gaps in knowledge about climatic change and helped write the hydrological history of ancient Australia. But, as his colleague RW Galloway wrote in 1969, it was still 'painfully clear that we know very little'.²¹

When Bowler learnt of the Willandra Lakes, he was a PhD student in the Research School of Pacific studies at the ANU and he saw it as an opportunity to study an ancient water system on a more manageable scale. The erosion of the lakes system would allow him to 'see inside' the landscape.²² As Bowler explained to me in 2015, mainland Australia has a peculiarly stable geological history: 'There's been no ice sheets, no mountain building. This landscape, right across southern and inland Australia, in many places has not changed much over the last million years.'²³ This has allowed remnants of the deep past, which in other continents have been carved out by glaciers, to survive through to the present day. When major erosion creates gullies and residuals out of this deep-time record, there is no need for excavation or coring: a skilled eye can read its history in the exposed walls of sediment and soil.

Following Jennings' advice, Bowler made his first visit to the Willandra Lakes in early 1967 with Roger Houston. It was hot and they were grateful for the hospitality of the pastoralist Len Carroll, who allowed them to stay a few nights in the shearers quarters at Gol Gol Station. This was Bowler's first encounter with the massive lunettes of the Willandra Lakes: low, curving lines of sandy hills that arc around the shores of shallow lake basins. It was also his first experience of the erosion that is weathering the landscape away. During a survey of Lake Mulurulu they were engulfed by a dust storm and their camp was buried under drifting sand. They took shelter in their Land Rover listening to the wind and the wireless. 'A cloud of dust swept across the country ... the temperature would have been 105 degrees ... and then rain came which turned the dust to red sticky mud.'²⁴

He returned alone a few months later, travelling across the low ridgelines and nested dunes on a flat-tired motorbike, studying the landscape during the day and retreating to his quarters on the Mungo Pastoral Station in the evenings. He was fascinated by this dry place that had

²¹ RW Galloway, 'Evidence for Late Quaternary Climates', in John Mulvaney and Jack Golson (eds.), *Aboriginal Man and Environment in Australia* (Canberra: ANU Press, 1971), 14-25, 15.

²² Jim Bowler, as quoted in Helen Lawrence (ed.), *Mungo over Millennia: The Willandra landscape and its people* (Sorell, TAS: Maygog Publishing, 2006), 15.

²³ Bowler interviewed by Griffiths, ORAL TRC 6680/3.

²⁴ Bowler interviewed by Griffiths, ORAL TRC 6680/3.

been shaped by water, a landscape that could be read like scripture. In late 1967, Bowler first explored a basin further south where there had been major erosion on the margin, exposing fresh water shells and gravel beaches: signals of lake full periods. ‘You could actually put your spade on the point,’ he marvelled in 2015. ‘This is where the water was when that beach was formed.’²⁵ As he worked, his mind turned over the climatic change he was observing. Was it cyclic? And how had this landscape formed over time?

Bowler felt at home among the dunes. As his daughter Jenny writes, ‘the breadth and depth of isolated places resonated with him.’ He was ‘rough and ready, he played his classical music loud and cooked a good hot curry.’²⁶ His hosts at the Mungo pastoral station, Albert and Venda Barnes, accommodated his eccentric interest in their sheep paddocks. They had not known they lived on a fossil lakebed.²⁷ Indeed, at that stage the lakes had no cartographic name. Having mapped the basins, Bowler was charged with that responsibility and chose to name them after the sheep stations. The origins of the name ‘Mungo’, which has become so iconic of Aboriginal Australia, are disputed. Some claim it derives from the Ngyiampaa word for canoe – *mangar*; others trace it back to the late sixth century Scottish apostle, Saint Mungo. When Alex and Albert Barnes bought Mungo pastoral station in 1934 from Ewan and Angus Cameron, they found a photo of the St Mungo cathedral in Glasgow on the dining room wall.²⁸

Bowler’s great contribution was to understand the anatomy of the lunettes, to unpack the great cycles of change, the drying of the lakes and the building of the big dunes.²⁹ It was only gradually that he realised that there were human actors on his environmental stage. The key to the story at the Willandra Lakes were the lunettes – named such because their shape evokes the crescent moon. The lunette at Lake Mungo curves for over thirty kilometres around the basin and towers over this flat landscape at some twenty-four metres high and two hundred metres wide. The Lake Garnpung lunette, to the north, rises to thirty metres high and is the largest clay lunette in the world.³⁰ Building on the earlier findings of geologist Edwin

²⁵ Bowler interviewed by Griffiths, ORAL TRC 6680/3.

²⁶ Jenny Bowler, ‘Mungo Memories’, *Griffith Review* 19 (Autumn 2008), 180-85.

²⁷ Douglas, *Pictures of Time Beneath*, 137.

²⁸ For a detailed discussion of the names see Nicholas Jose, ‘The Mungo Excursion’, in Donata Carrazza and Paul Kane (eds.), *Vintage: Celebrating Ten Years of the Mildura Writers’ Festival* (Melbourne: Hardie Grant Books, 2004), 25-37, 30-33.

²⁹ Jim Bowler, ‘Aridity in Australia: Age, Origins and Expression in Aeolian Landforms and Sediments’, *Earth-science Reviews* 12 (1976), 279-310, 289-93.

³⁰ Douglas, *Pictures of Time Beneath*, 141.

Sherbon Hills, Bowler found that the lunettes were mostly composed of fine clay, which had formed on the damp lake floor before being clumped into fluffy pellets by salt, and blown by the wind up onto the lakeshore, where the clay gradually built up, layer by layer, to create a lunette. When the lake basins held water, the wind was the agent that built the lunettes; but with no moisture or salt to create clay, it is now blowing them away and, in the process, exposing long buried shorelines.³¹ By understanding their formation, and identifying units that marked phases of climatic change and soil development (Golgol, Mungo and Zanci), Bowler had uncovered an index of human-environment interaction.

When the first Australians arrived on the continent some sixty thousand years ago, Lake Mungo had been dry for over fifty thousand years. (This is the Golgol unit.) As the climate cooled, glaciers formed in the mountains and the melting ice enlarged the rivers. From around 60,000 to 50,000 years ago, the Lachlan River supplied the Willandra Creek with enough water from the snowfields on the Snowy Mountains to maintain a system of thirteen lakes with over two hundred kilometres of shoreline.³² (This is the Mungo unit.) ‘In the Willandra system alone,’ Bowler writes, ‘more than 1000 km² of open water was introduced to a region where no permanent water existed previously.’³³ Lake Mungo was an overflow lake, fed by the nearby Lake Leaghur. As the climate became more arid, the mountain snowfields shrank, the rivers changed shape, and the lakes became ephemeral for perhaps three thousand years, before a drying trend set in leading up to the Last Glacial Maximum at 21,000 years ago. Bowler stresses that there is no modern analogue for these conditions within Australia: ‘although not as cold, they may have borne some resemblance to parts of Alaska.’³⁴ (This is the Zanci unit.) By around 14,500 years ago the lakes were defunct.

The first intimations that people were a part of these great climatic events were the fresh water shells that Bowler found high up on the shorelines. They must have been carried there. He reported the burnt shells, along with scattered hearths and flaked stones back to his

³¹ Jim Bowler, ‘Clay Dunes: Their Occurrence, Formation and Environmental Significance’, *Earth-science Reviews*, 9 (1973), 315-338.

³² Jim Bowler, ‘Pleistocene Salinities and Climatic Change: Evidence from Lakes and Lunettes in Southeastern Australia’, in John Mulvaney and Jack Golson (eds.), *Aboriginal Man and Environment in Australia* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1971), 47-65, 59-60.

³³ Jim Bowler, ‘Recent Developments in Reconstructing Late Quaternary Environments in Australia’, in RL Kirk and AG Thorne (eds.), *The Origin of the Australians* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1976), 55-77, 67.

³⁴ Jim Bowler, ‘Quaternary Climate and Tectonics in the Evolution of the Riverine Plain, Southeastern Australia’, in JL Davies and MAJ Williams (eds.), *Landform Evolution in Australia* (Canberra: ANU Press, 1978), 70-112, 108-109.

colleagues at the ANU, but his message was greeted with scepticism.³⁵ The evidence he was claiming for human activity was associated with the lake-full periods of thirty to forty thousand years ago: almost double the oldest dates for human occupation in Australia. ‘I was sort of politely told, “look you’re a geologist, you stick with your stones and we’ll look after the archaeology”’.³⁶

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Bowler first presented his research on the Willandra Lakes as part of a seminar series at the Australian National University between October and December 1968. The papers from this forum were later collected in the landmark volume *Aboriginal Man and Environment in Australia* (1971). The seminars reflected the increasingly interdisciplinary nature of research into ancient Australia and the growing focus within archaeology on scientific and technological insights. As Peter Bellwood remarked in his review of the book, ‘it is surely a sign of the times that only eight of the 26 papers are directly concerned with archaeological topics.’³⁷ The interdisciplinary nature of the seminar series also reflects the convictions of the organisers, John Mulvaney and Jack Golson, who firmly believed that archaeological practice in Australia needed to be enmeshed with other fields. ‘Human history,’ as geologist George Seddon reminds us, ‘is not complete without environmental history. It is not enough to detail the actions of the actors; the stage is equally important.’³⁸ Both Mulvaney and Golson tried hard to establish a ‘working association’ at the ANU between archaeology and the earth sciences. ‘Without this personal contact,’ Wilfred Shawcross and Maureen Kaye wrote in 1980, ‘it is possible that the formal boundaries of their disciplines might have inhibited the transmission of information and the encouragement that was necessary to establish the [Mungo] discoveries.’³⁹

In some ways the seminar series can be seen as a response to the challenge Rhys Jones had issued to the field in a provocative editorial for *Mankind* in June 1968. Jones urged his fellow Australian archaeologists to take stock of the recent discoveries, to synthesise the mass of

³⁵ Bowler, ‘Pleistocene Salinities and Climatic Change’, 61.

³⁶ Bowler interviewed by Griffiths, ORAL TRC 6680/3.

³⁷ Peter Bellwood, ‘Reviews’, *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 81 (2) (Jun 1972), 277-279, 278.

³⁸ George Seddon, ‘Thinking like a Geologist: The Culture of Geology’, Mawson Lecture, *Australian Journal of Earth Sciences* 43 (1996), 487-95, 495.

³⁹ Wilfred Shawcross and Maureen Kaye, ‘Australian Archaeology: Implications of Current Interdisciplinary Research’, *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews* 5(2) (1980), 112-28, 114.



Fig. 35 Jim Bowler at Lake Mungo (Source: *Sunraysia Daily*, 4 June 2016).



Fig. 36 John Mulvaney at Lake Mungo (Source: NAA).



Fig. 37 Excavations at Arumpo Top Hut 3 August 1975, (l-r) Michael Pearson, Colin Macdonald, Anne McConnell, Phyllis Nicholson and Isabel McBryde (Source: P Macdonald, *Many Exchanges*).



Fig. 38 Alan Thorne at the ANU, 1974 (Source: NAA).

raw data about ancient Australia, and to take a global view of their research. ‘The honeymoon is over,’ he declared, ‘The new wave of Australian archaeology is settling down comfortably to a premature middle age.’ He was searching for a ‘glimmer of independent archaeological thinking which could grow into a viable and recognizable Australian school’:

Let us not confuse the accumulation of raw data with improved quality of thought. Simple-minded archaeology is still simple minded, be it conceived over a continent or over a parish ... In terms of the ‘main stream of history’, Australia is a peripheral eddy. If we are content merely to document this local sequence, we consign our work to a footnote of world prehistory.⁴⁰

Jim Bowler’s seminar paper on Lake Mungo, in which he outlined human associations with Ice Age climatic change, pulled Australian archaeology from a footnote onto the front page of world prehistory. ‘Immediately afterwards the situation changed,’ Bowler reflected in 2015, ‘Peter White [from the University of Sydney] collared me as we came out and said “I’d love to go out there. When can we go out there?” I was then subsequently clobbered by Rhys Jones [from the ANU], “Don’t have anything to do with Sydney! Wait until we’re ready!”’⁴¹

The main cause of the excitement was a chance discovery Bowler had made during a geomorphological survey of the lunettes. On 5 July 1968, he noticed ‘some strange bone fragments’ in a calcrete block eroding from the lunette on the Joulni sheep station on the southern shores of Lake Mungo. It looked to him like the remains of a meal ‘burnt by early man’.⁴² Perhaps the bones belonged to one of the giant extinct marsupials that once roamed this lakeshore? He marked the site with a red iron peg ‘about twenty metres away so that sheep wouldn’t come and scratch against it.’⁴³ He knew not to remove the remains from their context. He had in the back of his mind the challenges his team had faced in Keilor three years earlier when he, Tom Darragh and Dermot Casey had removed skeletal remains from the terraces at Green Gully.⁴⁴ The lack of archaeological context had rendered the bones

⁴⁰ Rhys Jones, ‘Editorial’, *Mankind* 6 (1968), 535-536, 535.

⁴¹ Bowler interviewed by Griffiths, ORAL TRC 6680/3.

⁴² Bowler interviewed by Griffiths, ORAL TRC 6680/3.

⁴³ Jim Bowler in JM Bowler, R Jones, H Allen and AG Thorne, ‘Pleistocene Human Remains from Australia: A Living Site and Human Cremation from Lake Mungo, Western New South Wales’, *World Archaeology* 2(1) (1970), 39-60, 43.

⁴⁴ JM Bowler, DJ Mulvaney, DA Casey, and TA Darragh, ‘Green Gully Burial’, *Nature* 213(5072) (1967), 152-154; Jim Bowler to Edmund Gill, 22 December 1965, John Mulvaney Papers, National Library of Australia, Canberra, MS 9615/8.7/3, Box 68.

undatable. This time he was determined to wait for the archaeologists, ‘the ordained members of the intellectual clergy’ whose hands are ‘anointed’ to work on such things.’⁴⁵

The earliest he was able to draw a party to look at the find was the following March, when he led a group of geologists, soil scientists and archaeologists around the Willandra Lakes. They stayed in the shearers’ sheds at Lake Mungo, explored the dunes during the day and debated ideas at night over lamb chops and flagons of wine.⁴⁶ The archaeologists, Harry Allen, Rhys Jones, Con Key and John Mulvaney, were tantalised by the suggested association of giant marsupials and artefacts and they excitedly followed Bowler to Joulni to investigate the charred bones.⁴⁷ But the find was even more dramatic than they imagined. As they carefully investigated the shattered bundle of bones, out dropped a piece of human jawbone. Geologist Keith Crook recalls Jones dancing as he held aloft the diagnostic evidence.⁴⁸ In an instant, the scale of Australian history changed. ‘We were confronted,’ in Bowler’s words, ‘not only with human activity but by the very presence of humanity itself’.⁴⁹

‘We had not come prepared for an excavation,’ Jones and Allen later wrote, ‘and yet here before us was a feature which could contain the oldest human bones so far discovered in Australia.’⁵⁰ And it was turning to dust before their eyes. While Bowler was explaining the lunette structure to his geomorphologist colleagues on a neighbouring dune, Jones, Allen and Mulvaney photographed and drew the features of the burial and collected the loose bones. They then made the decision to remove the bones. ‘It was a very dramatic moment,’ Mulvaney later reflected: ‘It was more dramatic because there were sheep all around and they were walking all over it.’⁵¹ A thunderstorm was brewing and they were acutely aware that the rains could sweep the bones away in one downpour. They carefully cut and removed the disintegrating calcrete block out of the lunette and packed them in the only vessel available: John Mulvaney’s suitcase. Some of Mulvaney’s clothes were returned as padding. That

⁴⁵ Bowler interviewed by Griffiths, ORAL TRC 6680/3.

⁴⁶ Harry Allen, comment in Andrew Pike and Ann McGrath (dir.), *Message from Mungo* (2014), Canberra: Ronin Films.

⁴⁷ Tindale claimed to have uncovered similar human-megafauna associations at the nearby Menindee. Shawcross and Kaye, ‘Australian Archaeology’, 117; Mulvaney to John Barnes, ‘Field work’, 20 February 1969 in John Mulvaney, ‘Digging in the Archaeological Archives’, *Australian Archaeology* 50 (Jun 2000), 1-6, 6.

⁴⁸ Claudio Tuniz, Richard Gillespie and Cheryl Jones, *The Bone Readers: Atoms, Genes and the Politics of Australia’s Deep Past* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2009), 29. Jones later wrote about the Mungo discoveries under the title ‘Happiness is a sand dune’, see: Rhys Jones, ‘Australia Felix—The Discovery of a Pleistocene Prehistory’, *Journal of Human Evolution* 6(4) (1977), 353-61, 356.

⁴⁹ Jim Bowler, as quoted in Lawrence, *Mungo over Millennia*, 17.

⁵⁰ Rhys Jones and Harry Allen in Bowler *et al*, ‘Pleistocene Human Remains from Australia’, 47.

⁵¹ John Mulvaney, comment in Pike and McGrath, *Message from Mungo*.

suitcase is now in the National Museum of Australia.

‘The discussion that night,’ Harry Allen recalled, ‘was one largely of shock. The archaeologists were in shock. It was a monumental discovery, a monumental shift in the way the Aboriginal past – the Australian past in human terms – was understood.’⁵² Bowler described the feeling of the group as ‘elation’.⁵³ They took the remains back to Canberra the following day and that evening zoologist John Calaby confirmed them to be human. While physical anthropologist Alan Thorne began the painstaking task of excavating, cleaning and reconstructing the shattered skull, Allen, Jones and Bowler returned to the site to look for other archaeological evidence. They pitched their tent near the Walls of China as thunder clouds rolled across the vast horizon and an ‘enormous storm broke’. ‘The ground in seconds became white with pelting water,’ Jones wrote in his diary, ‘That night we saw my first Aurora Australis.’⁵⁴ They awoke to find another layer of the lunette stripped away, and a wide variety of stone tool scatters exposed on a Pleistocene beach. The silcrete blades, scrapers and choppers they collected on that return visit formed the kernel of their argument for a pan-continental, Pleistocene ‘Australian core tool and scraper tradition’, which was an important refinement of Mulvaney’s two-part technological sequence (chapter one).⁵⁵

In Canberra, it took Thorne over six months to excavate and reconstruct the hundreds of skull fragments, many the size of postage stamps, contained in the calcrete blocks.⁵⁶ They were found to belong to a young adult female of gracile build and small stature, who had been burnt on a pyre by the lakeshore between 25-32,000 years ago – later revised to over forty thousand years ago.⁵⁷ What was ground-breaking at the time was that the remains were anatomically modern, thus shattering any lingering questions about nineteenth century social Darwinism and challenging the prevailing theories about the population of ‘robust’ hominids found at Kow Swamp. ‘The Lake Mungo skeleton,’ Bowler, Thorne and Polach wrote in 1972, ‘suggests that fully sapient populations were present in south Asia earlier than their known presence elsewhere.’⁵⁸ For his PhD, Thorne devised an evolutionary model that could

⁵² Harry Allen, comment in Pike and McGrath, *Message from Mungo*.

⁵³ Bowler interviewed by Griffiths, ORAL TRC 6680/3.

⁵⁴ Rhys Jones, ‘Mungo Man, 2nd Trip’, 23 March-14 April 1969, Field Journals, AIATSIS Library, Canberra, MS 5040/1/28.

⁵⁵ Jones and Allen in Bowler *et al*, ‘Pleistocene Human Remains from Australia’, 48.

⁵⁶ Thorne in Bowler *et al*, ‘Pleistocene Human Remains from Australia’, 56

⁵⁷ Alan G Thorne, ‘Mungo and Kow Swamp: Morphological Variation in Pleistocene Australians’, *Mankind* 8(2) (Dec 1971), 85-89.

⁵⁸ JM Bowler, AG Thorne, and HA Polach, ‘Pleistocene Man in Australia: Age and Significance of the Mungo Skeleton’, *Nature*, 240(5375) (1972), 48-50.

accommodate the co-existence of the ‘gracile’ Mungo skeleton and the ‘robust’ Kow Swamp burials, suggesting two distinct waves of Pleistocene colonisation.⁵⁹ The palaeoanthropological community has since refuted this hypothesis, attributing the differences in the remains to genetic diversity, environmental variation and, in the case of the Kow Swamp burials, an ethnographically observed cultural practice of ‘head pressing’.⁶⁰ ‘It changes you when you put together the remains of somebody in this way,’ Thorne later reflected, ‘It is professional, but it’s also personal because this cast is of a young woman who lived a long, long, long time ago and she was just like us.’⁶¹

The skeleton – or Mungo I – became affectionately known as Mungo Lady. Her cremated remains had been buried in a small round hole on a sandy beach a few metres from the water’s edge. There she had remained for forty thousand years, as the lake system dried and the camp was abandoned, as her descendants moved to other parts of their country, and as the rabbits and goats and farmers arrived. If Jim Bowler hadn’t stumbled across her remains in July 1968, all evidence of her life and death would have eroded into the wind within a year. The ephemeral nature of her discovery and preservation, and the impact her discovery had on the Australian public, has led traditional owners such as Dorothy Lawson to declare, ‘She surfaced for a reason.’⁶² As Mutthi Mutthi elder – and Darryl’s mother – Mary Pappin wrote, ‘I believe that the Mungo Lady came to walk with our people to help us with our struggle and to tell the rest of the world about our cultural identity with that land.’⁶³ The resurrection of Mungo Lady changed the face of Australian archaeology. As Bowler reflected in 2015, ‘I stumbled across these bones and blundered into an archaeological and cultural minefield!’⁶⁴

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⁵⁹ Alan Thorne, ‘Kow Swamp and Lake Mungo: Towards an Osteology of Early Man in Australia’, PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 1975.

⁶⁰ Palaeoanthropologist Peter Brown draws on general ethnographic evidence to suggest that the Pleistocene cultural practice of head pressing in south-eastern Australia was carried out by a mother gently rubbing and shaping her newborn’s head over several months. Peter Brown, ‘Artificial Cranial Deformation: A Component in the Variation in Pleistocene Australian Aboriginal Crania’, *Archaeology in Oceania* 16 (1981), 156-167, 165-66; Peter Brown, ‘Nacurrie 1: Mark of Ancient Java, or a Caring Mother’s Hands, in Terminal Pleistocene Australia?’ *Journal of Human Evolution* 59(2) (Aug 2010), 168-187, 185. For a clear overview of the field, see: Colin Pardoe, ‘Australian Biological Anthropology for Archaeologists’, in Tim Murray (ed.), *Archaeology from Australia* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2004), 131-150, 132-36.

⁶¹ Alan Thorne, comment in Pike and McGrath, *Message from Mungo*.

⁶² Dorothy Lawson, comment in Pike and McGrath, *Message from Mungo*.

⁶³ Mary Pappin, ‘Working Together’, in Helen Lawrence (ed.), *Mungo over Millennia: The Willandra Landscape and its People* (Sorell, TAS: Maygog Publishing, 2006), 50-51.

⁶⁴ Bowler interviewed by Griffiths, ORAL TRC 6680/3.

Little has been written about the Aboriginal history of the Willandra region.⁶⁵ The turbulent history of the traditional owners is marked by loss and pain, struggle and survival. The Aboriginal custodians at Mungo were forced off their land to live in fringe-camps in the surrounding towns and settlements of Balranald, Wentworth, Wilcannia and Mildura. In these camps and missions it was illegal to practise aspects of their traditional culture and they were forbidden to speak their language. Up until 1969, the Aborigines' Welfare Board (previously the Aborigines Protection Board) was still forcibly removing Aboriginal people, in particular Aboriginal children, to reserves and managed stations. Mutthi Mutthi woman Tanya Charles remembers the panic that arose when they heard 'welfare coming' and how she would hide in the bush waiting for an all-clear whistle.⁶⁶ Paakantyi elder Dorothy Lawson lamented the cultural upheaval in her lifetime: 'It hurts me ... that I have lost the way of speaking in my ... native tongue.'⁶⁷ Even the landscape has changed through European settlement. Many of the plants and animals upon which Indigenous people traditionally depended have become locally extinct through overgrazing, drought, and the invasion of ferals. As Paakantyi elder Ronnie Mitchell recalled: 'When we was a child ... you could go out and pick up things, yams, stones and find things to eat. Now we can't find anything out the bush... Because they brought cattle and sheep and that out and cleaned up everything.'⁶⁸

When the archaeologist Harry Allen began his large-scale regional archaeological survey of the Darling Basin in 1969, he hoped 'to interview the few old Aborigines of the area who had lived in the bush' to see how their traditional knowledge could inform the archaeological story. But he faced difficulties tracking down traditional owners, let alone talking with them.⁶⁹ He had been a part of the student scene at the University of Sydney during the Freedom Rides and was interested in connecting contemporary Indigenous affairs with stories of the deep past.⁷⁰ It was with 'some regrets' that he decided to restrict his ethnographic study to the written record. He later reflected, wryly: 'I'd been picked up by the police because I wanted to talk to Aboriginal people'.⁷¹

⁶⁵ Douglas, *Pictures of Time Beneath*, 145.

⁶⁶ Tanya Charles, comment in Pike and McGrath, *Message from Mungo*.

⁶⁷ Dorothy Lawson, comment in Jim Bowler (prod.), *Lake Mungo: Window to Australia's Past* (2002), CD-ROM, Melbourne: School of Earth Sciences, University of Melbourne.

⁶⁸ Ronnie Mitchell, comment in Bowler, *Lake Mungo*.

⁶⁹ Allen, 'Where the Crow Flies Backwards', 133.

⁷⁰ Ann Curthoys portrays the student scene at the University of Sydney at this time in her book, *Freedom Ride: A Freedom Rider Remembers* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2002).

⁷¹ Harry Allen, comment in Pike and McGrath, *Message from Mungo*.

Allen found only snippets of information about cultural and economic practices in the documentary record, and most of this was tied to the main rivers, which the early European explorers followed closely in their searches for an inland sea. He opened his thesis with ‘a history of the Aboriginal peoples of the Darling Basin and of the destruction of their society by the Europeans’.⁷² He recorded the devastating impact of disease on Indigenous populations as well as the conflict and bloodshed that stained the Darling and the Murray. As pastoral leases spread across the country in the mid-nineteenth century, Aboriginal people became seen as ‘trespassers’ on their own country, ‘aliens in their own land’.⁷³ Without access to their traditional hunting grounds, Aboriginal people speared the intruders – cattle – which far too often, wrote nineteenth-century anthropologist Alfred Howitt, ‘led to the tribe being, in the euphemistic phrase of the frontier, “dispersed.”’⁷⁴ ‘They rounded them up like kangaroos, my people,’ Mutthi Mutthi elder Alice Kelly mourned in 1990,

Women and children too. They drove them on foot from horse back, with whips cracking over their heads. They shot them and the sands covered them over. ... Barbarians. Saxon barbarians. They showed us no mercy.⁷⁵

The traditional owners had little choice but to leave their homelands and attempt to find food and safety on the fringes of the new homesteads that dotted the country. Some worked as shepherds and on homesteads, playing an important role in the pastoral industry, but homestead accounts document a rapid decline in Aboriginal populations in the late nineteenth century and fears that they would soon become extinct. Then came the Protection era policies, which were still in place when Allen was writing his thesis. The surviving inhabitants of the upper Willandra Creek were rounded up and relocated to Balranald mission; some were forced onto paddle steamers and shipped down the Murray to missions at Goolwa.⁷⁶

Allen’s method of regional survey combined with ethnography was similar to Isabel McBryde’s approach in New England, but he was also influenced by what Betty Meehan and

⁷² Allen, ‘Where the Crow Flies Backwards’, 21.

⁷³ Allen, ‘Where the Crow Flies Backwards’, 18

⁷⁴ AW Howitt, ‘Dieri and other kindred tribes of Central Australia’, *Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 20 (1891), 30-104, 40; as quoted in Allen, ‘Where the Crow Flies Backwards’, 29.

⁷⁵ Alice Kelly interviewed by Judy Atkinson, 1990, as quoted in Judy Atkinson, *Trauma Trails, Recreating Song Lines: The Transgenerational Effects of Trauma in Indigenous Australia* (Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2002), 64.

⁷⁶ Olga Gostin, *Accessing the Dreaming: Heritage, Conservation and Tourism at Mungo National Park* (Underdale, SA: University of South Australia, 1995), 34.

Rhys Jones have characterised as the ‘Sydney School’.⁷⁷ He was interested in using ecological and economic analyses advocated by Cambridge archaeologist Eric Higgs – and pioneered in Australia by anthropologists such as Donald Thomson and Nicolas Peterson – to understand the archaeological remains in terms of camp life and seasonality.⁷⁸ His review of the ethnographic literature influenced many of his archaeological interpretations and his research was criticised for projecting the ethnography onto the deep past.⁷⁹ But the sheer scale of his PhD research is virtually unmatched in Australian archaeology. He documented details of twelve sites across the wider Darling Basin, mapped hundreds of square metres of midden, and systematically collected and excavated artefacts from the eroding shorelines of Lakes Leaghur, Garpung, Arumpo, Mungo and Mulurulu in the Willandra region. The climate was harsh and he often worked alone, travelling across vast distances on a small motorbike.⁸⁰ His study extended from remote open sites in the rocky uplands to shelters on pastoral stations, from middens on the lunettes to the Mildura fish ‘n’ chips shop, where he compared the ear-bones (otoliths) of golden perch with their ancient counterparts.⁸¹

It was a challenging and unfamiliar environment for archaeologists and Allen relied heavily on Bowler’s geomorphic interpretations to put the ancient surface finds in context. He was particularly interested in possible associations between humans and extinct megafauna, hoping to ‘throw some light on whether or not the Aborigines had caused the extinction of the giant marsupials’.⁸² He had no luck solving this vexed question (which is explored in chapter ten). Amidst the thousands of faunal remains recorded across the Willandra region over the past four decades, there have been remarkably few belonging to extinct megafauna, and none which have been found in Aboriginal campsites.⁸³

Allen speculated that Aboriginal occupation of the Willandra was largely dependent on fresh water phases of the lakes, with societies retreating to the river systems when the water turned

⁷⁷ Betty Meehan and Rhys Jones (eds.), *Archaeology with Ethnography: An Australian Perspective* (Canberra: Department of Prehistory, Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National University, 1988), viii.

⁷⁸ Harry Allen and Simon Holdaway, ‘The Archaeology of Mungo and the Willandra Lakes: Looking Back, Looking Forward’, *Archaeology in Oceania* 44(2) (Jul 2009), 96-106, 97.

⁷⁹ See, for example, J Peter White and James F O’Connell, *A Prehistory of Australia, New Guinea and Sahul* (Sydney: Academic Press, 1982), 39.

⁸⁰ Allen, ‘Where the Crow Flies Backwards’, 136; Wilfred Shawcross, ‘Archaeological Excavations at Mungo’, *Archaeology in Oceania* 33(3), Willandra Lakes: People and Palaeoenvironments (Oct 1998), 183-200, 185.

⁸¹ Tuniz *et al*, *The Bone Readers*, 30.

⁸² Allen, ‘Where the Crow Flies Backwards’, 20, 133.

⁸³ Although Michael Westaway’s team have recently suggested that people coexisted with *Zygomaturus trilobus* at Lake Mungo for some seventeen thousand years. Michael C Westaway, Jon Olley and Rainer Grün, ‘At Least 17,000 Years of Coexistence: Modern Humans and Megafauna at the Willandra Lakes, South-Eastern Australia’, *Quaternary Science Reviews* 157 (Feb 2017), 206-211.

saline or dried up. When the lakes were full, the inhabitants hunted kangaroos and bettongs on the sand dunes and plains; they foraged for emu eggs and trapped small birds in the scrub; they caught Murray cod and golden perch with nets in the deep lake waters and dug into the muddy shoreline for shellfish; 'they came together in large semi-sedentary groups living in village-like encampments of substantial grass huts' to feast and fight, to trade and conduct business.⁸⁴ He projected seasonal habits on the archaeological remains and interpreted the introduction of the grindstone – and the accompanying practices of harvesting and storing grain – as a response to the drying phase of the lakes. But his overall interpretation, much like Richard Gould's contemporary findings at Puntutjarpa, was 'one of a single continuous cultural tradition': 'Changes took place in this tradition during man's 32,000 year history in the area, but these were not so great as to destroy the impression of continuity.'⁸⁵

Allen was also struck by the continuity of faunal remains in the area: the same animals, he noted in his thesis, 'have been hunted and collected by Aborigines for the past 30,000 years without causing any apparent fatal changes. Even the populations may not have changed very much.'⁸⁶ He concluded this 'suggests the existence of a stable system of interrelationships between these species and Aboriginal man,' adding, ruefully, 'This longstanding relationship was destroyed with the introduction of sheep, cattle, foxes and rabbits in the area by Europeans'.⁸⁷

In 1998, with the benefit of Jane Balme's research in the wider Darling River region, Allen returned to his 1969-72 survey material and offered new interpretations that stressed change and adaptability instead of 'a single cultural tradition from the late Pleistocene to the ethnographic present'.⁸⁸ 'In 1972, I sought to question Aboriginal subsistence in terms of either continuity *or* change and the search was restricted to matters of technology.'⁸⁹ But Balme had demonstrated that profound change could accompany technological continuity.⁹⁰ Allen accepted the critique of his seasonal model for Pleistocene Mungo, based on nineteenth century documentary records. Considering that culture is a dynamic process, not something

⁸⁴ Allen, 'Where the Crow Flies Backwards', 96

⁸⁵ Allen's claims for continuity shaped much subsequent work, including Sandra Bowdler's coastal colonisation model in the 1980s. Allen, 'Where the Crow Flies Backwards', 356.

⁸⁶ Allen, 'Where the Crow Flies Backwards', 327.

⁸⁷ Allen, 'Where the Crow Flies Backwards', 350.

⁸⁸ Allen, 'Where the Crow Flies Backwards', abstract.

⁸⁹ Harry Allen, 'Reinterpreting the 1969-1972 Willandra Lakes Archaeological Surveys', *Archaeology in Oceania* 33(3), Willandra Lakes: People and Palaeoenvironments (Oct 1998), 207-220, 207.

⁹⁰ Jane Balme, '30,000 Years of Fishery in Western New South Wales', *Archaeology in Oceania* 30 (1995), 1-21, 18-19.

fixed in time, he came around to the view that change was more likely than continuity.⁹¹ As Wilfred Shawcross wondered in 1998, ‘Is it not likely that the Pleistocene ancestors of Aborigines did things differently?’⁹²

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The discovery of Mungo Lady was a watershed in Australian archaeology. As David Horton reflected in 1991, ‘most people think that Australian archaeology began in 1969 at Lake Mungo’.⁹³ ‘Something remarkable,’ journalist Gavin Souter wrote at the time, ‘is taking place in a field of Australian science that once seemed as dry as dust, the archaeology of our prehistory.’⁹⁴ Of Mungo Lady, another journalist wrote: ‘She rises up from the very dawn of prehistory, this eternal woman, to unlock the mind of early man. With this and other finds, Australia – virtually ignored by prehistorians until the late 1960s as a tedious archaeological backwater – is now the focus of the quest to unravel the prehistory of mankind.’⁹⁵ The excitement was heightened by the international significance of the finds: the antiquity of ancient Australian societies demanded the world’s attention. ‘As old as anything in America at the present time, and as old as any other modern-man finds in the world,’ wrote Jacqueline Rees, ‘the discoveries indicate the rapidity of the development of Australian research in recent years.’⁹⁶ There were visits from international archaeological greats such as François Bordes, Lewis Binford and Glynn Isaac. The *Sydney Morning Herald* published a colourful two-page poster pullout on ‘The Aborigines’, as well as a series of articles on Aboriginal society, past and present: ‘The 601 Tribes of Australia’, ‘Subtle complexities of tribal society’, ‘Why does a Boomerang Return?’ and features on contemporary Indigenous art and dance.⁹⁷ The work of Australian archaeologists suddenly began to be recognised.

The initial phase of research at Mungo ended with the completion of several PhD programs. Jim Bowler drew his work on Port Phillip Bay, the crater lakes of Victoria, and the Willandra

⁹¹ Allen enriches this discussion in his recent critique of the concepts of ‘progress’ and ‘essentialism’ as applied to history and culture. See: Harry Allen, ‘The Past in the Present? Archaeological Narratives and Aboriginal History’, in Ann McGrath and Mary Anne Jebb (eds.), *Long History, Deep Time: Deepening Histories of Place* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2015), 171-202.

⁹² Shawcross, ‘Archaeological Excavations at Mungo’, 199.

⁹³ David Horton, *Recovering the Tracks: The Story of Australian Archaeology* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1991), xiii.

⁹⁴ Gavin Souter, ‘Adam and Eve in Australia ... Part One: The Young Woman at Lake Mungo’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 August 1974, 13.

⁹⁵ Graham Williams, ‘The Dawn of Man’, *The Australian*, 22 March 1975, 19.

⁹⁶ Jacqueline Rees, ‘Traces of Ancient Australians’, *The Canberra Times*, 10 August 1974, 9.

⁹⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 July 1974, 42-43.

Lakes system into a single PhD at the ANU; Harry Allen submitted his PhD and took up a position in New Zealand; and geophysicist Michael Barbetti completed a project investigating the magnetism of baked clay in ancient Aboriginal fireplaces in the Willandra. (He interpreted evidence for a near reversal of the earth's magnetic field around 30,000 years ago – known as 'the Lake Mungo Excursion'.)⁹⁸ But research in the Willandra was only beginning. The 1970s ushered in a surge in archaeological research in the Willandra that was underpinned by a salvage mentality. As Shawcross wrote in 1998, the fossils, hearths and artefact scatters being exposed by erosion were 'a transient resource for research.'⁹⁹

Archaeologists, such as John Mulvaney and Isabel McBryde, were eager to investigate this fossil landscape before it blew away, but they also began advocating for its protection and recognition. Their campaigns to conserve the Willandra culminated in the acquisition of Mungo Station from Albert and Vanda Barnes for the creation of Lake Mungo National Park in 1978 and, three years later, the registration of the Willandra Lakes as a UNESCO World Heritage landscape.¹⁰⁰ It was listed at the same time as the Great Barrier Reef and Kakadu National Park and, significantly, it was recognised for its natural *and* cultural heritage. It was a celebration of Lake Mungo as 'one of the world's great open-air museums': Australia's Rift Valley.¹⁰¹ Bowler is quick to pay tribute to the role of the Barnes family in this process, who 'forfeited their heritage, Mungo Station, to permit the investment of that region's scientific treasures in the national interest'.¹⁰²

The second phase of research at Willandra, starting in 1973-74, and fuelled by the creation of an undergraduate teaching department at ANU in 1972, marked a new beginning for archaeological research in Australia.¹⁰³ The initial expedition to excavate Mungo Lady in 1969 (including fuel, meals and accommodation for three people) had cost the Australian National University a meagre \$94: 'a remarkably productive investment,' Mulvaney later noted, 'that ensured the Willandra Lakes a World Heritage registration by 1981.'¹⁰⁴ The 1973

⁹⁸ MF Barbetti and MW McElhinny, 'The Lake Mungo Geomagnetic Excursion', *Philosophical Transactions Royal Society of London* 281 (1976), 515-542.

⁹⁹ Shawcross, 'Archaeological Excavations at Mungo', 184.

¹⁰⁰ Australian Heritage Commission, 'Nomination of The Willandra Lakes Region for inclusion in the World Heritage List', October 1980, Mulvaney Papers, NLA, MS 9615/15/4, Box 122.

¹⁰¹ Michael Westaway, 'Caring for the Willandra', in Helen Lawrence (ed.), *Mungo over Millennia: The Willandra Landscape and its People* (Sorell, TAS: Maygog Publishing, 2006), 45-49.

¹⁰² Jim Bowler, as quoted in Douglas, *Pictures of Time Beneath*, 131.

¹⁰³ Shawcross and Kaye, 'Australian Archaeology', 119.

¹⁰⁴ Mulvaney to Barnes, 'Field work', 20 February 1969 in Mulvaney, 'Digging in the Archaeological Archives', 6.

research agenda, on the other hand, was the first exercise in ‘big archaeology’ in Australia.¹⁰⁵ ‘This project is the most ambitious collaborative effort between environmental scientists and prehistorians to have been attempted in Australia,’ wrote Mulvaney in his grant application.¹⁰⁶ They sought to undertake a large-scale excavation at Lake Mungo, along with a systematic regional survey, which would help place eroded finds in context. The Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies approved funds for a geological technician, a bright yellow tractor with backhoe and front blade attachments, a bespoke set of pneumatic sieves (to keep pace with the backhoe), the chartering of a light plane for aerial photography, and a field and lab technician in the form of John Magee. It was the beginning of a new era of large-scale, interdisciplinary field research. This is not to say that small scale excavations were rendered obsolete – far from it – but the new Mungo investigations, shaped by the growing emphasis on scientific methods, archaeological statistics and geoarchaeology, served as a ‘test-bed’ for a new form of large-scale interdisciplinary research.¹⁰⁷ A recent survey of Willandra Lakes led by Rainer Grün harnessed satellites, lasers, aircraft, deep physics, geomorphology and traditional knowledge in its pursuit of the deep past.¹⁰⁸

In the early 1970s we also see the new legislative landscape archaeologists had to navigate. For the first time they needed permits from the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) to conduct any form of fieldwork.¹⁰⁹ Permission to excavate was granted in three or twelve month increments, and was accompanied by conditions to back-fill trenches, lodge findings with museums, and complete ongoing paperwork such as environmental impact statements. It was the kind of heritage protection Mulvaney had long campaigned for, but when his permit arrived in the mail the Director of the NPWS, Don Johnstone apologised for what he thought might appear to be a ‘tirelessly bureaucratic’ and ‘unnecessarily restricting’ process.¹¹⁰

In 1973 Mulvaney dug a trench three metres into the southern end of the Mungo lunette into a series of beach gravels, while Isabel McBryde, Peter Bellwood and Wilfred Shawcross gridded and systematically collected over a large area of the western end of the Mungo

¹⁰⁵ Tuniz *et al*, *The Bone Readers*, 36.

¹⁰⁶ John Mulvaney, ‘Research Application to Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies’, 29 June 1972, Mulvaney Papers, NLA, MS 9615/8.10/1, Box 70.

¹⁰⁷ This sentence paraphrases Shawcross and Kaye, ‘Australian Archaeology’, 126.

¹⁰⁸ Tuniz *et al*, *The Bone Readers*, 14.

¹⁰⁹ DA Holmes to John Mulvaney, 21 August 1972, Mulvaney Papers, NLA, MS 9615/8.10/1, Box 70.

¹¹⁰ DA Johnstone to John Mulvaney, 3 August 1973, Mulvaney Papers, NLA, MS 9615/8.10/5, Box 70.

lunette.¹¹¹ The Mulvaney trench had ‘an architectural grandeur’ which ‘gave people a sense of the time scale in which they were working.’¹¹² A charcoal sample from spit 17 produced the widely quoted date of ‘greater than 40,000 years’. Aboriginal leader Marcia Langton recalls the significance of this work in the student movement for Aboriginal rights: ‘The work by Mulvaney and others established that Aboriginal people had been here for over forty thousand years and I learnt about that as a young student ... It not only changed the way other people saw Aboriginal people but it was enormous news for Aboriginal people to have an actual date.’¹¹³ (Langton studied archaeology as an undergraduate at the ANU.)¹¹⁴

Shawcross took over direction from Mulvaney in the three subsequent seasons, seeking to understand stratigraphically the ancient ‘living floor’ that extended over ten hectares.¹¹⁵ McBryde’s interest in the region grew in 1974, as she focused on systematically collecting, measuring and dating shell middens, hearths and artefact scatters on the Outer Lake Arumpo lunette.¹¹⁶ Meanwhile Bowler continued his geological survey of the lunettes, investigating the anatomy of the landscape and trying to understand this ‘dramatic panorama of environmental change’.¹¹⁷

On 26 February 1974, Bowler was ‘confined to the barracks’ at Mungo Station most of the day by heavy rains. In the late afternoon, as the skies cleared and the mud dried he ‘hastened’ to the Joulni lunette, where he found Mungo Lady almost six years earlier, ‘eager to explore surfaces refreshed by cleansing rains’:

While I was following a distinctive soil horizon, one that had already yielded many artefacts, the late afternoon sun highlighted a tiny patch of something white shining through a cover of expansive sand mantle. An immediate examination revealed what was obviously the domal part of a human skull. I brushed away sand to reveal that the jawbone was intact. This was part of an emerging body.¹¹⁸

¹¹¹ Harvey Johnston and Peter Clark, ‘Willandra Lakes Archaeological Investigations 1968-98’, *Archaeology in Oceania* 33(3), Willandra Lakes: People and Palaeoenvironments (Oct 1998), 105-119, 109.

¹¹² Shawcross, ‘Archaeological Excavations at Mungo’, 190.

¹¹³ Marcia Langton, comment in Pike and McGrath, *Message from Mungo*.

¹¹⁴ Sandra Bowdler and Genevieve Clune, ‘That Shadowy Band: The Role of Women in the Development of Australian Archaeology’, *Australian Archaeology* 50 (Jun 2000), 27-35, 32.

¹¹⁵ Wilfred Shawcross, as quoted in Lawrence, *Mungo over Millennia*, 22.

¹¹⁶ Johnston and Clark, ‘Willandra Lakes Archaeological Investigations 1968-98’, 109.

¹¹⁷ Bowler interviewed by Griffiths, ORAL TRC 6680/3.

¹¹⁸ Jim Bowler, ‘Mungo Man is a Physical Reminder of the Need for Indigenous Recognition’, *The Guardian*, 25 February 2014.

He reported the find to the ANU by phone from a nearby homestead and two days later Thorne, Shawcross, SN Rajaguru, Colin Groves and Anthea Carstairs arrived at Lake Mungo to investigate. As always, ‘the threat of heavy rain, with possible destruction of the site, imposed an additional urgency.’¹¹⁹ On 28 February the team removed the covering sands to reveal a burial. Thorne identified it immediately as a man, lying in an outstretched position, hands extended over the groin, in a carefully prepared grave dug 80-100 centimetres deep into the Mungo unit.¹²⁰ There were several areas of ‘collapsed and crumbling bone’, probably due to the wandering hooves of the stock that were grazed in this area of the lunette. But the body was remarkably intact. The initial age estimate was 28-32,000 years.¹²¹ This was later revised to 40-42,000.¹²² ‘With each delicate removal of sand,’ Bowler later reflected, ‘a new chapter of Australian history was unfolding before us.’¹²³ The curious feature of the burial was the presence of ‘a strange brownish-red zone around the upper part of the body’ and a ‘pink staining’ around the grave margins. While examining a small pellet, Bowler gradually realised that he was looking at ochre: an incredibly rare resource in the Willandra area that must have been traded and transported there from over two hundred kilometres away.¹²⁴ The body had been painted or sprinkled with over two kilograms of this sacred resource: a ritual practice unfathomable to the researchers at that time.¹²⁵

Bone analysis by Alan Thorne and Steve Webb gives us some insight into this individual who walked the lakeshores of the Willandra region before humans had penetrated the icy heart of

¹¹⁹ Jim Bowler and Alan Thorne, ‘Human Remains from Lake Mungo: Discovery and excavation of Lake Mungo III’, in RL Kirk and AG Thorne (eds.), *The Origin of the Australians* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1976), 127-138, 128.

¹²⁰ In 2000, Peter Brown questioned the sex of Mungo 3, arguing that the skeleton lacks the most diagnostic areas of the skull and pelvis. A reexamination of the remains published in 2009 reached the conclusion that Mungo 3 was male. Peter Brown, ‘Australian Pleistocene variation and the sex of Lake Mungo 3’, *Journal of Human Evolution* 38 (2000) 743-47; Arthur C Durband, Daniel RT Rayner and Michael Westaway, ‘A New Test of the Sex of the Lake Mungo 3 Skeleton’, *Archaeology in Oceania* 44(2) (Jul 2009), 77-83.

¹²¹ Bowler and Thorne, ‘Human Remains from Lake Mungo’, 136.

¹²² In 1999, a team of scientists led by Thorne used new techniques to date the remains of Mungo 3 to around 62,000 years old. Bowler and Magee were immediately sceptical of the dates and cast doubt upon their validity. In 2003 another team of researchers, led by Bowler, published a paper arguing that Mungo I and Mungo 3 were both buried around 40,000 years ago and that humans were present at Lake Mungo by 50,000-46,000 years ago. A Thorne, R Grün, G Mortimer, NA Spooner, JJ Simpson, MT McCulloch, L Taylor and D Curnoe, ‘Australia’s Oldest Human Remains: Age of the Lake Mungo 3 Skeleton’, *Journal of Human Evolution* 36 (1999), 591-612, 605; JM Bowler and JW Magee, ‘Redating Australia’s Oldest Humans Remains: A Sceptic’s View’, *Journal of Human Evolution* 38 (2000), 719-726; JM Bowler, H Johnston, JM Olley, JR Prescott, RG Roberts, W Shawcross and NA Spooner, ‘New Ages for Human Occupation and Climatic Change at Lake Mungo, Australia’, *Nature* 421 (2003), 837-40.

¹²³ Bowler, ‘Mungo Man is a physical reminder of the need for Indigenous recognition’.

¹²⁴ Bowler interviewed by Griffiths, ORAL TRC 6680/3.

¹²⁵ Bowler and Thorne announced the findings during the Biennial General Meeting of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies on 21-22 May 1974. For more on this gathering, see interlude II.

Europe. Mungo Man was around the age of fifty when he died. He was missing both canine teeth, which may have been extracted during an initiation ritual in his teenage years. His lower molar teeth were worn down in a way that suggests they had been used to strip fibre off long leaves ‘so that it could be teased into string for making nets to use in the lakes.’¹²⁶ He suffered from serious osteoarthritis of the right elbow, possibly the result of a lifetime’s use of the spearthrower or woomera. Webb, who painstakingly studied his remains at the ANU, finds it ‘easy to picture him sitting, slowly rubbing the aching elbow in front of his fire on a cold ice age night.’¹²⁷ Indigenous custodians such as Tanya Charles find the evidence of the ancient past just as vivid: ‘It’s like yesterday that our people were still walking across this country. I can’t go back and say hundreds and thousands of years because everything’s like yesterday to me, especially when you’ve still got the spirits around and you can feel the presence of them’.¹²⁸

Studies of the paleopathology, DNA and isotopic bone and teeth structures of Mungo Man have given us an insight into life in ancient Australia. But it is the ritual nature of his burial, Bowler stresses, that ‘has changed our understanding of the time-depth and complexity of Aboriginal culture.’¹²⁹ The central nature of rare ceremonial ochre, which had been imported from distant sources, the association with a nearby hearth, and the careful grave emplacement ‘presented one of the dramatic mysteries of ancient human cultural development’.¹³⁰ The evidence also resonated with contemporary Aboriginal connections to country. ‘There is great dignity here in that people-land relationship,’ Bowler wrote in 2016, ‘Exemplified today in the Dreaming, song lines and creation stories, they remain of central importance in helping define traditional people’s identity with and connection to the place they call home. White Australians have something important to learn from our Aboriginal cousins.’¹³¹ But, as Shawcross reflected of the archaeologists in the area,

¹²⁶ Steve Webb, ‘The Pathology and Ecology of Ice Age Willandra People’, in Helen Lawrence (ed.), *Mungo over Millennia: The Willandra Landscape and its People* (Sorell, TAS: Maygog Publishing, 2006), 41-44, 43.

¹²⁷ Steve Webb, ‘The Pathology and Ecology of Ice Age Willandra People’, 43.

¹²⁸ Tanya Charles, interview by Ann McGrath, October 2011, as quoted in Malcolm Allbrook and Ann McGrath, ‘Collaborative Histories of the Willandra Lakes: Deepening histories and the deep past’, in Ann McGrath and Mary Anne Jebb (eds.), *Long History, Deep Time: Deepening Histories of Place* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2015), 241-252, 246.

¹²⁹ Bowler interviewed by Griffiths, ORAL TRC 6680/5.

¹³⁰ Jim Bowler, ‘Willandra Lakes Revisited: Environmental Framework for Human Occupation’, *Archaeology in Oceania* 33(3) (Oct 1998), 120-155, 120.

¹³¹ Jim Bowler, ‘Mungo Man Needs Help – To Come Home’, *Inside Story*, 9 February 2016.

We, and that includes me, had not remotely considered that the Aboriginal people would be concerned about what we were doing ... I suppose we felt rather righteous – I felt rather righteous – that here we were rediscovering their past. Shouldn't they be grateful?¹³²

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In 1973, on learning of the archaeological activities at Lake Mungo, one of the Aboriginal custodians, Mutthi Mutthi Elder, Alice Kelly, wrote a letter to the NPWS expressing concern. She wanted to know why she hadn't been consulted about the work that was being undertaken on her land. She was particularly concerned by the removal of Aboriginal bones: it conjured painful memories of the skulduggery of grave robbers along the Murray River throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century, such as the exploits of George Murray Black.¹³³ Human remains were not scientific evidence: they were relatives, ancestors, spirits.

Please withdraw any further excavation of skeletons from the Walls of China, New South Wales, about 70 miles north-east of Mildura. They are our tribal people. ... The point is they would not like the same thing done to their people.¹³⁴

Sharon Sullivan, the NPWS's first archaeologist, received the letter and together with Isabel McBryde, who was on the committee of Parks and Wildlife, made the case for the traditional owners to be consulted and involved in ongoing fieldwork.¹³⁵ The committee's recommendation was to 'contact Mrs Kelly and discuss the excavation with her, perhaps taking her out to see work in progress.'¹³⁶ 'Mrs Kelly,' McBryde added in a letter to Mulvaney, 'is apparently a serious and concerned lady, quite sophisticated, and acting on her own initiative not as [a] tool for outside activists.'¹³⁷

Alice Kelly was born in 1919 near the banks of the Murrumbidgee River, where as a child

¹³² Wilfred Shawcross, comment in Pike and McGrath, *Message from Mungo*.

¹³³ Tom Griffiths, *Hunters and Collectors: The Antiquarian Imagination in Australia* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 81.

¹³⁴ Alice Kelly's letter, as quoted in Isabel McBryde to John Mulvaney, undated [1973], Mulvaney Papers, NLA, MS 9615/8.10/4, Box 70.

¹³⁵ McBryde highlights the importance of Sullivan's role in her interview with Martin Thomas, 17-19 August 2004, National Library of Australia, sound recording, ORAL TRC 5194/5. See also Sharon Sullivan, 'It was a Different World', in Johanna Kijas (ed.), *Revival, Renewal and Return: Ray Kelly and the NSW Sites of Significance Survey* (Hurstville, NSW: Department of Environment & Conservation, 2005), 67-78.

¹³⁶ McBryde to Mulvaney, undated, 'Mungo 1973-1974'.

¹³⁷ McBryde to Mulvaney, undated, 'Mungo 1973-1974'.

she had watched her father cut his own bark canoe.¹³⁸ At the age of fifteen she married a drover, Alf Kelly, and started a family in nearby Balranald. She was proud of her heritage and soon after the creation of the Aboriginal Flag in 1971, she adorned the windows of her house in Balranald with the bold red, yellow and black symbol.¹³⁹ As Bowler wrote in the wake of her death in 2003, ‘She remembered language, observed traditional laws and above all, developed a passionate love of the land to which her people were intimately attached.’¹⁴⁰ Jean Charles, one of her eleven children, stressed the importance she placed on words. She took a dictionary everywhere she went and ‘wrote everything down’: ‘She put dates on those papers too, whether it was on a piece of cardboard, a Weet-Bix box, butchers paper, whatever.’¹⁴¹ When linguist Luise Hercus interviewed her in the mid-1960s, she was impressed to find that Kelly was already collecting her own word-lists of Aboriginal languages.¹⁴² Her passionate advocacy for Aboriginal rights, and the discipline and determination with which she conducted her affairs, made her for many years the voice for Aboriginal people in the area.¹⁴³ And in Isabel McBryde, Kelly found a good friend and sympathetic ear. ‘In 1975,’ wrote McBryde, ‘when I was investigating Pleistocene camp-sites on the Arumpo lunette, she and Alf visited us. It was a wonderful opportunity to share our perspectives on understanding that ancient landscape and past Aboriginal life within it.’¹⁴⁴

The resurgence of the local Aboriginal community had major implications for archaeological research in the region. Over the following decade a rift formed between the traditional owners and the researchers. Isabel McBryde ceded control to Alice Kelly and others, declaring that she would only continue her work there if they wished her to: ‘I felt that the only way I could show I was genuine was to say, “If you are unhappy about what I am doing, I will not go on.”’¹⁴⁵ Many of her colleagues, on the other hand, remained concerned about the ongoing destruction of the Willandra landscape and the natural and cultural heritage that was being lost through erosion. Mulvaney defended the work of scientists in the region,

¹³⁸ Jim Bowler, ‘“Tribal Loyalties”: Reconnecting with the Land: A Tribute to Mrs Alice Kelly, 1919-2003’, *Aboriginal History* 27 (2003) 247-248, 247.

¹³⁹ Tanya Charles, comment in Pike and McGrath, *Message from Mungo*.

¹⁴⁰ Bowler, ‘“Tribal Loyalties”’, 247.

¹⁴¹ Jean Charles, comment in Pike and McGrath, *Message from Mungo*.

¹⁴² Isabel McBryde, ‘Alice (Ally) Ellen Kelly: 26 June 1919 – 30 June 2003’, *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 2 (2003), 140-143, 141.

¹⁴³ Allbrook and McGrath, ‘Collaborative Histories of the Willandra Lakes’, 247-48.

¹⁴⁴ McBryde, ‘Alice (Ally) Ellen Kelly’, 141. McBryde expands on her role in ‘building bridges’ at Lake Mungo in the final session of her interview with Martin Thomas, ORAL TRC 5194/6.

¹⁴⁵ Isabel McBryde, comment in Pike and McGrath, *Message from Mungo*.



Fig. 39 Isabel McBryde advising Ralph Slayter, Chair of UNESCO World Heritage Committee (centre) on a tour of the Walls of China, Lake Mungo, 9 September 1983, with (l-r) Jack Giles, NSW Premier Neville Wran, Peter Clark and David Hurley (Source: *Many Exchanges*).



Fig. 40 A team of visiting archaeologists are guided around the Lake Mungo lunette by traditional custodians Darryl Pappin and Leanne Mitchell (Source: B Griffiths).

arguing that they had a duty to protect these sites for the sake of posterity.¹⁴⁶ As Christopher Chippindale reflected, ‘At issue are fundamental questions of ideology and ownership. Does the history of humans in Australia ... belong to the ethnic descendants of those first inhabitants? ... Or is there some wider claim, of science and common human concern, to rights of access to relics of the past?’¹⁴⁷ In 1988, the Western Regional Land Council placed an embargo on archaeological excavation at Lake Mungo.

The increasingly complex layers of bureaucracy in the Willandra region compounded the tension between researchers and the traditional owners.¹⁴⁸ As a World Heritage landscape, the lakes system comes under federal supervision and requires a management plan to protect its natural and cultural heritage; but as a National Park it also falls under the jurisdiction of the state government, which in turn has legislation to empower the views of the traditional owners – the three Aboriginal land councils of the Paakantyi, Mutthi Mutthi and Ngyiampaa people – as well as a responsibility to accommodate the interests of pastoral leaseholders. The High Court rulings on native title (*Mabo* in 1992 and *Wik* in 1996) have added further complications to this mix.¹⁴⁹ Alice Kelly represented local Aboriginal interests on boards and committees at every level of this bureaucracy and played a key part in negotiating a management plan for the World Heritage area. In 1988, the National NAIDOC Committee awarded her the title of ‘Aboriginal of the Year’.¹⁵⁰

In June 1989, following the embargo on research, a three-day seminar was held at Mungo, bringing together scientists, Parks Service and Land and Water Conservation managers, landholders and local Aboriginal people.¹⁵¹ The lengthy discussions about conduct of research, control of cultural heritage, park management and the return of human remains paved the way for a new era of research at Mungo, anchored in collaboration and dialogue. ‘It was decided,’ the resulting Mungo Statement read, adopting the political vocabulary of the day, ‘to embark on a course of reconciliation between archaeologists and Aborigines. It was recognised that Aboriginal people must have the final say whether research was done and

¹⁴⁶ Mulvaney’s views on ownership of cultural heritage are explored more deeply in chapter eight.

¹⁴⁷ Christopher Chippindale, ‘Skeletons rattle down under’, *New Scientist* 1447 (14 March 1985), 10-11, 11.

¹⁴⁸ McBryde, ‘Alice (Ally) Ellen Kelly’.

¹⁴⁹ Olga Gostin carefully navigates these overlapping legislative realms in her chapter on ‘Managing the Dreaming’ in *Accessing the Dreaming*, 32-50.

¹⁵⁰ Gostin, *Accessing the Dreaming*, 69.

¹⁵¹ ‘The Mungo Statement: Towards a Reconciliation; A record of discussion at the Willandra Research Publication Workshop, Thursday 22 June 1989’, Mulvaney Papers, NLA, MS 9615/8.10/14, Box 71.

what it might be.’¹⁵² The resolution was in tune with the national zeitgeist, with the Commonwealth Parliament establishing the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation with cross-party support two years later, in 1991.¹⁵³ At the heart of the reconciliation in the Willandra region was a symbolic act: the return of Mungo Lady to a ‘Keeping Place’ on the site where she had been buried.

In a moving ceremony on the shores of Lake Mungo on 11 January 1992, Alan Thorne handed over the remains of Mungo Lady to thirteen elders. Over two hundred people, mostly Aboriginal, watched as the remains were transferred to a marquee and officially welcomed home by Alice Kelly.¹⁵⁴ At the end of the ceremony, the crowd had a chance to view the fossil skeleton and pay their respects. Mungo Lady now rests in a locked, decorated safe underground in Mungo National Park. ‘There are two keys to this lock,’ Senior Ranger Badger Bates announced at the ceremony. ‘One key is held by Aborigines and one key is held by scientists. Only when both keys are turned together will the safe be open.’¹⁵⁵

Since that powerful moment, a fragile partnership has formed between traditional owners and researchers. There remains some bewilderment about the scientific study of ancient Australia, as voiced in Andrew Pike and Ann McGrath’s film *Message From Mungo*.¹⁵⁶ ‘What were they trying to prove?’ asked an exasperated Lottie Williams, ‘When me and all the rest of us know we were here all the time, so that wasn’t news to us.’¹⁵⁷ But there is also a growing accommodation of scientific practices, and many custodians, like my guide Darryl, are actively engaging with the archaeological story of the Willandra Lakes.¹⁵⁸ Junette Mitchell, an elder of the Paakantji people, recently gave a DNA sample to a geneticist studying the evolutionary history of Aboriginal people because she ‘wanted to see how close we were to Mungo Lady’.¹⁵⁹ She took pride in the national and international recognition of her homeland: ‘It’s a big breakthrough now to prove that Aboriginal people was in Australia before anyone had ’em here. That’s what Mungo Lady showed.’¹⁶⁰ In her welcoming address to the Mungo Youth festival in 2006, Mary Pappin also paid tribute to ‘our ancestor, our

¹⁵² ‘The Mungo Statement’.

¹⁵³ Mark McKenna, *This Country: A Reconciled Republic?* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2004), 23-25.

¹⁵⁴ Gostin, *Accessing the Dreaming*, 88.

¹⁵⁵ As quoted in Rhys Jones and Vincent Megaw, ‘Confessions of a Wild Colonial Boy: Rhys Jones in Conversation with Vincent Megaw’, *Australian Archaeology* 50 (2000), 12-26, 23.

¹⁵⁶ Pike and McGrath, *Message from Mungo*.

¹⁵⁷ Lottie Williams, comment in Pike and McGrath, *Message from Mungo*.

¹⁵⁸ Allbrook and McGrath, ‘Collaborative Histories of the Willandra Lakes’, 247

¹⁵⁹ Junette Mitchell in 2006, as quoted in Tuniz *et al*, *The Bone Readers*, 1.

¹⁶⁰ Junette Mitchell in 2006, as quoted in Tuniz *et al*, *The Bone Readers*, 3.

mother, who came up out of the ground, who was accidentally found, who was then taken away': 'It all comes about because of that Mungo Lady'.¹⁶¹ Since 2009, the Paakantyi, Mutthi Mutthi and Ngyiampaa people have been joint managers of the national park with the NSW government.

While Alice Kelly saw Mungo Lady and Mungo Man as a fundamental part of her own culture and identity, she also invited others to share in their story. 'Mungo,' she declared, 'is for all Australians, black and white, it can embrace us all in its spirituality and draw us closer to the land.'¹⁶² Her words speak directly to the construction of Lake Mungo as a national landscape. While no landscape is inherently culturally or environmentally valuable, historian Simon Schama observes, national identity would lose much of its 'ferocious enchantment' without the mystique of a landscape tradition: 'its topography mapped, elaborated, and enriched as homeland'.¹⁶³ Places like Lake Mungo are imaginatively and materially created to meet the demands of the present day – through research, art, literature and legislation. The bestowal of World Heritage status, as historian Jane Carruthers has explored, further encourages the commodification of heritage, feeds into national pride and offers the potential for political reconciliation.¹⁶⁴ The role of the Willandra Lakes in the Australian imagination remains undefined, as does the deep history that has been preserved in its lakeshores. But in the years since Jim Bowler first rumbled across the lunettes on his flat-tired motorbike, Lake Mungo has emerged as a national landscape, representing the ancient past of a young nation and the symbolic Eden of its Indigenous population.¹⁶⁵

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The man who made the discoveries at Lake Mungo, Jim Bowler, has been haunted by the finds ever since. Although he did not meet Aboriginal people until the 1970s, he grew up aware of the people who had lived there before him. Two ground-edged axes, recovered from the onion patch in Leongatha, took pride of place on the mantle in the family kitchen, and his father treasured a copy of anthropologist AP Elkin's 1938 tome, *The Australian Aborigines: how to understand them*.¹⁶⁶ The later editions of that book included a final chapter titled 'The

¹⁶¹ Mary Pappin in 2006, as quoted in Tuniz *et al*, *The Bone Readers*, 5-6.

¹⁶² As quoted in Gostin, *Accessing the Dreaming*, 77.

¹⁶³ Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 14-15.

¹⁶⁴ Jane Carruthers, 'Mapungubwe: an historical and contemporary analysis of a World Heritage cultural landscape', *Koedoe* 49(1) (Dec 2006), 1-13.

¹⁶⁵ Douglas, *Pictures of time beneath*, 148.

¹⁶⁶ Bowler interviewed by Griffiths, ORAL TRC 6680/1.

Aborigines on the March’, documenting ‘the slow building up and expression of Aboriginal opinion and the stirring of Aboriginal feelings.’¹⁶⁷ In the 1974 edition, the year Mungo Man emerged, Elkin reflected on the dramatic cultural and political changes afoot in Indigenous affairs: ‘They are still on the march, but now within the threshold... They are now, as it were, advancing into and occupying the promised land of independent citizenship on an Australia-wide front, with their own leaders and spokesmen... This apparently simple statement,’ he added, ‘embodies an amazing historical development.’¹⁶⁸ Within his lifetime, Bowler had witnessed a dramatic social transformation, and through his work at Lake Mungo, he had found himself at the centre of discussions about cultural identity. ‘He was bound by his fate,’ his daughter Jenny Bowler reflected, ‘these discoveries of such cultural and international significance swept Jim Bowler into other-worldly realms.’¹⁶⁹

Jim has been working on his magnum opus on Mungo for decades. The process of writing has always burdened him, but the struggle he faces with the Mungo Book is twofold.¹⁷⁰ He wants to write the scientific story of a fossil landscape that can be read like scripture to understand life in ancient Australia. But he is also driven by a more philosophical impulse. He sees Mungo, and the ritual burial of Mungo Man, as representing a bridge between cultures: ‘Mungo Man crosses many boundaries, boundaries between science and traditional cultures, between past and present, between black and white, between life and death.’¹⁷¹ Inspired by the work of theologian Teilhard de Chardin, he seeks to understand the human and spiritual significance of the discovery of Mungo Man.¹⁷² He views the ritual anointing of Mungo Man’s body with ochre as a powerful and universal expression of connection to country: something that all people once had, and that Aboriginal people have managed to retain. As he wrote in the *Guardian* in 2014, ‘In my pursuit of rational science, those lakeshore sands, originally solely of geological interest, have been transformed into sacred grounds. My eyes have been opened to glimpse and share in some small way that inner view long entrusted to Mungo Man’s Aboriginal descendants, a deep connection to country, to their ancestral spirit-charged lands.’¹⁷³ The magnitude of this insight weighs him down as it lifts him up. He meditates on the significance of the ‘people-land conjunction’ as he labours

¹⁶⁷ AP Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1974), 373.

¹⁶⁸ Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines*, 384

¹⁶⁹ Bowler, ‘Mungo Memories’, 181.

¹⁷⁰ Bowler often corresponded with Mulvaney by ‘tapes’, instead of writing. See, for example, John Mulvaney to Jim Bowler, 5 April 1976, Mulvaney Papers, NLA, MS 9615/1/40, Box 5.

¹⁷¹ Bowler, ‘Mungo Man is a Physical Reminder of the Need for Indigenous Recognition’.

¹⁷² Bowler interviewed by Griffiths, ORAL TRC 6680/8.

¹⁷³ Bowler, ‘Mungo Man is a Physical Reminder of the Need for Indigenous Recognition’.

on his Mungo book in his ‘monastic retreat’ in Foster, with its distant view of the ‘Bassian Plain’, and when he is out in the arid landscape he knows so well: ‘I go back to sit on a sand dune again and contemplate everything.’¹⁷⁴ His daughter, Jenny, has witnessed this struggle her whole life. She has ‘come to terms with the painful realisation that his extraordinary spirit is not found in these moments [at home]. It’s out there, exploring the rhythms of the land and listening to the echoes of an ancient culture and this haunting, ancient terrain’.¹⁷⁵

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In November 2015, Mungo Man made his first steps back towards the desiccated shores from whence he came. There was a great sense of occasion in the Great Hall at University House in the ANU where scientists gathered with traditional owners who had travelled from Mildura and Swan Hill and surrounds to attend the meeting. Mary Pappin spoke about the learning and the heartache at Willandra over the past forty years. She talked about the ‘old women’, led by Alice Kelly, who had fought for their cultural heritage, although they were in their sixties, ‘broken down’ and ‘not recognised as Aboriginal in their own towns’:

They stood up, them girls, and said ‘what are you doing with our culture?’ ... They knew to make sure that our ancient people taken out of the ground there, and taken to the ANU, had a story to tell ... They knew that Aboriginal Australians would come to their country to learn about the past. ... Our cultural heritage is all we have now, because our landscape, even our sky, is changed.¹⁷⁶

Isabel McBryde, in her eighties, attended the meeting and was highly praised by many speakers for her role as a listener on the lunettes.

Archaeologist Nicola Stern spoke of the new generation of research into the ‘rare and magical record’ at Lake Mungo and the relationship of ‘mutual trust and collaboration’ that has formed over the past thirty years. Steve Webb described the handover as a ‘watershed’ and outlined a vision for Willandra’s future, including plans for the much delayed Cultural Centre and Keeping Place. His advice was: ‘Involve the world: the world is interested.’ Finally, Jim Bowler gave an impassioned speech about the ‘injustices’ of the past and the

¹⁷⁴ Bowler interviewed by Griffiths, ORAL TRC 6680/3.

¹⁷⁵ Bowler, ‘Mungo Memories’, 185.

¹⁷⁶ Mary Pappin, speaking at the Willandra Seminar, 5 November 2015, Australian National University. The seminar was recorded and parts of it were televised on SBS and ABC.

bridges that Mungo represents: between black and white, between science and traditional cultures, between nature and culture. ‘We took away the kids, we took away the land, and gravest of all, we took away dignity. We need to give back. We hand back, in humility, the deep scientific story and how to communicate it.’ He ended on a personal note, reflecting on ‘42 years of living with Mungo Man’, from the discovery ‘in the cathedral of Lake Mungo’s shores’ through to elevation of this ancient individual as a national icon: ‘I owe a great debt to Mungo Man. He has changed me, and he is capable of changing everyone else.’¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ Nicola Stern, Steve Webb and Jim Bowler, speaking at a publicly recorded event as part of the Willandra Seminar, 5 November 2015, Australian National University. These quotes come from the author’s notes and have been checked with Jim Bowler.

Eaglehawk and Crow, 1974

In the wake of the Mungo discoveries, in 1974, Prime Minister Gough Whitlam celebrated Indigenous culture as ‘one of the oldest and most remarkable in the world’: ‘It has been developed over 30,000 years; it is expressed in a wealth of art and song. I want the rest of the world to experience and understand it.’¹ He considered Aboriginal people to be ‘our true link with our region’ and connected Indigenous affairs with Australia’s international responsibilities. ‘Australia’s treatment of Aboriginal people,’ he announced in his policy speech on 13 November 1972, ‘will be the thing upon which the rest of the world will judge Australia and Australians – not just now, but in the greater perspective of history.’² His government introduced a raft of policies to facilitate Aboriginal self-determination, including setting up the Aboriginal Land Rights Commission, creating the Department for Aboriginal Affairs, and expanding the Aboriginal Study Grants Scheme.³ Whitlam also sought to enliven public appreciation of Indigenous culture by supporting the creation of the Australia Council’s Aboriginal Arts Board and dramatically increasing the funding for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. In his first year in office, he tripled its annual grant, from \$512,000 in 1972-73 to \$1.5 million in 1973/74.⁴

The recently appointed principal of the AIAS, archaeologist Peter Ucko, harnessed the new funds to organise a major international conference on Aboriginal Australia. He invited scholars from across the world, such as Lewis Binford and François Bordes, to meet in Canberra for a seventeen-day conference on Indigenous art, prehistory, linguistics,

¹ Gough Whitlam, ‘Foreword’, in Mary White (ed.), *The Art of the Aboriginal Australian* (Canberra: Australian Department of Aboriginal Affairs, 1974), 1.

² Gough Whitlam, Policy Speech, 13 November 1972, as quoted in *The Whitlam Government 1972-1975* (Ringwood, Vic: Viking, 1985), 466.

³ Whitlam also initiated the Hope Committee of Inquiry into the National Estate (1973-74), a wide-ranging assessment of Australia’s natural and cultural heritage that culminated in 1976 with Malcolm Fraser establishing the Australian Heritage Commission.

⁴ John Mulvaney, ‘Conflict and the Rituals of Diplomacy: Les Hiatt and the AIAS’, in Francesca Merlan, John Morton and Alan Rumsey (eds.), *Scholar and Sceptic: Australian Aboriginal Studies in Honour of LR Hiatt* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1997), 29-38, 34-35.

anthropology, psychology and human biology.⁵ It was a major event, echoing the ambition of the 1961 conference, and it lay at the heart of his push to change the culture of the Institute. Although the Institute had some Aboriginal Council members, he had been confronted, on appointment, by the ‘untenable situation’ whereby ‘whites gave out money to whites, through white committees, to study the blacks’.⁶ Over the course of his tenure, he sought to ‘Aboriginalise’ the Institute and involve Aboriginal people in decision-making at every level.⁷ ‘The Institute will have failed if, over the next year, it does not manage to place Aboriginal studies in its rightful position within the world context of the study of human societies,’ he wrote in 1973. ‘We can only achieve this aim ... if we can convince those in power that research and Aboriginal indigenous activity are not separate activities but are intimately connected, and inextricably bound together.’⁸

During Ucko’s tenure, the Australian archaeological community began to depend less on the AIAS as an organising body and to develop their own institutional infrastructure.⁹ In August 1973, after an ANZAAS meeting in Perth, ‘a dozen or so’ people met in the back room of a pub to launch the Australian Archaeological Association (AAA).¹⁰ At that time, Ron Lampert reflected, archaeologists were still ‘thin on the ground, a species of scientist largely unknown to administrators, developers and others with whom we interact today as a matter of routine; legislation to protect archaeological sites was still under formulation; the concept of “public archaeology” in Australia only just emerging.’¹¹ The AAA was established as an inclusive organisation, with membership open to all, regardless of qualification. (An organisation for ‘professional’ archaeologists was developed in 1979.¹²) The first issue of the AAA ‘newsletter’ *Australian Archaeology* was published in 1974 and distributed to its seventy-four members. Lampert, the inaugural editor, hoped it would play a vital role in overcoming misunderstandings and establishing dialogue with Aboriginal people ‘by publishing opinions

⁵ Jaqueline Ann Lambert, ‘A History of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies 1959 -1989: An Analysis of How Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People Achieved Control of a National Research Institute’, PhD thesis, Australian National University, 2011, 150.

⁶ As quoted in Neal Ascherson, ‘Peter Ucko (1938-2007)’, *Australian Archaeology* 65 (Dec 2007), 73-74, 73.

⁷ Mulvaney, ‘Conflict and the Rituals of Diplomacy’, 33.

⁸ Peter J Ucko, ‘Review of AIAS activities, 1973’, *AIAS Newsletter* I (1974), 5-15, 13.

⁹ Stephanie Moser, ‘The Aboriginalisation of Archaeology: The Contribution of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies to the Indigenous Transformation of the Discipline’, in Peter J Ucko (ed.), *Theory in Archaeology: A World Perspective* (London: Routledge, 1995), 150-177.

¹⁰ RJ Lampert, ‘Retrospective’, *Australian Archaeology* 39 (1994), v-vii.

¹¹ Lampert, ‘Retrospective’, v.

¹² Marjorie Sullivan, ‘The Australian Association of Consulting Archaeologists’, *Australian Archaeology* 10 (Jun 1980), 117-118.

and comments both from archaeologists and Aborigines.¹³ The new president of the AAA, Western Australian curator Ian Crawford, hoped the association would help educate the public about Aboriginal history and bring an end to remarks such as: ‘I don’t suppose there is any archaeology in Australia!’¹⁴

In the months before the much-awaited 1974 AIAS conference, a Sydney-based group that called themselves ‘Eaglehawk and Crow’ launched an attack on the academic study of Aboriginal society, and in particular the AIAS.¹⁵ Their name echoed the title of anthropologist John Mathew’s 1899 ‘study of the Australian aborigines’, whilst acknowledging the forces of the ancestral beings *Bunjil* (Eaglehawk) and *Waa* (Crow).¹⁶ Their open letter to the AIAS and its members questioned the existence of the Institute and accused it of ignoring the concerns of Aboriginal people in favour of ‘doubtfully relevant studies’ and an expensive international conference.¹⁷ Although Ucko was seeking to ‘Aboriginalise’ the Institute, Jacquie Lambert notes in her history of the AIAS, his focus on ‘traditional’ culture reinforced the alienation felt by those who lived in cities and no longer spoke their own languages.¹⁸ Of the six signatories of the Eaglehawk and Crow letter – Terry Widders, Gary Williams, Lyn Thompson, Bob Bellear, Len Watson and Peter Thompson – only the latter was non-Indigenous. They urged the Institute to take a ‘public stand’ on issues that were important to the Aboriginal community, such as land rights: ‘Money and other resources are in short supply for Aboriginal control of their livelihood, but not, it seems, for discussing it.’¹⁹

The letter dominated the 1974 conference, and for many Australian archaeologists, it shocked them into action. They had long campaigned for heritage legislation to protect Aboriginal sites and to promote understanding of Indigenous history and culture within settler communities; now, it seemed, they had to communicate the nature and value of archaeology to the Indigenous public as well. The public role of the Australian Archaeological

¹³ RJ Lampert, ‘Editorial’, *Australian Archaeology* 2 (Apr 1975), 1-2, 1.

¹⁴ Ian Crawford, ‘The Role of the Australian Archaeological Association’, *Australian Archaeology* 2 (Apr 1975), 3-4, 3.

¹⁵ Lambert, ‘A History of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies’, 138.

¹⁶ John Mathew, *Eaglehawk and Crow: A study of the Australian Aborigines Including an Inquiry into their Origin and a Survey of Australian Languages* (Melbourne: Melville, Mullen and Slade, 1899).

¹⁷ Terry Widders, Peter Thompson, Gary Williams, Lyn Thompson, Bob Bellear and Len Watson, ‘Eaglehawk and Crow: Open Letter Concerning the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies’, 29 March 1974, AIATSIS Library, Canberra, File 73/119, 4.

¹⁸ Lambert, ‘A History of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies’, 135-7.

¹⁹ Widders *et al*, ‘Eaglehawk and Crow’, 1.

Association seemed clear. ‘We are now at a most crucial stage in archaeological development in Australia,’ David R Moore declared, ‘which might well be characterised as the “Publicize or Pack Up” interstadial.’²⁰

In January 1975, John Mulvaney and Isabel McBryde invited a number of Aboriginal critics, including Charles Perkins, to discuss the nature of archaeological research in Canberra. It was, in Mulvaney’s words, ‘the first major dialogue between prehistorians and the people whose past they studied’.²¹ Jack Golson spoke of the value of archaeological research for both Aboriginal Australians and settler Australians: ‘co-citizens as they are, it can help to foster a joint pride in the unique past of the particular part of the world where both now live.’²² Ray Kelly, the first Aboriginal person employed by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, agreed: ‘I feel we need to get all our people to become knowledgeable about Aboriginal history and culture – things that only a few of us seem to be interested in at present.’²³ But the symposium made it clear that further research into the Aboriginal past hinged on dialogue and respect. As Sandra Onus, a Gunditjmara woman and land rights campaigner, wrote in *Australian Archaeology*: ‘It has been and still is the feeling amongst my people that archaeologists are a bloody nuisance only good for sticking their noses and tools where they are not wanted “just like most white men” ... I am just as interested in knowing about the age and past habits of my people, but not to the point where it interferes with our tribal laws and customs that were laid down by my ancestors thousands of years ago.’²⁴ Mulvaney believed that the Canberra Congress convinced some Indigenous attendees of ‘our good faith’ as archaeologists: ‘significantly, this included the future Aboriginal leader Charles Perkins. He later launched the book I most enjoyed writing, *Encounters in Place Outsiders and Aboriginal Australians 1606-1985*.’²⁵

The ‘Eaglehawk and Crow’ letter served to accelerate Ucko’s agenda for change at the AIAS. It had an impact, Lambert reflects, because it confronted the Institute on its own terms. It was written with anger, but it was also well-researched and made relatively mild demands.²⁶ In the years that followed, Ucko oversaw the establishment of an Aboriginal Advisory

²⁰ David R Moore, ‘Archaeologists and Aborigines’, *Australian Archaeology* 2 (Apr 1975), 8-9, 9.

²¹ John Mulvaney, ‘What Future for Our Past’, *Australian Archaeology* 13 (1981), 16-27, 21.

²² Jack Golson, ‘Archaeology in a Changing Society’, *Australian Archaeology* 2 (Apr 1975), 5-8, 8.

²³ Ray Kelly, ‘From the “Keeparra” to the “Cultural Bind” an Analysis of the Aboriginal Situation’, *Australian Archaeology* 2 (Apr 1975), 13-17, 16.

²⁴ Sandra Onus, ‘Archaeologists and Aborigines’, *Australian Archaeology* 3 (1975), 2.

²⁵ John Mulvaney, ‘Reflections’, *Antiquity* 80 (308) (Jun 2006), 425-434, 427.

²⁶ Lambert, ‘A History of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies’, 147.

Committee in 1975; the Institute created grants for Aboriginal people to receive training and conduct research, as well as funds for Aboriginal-requested research; and, in a reversal of its previous position, the AIAS Council threw its support behind the repatriation of Truganini's remains: 'Truganini's remains should be disposed of immediately in accordance with her own wishes or those of her descendants'.²⁷ During the 1970s, Ucko's push to Aboriginalise the Institute saw many more Indigenous people become employed as staff and cultural practitioners.

One of Wiradjuri journalist Stan Grant's first jobs was to deliver the internal mail at the AIAS in the 1970s. In his memoirs in 2016, Grant reflected on the opportunities afforded by the re-energised organisation:

At the Institute I reconnected with the kinship I had lost when we moved to the city. There was a subterranean black community lurking below this bland bush city... At the Institute there were people like me – Aboriginal people – studying, writing and wrestling with new ideas. These people worked as film and sound archivists and anthropologists and historians. Black people did this? I could barely believe it.²⁸

In between his mail rounds, Grant searched through the archives, learning more about his family history: 'It was a magical place where I could touch my past.'²⁹ It was in the corridors of the AIAS that he met Marcia Langton, a bibliographer in the Institute library and already a strong intellectual presence in Aboriginal affairs, who encouraged him to enter journalism. Langton, too, recognised the value of the Institute as a place of learning and understanding. 'There cannot be any doubt that teaching and research about Aboriginal society adds dignity to humankind as a whole,' she wrote in 1996, 'It is an essential means of leading other Australians to greater tolerance and understanding.'³⁰

With the decline of the biennial AIAS meetings in the late 1970s, the Australian Archaeological Association took over as the central organ of the discipline. By the end of the decade, archaeologists no longer had to depend on Institute meetings or ANZAAS sessions to

²⁷ As quoted in Peter J Ucko, 'Australian Academic Archaeology: Aboriginal Transformations of its Aims and Practices', *Australian Archaeology* 16 (1983), 11-26, 15.

²⁸ Stan Grant, *Talking to My Country* (Sydney: HarperCollins, 2016), 59.

²⁹ Grant, *Talking to My Country*, 65-67.

³⁰ Marcia Langton, 'A Fireside Chat', in Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths (eds.), *Prehistory to Politics: John Mulvaney, the Humanities and the Public Intellectual* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996), 134-43, 142.

converge and discuss ideas: they had their own independent institutional infrastructure.³¹ The 1978 meeting at the ANU field station at Kiola, although not held under the auspices of the AAA, provided the template for future AAA conferences.³² It was built around a theme – field and laboratory methods – and held in a regional location, outside the Sydney-Canberra axis. The organiser, Ian Johnson, recognised that ‘the papers given at the conference were undoubtedly less important than the discussions which took place over lunch and in the evenings.’³³ The informal, social nature of these early gatherings reflected the young, exciting nature of the discipline. As Stephanie Moser observed, ‘Not only did the university archaeologists work together but they socialised together as well ... drinking was a part of the disciplinary culture’.³⁴ These informal affairs reached their ‘zenith’ at the coastal conference at Valla in 1980. ‘Far be it from me to draw attention to the foibles of worldly flesh exhibited there,’ Sandra Bowdler wrote in ‘Valla Madness’, the introduction to the published conference proceedings.³⁵ The cricket contests held between archaeologists at the Australian National University and those at the University of Sydney’s department of anthropology were another ‘celebrated event on the social calendar’, with the match results being included in the departments’ annual reports.³⁶

By the end of the 1970s, the ‘newsletter’ *Australian Archaeology* had transformed from a means of communication into a research-oriented academic journal and the membership of AAA was rapidly growing.³⁷ Peter Ucko, meanwhile, resigned his position at the AIAS in 1981 and made way for its first Aboriginal Principal, Eric Willmot. The Institute, now known as the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, became the first Indigenous controlled national research centre in Australia.

³¹ Stephanie Moser, ‘Archaeology and its Disciplinary Culture: The Professionalisation of Australian Prehistoric Archaeology’, PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 1995, 222.

³² Mike Smith, ‘Annual Conferences of the AAA’, *Australian Archaeology* 39 (1994), 132-133, 132.

³³ Ian Johnson, ‘Introduction’, in Ian Johnson (ed.), *Holier than Thou: Proceedings of the 1978 Kiola Conference on Australian Prehistory* (Canberra: ANU, 1980), 1.

³⁴ Moser, ‘Archaeology and its Disciplinary Culture’, 167. There is a famous scene in one of Tom Haydon’s early films of archaeologists gathering at a remote pub in 1974 to discuss the Mungo finds. The pub, Mulvaney reflected wryly, had no beer. Tom Haydon (dir.), *The Long, Long Walkabout* (1975), Sydney: ABC Commercial.

³⁵ Sandra Bowdler, ‘Valla madness’, in Sandra Bowdler (ed.), *Coastal Archaeology in Eastern Australia: Proceedings of the 1980 Valla Conference on Australian Prehistory* (Canberra: Department of Prehistory, Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National University, 1982), v-ix, vi.

³⁶ John Mulvaney, ‘Sesqui-centenary to Bicentenary: Reflections on a Museologist’, *Records of the Australian Museum* (1993), 17-24, 23.

³⁷ In December 1980 it dropped the ‘newsletter’ tag to become *Australian Archaeology*, raising questions about whether the journal should be refereed. Jim Allen and Jeannette Hope, ‘Editorial’, *Australian Archaeology* 19 (1984), 1.



Fig. 41 The sandstone escarpment country of western Arnhem Land (Source: B Griffiths).



Fig. 42 The mouth of the Liverpool River, where saltwater meets fresh, near the settlement of Maningrida, central Arnhem Land (Source: B Griffiths).

Landscapes of the Mind

Carmel Schrire and Betty Meehan in Arnhem Land¹

Arnhem Land lies at the tip of the Top End, jutting out between the Timor Sea and the Gulf of Carpentaria. It is a land of topographic and climatic contrasts. The stony, faulted plateau – home to some of the oldest surface rocks on earth – is also one of the world’s most flammable landscapes; yet in the cool depths of chasms and gorges, remnants of rainforest survive, protected from fire for millennia.² The great cliffs of the escarpment divide the rugged plateau from the sweeping plains below. In the wet, the plains shimmer with fresh water and birdlife, fed by rivers flowing from the stone massif above. In the early dry, small leads of smoke streak the lowland plains, as the country is worked and cleaned. This dramatic landscape is where many archaeologists came to ‘discover’ Aboriginal Australia, for the first time working alongside and observing individuals who had been born into a hunter-gatherer way of life. To archaeologists, Arnhem Land conjures the Dordogne – the great archaeological wonderland of Europe – with its cliffs pocked with richly decorated rock shelters and shell mounds rising out of the plain.³ It is ‘one of the world’s most important storehouses of information about prehistory and the art of hunting and gathering man.’⁴ To the first Australians, it is an inscribed landscape, shaped by the movements of totemic beings and pulsing with the life-force of the Dreaming.

¹ This title draws from a strong tradition in Australian archaeology. Rhys Jones used the phrase as a title in his essay: ‘Landscapes of the Mind: Aboriginal Perceptions of the Natural World’, in John Mulvaney (ed.), *The Humanities and the Australian Environment* (Canberra: Australian Academy of the Humanities, 1991), 21-48; Isabel McBryde wrote of ‘numinous landscapes of the mind, peopled by beings from an ever-present Dreaming whose actions were marked by the features of the created landscape ... a landscape “mapped by stories”.’ Isabel McBryde, ‘Travellers in Storied Landscapes’, *Aboriginal History* 24 (2000), 152-74, 156. Bruno David and Harry Lourandos have also argued that ‘History, like geography, is about tracing the landscapes of the mind’, in: ‘Landscape as Mind: Land Use, Cultural Space and Change in North Queensland Prehistory’, *Quaternary International* 59 (1999), 107-23, 107.

² John CZ Woinarski, Jeremy Russell-Smith, Alan N Andersen and Kym Brennan, ‘Fire Management and Biodiversity of the Western Arnhem Land Plateau’, in Jeremy Russell-Smith, Peter Whitehead and Peter Cooke (eds.), *Culture, Ecology and Economy of Fire Management in North Australian Savannas: Rekindling the Wurrk Tradition* (Canberra: CSIRO Publishing, 2009), 201-28.

³ Rhys Jones and Tia Negerevich, ‘A Review of Previous Archaeological Work’, in Rhys Jones (ed.), *Archaeological Research in Kakadu National Park* (Canberra: Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service, 1985), 1-16, 1.

⁴ Jones and Negerevich, ‘A Review of Previous Archaeological Work’, 15.

Despite many attempts, Australia's northern coast was never conquered, nor systematically settled by white colonists. As late as 1933 journalist Ernestine Hill described Arnhem Land as being 'the only corner of Australia that has persistently baffled, and even frightened, the white pioneer ... for 100 years Arnhem Land, by the sheer ferocity of its natives, has defied colonisation.'⁵ Rhys Jones and Betty Meehan believe the key to the resilience of the people of Arnhem Land is their long history of contact with other cultures.⁶ For centuries Macassan voyagers in search of trepang visited the shores of Arnhem Land, growing rice and building stone hearths along the coastline, trading with local communities, and even taking Aboriginal people with them back to foreign ports.⁷ John Mulvaney surveyed a series of Macassan sites in 1965 to draw attention to what he described as a 'largely ignored ... theme of Australian history'.⁸ His PhD student, Campbell Macknight, followed up with the first major research on the history and archaeology of the Macassan voyages. In his celebrated history of the Macassan trepangers, *The Voyage to Marege*, Macknight drew upon the documentary evidence to argue that the trade began sometime between AD 1650 and 1750.⁹ He also acknowledged oral traditions of visitors who came before the Macassan traders, known as the Baijini.¹⁰ Later scholars, such as Darrell Lewis and Anne Clarke, suggested that the Macassans started visiting much earlier, around one thousand years ago, and that their influence on Aboriginal culture can be read in changes in the archaeology and rock art.¹¹ The traders introduced new technologies, such as the dug-out canoe, and inspired a shift in diet, from a terrestrial to a more marine economy.¹² Macassan words entered the local languages – and still remain: 'Balanda' (whitefella) is believed to have a Macassan root. In the wet season of 1907, the coastal clans of Arnhem Land prepared for the annual trading season as usual,

⁵ Ernestine Hill, 'Arnhem Land: Deals, Death and Defiance', *Northern Standard*, 21 Jul 1933, 5.

⁶ Rhys Jones and Betty Meehan, 'The Arnhem Salient', in Desmond Ball (ed.), *Aborigines in the Defence of Australia* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1991), 100-62, 100.

⁷ Anne Fiona Clarke, 'Winds of Change: An Archaeology of Contact in the Groote Eylandt Archipelago, Northern Australia', PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1994, 19.

⁸ John Mulvaney, 'Bêche-de-mer, Aborigines and Australian History', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria* 79(2) (Sept 1966), 449-57, 449.

⁹ Campbell Macknight, *The Voyage to Marege: Macassan Trepangers in Northern Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1976), 97-99.

¹⁰ Perhaps these earlier visitors introduced the dingo to Australia around four to five thousand years ago? For more on the 'Baijini', see: Ronald M Berndt and Catherine H Berndt, *The First Australians* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954), 32-39.

¹¹ Darrell Lewis, *The Rock Paintings of Arnhem Land, Australia: Social, Ecological and Material Culture Change in the Post-Glacial Period* (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports International Series 415, 1988), 102-04; Clarke, 'Winds of Change', 470, 19. Macknight found 'anomalous' older dates in his early excavations, which he discounted in favour of the written record.

¹² Carmel Schrire, 'Ethno-Archaeological Models and Subsistence Behaviour in Arnhem Land', in David L Clarke, *Models in Archaeology* (London: Methuen, 1972), 653-70, 667.

but no Macassan praus arrived.¹³ The long history of trade and communication had been formally prohibited by legislation in tune with the White Australia Policy.

When the first Europeans voyaged to Australia, long after the Macassan trade had begun, they brought with them a new way of seeing the landscape. Art historian Bernard Smith has explored how the newcomers perceived the unfamiliar terrain through the lens of the familiar. The landscape was prized for its potential: what it could become, what it could be shaped into.¹⁴ The European colonisation of the Northern Territory, writes Howard Morphy, ‘was a movement inspired by myth and fantasy, by images of inland lakes, mountains of gold and rich pastures for cattle, all of which were to prove illusory.’¹⁵ The settlement at Port Essington on the Cobourg peninsula was one of the many short-lived, ‘forsaken settlements’ constructed on the northern coastal rim.¹⁶ Built in 1838 to foster the long trade relationship with Asia, and to guard Australia’s north coast from invasion, it suffered from limited resources and a failure to understand the environment.¹⁷ By 1849 this small cluster of houses had been abandoned. The ruins, studied by Jim Allen in the 1960s, became the subject of Australia’s first major excavation in historical archaeology.¹⁸

Ironically, John Woinarski and Freya Dawson argue, it was environmental ignorance and developmental hubris that have ultimately allowed vast areas of northern Australia to remain relatively unmodified.¹⁹ The ‘spectacular failures’ of early agricultural and forestry ventures, which had been devised on an ambitious scale with limited knowledge, were what enabled Aboriginal people to continue to live a traditional life on their land well into the twentieth century. The land was perceived to be so marginally productive that only grand visions and intensive modification of the environment could yield profit. It is a view that remains popular, as arguments about a ‘northern food bowl’ attest, and it speaks to the heart of the vision of land that the British imported. But it is a perception that clashes with an Aboriginal

¹³ Henry Reynolds, *North of Capricorn: The Untold Story of Australia’s North* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2003), 13-14.

¹⁴ Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific, 1768–1850: A Study in the History of Art and Idea* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960).

¹⁵ Howard Morphy, *Aboriginal Art* (London: Phaidon Press, 1998), 14.

¹⁶ Peter G Spillett, *Forsaken Settlement: An Illustrated History of the Settlement of Victoria, Port Essington, North Australia 1838-1849* (Melbourne: Lansdowne Press, 1972).

¹⁷ There were earlier failed settlements at nearby Fort Dundas (1824-29) and Raffles Bay (1827-29). Mark McKenna, *From the Edge: Australia’s Lost Histories* (Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press, 2016), 65.

¹⁸ Jim Allen, ‘Archaeology and the History of Port Essington’, PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1969.

¹⁹ John Woinarski and Freya Dawson, ‘Limitless Lands and Limited Knowledge: Coping with Uncertainty and Ignorance in Northern Australia’, in JW Handmer, TW Norton, and SR Dovers (eds.), *Ecology, Uncertainty and Policy: Managing Ecosystems for Sustainability* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 2002), 83-115, 89-95.

understanding of country. As Rhys Jones reminds us, reflecting on the moment of colonisation, ‘The newcomers struggling through the surf were met on the beaches by other men looking at them from the edge of the trees. Thus the same landscape perceived by the newcomers as alien, hostile, or having no coherent form, was to the indigenous people their home, a familiar place, the inspiration of dreams.’²⁰

In Arnhem Land, perhaps more than anywhere else, Australian archaeologists began to accommodate this other, more familiar view of country. Striving to see the landscape through Aboriginal eyes enabled them to understand the ways in which the environment has been modified and used over generations, and how this is reflected in the archaeological remains. The first Australians cultivated the land through fire and developed a complex and intimate relationship with the environment that relied upon detailed knowledge of plants, animals and the seasons. The walls of the Arnhem Land escarpment, decorated in reds, yellows, whites and blacks, vividly illustrate this deep cultural knowledge, while the dusty floors at their base preserve an archive of ancient human occupation: the oldest chapter in the history of the first Australians.

‘Ever so gradually,’ Prime Minister Paul Keating reflected in his iconic 1992 Redfern Speech, ‘we are learning how to see Australia through Aboriginal eyes, beginning to recognise the wisdom contained in their epic story. ... We cannot imagine that the descendants of people whose genius and resilience maintained a culture here through fifty thousand years or more, through cataclysmic changes to the climate and environment, and who then survived two centuries of dispossession and abuse, will be denied their place in the modern Australian nation. We cannot imagine that.’²¹ This chapter explores this intellectual transformation in the context of archaeological field research in Arnhem Land. It tells the story of two early scholars, Carmel Schrire and Betty Meehan, who strove to ‘see Australia through Aboriginal eyes’ and it sets the scene for the archaeological work that delivered the date of ‘fifty thousand years or more’ (to be discussed in chapter ten).

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²⁰ Rhys Jones, ‘Ordering the Landscape’, in I Donaldson and T Donaldson (eds.), *Seeing the First Australians* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1985), 181-209, 185.

²¹ Paul Keating, ‘Redfern Speech (Year for the World’s Indigenous People)’, Delivered in Redfern Park, 10 December 1992.

When South African-born archaeologist Carmel Schrire (then White) first came to Arnhem Land in 1964, within a few months of arriving in Australia, the Northern Territory seemed like an ‘endless outback’. ‘I was 23 years old. I could barely drive, had never run a field trip in my life, and knew almost nothing about Australian archaeology, let alone Arnhem Land.’²² She drove up from Port Augusta with her supervisor, Jack Golson, and a field supervisor, Ron Lampert, stopping in farms, missions and small towns along the ‘tarred ribbon’ of the Stuart Highway, where talk in the pubs was mostly ‘about women, gins, lubras, bitches, and worse’.²³ Although segregation was not as explicit as it was in apartheid South Africa – there were no signs proclaiming ‘Whites Only’ – Schrire could not help but notice a customary divide within these remote towns. Her South African accent was greeted with ‘conspiratorial nods and nudges’.²⁴ Whites drank inside while Aboriginal people squatted in the dust outside, ‘shooting longing glances towards the hot, beery interiors’.²⁵ The power to enter Aboriginal reserves rested in the hands of the government, not elders, and it depended upon an elaborate formal application, including a chest scan to stop the spread of tuberculosis.

Schrire arrived in the year that Indigenous people graduated from wards of the state – someone who is unable to act in their own interest – to citizens. They could vote and make decisions about life on their land, even though they were not counted in the census. A year earlier, in 1963, the Yolngu people of northeast Arnhem Land had opposed the federal government’s leasing of their land at Yirrkala on the Gove Peninsula and demanded recognition of their rights to country. Their protests saw ‘land rights’ (as opposed to civil rights) emerge as a national issue.²⁶ Over the following decade the Northern Territory became a hot spot for Aboriginal activism. In 1966 the Gurindji walked off Wave Hill Station (Jinparak), 600 kilometres south of Darwin, beginning a decade-long campaign for rights to their land.²⁷ The resounding 90% ‘Yes’ vote at the 1967 referendum brought Aboriginal people into the census, into civil law and into the Commonwealth. Previously, Indigenous

²² Carmel Schrire, ‘Exploring the Legacy of the 1948 Arnhem Land Expedition (Book Review)’, *Archaeology in Oceania* 47(2) (Jul 2012), 108-111, 108.

²³ Carmel Schrire, *Digging Through Darkness: Chronicles of an Archaeologist* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 45.

²⁴ Schrire, *Digging Through Darkness*, 44.

²⁵ Schrire, *Digging Through Darkness*, 44.

²⁶ Bain Attwood, *Possession: Batman’s Treaty and the Matter of History* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2009), 262-63.

²⁷ Prime Minister Gough Whitlam returned part of the land of the Gurindji people in the Northern Territory (albeit in the form of a lease rather than a title of ownership) in a ceremony at Daguragu in August 1975. Charlie Ward, *A Handful of Sand: The Gurindji Struggle, After the Walk-off* (Melbourne: Monash University Publishing, 2016), esp. 27-44, 175-94.

Affairs had been managed by the states, often through departments that also handled flora, fauna and wildlife.²⁸ While the referendum signalled the shifting mood in Australian society, the rejection of the Yolngu's case for land title in April 1971 made it clear that change would have to come from the government rather than the courts.²⁹ In December 1972 Gough Whitlam was elected Prime Minister with a land rights platform and in 1976, under Malcolm Fraser's *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act*, Aboriginal people were able to gain legal title to their country.³⁰ The scale of this dramatic social, cultural and political transformation was hard to imagine when Schrire first entered the Arnhem Land Reserve.

The choice of Arnhem Land – and the goal of establishing a ‘cultural sequence’ – was ‘a direct outcome of the state of Australian archaeology in 1964’.³¹ A year earlier, in August 1963, Golson had excavated sites at Sleisbeck and Katherine, 300 km south of Darwin, while John Mulvaney led excavations at the nearby Ingaladdi and Kintore Cave. Schrire was now accompanying Golson on his return trip north to find a region to study for her PhD. Although work had been done in Arnhem Land, the previous excavations were far from systematic and the findings had received little analysis. Anthropologist Donald Thomson had conducted some minor excavations in 1935 and 1937; Neil ‘Black Mac’ Macintosh had excavated a five-metre trench through the Tandandjal shelter in 1949; and WEH Stanner had dug a small pit in Yarar shelter in 1958-59.³² But the only major excavations in Arnhem Land had been conducted through the 1948 American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land, an extravagant exercise in cultural diplomacy sponsored by a variety of governmental agencies and cultural institutions, including the National Geographic Society and the Smithsonian Institution. The nine-month research expedition produced, in Sally K May's words, ‘volumes of scientific publications, kilometers of film, thousands of photographs, tens of thousands of scientific specimens, and a vast array of artifacts and paintings from across Arnhem Land.’³³

The two archaeologists on that expedition, Frederick D McCarthy and Frank M Setzler,

²⁸ See Bain Attwood and Andrew Markus, *The 1967 Referendum: Race, Power and the Australian Constitution* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2007).

²⁹ Attwood, *Possession*, 295.

³⁰ Schrire, *Digging Through Darkness*, 205.

³¹ Carmel Schrire, *The Alligator Rivers: Pre-history and Ecology in Western Arnhem Land* (Canberra: Department of Prehistory, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, 1982), 30.

³² NWG Macintosh, ‘Archaeology of Tandandjal Cave, South-West Arnhem Land’, *Oceania* 21(3) (1951), 178-204; Mulvaney revisited Yarar, see ‘Notebook, 1965’, in Mulvaney Papers, NLA, MS 9615/8.5/9, Box 64.

³³ Sally K May, *Collecting Cultures: Myth, Politics, and Collaboration in the 1948 Arnhem Land Expedition* (Lanham, Maryland: AltaMira Press, 2010), 2. See also Martin Thomas, ‘A Short History of the Arnhem Land Expedition’, *Aboriginal History* 34 (2010), 143-70.

excavated Macassan sites on Groote Eylandt and Port Bradshaw, examined middens along the eastern shore of Melville Bay, found stone points at Yirrkala and recorded art sites on Chasm Island.³⁴ Their major excavations were at Oenpelli (Gunbalanya), where they passed almost a month excavating sites on two hills flanking the mission, wearing gas masks to cope with the plumes of dust from their sieves. ‘The temperature among the rocks was high,’ wrote the expedition leader Charles Mountford, ‘the humidity oppressive and the dust from the sieves so dense that it was sometimes difficult to see the archaeologists.’³⁵ In their rush ‘to determine the origin, or at least the prehistory, of the Australian Aborigines in Arnhem Land’,³⁶ McCarthy and Setzler decided to focus only on large ‘finished’ stone tools, ignoring food debris, shells and ‘waste flakes’.³⁷ Their method of excavation, May writes, ‘consisted of shoveling all the deposit into sieves and bagging any stone, wood, or shell that remained. Little attention was paid to stratigraphic layering or standard archaeological excavation procedures.’³⁸ From this selective archive, they recognised five different tool types which they interpreted as reflecting successive waves of migration into Australia. ‘Thus Oenpelli became the Les Eyzies of the Antipodes,’ wrote Schrire, ‘a cultural meeting place from which colonists spread forth.’³⁹

McCarthy and Setzler’s report on ‘The Archaeology of Arnhem Land’ was published twelve years after the expedition in 1960. Schrire locates it ‘at the very roots of modern Australian archaeological theory and practice.’⁴⁰ But although the expedition was pioneering in the sense that ‘archaeology’ was treated as a distinct component of a wider scientific project, I am more inclined to agree with Anne Clarke and Ursula Frederick’s conclusion that their work should be seen as ‘a relic of an earlier era of research’ rather than a foundation of the

³⁴ Charles P Mountford, *Records of the American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land, Volume 1: Art, Myth and Symbolism* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1956), 102; Frederick D McCarthy, ‘The Cave Paintings of Groote Eylandt and Chasm Island’, in Charles P Mountford (ed.), *Records of the American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land, Volume 2: Anthropology and Nutrition* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1960), 297-414.

³⁵ Mountford, *Records, Volume 1*, xxviii-xxix.

³⁶ Frederick D McCarthy and Frank M Setzler, ‘The Archaeology of Arnhem Land’, in Charles P Mountford (ed.), *Records of the American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land, Volume 2: Anthropology and Nutrition* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1960), 215-296, 215.

³⁷ Carmel White and Nicolas Peterson, ‘Ethnographic Interpretations of the Prehistory of Western Arnhem Land’, *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 25(1) (1969), 45-67, 62.

³⁸ May, *Collecting Cultures*, 85-86.

³⁹ Les Eyzies, in the heart of the Vezere Valley, is the centre of archaeological research in the Dordogne in France. Carmel Schrire, ‘Interactions of Past and Present in Arnhem Land, North Australia’, in Carmel Schrire (ed.), *Past and Present in Hunter Gatherer Studies* (Orlando: Academic Press, 1984), 67-93, 79.

⁴⁰ Schrire, ‘Exploring the Legacy of the 1948 Arnhem Land Expedition’, 109.

modern era.⁴¹ In 1964, Jack Golson reviewed the stone tool evidence from the Oenpelli excavations and was shocked by the muddled lithic analysis: ‘two distinct entities,’ he exclaimed, ‘are presented as a single “culture”’.⁴² Schrire delivers a stinging critique of McCarthy and Setzler’s report in her thesis, lashing their decision to discard ‘waste flakes’ and ignore food debris.⁴³ But what most demarcates their research from the modern era was their role in actively scavenging more than 241 human remains, some quite recent, without the permission and often deliberately behind the backs of their Aboriginal guides.⁴⁴ These were then packed and shipped to the Smithsonian Museum in Washington. ‘That Aboriginal human remains were fetishised and collected in the name of science, and often taken to institutions in distant lands, is hardly breaking news,’ writes historian Martin Thomas, ‘But the idea of bone-taking being captured in a National Geographic film production – in colour no less – shocks me even now.’⁴⁵ Over the past two decades many of these remains have made the long journey home.

Schrire arrived in Arnhem Land with a different gaze and with a view of working with Aboriginal people as participants, not objects of study. One of the key attractions of working in Arnhem Land, she explained in 1967, invoking the 1966 Man the Hunter conference, was that ‘Aborigines live in the area today so that ethnographic material can be collected to help interpret the archaeological record.’⁴⁶ Although she recognised the limits of ethnographic interpretation, ‘at this stage of Australian pre-history,’ she wrote, ‘I feel that this type of information cannot be ignored.’⁴⁷

When her party crossed into Arnhem Land, they misjudged the tidal bore of the East Alligator River and drowned their truck at Cahill’s Crossing. The superintendent of the Church Mission Society settlement at Oenpelli, Alf Wilson, greeted them stonily that evening. As Schrire later wrote, he had ‘no interest whatsoever in research, and he felt deeply

⁴¹ Anne Clarke and Ursula Frederick, ‘Making a Sea Change: Rock Art, Archaeology and the Enduring Legacy of Frederick McCarthy’s Research on Groote Eylandt’, in Martin Thomas and Margo Neale (eds.), *Exploring the Legacy of the 1948 Arnhem Land Expedition* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2011), 135-155.

⁴² Jack Golson, ‘Australia’, *COWA Surveys and Bibliographies III* (1964), 1-11, 5.

⁴³ Carmel White, ‘Plateau and Plain: Prehistoric Investigations in Arnhem Land, Northern Territory’, PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1967, 471-75.

⁴⁴ May, *Collecting Cultures*, 184-88.

⁴⁵ Martin Thomas, “‘Because it’s Your Country’: Bringing Back the Bones to West Arnhem Land’, *Australian Book Review* 350 (Apr 2013), 26-37, 30.

⁴⁶ Carmel White, ‘Early Stone Axes in Arnhem Land’, *Antiquity* 41 (1967), 149-152, 149.

⁴⁷ White, ‘Plateau and Plain’, 54.

opposed to having a young white woman, wandering around on her own.⁴⁸ They camped that night on a stony pan beyond the mission under trees laden with raucous cockatoos. They were dirty, tired and covered in insect bites.⁴⁹

In her 1995 memoir, *Digging Through Darkness*, Schrire imagines what her arrival in the region might have meant to the Aboriginal people with whom she worked. She considers her expedition in the mid-1960s as an extension of the colonial experience, and reflects on its cross-cultural dimensions: ‘I have tried to show both sides, invader and native, to let each explain what they were after, as well as letting each reveal the world they thought they knew.’⁵⁰ Drawing inspiration from novelist JM Coetzee and historian Greg Denning, she wove fiction with archival sources to reveal ‘how fine is the line that separates assumed reality from imagination’.⁵¹ She hoped that her fictional passages – ‘annotated, fleshing out and narrating inferences made from evidence’ – would allow her to convey the temper and physicality of her experience in Arnhem Land, and enable her to make the imaginative leap to the other side of the frontier.⁵² It is an open acknowledgement of the fictions inherent in cross-cultural encounter, and a reflection of the cultural challenges at the heart of archaeology. ‘Possessing the other,’ Schrire quotes Denning as saying, ‘like possessing the past, is always full of delusions.’⁵³

In her chapter on Arnhem Land, her friend, guide and interpreter, Frank Gananggu becomes ‘Gurrawoy’, also known as ‘Fred’. Gananggu, like his fictional counterpart, suffered from Hansen’s disease (leprosy) and spent many years in the East Arm Leprosarium in Darwin. He grew up in and around Oenpelli and spoke Erre, Kakadu, and, through his time in Darwin undergoing treatment, English.⁵⁴ Gananggu also knew about archaeology. He had worked on the 1948 expedition through Arnhem Land and one of his first questions to Schrire in 1964 was, ‘You with the McCarthy-Mountford mob?’⁵⁵

⁴⁸ Schrire, *Digging Through Darkness*, 45.

⁴⁹ Schrire, *Digging Through Darkness*, 199-201.

⁵⁰ Schrire, *Digging Through Darkness*, 148.

⁵¹ Schrire, *Digging Through Darkness*, x.

⁵² This sentence evokes the title of Henry Reynold’s landmark history, *The other side of the frontier: Aboriginal resistance to the European invasion of Australia* (Townsville: History Dept., James Cook University, 1981); Schrire, *Digging Through Darkness*, 5.

⁵³ As quoted in Schrire, *Digging Through Darkness*, 10.

⁵⁴ Schrire, *The Alligator Rivers*, 30.

⁵⁵ Schrire, ‘Exploring the Legacy of the 1948 Arnhem Land Expedition’, 108.

In her portrait of Gurrawoy, Schrire brings to life the warmth and humour of Gananggu, his struggles with leprosy, the relentless incursion of the white world, and his impressions of her 1964-65 field season in Arnhem Land. She wonders about the cultural implications of having a woman as a boss.⁵⁶ What did he make of this ‘young, intense’ woman ‘with a loud voice’, who wanted to rummage around old camps on his country?

The archaeologist habitually wore men’s clothes. ... Despite her incorporation in their kinship system as Gurrawoy’s sister, her gender was indeterminate. ... To men whose childhood had been spent hunting possums and spearing fish, she seemed utterly ignorant. Yet you had to hand it to her for sheer persistence, digging away, sunrise to sunset, week after week, with little change to show for it all. A mad person, no doubt, whatever else she might be.⁵⁷

For most of this first season Schrire worked alone with Gananggu and his cousins, who she paid with cigarettes, food and camp supplies. Golson soon returned to his duties at the ANU, while Lampert departed early after his mandatory TB test delivered him a fatal (though misread) prognosis.⁵⁸ Schrire’s persistence in the field earned her the distinction of being, in Mulvaney’s words, Australia’s first ‘cowgirl’ archaeologist – a moniker she quite enjoyed.⁵⁹

Schrire relied heavily on Aboriginal interlocutors such as Frank Gananggu to guide her to ‘old living places’.⁶⁰ The guides and assistants were mainly men more than forty or fifty years old who had lived as hunter-gatherers when they were young. ‘They were all conversant with local wild plants and wild animals and knew the main features of the landscape.’⁶¹ She also worked with women and Magdalene, an Edey elder, was especially forthcoming about the names of shellfish, water plants and animals that were collected for food on the plains. Gananggu constantly advised Schrire to check his information with her: ‘My old lady knows.’⁶² In the pit, Schrire excavated alone, singing to herself, while the Aboriginal men sieved, sorted and bagged the finds nearby, dividing axes from

⁵⁶ Schrire, *Digging Through Darkness*, 201.

⁵⁷ Schrire, *Digging Through Darkness*, 202-204.

⁵⁸ All permit seekers were required to have a chest scan to enter Arnhem Land. Lampert’s initial test delivered him a fatal prognosis of tuberculosis, which was only cleared up as a mistake after he returned home. Schrire, ‘Exploring the Legacy of the 1948 Arnhem Land Expedition’, 108.

⁵⁹ John Mulvaney, ‘Arnhem Land Prehistory’, *Australian Archaeology* 16 (Jun 1983), 160-62, 160; Carmel Schrire to John Mulvaney, 14 July 1983, Mulvaney Papers, NLA, MS 9615/1/206, Box 25.

⁶⁰ White, ‘Plateau and Plain’, 17.

⁶¹ Carmel White, ‘The Prehistory of the Kakadu People’, *Mankind* 6 (1967), 426-431, 426.

⁶² White, ‘Plateau and Plain’, 377-78.

hammerstones, silcrete from quartz. Their assistance allowed the identification of objects such as the remains of the edible lotus lily, ‘which might otherwise have been thrown away.’⁶³ Although Schrire remained sceptical about some of the information from her interlocutors – one man attributed the presence of shells in an inland shelter to Noah’s Flood⁶⁴ – she also acknowledged the influence of Indigenous knowledge on her research. Her thesis is dedicated ‘to Frank Gananggu of Oenpelli, who told me this story in the first place.’⁶⁵

The first site Schrire excavated was at Malakunanja I – ‘a small recess at the base of the escarpment where the cliff met the talus slope.’⁶⁶ She excavated in grids using trowels, brushes, paint scrapers, ash pans and circular plastic sieves.⁶⁷ After twelve days at this ‘hot and uncomfortable site’, she abandoned it due to the presence of human remains, ‘some obviously recent’.⁶⁸ In *Digging Through Darkness*, she reflects on this scene of discovery: the men standing above the pit while she crouched over the bones, patently human, wrapping them in tissue and foil, packing them into carefully labelled bags.

This was no one they knew; nevertheless, their discomfort grew as they watched her disturb the sacred things ... Gurrawoy stood in silence, his swollen face impassive and shut. Suddenly he wished he had never seen her, the truck, the tins of food, the batteries, even the tape recorder. A wave of shame and hate boiled up at her and her kind.⁶⁹

In this passage, Schrire returns to the theme of her memoir: ‘This is a book about the history and consequences of colonialism and racism, seen through the eyes of a colonial-born archaeologist.’⁷⁰ ‘Colonialism,’ she writes, ‘is a chronicle of betrayals.’⁷¹ Her intrusion into Gurrawoy’s world was simply the latest chapter. She left Malakunanja I behind and moved onto other sites across the plateau and the plains.

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⁶³ White, ‘Plateau and Plain’, 59.

⁶⁴ White, ‘Plateau and Plain’, 53-54.

⁶⁵ White, ‘Plateau and Plain’, dedication, vii.

⁶⁶ This is a different site to Malakunanja II (Madjedbebe). Schrire, *The Alligator Rivers*, 31.

⁶⁷ Schrire, *The Alligator Rivers*, 33.

⁶⁸ Schrire, *The Alligator Rivers*, 31.

⁶⁹ Schrire, *Digging Through Darkness*, 205.

⁷⁰ Schrire, *Digging Through Darkness*, 1.

⁷¹ Schrire, *Digging Through Darkness*, 51.

Schrire's views of colonialism and racism draw directly from her experiences growing up in Cape Town during apartheid. As a white, Jewish female she had a privileged existence in segregated South Africa. She was born in 1941 and lived with her three sisters in a house that clung to the slopes of Table Mountain.⁷² She remembers how the atrocities of the holocaust hung heavily on the shoulders of her father, and the gradual process by which she became aware of a different kind of racial discrimination at home. Her daily interactions with the family's domestic servants spoke directly to 'the inequitable laws of South African society that kept everyone in place'.⁷³

Her interest in archaeology stemmed from her parents' membership to the South African Archaeological Society, which held monthly meetings on all things archaeological: from Greek statues and Japanese martial weaponry to early hominids of the Transvaal and the art of the Khoisan people. The meetings were characterised by 'polite applause and desultory questions', followed by tea, hard biscuits 'and subdued good nights.'⁷⁴ It was the field trips of this society, however, that drew Schrire into the mysteries and excitement of the ancient world: 'They led us into dank caves and up steep, coastal middens, where millions of shells attested to former meals. I crouched in the dusty holes, wondering how many other children had shivered in the winter rains, thousands of years before.'⁷⁵

She enrolled in 'African Studies' at the University of Cape Town in 1958, studying African government and law, Bantu languages, social anthropology, ethnology and archaeology.⁷⁶ Archaeology in South Africa, as in Australia, was profoundly influenced by Cambridge University and Schrire quickly realised that she had unwittingly become an apprentice of the Cambridge archaeological empire. The chair of the department, Professor Monica Wilson, was a Cambridge graduate, as was Professor Astley John Hilary Goodwin – then the only full-time teacher of archaeology in the subcontinent. Goodwin's death in 1959 thrust Schrire's class into the hands of three more Cambridge graduates: Glynn Isaac, Brian Fagan and Ray Inskeep. It was thus a natural decision for Schrire to follow in their footsteps and pursue archaeology at Wilson's alma mater, Girton College.⁷⁷

⁷² Schrire, *Digging Through Darkness*, 20.

⁷³ Schrire, *Digging Through Darkness*, 23-25.

⁷⁴ Schrire, *Digging Through Darkness*, 25-26.

⁷⁵ Schrire, *Digging Through Darkness*, 25-26.

⁷⁶ Schrire, *Digging Through Darkness*, 33-34.

⁷⁷ Schrire, *Digging Through Darkness*, 41.

A private review of her studies, written by Fagan to Inskeep, speaks volumes for the academic culture of her university years:

Schrire (Carmel, Miss, c.18). A Jewess, and a curvaceous one. ... Her interest in archaeology is somewhat superficial – she is at heart a Social Anthropologist. Not interested in the practical side, except perhaps paintings. Works hard. Boy friend (steady) in Jo'burg. Ardent liberal.⁷⁸

When Schrire arrived in Cambridge in 1960, men outnumbered women ten to one. And while her male peers were afforded special treatment in their colleges, 'women were relegated a subtly lesser role, as helpmeets, rather than protagonists.'⁷⁹ Schrire had limited access to tutors and advisors in archaeology and remembers the celebrated archaeologist Eric Higgs refusing to take women into the field 'because they caused nothing but trouble.'⁸⁰ Despite these challenges, Schrire thrived in the exciting intellectual environment and formed close connections within her cohort, which included Rhys Jones, Barry Cunliffe, Colin Renfrew and her future husband Peter White.⁸¹ During her studies she became engaged to White, who had studied 'Pacific Prehistory' under Mulvaney at the University of Melbourne (and who was present when Gordon Childe lectured the class in 1957). Together, in Cambridge, they planned their future careers. In 1963, White was offered a job as an archaeologist in Peshawar. Schrire, his potential employers suggested, could accompany him and 'teach needlework to the girls.' Diplomatically, they resolved to instead 'try our luck in the Antipodes', where Jack Golson was advertising PhD opportunities at the ANU.⁸²

It is worth dwelling upon the many obstacles that Schrire faced because of her gender, for they are representative of the experiences of other female scholars at the time.⁸³ But despite such structural disadvantages, Isabel McBryde reflects, the field of Australian archaeology has been fundamentally shaped by 'that intrepid yet often shadowy, even invisible, band of women archaeologists'.⁸⁴ And since the 1980s, under the leadership of Sandra Bowdler,

⁷⁸ Schrire, *Digging Through Darkness*, 40.

⁷⁹ Schrire, *Digging Through Darkness*, 41.

⁸⁰ Schrire, *Digging Through Darkness*, 41.

⁸¹ Grahame Clark, *Prehistory at Cambridge and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 115.

⁸² Schrire, *Digging Through Darkness*, 43.

⁸³ Claire Smith and Emer O'Donnell, 'Gender and the Disciplinary Culture of Australian Archaeology', in Sarah Nelson (ed.), *Handbook of Gender in Archaeology* (Berkeley, USA: AltaMira Press, 2006), 691-732.

⁸⁴ Isabel McBryde, 'In Her Right Place...?' Women in Archaeology, Past and Present', in Hilary du Cros and Laurajane Smith (eds.), *Women in Archaeology: A Feminist Critique* (Canberra: Department of Prehistory, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, 1993), xi-xv, xi.

feminist scholarship and gender archaeology have become dynamic streams in the discipline, culminating in the 1990s in a series of Women in Archaeology conferences that continue today. McBryde's phrase 'that Shadowy Band' was harnessed by Bowdler and Genevieve Clune in their overview of the field in 2000, in which they explored the vital and diverse roles women have played in the development of Australian archaeology.⁸⁵ To remove women from the field, they argued, would be to strip much that is distinctive about Australian archaeology. 'No Isabel McBryde, Carmel Schrire or Betty Meehan, for instance,' Bowdler wrote in 1993, 'means no emphasis on regional survey, no ethnohistory, no significant role for ethnographic analogy nor ethnoarchaeology.'⁸⁶ In 1991, the editors of *Australian Archaeology*, Val Attenbrow and Betty Meehan, drew the attention of their readers 'to the fact that most of the material included in this issue of AA is either written by a woman alone or as a joint author. We did not organise this, it just happened that way!'⁸⁷

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Schrire returned to Arnhem Land for a second season in 1965 with her husband Peter White, as well as Edgar Waters, to continue her work with Frank Gananggu's team. While they were in the field, she received the radiocarbon dates from the previous year's excavations. The dates defied belief. Charcoal samples from the lower sands at Malangangerr – a shelter with deep shade near the East Alligator River – came in at over twenty-two thousand years old: then the oldest dates for human occupation in Australia.⁸⁸ What was even more baffling was that these dates were associated with edge-ground axes, which she had found in all shapes and sizes – and at considerable depth – at Malangangerr during her first season. 'They continue to find axes at the base of the deposits,' Mulvaney wrote excitedly to Dermot Casey after visiting Schrire and White in 1965.⁸⁹ For so long axes had been regarded as a relatively recent technological invention – indeed they were considered diagnostic features of the 'neolithic': the era of agriculture. The axes that Schrire uncovered undermined this conventional wisdom and revealed the complexity of Aboriginal life during the Pleistocene.

⁸⁵ Sandra Bowdler and Genevieve Clune, 'That Shadowy Band: The Role of Women in the Development of Australian Archaeology', *Australian Archaeology* 50 (Jun 2000), 27-35, 32.

⁸⁶ Sandra Bowdler, 'Review of Recovering the Tracks: The Story of Australian Archaeology', *Australian Archaeology* 37 (Dec 1993), 68.

⁸⁷ Val Attenbrow and Betty Meehan, 'Editorial', *Australian Archaeology* 32 (1991), 1.

⁸⁸ White, 'Early stone axes in Arnhem Land'.

⁸⁹ John Mulvaney to Dermot Casey, 18 August 1965 (from Goulburn Island Mission), Dermot Casey Papers, AIATSIS, Canberra, MS 1326/A/a/i, Box 1.

At over twenty thousand years old, they ‘thus appeared to be the oldest in the world.’⁹⁰ And by a significant margin: axes in Europe dated to around eight thousand years ago. Tim Murray and Peter White, in their 1981 overview of the field of Australian archaeology, described the Malangangerr axe as ‘the most dramatic’ discovery ‘in world terms’ of the 1960s, a decade that included the unearthing of Mungo Lady.⁹¹

The team returned to Malangangerr to carry out further excavation while Golson and Mulvaney arranged for geomorphologists Joe Jennings, Martin Williams and ADL Hooper to visit and check Schrire’s stratigraphic interpretations.⁹² Their soil samples confirmed the dates and helped her better understand the formation of the deposits. But when she published the find in *Antiquity* in 1967, the news was greeted with profound scepticism.⁹³ Very few archaeologists accepted the dates: you couldn’t have the neolithic so early! It put the first Australians at the cutting-edge of Pleistocene technology and challenged the widespread assumption that Australia was the last continent to be settled by modern humans.⁹⁴ It would take the Mungo discoveries two years later to shake this narrative from its rigid foundations. Australian archaeology continues to deliver surprising and challenging technological evidence. In 2016, Peter Hiscock, Sue O’Connor, Jane Balme and Tim Maloney published the discovery of the world’s oldest ground-edge axe: a 44-49,000 year-old fragment found in Carpenters Gap in the Kimberley region of northern Australia. A tool that was once linked to the origins of agriculture may have been part of the colonising baggage of the first Australians.⁹⁵

The arrival of the radiocarbon dates at Oenpelli Mission also allowed Schrire to give a timescale to the story she had been reading into the archaeology. Drawing on Gananggu’s information and documentary sources, she interpreted a distinct cultural divide between the archaeology of the coastal plain and that of the escarpment country.⁹⁶ From twenty-thousand years ago through to six or seven thousand years ago, she argued, one people – ‘the old-

⁹⁰ Schrire, *The Alligator Rivers*, 31.

⁹¹ Tim Murray and J Peter White, ‘Cambridge in the Bush? Archaeology in Australia and New Guinea’, *World Archaeology* 13(2) (Oct 1981), 255-263, 257.

⁹² White, ‘Plateau and Plain’, 125.

⁹³ John Mulvaney to J Harris, ‘Carmel Schrire: Promotion to Professor II’, 22 August 1996, Mulvaney Papers, NLA, MS 9615/1/206, Box 25.

⁹⁴ Grahame Clark, *World Prehistory: An Outline* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 253.

⁹⁵ Peter Hiscock, Sue O’Connor, Jane Balme, and Tim Maloney, ‘World’s Earliest Ground-Edge Axe Production Coincides with Human Colonisation of Australia’, *Australian Archaeology* 82 (1) (2016), 2-11.

⁹⁶ Carmel White, ‘Report on field trip to Yirrkalla and Port Bradshaw, Northern Territory, August-September, 1969’, 1970, AIATSIS Library, Canberra, PMS 2005, Doc. 70/923, 8.

timers' – roamed across western Arnhem Land with their ground-edge axes. Then around seven thousand years ago (after the sea levels had risen dramatically) something changed. The coastal plains became the domain of the 'woodworkers who seldom made or used stone tools' while '[a]way in the hills lived the stone workers ... with whom the plainsmen traded.'⁹⁷ She presented these distinct cultural histories in her 1967 thesis 'Plateau and Plain'.

Within two years, Schrire had revisited her conclusions and critiqued her own work. With anthropologist Nicolas Peterson, she suggested that instead of two defined groups of people – the 'wood workers' and 'stone workers' – the difference in archaeology could be understood through the seasonal movements of one people between high and low country.⁹⁸ But this interpretation did not last long either. It was criticised for being too neat, and for projecting seasonal ethnographic observations onto ancient archaeological remains.⁹⁹ Ultimately, Schrire settled on a 'less environmentally determined' and more complex story. There were differences between the archaeology of the plateau and the plain, but they could not be wholly explained by the changing climate or the seasonal movements of individual groups; they had more to do with 'human decision-making and self perception as elements operating within the ecosystem.'¹⁰⁰ The rapid succession of hypotheses reflects the changing theoretical grounding of the 1970s and 1980s (see chapter nine) and the challenges of combining archaeology and ethnography.¹⁰¹ Although many of her observations and interpretations would not have been possible without the benefits of drawing on Indigenous knowledge – trying to see the landscape through their eyes – there were limits to how far this cultural information could go. '[T]he man-land interactions observed at first contact with Europeans,' she concluded in 1984, 'could not have existed here for more than the past 1000 years.'¹⁰²

Schrire returned to Arnhem Land in 1968 and 1969 to continue a study on the 'Ethno-archaeology in Arnhem Land' through the AIAS, observing diets at Caledon Bay, reflecting on the cultural-contact with the Macassans and exploring the different roles of 'Man the Hunter and Woman the Gatherer'.¹⁰³ But in 1970, Schrire left Australia for North America,

⁹⁷ White, 'Plateau and Plain', 1; White, 'The Prehistory of the Kakadu People', 431.

⁹⁸ White and Peterson, 'Ethnographic Interpretations', 61-63.

⁹⁹ Richard A Gould, *Living Archaeology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 34-35; J Peter White and James F O'Connell, *A Prehistory of Australia, New Guinea and Sahul* (Sydney: Academic Press, 1982), 42.

¹⁰⁰ Schrire, 'Interactions of Past and Present in Arnhem Land', 88.

¹⁰¹ Isabel McBryde, 'Ethnohistory in an Australian Context: Independent Discipline or Convenient Data Quarry?', *Aboriginal History* 3 (1979), 128-151.

¹⁰² Schrire, 'Interactions of past and present in Arnhem Land', 68.

¹⁰³ Carmel White, 'Report on field trip to Caledon Bay, Northern Territory Dec./Jan. 1968-69', 1969, AIATSIS Library, PMS 2004, Doc. 69/816, 2.

where she devoted a decade to ‘teaching and raising children’. By the time she returned in 1980, the political landscape in Arnhem Land had changed.

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Another archaeologist, Betty Meehan, gives us a unique view of the transformations in Arnhem Land in the early 1970s, and another portrait of the ways in which archaeology was being integrated with ethnography. She first worked in Arnhem Land as a schoolteacher in 1958 when she accompanied her then husband anthropologist Les Hiatt to the small trading post of Maningrida.¹⁰⁴ While Hiatt studied kinship networks, Meehan set up the community’s first school, made from corrugated iron and chicken wire.¹⁰⁵ They had met in Bourke, Meehan’s hometown, in 1955 and moved to Sydney a few months later as newlyweds.¹⁰⁶ It was a period of ‘amazing change’ for Meehan, a country girl from a working-class family with Irish and Welsh connections, who had not travelled much further than Bathurst before. She taught in a primary school in the Sydney suburb of Petersham, while Hiatt studied anthropology and worked occasionally as a dentist. After he graduated with Honours, they made preparations for an extended period of fieldwork in central Arnhem Land, which would form the basis of his doctoral research. Meehan entered Arnhem Land with a very different set of experiences to Schrire: while Schrire grew up with servants in South Africa, Meehan had Aboriginal schoolmates. She and Hiatt also had some linguistic ability thanks to a crash course in Canberra, where she recalls ‘struggling with the *ng* sound at the beginning of Aboriginal words and of the soreness this caused to our throats.’¹⁰⁷

Maningrida had existed for less than a year when they arrived in 1958.¹⁰⁸ It had been set up as a commercial centre in the heart of Arnhem Land, where Aboriginal people could get access to European items such as blankets, tomahawks, sugar, tea and tobacco in exchange

¹⁰⁴ Betty Meehan to her parents, 15 May 1958, as quoted in Helen Bond-Sharp, *Maningrida: A History of the Aboriginal Township in Arnhem Land* (Howard Springs: Helen Bond-Sharp, 2013), 66.

¹⁰⁵ This work on kinship was later published as: Les Hiatt, Kim McKenzie, Betty Ngurrabangurraba, Betty Meehan and Rhys Jones, *People of the Rivermouth: The Joborr Texts of Frank Gurrmanamana* (Canberra: National Museum of Australia, Aboriginal Studies Press, 2002).

¹⁰⁶ Betty Meehan, ‘Irreverent Recollections of the Making of an Anthropologist’, in Francesca Merlan, John Morton and Alan Rumsey (eds.), *Scholar and Sceptic: Australian Aboriginal Studies in Honour of LR Hiatt* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1997), 11-28, 11-13.

¹⁰⁷ Meehan, ‘Irreverent Recollections of the Making of an Anthropologist’, 15-17.

¹⁰⁸ Syd Kyle-Little, a patrol officer of the Native Affairs Branch in Darwin, chose the site of Maningrida for a ‘trading post’ on 9 June 1949, but it was abandoned a few months later after a devastating outbreak of disease. The government settlement was created in 1957. See Billy Griffiths, ‘Caring for Country: The Place Where the Dreaming Changed Shape’, *Griffith Review* 56 (2017), 232-45, 236-37.



Fig. 43 Betty Meehan in camp at Manganama, 1972-73 (Source: R Jones, AIATSIS).



Fig. 44 Women and children collecting shell fish, Madang-adjira, Maningrida area, 1972 (Source: B Meehan, AIATSIS).

for crocodile skins, dingo scalps, pandanus dilly bags, dried trepang, and pearls. It was designed to stop the drift of Aboriginal people into Darwin, and it quickly drew people in from the surrounding country. Within a decade it was the fifth largest town in the Northern Territory.¹⁰⁹ ‘Anyone visiting Maningrida at the end of the 1960s would have been overwhelmed by the feeling that all the Aborigines were there to stay,’ Meehan later wrote.¹¹⁰ Ingrid Drysdale, the wife of the first manager and first white woman to live at Maningrida, lamented that the traditional owners were ‘at the end of their “dreaming” and at the beginning of a new road unmarked by the spirit ancestors who guided their every step in days gone by.’¹¹¹ The Anbarra people, with whom Hiatt worked, lived in public housing in the township: their homelands around the Blyth River region were ‘almost deserted’.¹¹²

But when Meehan returned a decade later as an archaeologist and anthropologist in her own right, she encountered an unexpected phenomenon. In an explicit rejection of attempts at assimilation, Aboriginal people had left the cramped housing in Maningrida and begun moving back onto country.¹¹³ Meehan was shocked by the rapid development of what became known as the outstation movement. In 1972 she was surprised to find that many of the people with whom she had worked in the town had returned to their homelands. They were hunting and foraging across the rich coastal country surrounding the Blyth River, moving camps according to the seasons and religious needs, and supplementing their diet with food bought from the Maningrida store with money from art sales and pensions. ‘Perhaps 20 years of living in a white-dominated European type town was long enough for the Maningrida people,’ Meehan and Rhys Jones mused,

perhaps the glitter of the Balanda [whitefella] culture and its material objects had dulled sufficiently during that time ... There can be no doubt that they desired to avoid the unpleasant by-products of Maningrida culture – alcoholism and associated petrol sniffing, violence and delinquency – that these were burdens that they no longer wished to bear.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ Betty Meehan, *Shell Bed to Shell Midden* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1982), 19.

¹¹⁰ Meehan, *Shell Bed to Shell Midden*, 19.

¹¹¹ Ingrid Drysdale, *The End of Dreaming* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1974), 194.

¹¹² Bond-Sharp, *Maningrida*, 67.

¹¹³ Bond-Sharp, *Maningrida*, 141-46.

¹¹⁴ Betty Meehan and Rhys Jones, ‘The Outstation Movement and Hints of a White Backlash’, in Rhys Jones (ed.), *Northern Australia: Options and Implications* (Canberra: Research School of Pacific Studies, 1980), 131-57, 135.

In the early years at Maningrida Aboriginal people had experienced a sedentary lifestyle for the first time – and they had rejected it. They were driven by a responsibility to return to country, to tend to sacred sites, and to work the land through fire, ceremony, hunting and gathering. Their actions were spurred on by the election of the Labor Government in 1972 and the establishment of the Woodward Land Rights Commission. ‘Even if the Commission was not a prime cause,’ Meehan reflected, ‘its existence added grit to the determination of the people who had already taken the plunge.’¹¹⁵

Meehan was greeted with smiles and warmth on a reconnaissance trip in August-September 1970, even gathering shellfish with Jeannie Maraginyaginya who ‘had been one of my school pupils in 1958 but is now married with two children’.¹¹⁶ But as Richard Gould had experienced in the Western Desert, she noticed many cultural changes: ‘The Aborigines appear to be much more sensitive about Europeans observing and photographing their ceremonies than they were in 1958 and 1960.’¹¹⁷ Fortunately, Meehan reflected, ‘I am not academically interested in that aspect of the culture.’ She and her new partner Rhys Jones hoped to explore ‘the relationship between a living culture and the archaeological record.’¹¹⁸ They were intent on studying the economic practices of the Anbarra people – what foods they collected, what archaeological traces they might leave behind, and how far these cultural practices go back in time. There was a precedent for this kind of study in Arnhem Land. Perhaps the most innovative element of the 1948 American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land was Frederick D McCarthy’s work with nutritionist Margaret McArthur on subsistence practices at Fish Creek: ‘The Food Quest and the Time Factor in Aboriginal Economic Life’.¹¹⁹ And as the Anbarra came to appreciate the purpose of Meehan and Jones’ presence in the community, they did whatever they could to assist. ‘Often we arrived at a hearth to find that the food had been laid out in species ready to be counted, weighed and measured.’¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ Meehan, *Shell Bed to Shell Midden*, 20.

¹¹⁶ John Hunter to Betty Hiatt, 7 August 1970, National Archives of Australia, E460, 1974/380, Doc. 70/1029; Betty Hiatt, ‘Application for Research Grant, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies’, National Archives of Australia, E460, 1974/380, Doc. 69/828; Betty Hiatt, ‘Report on Reconnaissance, August - September 1970’, National Archives of Australia, E460, 1974/380, Doc. 70/1029.

¹¹⁷ Betty Meehan, ‘Anbara Project’, 1970-74, National Archives of Australia, E460, 1974/380, 3.

¹¹⁸ Meehan, ‘Anbara Project’, 3.

¹¹⁹ Frederick D McCarthy and Margaret McArthur, ‘The Food Quest and the Time Factor in Aboriginal Economic Life’, in Charles P Mountford (ed.), *Records of the American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land, Vol. 2: Anthropology and Nutrition* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1960), 145-194.

¹²⁰ Meehan, *Shell Bed to Shell Midden*, 47.

Meehan focussed her work on the role of Aboriginal women as food gatherers, and particularly shellfish collection. 'For most anthropologists in the past, who have been social anthropologists and male, the collection of molluscs by women would have been an insignificant event compared with the exploits of the active male hunters of the same society.'¹²¹ Although it may seem 'an unspectacular, unobtrusive and humdrum activity', Meehan found that the collection of shellfish played a subtle but crucial role in the Anbarra diet. In particular, her focus on middens allowed her to engender the past: to see, and separate, women in the archaeological record.¹²² Shellfish contributed no more than one-tenth of their dietary needs, but it was one of the few reliable food sources that could, if necessary, be collected every day of the year. 'Shellfish are there for the taking, like the food on a supermarket shelf, with which they are sometimes compared.'¹²³ But they also have other roles in the society. Some shell mounds are considered to have been made by ancestral beings in the Dreaming, such as the Kula Kula or 'Dog Mounds', which are said to have been created by 'the first dog in the country [who] piled up these extensive mounds of shells with his paws, as dogs do with earth when they are digging a hole.'¹²⁴ Far from rubbish heaps; these middens could be regarded as sacred monuments. Meehan studied how shellfish were collected for utilitarian, religious, and recreational reasons, and wrote of the social history they represent. In her landmark 1982 book *Shell Bed to Shell Midden*, she argues that 'The ubiquity of shell middens around the coasts of the world may indeed be testimony to the special supportive role of shellfish in coastal economies and be recognised as fitting monuments to yet another unappreciated contribution made by women to the maintenance of human society.'¹²⁵

Although their interests were primarily archaeological, Meehan and Jones revised their research agenda in July 1972 in light of the immense changes accompanying the outstation movement. They extended their stay for a full year and decided to focus on documenting the 'ethnographic situation'. 'I felt that an opportunity to observe people in their own country throughout a yearly cycle should not be missed,' Meehan wrote in her interim report to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. They resolved to 'give the archaeological content

¹²¹ Meehan, *Shell Bed to Shell Midden*, 7.

¹²² This approach was also pursued by Sandra Bowdler in the 1970s at Balls Head and Bass Point, see: Sandra Bowdler, 'Balls Head: The Excavation of a Port Jackson Rockshelter', *Records of the Australian Museum* 28 (1971), 117-28, 126; Sandra Bowdler, 'Hook, Line, and Dilly Bag: An Interpretation of an Australian Coastal Shell Midden', *Mankind* 10 (1976), 248-58.

¹²³ Meehan, *Shell Bed to Shell Midden*, 160.

¹²⁴ Meehan, *Shell Bed to Shell Midden*, 167-168.

¹²⁵ Meehan, *Shell Bed to Shell Midden*, 171-172.

second place' and 'leave excavation to a later date'.¹²⁶ They hoped their observations over the year would offer 'a vignette in the history of a community' and a portrait 'of an Australian economic tradition that extends back for at least 35 000 years.'¹²⁷ The Anbarra welcomed the extension of their stay and 'wished to have their knowledge written down on *djurra* (paper) for some future time when their descendants would all be able to read. They were also keen that *balanda* in "Canberra" should be aware of the subtleties of their ecological knowledge.'¹²⁸ Frank Gurrmanana, in whose extended hearth they lived, 'chastised us sometimes for not documenting fully his accounts of the past – "More better you book 'im down straight.'"¹²⁹ The archives of the Australian National University and AIAS were compared 'to the inner knowledge of the great ceremonies.'¹³⁰

Meehan and Jones were allowed to camp on the edge of the various settlements, but they were left to procure their own food, wood and water.¹³¹ They joined hunters and foragers during the day, regularly walking twenty-kilometres or more and returning exhausted to write notes in their tent. 'I still have vivid and somewhat comical memories of various expeditions,' Meehan later wrote, 'especially those into the jungle areas to get yams, where I, bedecked with cameras, lightmetre, tape, spring balance, notebook and ball-point pen (not to mention a small haversack containing sunburn cream, mosquito repellent, water and a tin of baked beans), strove to keep up with a group of women on the scent of yams.'¹³² Meehan spent most of her time with the women, while Jones roamed the countryside with the men, working closely at times with Les Hiatt. As Meehan later wrote, 'much to my amusement (and a little to my chagrin) Gurrmanamana announced to the community that my first husband had given me to his "younger brother", my second husband, and that he himself had acquired a younger wife'.¹³³ Jones was quickly absorbed into the community and earned the moniker 'wombat' – because he was short, stout and liked to dig.

During the year between July 1972 and July 1973, Meehan and Jones counted thirty species

¹²⁶ Meehan, 'Anbara Project', 6.

¹²⁷ Meehan, *Shell Bed to Shell Midden*, 162. As they later reflected, 'Our journals therefore document a passing phase, half frozen as it were in the lens of history.' Betty Meehan, Rhys Jones and Annie Vincent, 'Gulu-kula: Dogs in Anbarra Society, Arnhem Land', *Aboriginal History* 23 (1999), 83-106, 91.

¹²⁸ Meehan, *Shell Bed to Shell Midden*, 46-47.

¹²⁹ Meehan *et al.*, 'Gulu-kula', 91.

¹³⁰ Meehan, *Shell Bed to Shell Midden*, 46-47.

¹³¹ Meehan, *Shell Bed to Shell Midden*, 43.

¹³² Meehan, *Shell Bed to Shell Midden*, 46.

¹³³ Betty Meehan, 'Bandeiyama: She Keeps Going', in Isobel White, Diane Barwick, Betty Meehan (eds.), *Fighters and singers: the lives of some Australian Aboriginal women* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1985), 200-213, 205.

and over 7000 kg of shellfish collected by the Anbarra people. In *Shell Bed to Shell Midden*, Meehan identified the archaeological signature of two kinds of ethnographically observed shell middens: the ‘base camp’, the main area where the community stayed and slept, and the ‘dinnertime camp’, an ephemeral site where a party of foragers paused during the day to cook and eat some of the food gathered/hunted.¹³⁴ The latter can be seen as a symbol of the economic and social autonomy of women in the archaeological record. The idea of a ‘dinnertime camp’ immediately caught on and was used to interpret archaeological sites from Tasmania to the lower Darling, South Australia to the Australian Alps.¹³⁵ Meehan also used her shell midden analysis to re-appraise other sites around Australia, such as Rocky Cape and West Point in Tasmania.¹³⁶

Meanwhile, Jones became interested in the religious life of the Anbarra and the ‘economic consequences’ of the great ceremonies. A *Kunapipi* ceremony, for example, brought together around 300 people and required an ‘investment of some 400 man weeks’: ‘[T]his much labour,’ Jones reflected, ‘might have erected a small hill fort, cleared many acres of ground or written two and a half Ph.D theses, had these been the aims of the society.’¹³⁷ To explain such an expenditure of energy demanded a deeper appreciation of the language and the culture of the Anbarra. The only way to understand the practices of a hunting economy was to learn something of the way his Indigenous friends and interlocutors thought about the plants, the animals, the land and the sky.¹³⁸ ‘To live by the spear and the digging stick,’ he reflected, ‘requires a detailed knowledge of the identity, location and characteristic behaviour of species; and of their ecological associations according to the passage of the seasons. If we wish to consider the landscape from the perspective of the hunter and gatherer, it is necessary

¹³⁴ Meehan, ‘Bandeiyama’, 206. Betty Meehan, ‘The Dinnertime Camp’, in Betty Meehan and Rhys Jones (eds.), *Archaeology with Ethnography* (Canberra: Dept. of Prehistory, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, 1988), 171-181, 179-80. See images in Meehan, *Shell Bed to Shell Midden*, 112-113.

¹³⁵ Jane Balme, ‘Prehistoric Fishing in the Lower Darling, Western New South Wales’, in C Grigson and J Clutton-Brock (eds.), *Animals and Archaeology: Vol. 2: Shell Middens, Fishes and Birds* (Oxford: B.A.R. International Series 183, 1983), 19-32, 23; Josephine Flood, *Archaeology of the Dreamtime: The Story of Prehistoric Australia and its People* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1983), 50; Roger A Luebbers, ‘Meals and Menus: A Study of Change in Prehistoric Coastal Settlements in South Australia’, PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1978, 302; Jim Stockton, ‘The Prehistoric Geography of Northwest Tasmania’, PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1982, 202.

¹³⁶ Meehan, *Shell Bed to Shell Midden*, 169.

¹³⁷ Rhys Jones, ‘The Tasmanian Paradox’, in RVS Wright (ed.), *Stone Tools as Cultural Markers: Change, Evolution and Complexity* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1977), 189-204, 201.

¹³⁸ Rhys Jones and Betty Meehan, ‘Anbarra Concept of Colour’, in Les Hiatt, *Australian Aboriginal Concepts* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1978), 20-39, 26.

not only to work within an ecological framework; but also within a linguistic one.’¹³⁹ Learning and inhabiting the language helped him to glimpse the landscape through Aboriginal eyes, in terms of the natural and the supernatural: two realms that ‘are but parts of a single concept of reality’.¹⁴⁰ Through these forces the land is constantly transforming, dictating the availability of plants and animals and the pattern of religious and social life. But the land is also dependent on people. ‘To sing the songs, to paint the designs and to carry out the dances,’ Jones wrote, ‘is to look after the land, to curate its religious essence.’¹⁴¹

Both Meehan and Jones were alert to the wider political transformations of the early 1970s. They explained the electoral process to the community living at Gupanga and helped enrol many adults to vote in the 1972 election, registering their occupations as either a ‘hunter’ or ‘huntress’. ‘They took on this role not just for the rights of the Gupanga people,’ writes historian Helen Bond-Sharp, ‘but as a building block upon which other rights could build.’¹⁴² Meehan and Jones also argued successfully for basic wage payments to be made by AIAS to their main interlocutors, Frank Gurrmanmana and Nancy Bandiyama.¹⁴³ And they were instrumental in assisting Aboriginal people to apply for social security benefits, negotiating the cultural challenges that come with having no birth certificate (and thus not qualifying for the retirement pension) or multiple wives (and eligibility for the single mothers benefit). ‘The importance of this income should not be underestimated,’ writes Bond-Sharp, ‘Although Aboriginal people in outstations were capable of supporting themselves by hunting and gathering as they had done for thousands of years, they were increasingly aware of the goods and services that other Australians had and aware of their rights as Australian citizens to have access to them.’¹⁴⁴ When news came through of Whitlam’s election in 1972, Big Barney, a senior landowner, ran down to the beach side camp at Gupanga and declared to the two progressive archaeologists, ‘You mob bin win’.¹⁴⁵ The election of the Whitlam government, however, was mixed news for the people of Arnhem Land.

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¹³⁹ Jones, ‘Landscapes of the Mind’, 28.

¹⁴⁰ Jones, ‘Landscapes of the Mind’, 23.

¹⁴¹ Jones, ‘Ordering the Landscape’, 203.

¹⁴² Bond-Sharp, *Maningrida*, 148.

¹⁴³ Hiatt, ‘Report on Reconnaissance, August-September 1970’.

¹⁴⁴ Bond-Sharp, *Maningrida*, 152-53.

¹⁴⁵ Bond-Sharp, *Maningrida*, 149.



Fig. 45 Rhys Jones with Anbarra men walking towards the Gunadjang-Ga fish trap site at Lalargajiripa, 1974 (Source: B Meehan, AIATSIS).



Fig. 46 Ranger uranium mine, surrounded by, but separate from Kakadu National Park, Northern Territory (Source: B Griffiths).

When Schrire returned to the Alligator Rivers Region in 1980, the roads had been sealed, Arnhem Land Reserve had been declared Aboriginal land, and, in the heart of the new Kakadu National Park, a mine had been dug. ‘Where buffalo guns once blazed,’ Schrire wrote, ‘geiger counters now crackled, heralding the arrival of Multinational Investors, followed by Supervising Scientists, and Resident Anthropologists.’¹⁴⁶ At the very moment Aboriginal people finally gained legal control over their land, mining companies – and the Australian government – heavily pressured them to give it away in lucrative leases. Schrire joined a project aimed at assessing the effects of uranium mining and royalty payments on formerly isolated communities, many of which had been re-established through the outstation movement.

In the late 1960s, the Alligator Rivers region – or western Arnhem Land – had been found to be home to 70 per cent of Australia’s known uranium resources.¹⁴⁷ The Ranger 1 uranium mine was the first of many to be planned in the region, and in 1972 the Commonwealth government joined with several mining companies to fund dollar-for-dollar a regional survey known as the Alligator Rivers Environmental Fact-Finding Study.¹⁴⁸ The mining companies were interested in the region’s rich uranium deposits; the Australian government was trying to determine the borders of the proposed Kakadu National Park in the area; both were keen to establish a body of basic data concerning the land and its resources.¹⁴⁹ Adding to this tense set of interrelationships was the legislation that became the 1976 *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act*, which acknowledged traditional rights to the land and its minerals.

John Mulvaney quickly recognised the significance of the Fact-Finding Study and lobbied to have archaeology included in the valuations of the cultural and scientific significance of the region.¹⁵⁰ He nominated Harry Allen, who had recently finished his PhD on the Darling Basin, to survey the area and consolidate Carmel Schrire’s archaeological work; Jo Kamminga, his former housemate, replaced him within a year. It was an unusual task at the time – conducting a large-scale survey in a short-time frame to satisfy industry and government. They were among the first consultant archaeologists in Australia: an industry that has grown immeasurably over the years and whose fate remains largely entwined with

¹⁴⁶ Schrire, *Digging Through Darkness*, 206.

¹⁴⁷ David Lawrence, *Kakadu: The Making of a National Park* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2000), 52.

¹⁴⁸ Lawrence, *Kakadu*, 64.

¹⁴⁹ Justin O’Brien, ‘Canberra Yellowcake: The Politics of Uranium and How Aboriginal Land Rights Failed the Mirrar People’, *Journal of Northern Territory History* 14 (2003), 79-92, 85.

¹⁵⁰ Mulvaney, *Digging up a Past*, 182.

the mining sector.¹⁵¹ ‘It feels a bit lonely here as a contracting archaeologist,’ Allen wrote back to Mulvaney in 1972, ‘as there is no place to which you belong and none who has responsibility for you.’¹⁵² Like Schrire, he was led to sites by Indigenous guides and told which he could and could not excavate. At Mount Brockman, his guides Fred and Peter pointed out where the Rainbow Serpent had emerged from the ground, advising him which caves represented the tail and which the head. ‘Both men were adamant that disturbance of either shelter by excavation (after careful explanation of what I wanted to do) would cause the rainbow serpent to come out and could cause the end of the world or at least a major calamity.’¹⁵³ Kamminga continued the regional survey in 1973 after Allen took a job in New Zealand. He, too, faced new challenges getting permission to excavate sites, partly, Mulvaney reflected privately, ‘because land rights are such an issue at present.’¹⁵⁴

Over 1972-73, Kamminga and Allen independently surveyed and recorded 120 sites, including tool scatters and stone arrangements, bundled burials and wooden weapons, decorated overhangs scarred by quarrying and wet season stringy bark shelters that still stood on the floodplain. The Fact-Finding Study found western Arnhem Land to be ‘one of the most archeologically significant areas in Australia’ and it helped provide the case for the declaration of Kakadu National Park and its subsequent World Heritage listing.¹⁵⁵ But it did not stop the establishment of mining interests in the area. As David Lawrence reflects in his history, *Kakadu*, ‘there is little doubt that the Commonwealth, with its 72.5 per cent share of the Ranger mining development, had a conflict of interest during the negotiations.’¹⁵⁶ At a time of high inflation and rising unemployment, Whitlam signed a memorandum of understanding in October 1975 that supported uranium mining in the Alligator Rivers region, and which bound his successor to comply. On 3 November 1978, the traditional owners signed the Ranger Agreement. It was more of a resignation than an agreement. One of the signatories, Toby Gangale, is reported to have said, ‘I’ve given up. It’s been six years now. I’m not fighting anymore.’¹⁵⁷ Historian Justin O’Brien describes the process as a ‘failure of

¹⁵¹ Sarah Colley, *Uncovering Australia: Archaeology, Indigenous People, and the Public* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2002), 42-44.

¹⁵² Allen to Mulvaney, 28 October 1972 (from Arnhem Land), Mulvaney Papers, NLA, MS 9615/1/5, Box 1.

¹⁵³ Allen to Mulvaney, 15 November 1972 (Oenpelli), Mulvaney Papers, NLA, MS 9615/1/5, Box 1.

¹⁵⁴ John Mulvaney to Harry Allen, 27 June 1973, Mulvaney Papers, NLA, MS 9615/1/5, Box 1.

¹⁵⁵ Johan Kamminga and Harry Allen, *Alligator Rivers Environmental Fact-Finding Study: Report of the Archaeological Survey* (unpublished report, Canberra, August 1973), 108.

¹⁵⁶ Lawrence, *Kakadu*, 103.

¹⁵⁷ Lawrence, *Kakadu*, 103, 78.

Aboriginal land rights legislation to deliver meaningful rights to the recognised traditional owners of the Ranger and Jabiluka project areas, the Mirrar people.’¹⁵⁸

Aboriginal responses to mining vary across the country.¹⁵⁹ But to understand the impact of mining on the region and the depth of opposition that continues in many communities today demands an Aboriginal understanding of country. Aside from health and land management concerns, there are profound spiritual matters at hand. Archaeologist Mike Smith put it well in a recent interview: ‘it’s not just that people are losing control over the sites or losing access to lands, the actual land is being shipped off to China. I mean there goes the Dreaming! There goes the body of the ancestral beings!’¹⁶⁰

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After almost three years monitoring the impact of uranium mining on traditional societies, Schrire decided to return to South Africa in 1983. She felt increasingly drawn to the archaeology of contact in her own country. ‘I began to feel what it was like to witness, and perhaps, to preside over the transformations of indigenous societies,’ she reflected. ‘The longer I watched, the more the desire grew to explore the concrete expression of such change. I wanted to taste dispossession in the material elements of invasion, the clay pipes, stone flasks, and bottles.’¹⁶¹ Although she has not conducted major field research in Australia since 1983, her work in Arnhem Land continues to resonate. The escarpment of western Arnhem Land remains linked with the search for human antiquity in Australia, and since the 1980s it has regularly been scoured for the oldest sites in Australia. In chapter ten, we will return to Arnhem Land and this hunt for the Pleistocene.

Meehan has continued to work with the Anbarra and has returned to Arnhem Land many times since she and Jones spent their year on the Blyth River in 1972-73. Many of those she lived with have also travelled south to visit her on the outskirts of Canberra. Two of her main interlocutors, Frank Gurrmanamana and Frank Malkorda, visited Canberra several times as members of the Council of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. They were

¹⁵⁸ O’Brien, ‘Canberra Yellowcake’, 79.

¹⁵⁹ See Marcia Langton, *The Quiet Revolution: Indigenous People and the Resources Boom*, Boyer Lectures 2012 (Sydney: Harper Collins, 2013), 31-58.

¹⁶⁰ Mike Smith interviewed by Tom Griffiths, 8 June 2012, National Library of Australia, sound recording, ORAL TRC 6429/3.

¹⁶¹ Schrire, *Digging Through Darkness*, 46. This work culminated in the recent book: Carmel Schrire (ed.), *Historical Archaeology in South Africa: Material Culture of the Dutch East India Company at the Cape* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2014).

transfixed by this place where decisions about their land were made. Jones memorably described Gurrmanamana's reaction on his first visit to Canberra in August 1974:

Here was a land empty of religious affiliation; there were no wells, no names of the totemic ancestors, no immutable links between land, people and the rest of the natural and supernatural worlds. Here was just a vast *tabula rasa*, cauterised of meaning.... Viewed from this perspective, the Canberra of the geometric streets, and the paddocks of the six-wire fences were places not of domesticated order, but rather a wilderness of primordial chaos.¹⁶²

Both Gurrmanamana and Malkorda were particularly interested in Canberra's role as the national capital: as a place representing the Australian people. So when Meehan and Jones returned to the Blyth River in 1979, Gurrmanamana and Malkorda came to their tent with a proposition: 'they wished to present a *Rom* to the people in Canberra whom they knew, both as an act of reciprocity for hospitality they had received from them and as an extension of friendship to those who had taken an interest in their life and culture.'¹⁶³

A *Rom* is essentially the presentation of a bound and decorated pole to a host community by a visiting group of singers and dancers. The ceremony takes several weeks to prepare and many days to perform. Les Hiatt describes *Rom* as a 'ritual of diplomacy', as it is designed to establish or reaffirm friendly relations between people of different communities, different languages and different cultures.¹⁶⁴

'We want that Canberra mob to look at our ceremony because we have been to many meetings there,' they explained to Peter Ucko, director of AIAS and 'big boss in Canberra':

We have been thinking about this for a long time. We have been thinking about all the men, the big members, all the time we have been attending Institute meetings. We have been thinking we would show all these people our ceremony.¹⁶⁵

They even specified trees 'near Cooma', and white clay 'from a pit on the

¹⁶² Jones, 'Ordering the Landscape', 205-207.

¹⁶³ Betty Meehan and Rhys Jones, 'From Anadjerramiya to Canberra', in Stephen A Wild (ed.), *Rom, an Aboriginal Ritual of Diplomacy* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1986), 15-31, 25.

¹⁶⁴ Les Hiatt, 'Rom in Arnhem Land', in Stephen A Wild (ed.), *Rom, an Aboriginal Ritual of Diplomacy* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1986), 3-13, 10-11.

¹⁶⁵ Meehan and Jones, 'From Anadjerramiya to Canberra', 25-26.

Hoskinson/Bungendore road' which they would use to make the ceremonial poles.

Over four days, from 31 October to 3 November 1982, the lawns in front of the AIAS library in Canberra became the ceremonial grounds of dancers and singers from Arnhem Land. All were invited, and thousands of people came to witness the song cycles unfold against the rhythmic sounds of clap sticks and the gravel tones of the didgeridoo.¹⁶⁶ 'It was a gesture of goodwill ... to the people of Canberra,' Stephen Wild later wrote in a book about the performance, 'and since Arnhem Land Aborigines are well aware of the national role of Canberra it was a gesture to Australia as a whole.'¹⁶⁷

Rom has been performed in Canberra twice since. In 1995, Gurrmanamana and Roy Riwa returned to sing songs from Jambich and Goyulan, while their compatriots leapt and danced in the National Library of Australia, on the lawns of AIATSIS and in Kings Hall in Old Parliament House.¹⁶⁸ In 2001, a new generation of dancers travelled from Arnhem Land to mark the opening of the new building at AIATSIS and reaffirm the long connection with the Anbarra fostered by Les Hiatt and Betty Meehan in the 1950s.¹⁶⁹ On both occasions, the performances were designed 'to make their culture known throughout Australia and, through knowledge, to further reconciliation.'¹⁷⁰

Recently, Yolngu leader and 1978 Australian of the Year, Galarrwuy Yunupingu, returned to the philosophy at the heart of the *Rom* ceremony in his 2016 essay in *The Monthly*, 'Rom Watangu'.¹⁷¹ Yunupingu has had interactions with every Australian Prime Minister since Gough Whitlam, dealing with many of them as one nation's leader to another: 'All the prime ministers I have known have been friendly to me, but I mark them all hard. None of them has done what I asked, or delivered what they promised.'¹⁷² 'What Aboriginal people ask,' Yunupingu wrote from eastern Arnhem Land, in a call for cross-cultural understanding,

¹⁶⁶ Margaret Clunies Ross, 'Rom in Canberra', in Stephen A Wild (ed.), *Rom, an Aboriginal Ritual of Diplomacy* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1986), 33-53.

¹⁶⁷ Stephen Wild, 'Introduction', in Stephen A Wild (ed.), *Rom, an Aboriginal ritual of diplomacy* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1986), xi-xiii, xii-xiii.

¹⁶⁸ Of the twenty-one dancers, Sam Gumugun, Cliff Murrundji, Clance Mangimirra and Shirley Margarij were also returning members from the 1982 performance. See Andy Greenslade, 'A Report on the Rom Ceremony Performances January 5th to 7th 1995', AIATSIS Library, Canberra, PMS 5643, 15.

¹⁶⁹ Anon, 'News and information', *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 2 (2001), 75-81.

¹⁷⁰ Greenslade, 'A Report on the Rom Ceremony', 8.

¹⁷¹ Although the *Rom* ceremony draws from a shared philosophy across Arnhem Land, it is important to note that there are differences between the ritual performed by the Anbarra in western Arnhem Land and the philosophy invoked Yunupingu as a leader of the Yolngu people in eastern Arnhem Land.

¹⁷² Galarrwuy Yunupingu, 'Rom Watangu: The Law of the Land', *The Monthly*, July 2016, 18-29, 29.

is that the modern world now makes the sacrifices necessary to give us a real future. To relax its grip on us. To let us breathe, to let us be free of the determined control exerted on us to make us like you. And you should take that a step further and recognise us for who we are, and not who you want us to be. Let us be who we are – Aboriginal people in a modern world – and be proud of us. Acknowledge that we have survived the worst that the past had thrown at us, and we are here with our songs, our ceremonies, our land, our language and our people – our full identity. What a gift this is that we can give you, if you choose to accept us in a meaningful way.¹⁷³

The full significance of the *Rom* ceremony has yet to be appreciated by the Australian public. At the heart of this symbolic act is a gift – of song and dance and cultural knowledge, but it comes with obligations. The acceptance of such a gift enmeshes the recipients into a continuing process of reciprocity. As a diplomatic ritual, it formalises bonds and establishes an equal footing upon which both communities can build. It is the extension of a hand in friendship, and it is offered in the hope that knowledge will bring understanding, acceptance and recognition.

¹⁷³ Yunupingu, 'Rom Watangu', 28.



Fig. 47 Lesley Maynard in 'The Squeeze' in the depths of Koonalda Cave under the Nullarbor Plain, South Australia (Source: R Edwards, AIATSIS).



Fig. 48 Mike Morwood recording rock art in central Queensland, 1976 (Source: D Lewis).

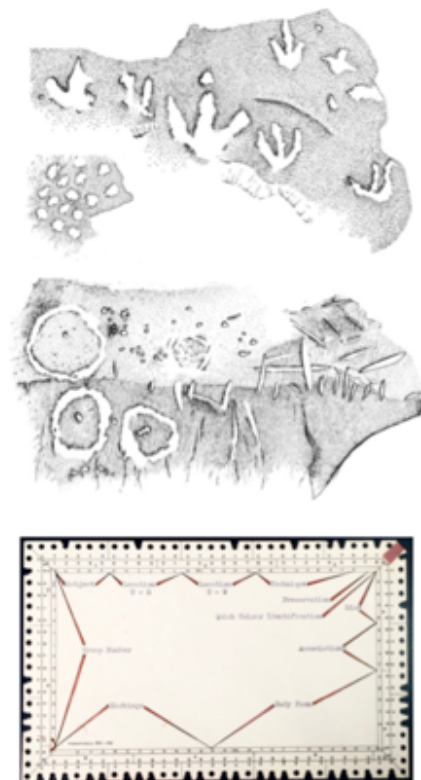


Fig. 49 Drawings of the 'Panaramitee' style rock engravings and the punch-card system Maynard used to record them (Source: M Smith / AIATSIS).

Marking Country

Lesley Maynard and ‘the Bob Edwards style’

On 12 September 1940, near the village of Montignac in the Dordogne region of southwestern France, an 18-year-old apprentice garage mechanic investigated a crevice in a rock wall under Lascaux manor. Marcel Ravidat followed the narrow passage deep into the rock until it opened out into a vast cave system. The next day he returned with three friends and a grease gun to illuminate their path. As Ravidat held the light up to the walls, the teenagers came face-to-face with the spectre of charging bulls, leaping stags and galloping horses painted in luminous wet pigment. They were the first people known to have viewed the vivid, brilliant art in the Cave of Lascaux in around fifteen thousand years. Archaeologist Abbé Breuil visited soon afterwards, on 21 September, and immediately confirmed the significance of the cavern.¹ The paintings adorning the walls were telecast around the world and celebrated as ‘the origins of art’, ‘the birth of humanity’. The cave art captured the public imagination in a way that other archaeological evidence could not. The people who created these images were unequivocally us: *Homo sapiens*. As Georges Bataille wrote in 1955, ‘Every beginning supposes what preceded it, but at one point night gave birth to day and the daylight we find at Lascaux illuminates the morning of our immediate species. It is the man who dwelt in this cave of whom for the first time and with certainty we may finally say: he produced works of art; he is of our sort.’² As the artist Pablo Picasso supposedly exclaimed on viewing the paintings in 1940, *nous n’avons rien inventé*: we have invented nothing.³

Although the images from Lascaux, alongside other European cave art, established a connection with Palaeolithic ancestors, Breuil and Bataille were at a loss as how to interpret them.⁴ What did the haunting images mean? Why had they been so carefully painted in the dark caverns of the Dordogne? In search of answers, they turned to the art of Australia.

¹ Abbé H Breuil (transl. Mary E. Boyle), *Four Hundred Centuries of Cave Art* (Montignac, Dordogne: Centre d’Etudes et Documentation Préhistoriques, 1952), 107.

² Georges Bataille (transl. Austryn Wainhouse), *Lascaux, or The Birth of Art* (Switzerland: Skira, 1955), 11.

³ The factual basis of this story has been questioned by Paul Bahn, in ‘A Lot of Bull? Pablo Picasso and Ice Age Cave Art’, *Munibe (Antropologia-Arkeologia)* 57 (2005), 217-223.

⁴ Breuil, *Four Hundred Centuries of Cave Art*, 151.

Indigenous Australians were seen as representing a stage in Western evolution, rather than having a past of their own, and the volumes of Australian ethnography that emerged in the early twentieth century were ransacked for insights into ‘the primitive mind’.⁵ Scholars such as Salomon Reinach and Abbé Breuil gleaned the concepts of totemism, sympathetic magic, and fertility rites from the Australian literature and applied them wholesale to the Palaeolithic cave art in the Dordogne.⁶ It was not until the 1960s that this method of studying rock art was challenged. Annette Laming and André Leroi-Gourhan led the charge, criticising the approach not only for its misplaced evolutionary assumptions, but also for the certainty with which Reinach and Breuil asserted a single, comprehensive hypotheses for the meaning of ancient art.⁷ As Peter Ucko and Andrée Rosenfeld reflected in 1967, ‘there may as well be one hundred reasons why Palaeolithic men decorated caves.’⁸

When the first European explorers encountered Aboriginal rock paintings and engravings they had mixed reactions. Some dismissed the art as ‘crude’ and ‘rude’; others grudgingly acknowledged that Indigenous people ‘possessed some dim notion of the Fine Arts’; while yet others were stunned by the variety and complexity of the images left scattered across the landscape.⁹ Ernest Giles described a walk through gullies full of rock art in Central Australia as a visit to ‘the aboriginal National Gallery of paintings and hieroglyphics’.¹⁰ Many early explorers struggled to align the rich array of images with their ideas about the ‘primitive’ nature of Aboriginal culture. The most notorious case was George Grey’s refusal to believe that the Wandjina paintings in the Kimberley had been created by Aboriginal people. ‘Whatever may be the age of these paintings,’ Grey wrote in 1837, ‘it is scarcely probable that they could have been executed by the self-taught savage.’¹¹ Rock art enthusiast Grahame

⁵ John Clegg, ‘From the Study of Aboriginal Art to the Archaeology of Prehistoric Pictures’, *Australian Archaeology* 16 (Jun 1983), 87-91, 87.

⁶ See Eduardo Palacio-Perez, ‘Cave Art and the Theory of Art: The Origins of the Religious Interpretation of Palaeolithic Graphics Expression’, *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 29(1) (Feb 2010), 1-14; Salomon Reinach, *The Story of Art Throughout the Ages: An Illustrated Record* (London: William Heinemann, 1904), 2-3.

⁷ André Leroi-Gourhan (transl. Norbert Guterman), *The Art of Prehistoric Man in Western Europe* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1967), 34.

⁸ Peter J Ucko and Andrée Rosenfeld, *Palaeolithic Cave Art* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967), 7. Rock art was the domain of women as well as men, as scholars such as Jo McDonald have shown in Australia: Jo McDonald, ‘Looking for a Woman’s Touch: Indications of Gender in Shelter Sites in the Sydney Basin’, in Jane Balme and Wendy Beck (eds.), *Gendered Archaeology: the second Australian Women in Archaeology Conference* (Canberra: ANH Publications, RSPAS, ANU, 1995), 92-96.

⁹ Susan Lowish, ‘Setting the Scene: Early Writing on Australian Aboriginal Art’, *Journal of Art Historiography* 4 (Jun 2011), 1-12, 4-5.

¹⁰ Ernest Giles, *Australia Twice Traversed*, vol. 1 (London: S. Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, Limited, 1889), 101.

¹¹ George Grey, *Journals of Two Expeditions of Discovery in North-West and Western Australia during the Years 1837, 38 and 39* (London: T. and W. Boone, 1841), 263.

Walsh continued this conjecture into the twenty-first century, arguing – on the basis of aesthetic evaluation – that the luminous human shaped forms were ‘pre-Aboriginal’: they represented the art tradition of an earlier race.¹²

The arrival of European society can be read on rock surfaces across Australia, as the invaders were absorbed into the existing systems of meaning: boats painted in x-ray style with cargo in the hold; saddled pack horses, pigs and buffalo; whitefellas with broad brimmed hats, smoking pipes and carrying guns. But within a generation or two of the invasion, the ancient craft of rock art came to an abrupt halt. ‘With a few exceptions,’ Lesley Maynard wrote in 1975, ‘this happened all over Australia – earlier in the South-east, later in the north of the continent.’¹³ Richard Gould’s surprise encounter with two men singing and painting in the Western Desert in 1967 stands as one of the last recorded examples of unprompted rock art creation. And forty years later, those paintings have all but disappeared. ‘They were not designed to be conserved,’ Maynard reflects, ‘They were designed to be repainted.’¹⁴

The rock art that remains is a beautiful, melancholy evocation of the dynamic religious systems and political economy of the first Australians. There are more than one hundred thousand recorded rock art sites scattered across Australia, from engravings on long-buried rock walls in Cape York to paintings on the eroded gorges, broken massifs and sloping rock shelters of the Arnhem Land escarpment.¹⁵ High quality pigments have been found at every layer in the oldest sites in the Northern Territory, suggesting, Jo McDonald and Peter Veth argue, that rock art was a fundamental component of ‘colonising repertoire’ of the first Australians.¹⁶ In the Dampier Archipelago of Western Australia, Ken Mulvaney has proposed a seven-stage Pleistocene-Holocene sequence for the estimated one million engravings at Murujuga (the Burrup Peninsula), based on sea levels and the animals depicted in the art.¹⁷

¹² Grahame L Walsh, *Bradshaws: Ancient Rock Paintings of North-West Australia* (Carouge-Geneva, Switzerland: published for the Bradshaw Foundation by Edition Limitae, 1994), 56-66; Ian J McNiven and Lynette Russell, *Appropriated Pasts: Indigenous Peoples and the Colonial Culture of Archaeology* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2005), 156.

¹³ Lesley Maynard, ‘Restoration of Aboriginal Rock Art: The Moral Problem’, *Australian Archaeology* 3 (Oct 1975), 54-60, 58.

¹⁴ Maynard, ‘Restoration of Aboriginal Rock Art’, 58.

¹⁵ June Ross, ‘Australian Rock Art’, in Claire Smith (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Global Archaeology* (New York: Springer, 2014), 686-697, 688.

¹⁶ Richard G Roberts, Rhys Jones and Michael A Smith, ‘Thermoluminescence Dating of a 50,000 Year-Old Human Occupation Site in Northern Australia’, *Nature* 345 (1990), 153-56; Jo McDonald and Peter Veth, ‘Information Exchange amongst Hunter-Gatherers of the Western Desert of Australia’, in Robert Whallon, William A Lovis and Robert K Hitchcock (eds.), *Information and Its Role in Hunter-Gatherer Bands: Ideas, Debates, and Perspectives* (Los Angeles: Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Press), 221-233.

¹⁷ Ken Mulvaney, *Murujuga Marni: Rock Art of the Macropod Hunters and Mollusc Harvesters* (Perth: UWAP

There have also been a number of claims for the depiction of extinct megafauna in the art, which Darrell Lewis and Robert Bednarik have recently reviewed and rejected.¹⁸ The oldest intimation of rock art – use of pigment on rock – comes from the Kimberley, where Sue O’Connor uncovered an ochre-stained palette at Carpenters Gap dated to about 40,000 years ago.¹⁹

The unusual survival of art across the continent brought Mike Morwood to declare in 2002 that ‘Australia is the rock art capital of the world.’²⁰ In many instances the pigment used for painting has bonded with the rock, staining the image into landscape, becoming part of the natural features. In some ways, this is how rock art should be viewed: as a fusion of the natural and the cultural. According to Indigenous lore, the Wandjina figures which Grey looked upon in 1837 with disbelief, came out of the sea and sky, created the features of the landscape and were then absorbed into the walls of rock shelters.²¹ It is common for Aboriginal people to attribute the creation of paintings and engravings to supernatural forces, instead of people.²² Many early rock art researchers assumed that this was evidence of an ancient, ‘extinct art’.²³ But to describe the art ‘as having always been there’ is simply an affirmation of the Dreaming, in which the natural and the cultural converge.²⁴

Aboriginal rock paintings and engravings are inevitably grounded in place, as they involve the representation of ancestral beings who traversed the country in the Dreaming and transformed the landscape, leaving something of themselves in its topographic features. ‘Art provides a sacred charter to the land,’ writes anthropologist Howard Morphy, ‘and producing art is one of the conditions of existence. It keeps the past alive and maintains its relevance to the present.’²⁵ Painting, engraving, ritual and ceremony help to focus the power of the Dreaming and reenergise ancestral marks. As Mike Morwood reflects, ‘symbolic systems are

Scholarly, 2015).

¹⁸ Darrell Lewis, ‘Megafauna Identification for Dummies: Arnhem Land and Kimberley “Megafauna” Paintings’, *Rock Art Research* 34(1) (2017), 82-99; Robert G Bednarik, ‘Megafauna Depictions in Australian Rock Art’, *Rock Art Research* 30(2) (2013), 197-215.

¹⁹ Sue O’Connor and Barry Fankhauser, ‘Art at 40,000BP? One Step Closer: An Ochre Covered Rock from Carpenters Gap Shelter 1, Kimberley Region, Western Australia’, in A Anderson, I Lilley and S O’Connor (eds.), *Histories of Old Ages: Essays in Honour of Rhys Jones* (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2001), 287-301.

²⁰ Michael J Morwood, *Visions from the Past: The Archaeology of Australian Aboriginal Art* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2002), 37.

²¹ Howard Morphy, *Aboriginal Art* (London: Phaidon Press, 1998), 55.

²² Robert Edwards, ‘Comparative Study of Rock Engravings in South and Central Australia’, *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Australia* 90 (1966), 33-38, 36.

²³ See, for example, Charles P Mountford, *Aboriginal Art* (Melbourne: Longmans, 1961), 29.

²⁴ Mike Smith, *The Archaeology of Australia’s Deserts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 221.

²⁵ Morphy, *Aboriginal Art*, 5.

not just peripheral decoration for the core elements of the culture; they are integral to cultural definition and operation.²⁶ Charles Mountford observed elders rubbing rock surfaces to release their life essence in the course of ceremonies to maintain and increase natural resources.²⁷ Dick Kimber has recorded the ways in which Pintupi men greeted their ancestors through art, adding stencils of their hands to decorated rock walls with the words ‘hullo old man’.²⁸ More recently, June Ross has highlighted the importance of sensory contact with totemic designs, describing evidence of abraded grooves, pits, and battered edges as ‘associated rock art traditions.’²⁹ The old masters who painted and etched the designs found across Australia were not making ‘art’; they were *marking country*, curating the Dreaming.

The systematic study of these marks is a relatively new discipline in Australia. The purely aesthetic approach of the early explorers developed into a more descriptive and quantitative craft in the early twentieth century, dramatically increasing the number of recorded art sites. ‘Overwhelmingly,’ Mike Morwood and Claire Smith reflect in their survey of the field, ‘these records resulted from the activities of committed individuals, rather than institutions’: Percy Tresize in Cape York, Ian Crawford and Bruce Wright in Western Australia, Charles Mountford in Central Australia, Frederick McCarthy in Sydney and northern Australia, Eric Brandl and George Chaloupka in Arnhem Land, and Bob Edwards in South Australia and the Northern Territory.³⁰ Most research into the history of Aboriginal rock art was guided by questions of meaning, sequence and chronology. Is it possible to discern purpose and subject matter in rock art? How have styles of rock art changed over time? And when were these pictures created?

The most troublesome of these questions was chronology. Even with the advent of radiocarbon dating, it remains a challenge to date pigment, thus antiquity must be inferred: from associated archaeology and its place in the landscape, the rate of weathering, discolouration or patination, or the technology and fauna depicted in the art. A range of ingenious dating techniques have been applied rock art, from Cation ratio dating (a technique applied to rock varnish overlying engravings) to optically stimulated luminescence dating (which tests grains of sand in mudwasp nests overlying or underlying rock paintings). But the

²⁶ Morwood, *Visions from the past*, xi.

²⁷ Charles P Mountford, *Nomads of the Australian Desert* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1976), 543.

²⁸ As quoted in Smith, *The Archaeology of Australia's Deserts*, 220.

²⁹ June Ross, ‘Rock Art, Ritual and Relationships: An Archaeological Analysis of Rock Art from the Central Australian Arid Zone’, PhD thesis, University of New England, 2003, 150.

³⁰ Michael J Morwood and Claire Smith, ‘Rock Art Research in Australia 1974-94’, *Australian Archaeology* 39 (Dec 1994), 19-38, 23.

most conclusive evidence is when rock art has been buried or detached and then uncovered in the course of an archaeological excavation – or if it depicts elements of known, datable events, such as the winged sails of British ships.

‘It is difficult,’ John Mulvaney lamented in 1969, ‘for a prehistorian to assess Aboriginal art.’³¹ Yet within a decade of these words, rock art research had emerged as a dynamic, independent discipline that was growing quickly alongside, and increasingly integrated with, the field of Australian archaeology. This chapter touches on some of the main figures and influences in Australian rock art as a distinct, but parallel field of study. As John Clegg, the first academic to teach rock art at an Australian university, observed in 1983, while the field of Australian archaeology has become increasingly integrated with ethnography, many rock art specialists have moved in the opposite direction, reducing ancient images to statistics, proportions and punch cards.³² Ironically, at the same time as researchers were moving away from studying art from an aesthetic viewpoint, the beauty and power of Aboriginal art began to be recognised and celebrated around the world. This appreciation of Aboriginal fine art, in turn, stimulated public interest in, and funds for, rock art research.

Although the craft of rock art waned in the twentieth century, it is important to remember that the dynamic cultures behind it, and the significance of art within those cultures, did not. As the Indigenous artist Wandjuk Marika wrote in 1976: ‘There is no real distinction for us between art and life; art is the expression of our beliefs, it upholds the laws by which we live, and is an important element in the way in which we relate to the physical world around us.’³³ Indeed, art has played a powerful role in Aboriginal political and cultural expression since invasion. Galarrwuy Yunupingu draws particular attention to the 1963 bark petition, through which his people, the Yolngu, opposed the federal government’s leasing of their land at Yirrkala on the Gove Peninsula and demanded recognition of their rights to country. The bark painting showed the clan designs of all the areas that were being threatened by the mining company. ‘It showed, in ways in which raising a multi-coloured piece of calico could never do, the ancient rights and responsibilities we have towards our country,’ Yunupingu wrote.³⁴ By submitting the bark painting as a legal document, the Yolngu were using art, in another

³¹ John Mulvaney, *The Prehistory of Australia* (New York: Praeger, 1969), 174.

³² Clegg, ‘From the Study of Aboriginal Art to the Archaeology of Prehistoric Pictures’, 87.

³³ Wandjuk Marika, ‘Introduction’, in Robert Edwards (ed.), *Aboriginal Art in Australia* (Sydney: Ure Smith, 1978), 6-9, 6.

³⁴ Galarrwuy Yunupingu, ‘The Black/White Conflict’, in Wally Caruana (ed.), *Windows on the Dreaming* (Canberra: Australian National Gallery, 1989), 13-17, 14.

way, to mark their country. ‘Our painting,’ Yunupingu observed, ‘is a political act.’³⁵

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Australia’s equivalent of the ancient Pleistocene cave art of the Dordogne lies deep below the Nullarbor Plain, an arid expanse bordering the Australian Bight in South Australia. Twenty-two kilometres inland, set in open steppe, a crater-like sink-hole plunges into the monotonous plain. The sheer sides drop eight-metres and then slope to a depth of twenty-five metres. Two passages lead off the sunken floor: the ‘Lake Passage’, which extends for six hundred metres through a series of underground lakes – some salt, some fresh – to a depth of ninety metres below the Nullarbor; and the ‘Art Passage’, the main chamber, which narrows after sixty metres into a small cavern known as the Squeeze. ‘Koonalda Cave,’ in the words of Richard Wright, ‘has a cool and awesome Gothic atmosphere – gloomy cathedral-sized chambers, precipitous boulder strewn slopes and mirror-smooth lake surfaces.’³⁶

The eccentric Hungarian-Australian amateur archaeologist Alexander Gallus was the first to investigate the archaeology of Koonalda Cave, joining a team from the Australian Speleological Federation in 1956 as the ‘referee for the Prehistoric expedition’.³⁷ Norman Tindale had earlier identified worked stone tools around the lip of the sink hole, but it was Gallus, over several field seasons from 1956 to 1973, who uncovered evidence of Aboriginal activity deep within the cave system.³⁸ He also found clues to what they were doing in the depths of the earth. Scattered throughout the excavation, he found debris from a strong flint-like raw material which had evidently been quarried to make stone tools.³⁹ Even more intriguingly, on his second field season he recorded a mysterious panel of engravings on the walls of the Art Passage, which reminded him of the so-called ‘macaroni’ art ‘which

³⁵ ‘If they wouldn’t listen to our words, they might try and understand our paintings.’ Yunupingu, ‘The Black/White Conflict’, 13.

³⁶ RVS Wright, ‘Preface’, in RVS Wright (ed.), *Archaeology of the Gallus site, Koonalda cave* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1971), iii.

³⁷ Alexander Gallus, ‘Results of the Exploration of Koonalda Cave, 1956-1968’, in RVS Wright (ed.), *Archaeology of the Gallus site, Koonalda cave* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1971), 87-133, 87.

³⁸ Ian Dunlop made a film of the 1960-1 expedition, narrated by Jo Jennings, which attracted AIAS funds for the 1965 trip. Ian Dunlop (dir.), *Under the Nullabor* (1962), Sydney: Australian Commonwealth Film Unit.

³⁹ Gallus and Wright disagreed over the terminology of the high-grade raw material that was mined in the depths of Koonalda Cave, with Gallus naming it ‘chalcedony’ and Wright calling it ‘flint’. Josephine Flood opted for the broad category of ‘silica’ in *Rock Art of the Dreamtime*. I have used the more evocative term ‘flint’ in this chapter. Gallus, ‘Results of the Exploration of Koonalda Cave’, 128; RVS Wright, ‘An Ethnographic Background to Koonalda Cave Prehistory’, in RVS Wright (ed.), *Archaeology of the Gallus site, Koonalda cave* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1971), 1-16, 6; Josephine Flood, *Rock Art of the Dreamtime: Images of Ancient Australia* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1997), 28.

characterise the beginning of cave art in the Younger Palaeolithic of western Europe'.⁴⁰

Gallus eagerly reported the discovery to his colleagues: he claimed to have found Ice Age art alongside evidence of an ancient mining industry under the Nullarbor Plain. The news was received with scepticism. Gallus was a maverick intellectual, with a thick Hungarian accent and a devoted following outside academia. He openly mocked 'Cambridge methods' and instead interpreted the Australian past through a combination of inference, intuition and complex European theory.⁴¹ Amongst the wilder of his 'deductions' was his firmly held belief that people had lived at Bain's Quarry near Keilor in Victoria for 'up to a million years' and that the first Australian was 'naturally a Homo erectus'.⁴² 'My deductions have always proved right,' Gallus once boasted to a reporter, 'when more technological methods were used.'⁴³

In February 1967, the AIAS sent Richard Wright from the University of Sydney to investigate Gallus' archaeological claims, along with rock art specialists Bob Edwards and Lesley Maynard to conduct a systematic survey of the supposed Ice Age art.⁴⁴ The resulting report, 'Archaeology of the Gallus Site, Koonalda Cave', is an intriguingly contradictory document. Wright's excavation report is delivered alongside, but completely separate from Gallus' contrary interpretation. They even adopted different terminology to describe raw materials and tool-types. 'No hybrid could have been produced,' Wright notes in the preface, 'without mutilating surgery that would have been unacceptable to the authors of both parts.'⁴⁵

Building on Gallus' original trench, Wright dug a six-metre-deep pit and uncovered evidence that the cave had been visited sporadically during the last Ice Age, between 22,000 and 15,000 years ago.⁴⁶ People stopped using the site as the sea level began to rise again, bringing the coastline closer and increasing the rainfall in the region. Wright speculated that rising seas would have washed away the nearby coastal dunes and exposed fresh nodules of flint on the surface, leading to the abandonment of Koonalda Cave: why venture into the earth for a material that could be found more easily on the surface? The charcoal Wright and Gallus

⁴⁰ Gallus, 'Results of the Exploration of Koonalda Cave', 87.

⁴¹ John Mulvaney, 'Dr Gallus and Australian Archaeology', *The Artefact* 21 (1998), 4-8.

⁴² Alexander Gallus, 'A Summary of the Results of Excavations at Keilor', *The Artefact* 33 (1974), 1-9, 1, 5.

⁴³ C Forbes, 'Keilor: The Key to Australia's Past?' *The Age*, 29 July 1978.

⁴⁴ Edwards documented the 1967 expedition in his film: Robert Edwards (dir.), *Flint Miners of the Nullabor* (1967), Adelaide: South Australian Museum in cooperation with AIAS.

⁴⁵ Wright, 'Preface', iii.

⁴⁶ RVS Wright, 'The Cave', in RVS Wright (ed.), *Archaeology of the Gallus site, Koonalda cave* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1971), 22-29, 24-26.

used to date the site came from the remains of ancient hand-held torches – bundles of burnt twigs, scorched roots and pieces of blackened wood that had once illuminated the dark cavern.

While Wright focused on the flint mines in the Lake Passage, Edwards and Maynard recorded the mesmerising patterns on the walls of the Art Passage. There were a few fresh markings – graffiti from European times – but most were old, heavily eroded grooves. The fine ‘patina’ that covered them reinforced the interpretation that the cave had been used frequently in the deep past and then abandoned. The ‘most visually impressive’ panel was on the south-west wall, where a continuous frieze of entrancing grooved patterns – or ‘finger fluting’ – had been made by ancient handstrokes: three to four fingers held together, clawing into the soft limestone wall, converging into fan-shaped forms, lattice grids, and long, meandering, grooved channels. There were some incised markings on walls and boulders, which had been engraved with stone tools, as well as more defined patterns such as concentric circles and a herringbone design. Everything was covered in the powder of limestone dust – or ‘moonmilk’.⁴⁷

The Art Passage at Koonalda narrows near the end and slopes sharply into part of the cave known as the Squeeze, a five-metre crawl tunnel, barely a foot high at its narrowest point. The darkness in this small cavity is total. Beyond the Squeeze, the passage opens onto a precipitous ledge overlooking an underground lake twenty metres below. Even here, the low ceiling is covered in wall markings and a single worked piece of flint was found. Curiously, the Squeeze – the remotest part of the Art Passage – is the only part of the cave where mining was carried out alongside the wall markings. ‘This vein does not seem to be intrinsically superior to flint found in the more accessible outcrops,’ Edwards and Maynard mused in their report. ‘But was it, in some magical or spiritual way, the better for coming from the deepest, darkest part of the cave?’⁴⁸ A small pit excavated at the entrance of the Squeeze revealed strong associations between flaked tools and a 20,000-year-old fragment of charcoal, leading the researchers to conclude that the finger fluting in this part of the cave was indeed Ice Age art.⁴⁹ Edwards and Maynard, however, rejected Gallus’ comparisons with European ‘macaroni’ art.

⁴⁷ Lesley Maynard and Robert Edwards, ‘Wall Markings’, in RVS Wright (ed.), *Archaeology of the Gallus site, Koonalda cave* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1971), 59-80, 70.

⁴⁸ Maynard and Edwards, ‘Wall Markings’, 76.

⁴⁹ Wright, ‘The Cave’, 28.



Fig. 50 Looking down into Koonalda Cave from the Nullarbor Plain (Source: R Jones, AIATSIS).



Fig. 51 Richard Wright (centre) inspects the sieves during the 1967 excavation at Koonalda Cave (Source: R Edwards, AIATSIS).

There are few ethnographic accounts of Aboriginal people using Koonalda Cave. Anthropologists such as Daisy Bates, who spent time with the tribes of the Nullabor coastal region, recorded how Aboriginal people feared the plain. A ‘hideous and gigantic snake’, called *ganba* or *Jeedara*, lived in the caves and blowholes on the plain and devoured all intruders.⁵⁰ ‘Weird hissing noises from the blowholes were the sound of the monstrous snake’s breathing,’ writes Flood, ‘and in the Dreamtime he had pushed up the steep-sea-cliffs so as to swim along beneath them.’⁵¹ Bates described Koonalda as an important stopping place on the ‘native highway’ that ran roughly parallel to the coast, but few Aboriginal people were known to have descended into the sinkhole.⁵² This history helps explain the archaeological silence in the cave over the last fifteen thousand years, but it also means that there is no Aboriginal lore about the meaning of the patterns on the walls of the Art Passage.

Perhaps, Gallus suggested, they were signposts, indicating where to find nodules of flint.⁵³ Engravings in other parts of Australia have been similarly interpreted: as maps along songlines and between resources and waterholes. Another early theory was that the finger fluting was the ‘accidental’ consequence of ‘people groping their way in the dark’ – such was the softness of the limestone. Edwards and Maynard even wondered whether the patterns represented ‘an instinctive human impulse to “make marks”’, admitting that many members of the 1967 expedition had ‘similar impulses’ when confronted with a patch of smooth, freshly broken surface.⁵⁴ Ultimately, they reasoned, ‘none of the pragmatic explanations – mining indicators, accidental marks, bone working or scraping off powder – account for those few definite patterns found among the mass of random markings.’⁵⁵ It seemed most likely that the wall markings were deliberately made as part of ritual activity, either to create designs or as part of the process of marking country.⁵⁶

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Bob Edwards documented the excavations and rock art recording during the 1967 expedition in his film *Flint Miners of the Nullabor*, using tin foil reflectors to illuminate the eerie

⁵⁰ Maynard and Edwards, ‘Wall Markings’, 76.

⁵¹ Flood, *Rock Art of the Dreamtime*, 27.

⁵² Daisy Bates (1938), as quoted in Wright, ‘An Ethnographic Background to Koonalda Cave’, 13.

⁵³ Gallus, ‘Results of the Exploration of Koonalda Cave’, 128

⁵⁴ Maynard and Edwards, ‘Wall Markings’, 79

⁵⁵ Maynard and Edwards, ‘Wall Markings’, 79

⁵⁶ Gallus thought Koonalda was a place of ‘spiritual power’, and made the case for stone arrangements to be viewed as ‘ritual theatres’, ‘megalithic construction’, ‘proto-sculpture’.

patterns in the dark depths of Koonalda. It was the first of many films on Aboriginal Australia that he directed as the Curator of the South Australian Museum (replacing Tindale, who retired in 1965). In another film he paid homage to the mighty canoe trees that lined the Murray River (and unexpectedly triggered a new wave of canoe building in the process); in others he documented archaeological investigations in Arnhem Land and filmed the luminous ‘archaic faces’ engraved in the Cleland Hills in central Australia.⁵⁷

Edwards’ interest in Aboriginal Australia had been kindled at an early age. As a child, he often joined his grandmother, a field naturalist, shell collector and ecologist, on long fieldtrips into the bush around Adelaide, and in the summers he played with Aboriginal people at Goolwa near the mouth of the Murray River, learning how to throw a boomerang.⁵⁸ At the age of thirteen he began to attend the Royal Society of South Australia, rubbing shoulders with anthropological luminaries such as Norman Tindale, Charles Mountford, Ted Strehlow, Harold Cooper, TD Campbell, Douglas Mawson and Andrew Abbey. He accompanied them on surface collecting expeditions into the Flinders Ranges and Central Australia, learning about the manufacture of stone tools and their various ‘uses and distribution’.⁵⁹ Campbell fondly described him as ‘one of our local super enthusiasts’.⁶⁰ It was not until Edwards worked at Fromm’s Landing with John Mulvaney in 1963 that he gained his first formal experience of archaeology.⁶¹

His main passion, however, was photography, and it was Mountford who taught him to photograph rock art: how to avoid all angles, so as not to skew the dimensions of a painting or engraving, and to patiently observe how light and shadows interact with the rock face before taking a photograph. Edwards bought his first camera at the age of thirteen in Rundle Street for 10 shillings and a sixpence, using all his pocket money. The Kodak was the first of hundreds he would collect over his lifetime, most of which followed him into the field. He joined the camera club at Thebarton Boys Technical High School and even built his own

⁵⁷ Edwards, *Flint Miners of the Nullarbor*; Robert Edwards (dir.), *Aboriginal Canoe Trees of the Murray* (1968), Adelaide: South Australian Museum in cooperation with AIAS; Robert Edwards (dir.), *Aboriginal Arnhem Land* (1969), Adelaide: South Australian Museum in cooperation with AIAS.

Robert Edwards (dir.), *Prehistoric Rock Art of the Cleland Hills* (1968), Adelaide: South Australian Museum in cooperation with AIAS.

⁵⁸ Dick Richards, ‘Bob Edwards: From Orchardist to Ethnographer’, Transcript, National Museum of Australia, ‘Bob Edwards: A Tribute’, 22 March 2011.

⁵⁹ TD Campbell and R Edwards, *Stone Implements* (Adelaide: S.A. Government Printer, 1966).

⁶⁰ TD Campbell to Dermot Casey, 27 September 1963, Dermot Casey Papers, AIATSIS, Canberra, MS 1326/A/h/1-3, Box 1.

⁶¹ Robert Edwards to WP Crowcroft, Director of the South Australian Museum, ‘Application for Curator of Anthropology’, 12 November 1964, courtesy of Bob Edwards; in possession of the author.

darkroom in the family home. ‘I actually had the audacity to write a paper on field photography at some stage,’ he told me in 2015, adding: ‘I wouldn’t write that now.’⁶² It is hard to find an early archaeological text in Australia that does not feature his photography.

But despite this passion and his extensive field experience, Edwards never gained a formal education in archaeology or anthropology. Acute labour shortages during and following World War II forced him to leave school to help on the family property at Marion.⁶³ He continued to visit and record Aboriginal sites, but in his holidays and weekends, alongside family life and various jobs as a horticulturalist, fruit grower, wine maker, house decorator, market gardener, and marketing director. It was not until he was appointed Tindale’s replacement at the South Australian Museum in 1965 that he was able to devote himself entirely to his passion. On learning of the appointment, he wrote to his friend Dermot Casey, ‘There is no doubt I have been extended the greatest opportunity of my life.’⁶⁴

Although Edwards emerged from an amateur tradition, he was attuned to the benefits of a systematic approach to Aboriginal sites. Even on his earliest expeditions into the bush, he focused on creating ‘statistical data’, by counting, tracing and measuring rock art, which could then be used ‘for analysis by computer methods’.⁶⁵ Over several years this patient, quantitative approach began to yield surprising results.

In 1961, he embarked on a three-year survey in northeast South Australia with his childhood mentor, Charles Mountford. They jumped from sheep station to sheep station in pursuit of art sites.⁶⁶ One of their initial survey areas was the series of engraving sites at Panaramitee, which Mountford had first recorded in 1926. They counted, traced and photographed over a thousand ‘pecked’ figures, dominated by animal tracks and circles, as well as crescents, human footprints, radiating lines, and a few other nonfigurative designs. The same narrow range of motifs appeared in a number of sites across the station. Some early European explorers believed the engravings to be fossil footprints, or the result of certain algae and

⁶² Bob Edwards, pers. comm, 30 November 2015. The report he referred to is held at AIATSIS Library. It includes advice on camera settings, the range and variety of equipment required for remote fieldwork and practical tips on how to manage the humidity of Arnhem Land and the dust of Central Australia. Robert Edwards, ‘Still Photography for the Fieldworker’, May 1966, AIATSIS Library, PMS 546, Doc. 66/392.

⁶³ Edwards to Crowcroft, 12 November 1964.

⁶⁴ Robert Edwards to Dermot Casey, 10 May 1965, Dermot Casey Papers, AIATSIS, Canberra, MS 1326/B/b/i, Box 2.

⁶⁵ Edwards to Crowcroft, 12 November 1964.

⁶⁶ A map of these sites is included in Bob Edwards to Jack Golson, 25 November 1963, John Mulvaney Papers, National Library of Australia, Canberra, MS 9615/1/92, Box 12.

lichens eating into the rock.⁶⁷ But they were human markings, made by precise pecking with a hand-held stone hammer into hard rock outcrops and deeply weathered and covered by a 'desert varnish' or 'patina' – a shiny, dark rust-coloured accretion.⁶⁸ Mountford, and geologist Herbert Basedow before him, believed the 'desert varnish' to be a sign of great antiquity.⁶⁹ When Edwards asked two Aboriginal elders, Jummintjarra and Migenteri, about the origins of such engravings, he was told that they 'have always been there.'⁷⁰

Panaramitee sheep station was bare and parched from years of drought when Edwards and Mountford roamed across it together, but as they neared the end of their survey a series of spectacular thunderstorms transformed the country, with heavy rain filling rockholes and causing the creeks to flow.⁷¹ The inundation highlighted another curious feature of the engravings: they all appeared to be adjacent to some form of water supply.⁷² Over the course of the three-year survey, Edwards began to notice the same weathered, track-and-circle engravings at other sites in southern and central Australia, almost all associated with water sources and occupational debris.⁷³ By counting the number of figures in these motif categories in each of these sites, he was able to turn broad similarities into statistics, revealing that the relative proportions of the various motifs were almost identical. He had uncovered a 'stylistic unit': the artistic signature of an ancient, widespread cultural tradition. 'It is significant,' he wrote, 'that the relative frequencies are very similar whether the sites being compared are close to one another, or 1,300 km or more apart.'⁷⁴ The homogeneity of the

⁶⁷ Herbert M Hale and Norman B Tindale, 'Observations on Aborigines of the Flinders Ranges and Records of Rock Carvings and Paintings', *Records of the South Australian Museum* 3(1) (1925), 45-60, 55.

⁶⁸ They were originally thought to have been made with the indirect percussion of a stone hammer and chisel, but experimental archaeology suggests otherwise. Flood, *Rock Art of the Dreamtime*, 103.

⁶⁹ Norman B Tindale, Herbert M Hale, Charles P Mountford, 'A Unique Example of Aboriginal Rock Carving at Panaramitee North', *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Australia* 53 (1929), 245-248; Herbert Basedow, 'Aboriginal Rock Carvings of Great Antiquity in South Australia', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 44 (1914), 195-211.

⁷⁰ Edwards, 'Comparative Study of Rock Engravings', 36. He worked closely with Aboriginal men on all his surveys and carefully recorded the Dreaming stories and oral histories they shared with him. He recognised the value of this local lore for they 'add to the scant knowledge of past Aboriginal history of these areas.' Robert Edwards, 'Report on Survey of Rock Engravings and Other Aboriginal Relics in the Leigh Creek – Flinders Range Area of South Australia, Feb-Mar 1965', AIATSIS Library, Canberra, PMS 543, Doc. 65/269, 5.

⁷¹ Charles P Mountford and Robert Edwards, 'Rock Engravings of Panaramitee Station, North-Eastern South Australia', *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Australia* 86 (1963), 131-146, 132.

⁷² Mountford and Edwards, 'Rock Engravings of Panaramitee Station', 132.

⁷³ Robert Edwards, 'Second Progress Report on Survey of Rock Engravings in North-Eastern South Australia', Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Interim Council Meeting, 4-5 September 1964, AIATSIS Library, Canberra, PMS 545, Doc. 64/176.

⁷⁴ Robert Edwards, 'Art and Aboriginal Prehistory', in John Mulvaney and Jack Golson (eds.), *Aboriginal Man and Environment in Australia* (Canberra: ANU Press, 1971), 356-67, 362.

‘stylistic unit’ suggested to him that ‘these motifs predate the time when tribal boundaries became rigid and separate cultural entities developed’.⁷⁵

In late June 1966 Edwards joined a team led by John Mulvaney to record and photograph a series of sites in the Northern Territory.⁷⁶ At Ingaladdi on Willeroo Station, west of Katherine, they dug at the base of a sandstone outcrop covered in pecked tracks and abraded grooves that resembled the Panaramitee engravings. In the lower levels of the pit they were excited to find detached pieces of sandstone bearing pecked engravings of emu and kangaroo tracks. It gave them the first positive date for rock art in Australia, and, at 5000-7000 years old, it confirmed Edwards’ belief that the track-and-circle tradition was ancient.⁷⁷

The widespread engraving tradition revealed something intriguing about rock art in ancient Australia, and it was a point of major discussion at a small gathering of rock art specialists and archaeologists at Panaramitee, following the 1969 ANZAAS Congress in Adelaide. For a while the track-and-circle designs were referred to as ‘the Bob Edwards style’. After all, Lesley Maynard reflected, ‘Edwards made the main contribution of illustrating and describing the range of motifs, environmental setting, archaeological associations, probable age, and vital statistics, but,’ she added, ‘Godfather Bob never christened his infant.’⁷⁸ That task fell to Maynard, a young rock art scholar making waves at the University of Sydney. She proposed the more general term, ‘Panaramitee’, as the engravings at Panaramitee sheep station, in her eyes, constituted ‘a classic assemblage of this type’.⁷⁹

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Lesley Maynard (née McMaha) was the first person to take a purely archaeological approach to the study of Aboriginal rock art. She was inspired by international scholars such as Annette Laming and André Leroi-Gourhan, who argued for a ‘topographic’ approach to rock art. At Lascaux, Leroi-Gourhan had demonstrated how the distribution, pattern and range of motifs in an art panel could be studied as deliberate arrangements, reflecting fundamental

⁷⁵ Edwards, ‘Art and Aboriginal Prehistory’, 363.

⁷⁶ Robert Edwards, ‘Preliminary Fieldwork Report on Recording of Cave Paintings and Rock Engraving Sites, Northern Territory’, September 1966, AIATSIS Library, Canberra, PMS 540, Doc. 66/456.

⁷⁷ Robert Edwards, ‘Application for Research Grant: The Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies’, 1970, courtesy of Bob Edwards; in possession of the author.

⁷⁸ Lesley Maynard, ‘Comment on Frederick D. McCarthy’s “Rock Art Sequences: A Matter of Clarification”’, *Rock Art Research* 5(1) (May 1988), 30-31, 30.

⁷⁹ Lesley Maynard, ‘The Archaeology of Australian Aboriginal Art’, in SM Mead (ed.), *Exploring the Visual Art of Oceania* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1979), 83-110, 92.



Fig. 52 Bob Edwards (front left) examines a stone circle at Panaramitee, South Australia, 1969 (Source: R Jones, AIATSIS).



Fig. 53 Harry Lourandos at an engraving site at Mount Cameron, north-west Tasmania, 1969 (Source: R Jones, AIATSIS).

changes in social organisation, group interaction and patterns of land use. Rather than divining the meaning of individual images, he searched for the range of social and economic information that is encoded in the art. ‘The only suitable tool for this sort of factual survey and analysis,’ he argued, ‘is the punch-card tabulator and sorter, which facilitates the handling of large quantities of evidence and at the same time assures the objectivity of the dialogue between the latter-day scholar and the prehistoric artist.’⁸⁰ Before coming to Australia, Patricia Vinnicombe made similar breakthroughs with her quantitative analyses of a range of sites in the Drakensberg region and Maggs in the western Cape of South Africa, demonstrating that artists were highly selective in their portrayal of animal species and that ‘the paintings are neither a menu nor a check list’.⁸¹ In her 1965 Honours thesis – the first on rock art in Australia – Maynard began to adapt the techniques of Leroi-Gourhan to the engravings in the Hawkesbury sandstone in the Sydney basin.⁸² By observing the topography of rock art – the location of individual motifs and their relationship to the whole art panel – Maynard was able to pioneer an archaeological approach to rock art.

Thousands of engravings mark the Hawkesbury sandstone around Sydney. There are outlines of British boats alongside people, spirit creatures, marsupials, birds, fish, weapons, and footprints, but there is very little information about what the figures mean or why they were engraved, other than a contemporary Indigenous view that they are ‘sacred’. ‘Despite the fact that some of them are less than two hundred years old,’ Maynard argued, ‘they are all as prehistoric as the Palaeolithic paintings in Lascaux Cave.’⁸³ Without direct knowledge of the social context of production, the kinship group of the artist, or the artist’s immediate intentions, Maynard mused, the rock art specialist must rely on visual clues, such as anatomical details and artistic techniques, patterns in the distribution and arrangement of motifs, and the cultural and geographic context: ‘he is deluded if he believes he can do anything about the meaning of a figure except speculate on it.’⁸⁴ ‘My reason for shedding gloom and despair upon the search for meaning in prehistoric Australian rock art is that I believe the study of this material to be basically an archaeological one...,’ Maynard

⁸⁰ Leroi-Gourhan, *The Art of Prehistoric Man in Western Europe*, 35.

⁸¹ Patricia Vinnicombe, *People of the Eland: Rock Paintings of the Drakensberg Bushmen as a Reflection of Their Life and Thought* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1976), 151. Patricia Vinnicombe, ‘Rock-painting analysis’, *The South African Archaeological Bulletin* (1967), 129-141.

⁸² Lesley McMahan, ‘A Quantitative Analysis of the Aboriginal Rock Carvings in the District of Sydney and the Hawkesbury River’, BA Honours thesis, University of Sydney, 1965.

⁸³ Maynard, ‘The Archaeology of Australian Aboriginal Art’, 84.

⁸⁴ Maynard, ‘The Archaeology of Australian Aboriginal Art’, 86.

explained. ‘These methods may not tell you why, but they will make a start on who, when, where, and how.’⁸⁵

Maynard studied the engravings in the Hawkesbury sandstone as if they were artefacts, breaking motifs down into their various structural attributes, measuring each element, and then recording the information using a punch-card system. She brushed the rock surface, chalked the grooves and laid down a scale or a grid, measured the size and depth of the engraving and then recorded and photographed the art. It was a slow and mechanical process, as ‘data’ was incrementally accrued: Maynard later published a diary of her recording practice with the (half-joking) title ‘day by dreary day’.⁸⁶ Once a panel of art was converted into ‘data’, Maynard was able to analyse recurrent attributes, how they clustered in a site, and then compare that information with other motifs and with art panels in other sites. ‘With hindsight,’ her supervisor, John Clegg, reflected, ‘it is clear that [Maynard’s] 1965 work was a landmark.’⁸⁷ It set a new standard for Australian rock art research and tied the young field into parallel debates about ‘processual archaeology’ in Europe, America and South Africa.

Maynard continued to work on the Sydney engravings in the late-1960s, but the scope of her study expanded. The work with Edwards at Koonalda Cave in February 1967 had given her a glimpse of what truly ancient art in Australia looked like, while the survey of the Hawkesbury sandstone engravings, on soft exposed material, evidently reflected a more recent art tradition; but how did they fit together in time and space? What was the history of rock art production in Australia, and how had it changed over time? These questions drove her to embark on an archaeological synthesis of Australian rock art, which in turn led her to Edwards’ work on the track-and-circle engravings of southern and central Australia.

There had been early attempts to summarise the regional and chronological evidence of rock art into a pan-Australia sequence, but Maynard was the first to adopt an archaeological approach to the evidence.⁸⁸ And, drawing upon emerging dating evidence, she attempted ‘to

⁸⁵ Maynard, ‘The Archaeology of Australian Aboriginal Art’, 86-87.

⁸⁶ Lesley Maynard, ‘Day by Dreary Day: A Few Jottings from the Aboriginal Relics Diary’, *Napawi* 2 (1973), 6-8.

⁸⁷ Clegg, ‘From the Study of Aboriginal Art to the Archaeology of Prehistoric Pictures’, 88.

⁸⁸ Ross, ‘Australian Rock Art’, 691; Lesley Maynard, ‘An Archaeological Approach to the Study of Australian Rock Art’, MA thesis, University of Sydney, 1976. For earlier pan-Australia sequences see, for example, Daniel Sutherland Davidson, *A Preliminary Consideration of Aboriginal Australian Decorative Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1937); Frederick D McCarthy, *Australian Aboriginal Rock Art* (Sydney: Trustees of the Australian Museum, 1958); Charles P Mountford, *Aboriginal Art* (Longmans, 1961); Andreas

correlate rock art with other aspects of Australian prehistory'.⁸⁹ She also proposed a new classificatory system for the study of rock art: a common vocabulary with 'clear definitions of terms' to minimise 'value judgements' and 'individual differences' in the recording process.⁹⁰ Clegg was particularly attuned to the biases inherent in rock art recording, taking the extreme view that any claim for image identification 'must be scrupulously rejected', as it is impossible to verify the intention of the artist. He proposed that even figurative motifs that resembled 'people', 'fish' or 'whales' should be labelled as 'xpeople', 'xfish', 'xwhales'.⁹¹ He outlined some of these challenges in his MA Thesis, which he playfully titled 'Mathesis Words; Mathesis Pictures'.⁹²

The Koonalda engravings, although ancient, were largely an enigma, as deep cave art was so rare across the continent. The pervasiveness of Panaramitee engravings, on the other hand, became the key to Maynard's sequence. She found less consistency in the tradition than Edwards had claimed, but she agreed that they represented a distinct 'cultural unit'. The breadth of her survey also allowed her to consider engravings in Laura in Queensland, Mount Cameron West in northern Tasmania and Ingaladdi in the Northern Territory, which she believed were 'essentially the same style.'⁹³ The Tasmanian engravings were of particular importance as they presented a means to date the art. If the engravings at Mount Cameron West were indeed part of the same cultural tradition, then the Panaramitee style must predate the formation of Bass Strait around 12,000 years ago.

In 1974, Maynard argued that there were three major identifiable styles in Australian rock art, which she attempted to put into a chronological sequence.⁹⁴ There was the ancient deep cave art, such as the finger fluting she and Edwards had recorded at Koonalda; the 'Panaramitee' engravings, a homogenous and widely distributed Pleistocene rock art tradition; and the diverse and regionalised traditions of the Holocene, as represented by 'Simple Figurative styles', such as the Sydney-Hawkesbury engravings, and 'Complex Figurative styles', such

Lommel, 'The Rock Art of Australia', in Hans-Georg Bandi *et al*, *The Art of the Stone Age: Forty Thousand Years of Rock Art* (London: Methuen, 1961), 205-237.

⁸⁹ Maynard, 'The Archaeology of Australian Aboriginal Art', 87.

⁹⁰ Lesley Maynard, 'Classification and Terminology in Australian Rock Art', in Peter J Ucko (ed.), *Form in Indigenous Art: Schematisation in the Art of Aboriginal Australia and Prehistoric Europe* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1977), 387-402, 393.

⁹¹ John Clegg, 'A Saussurian Model of Prehistoric Art', *The Artefact* 2(4) (Dec 1977), 151-60, 156.

⁹² John Kay Clegg, 'Mathesis Words; Mathesis Pictures', MA thesis, University of Sydney, 1978. Later published as John Clegg, *Notes towards Mathesis art* (Balmain: Clegg Calendars, 1981).

⁹³ Maynard, 'The Archaeology of Australian Aboriginal Art', 95.

⁹⁴ Maynard, 'The Archaeology of Australian Aboriginal Art', 91.

as the Wandjina art in the Kimberley and x-ray art in Arnhem Land.⁹⁵ She realised the potential to align her rock art sequence with broader archaeological debates by drawing attention to the parallels with Mulvaney's two-part technological history of Australia. Both cases presented a view of unilinear progression, as a relatively homogenous Pleistocene practice grew and diversified in the mid-Holocene.

Maynard's grand synthesis, and her call for a classificatory system for rock art, reflected the increasing 'professionalisation' of the field of rock art studies. The field had come a long way since Edwards' teenage recording escapades with the Royal Society of South Australia. 'Maynard's model was a *tour de force*,' Flood wrote in 1997, 'and still, twenty years on, forms the basis of our understanding of Australian rock art.'⁹⁶ Although now 'tattered around the edges', McDonald reflected in 2004, 'no one has come up with a better scenario'. Although, she added, 'The days of a simple pan-continental model for rock art in Australia are probably well over.'⁹⁷

It is fitting that Maynard first publicly aired her sequence at the 1974 'Schematisation in Art' symposium at the AIAS.⁹⁸ The symposium, organised by the new AIAS Principal Peter Ucko, acted in similar ways to the 1961 AIAS conference (see interlude I), in that it brought together researchers from all over Australia, many of whom had never met each other, to create a new forum for the exchange of ideas about Australian Aboriginal art. The book arising from the symposium, *Form in Indigenous Art*, signalled, in McDonald's words, 'a "coming of age" in Australian art studies'.⁹⁹ By the end of the decade 'studying prehistoric art was beginning to gain credence in the wider archaeological community as a valid archaeological pursuit.'¹⁰⁰ The leadership of Ucko, a rock art specialist from Europe, also promoted a change in AIAS funding priorities so that rock art was given greater precedence, which in turn attracted more overseas scholars.¹⁰¹ Within a decade of the 'Schematisation in Art' symposium, rock art studies had its own association (AURA in 1983) and journal (*Rock*

⁹⁵ Maynard, 'The Archaeology of Australian Aboriginal Art', 99-100.

⁹⁶ Flood, *Rock Art of the Dreamtime*, 194.

⁹⁷ Josephine McDonald, 'Australia: "Rock Art Capital of the World"', in Tim Murray (ed.), *Archaeology from Australia* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2004), 96-115, 106.

⁹⁸ Peter J Ucko (ed.), *Form in indigenous art: schematisation in the art of Aboriginal Australia and prehistoric Europe* (Canberra Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1977)

⁹⁹ Josephine McDonald, "'Everywhere you go you know he's been there before": The Influence of Fred McCarthy on Rock Art Research in the Sydney Basin', in M Sullivan, S Brockwell and A Webb (eds.), *Archaeology in the North: Proceedings of the 1993 Australian Archaeological Association Conference* (Darwin: North Australian Research Unit, 1994), 40-53, 40.

¹⁰⁰ McDonald, "'Everywhere you go you know he's been there before'", 40.

¹⁰¹ Ross, 'Australian Rock Art', 691-2.

Art Research in May, 1984), both of which placed a high priority on recognising Indigenous rights in cultural heritage.¹⁰² As the self-taught polymath Robert Bednarik wrote in the first edition of *Rock Art Research*, ‘Australian rock art research is experiencing a period of rapid development and widening of horizons.’¹⁰³

The increasing ‘institutionalisation’ of the field created a divide between researchers working from within universities and those who documented rock art from the periphery. The same tension that was on display in the Koonalda report often bubbled into disciplinary discussions, and was facilitated in the pages *Rock Art Research*. Flood has written about the occasionally internecine politics of these debates: ‘a saga of personal feuds, bitter rivalries and competition for “territory”, with some researchers defending regions far larger than, say, Britain or Ireland as “my research area”. ... Added to this is the explosive mix in the rock art world of so-called “professional” and “amateurs”, all with chips on both shoulders, it seems at times.’¹⁰⁴ But it is important to recognise the invaluable contributions of individuals from outside the academy. In many cases, extensive site recording programs led directly to more specialist work. For example, Percy Trezise, an Australian pilot, painter, explorer and writer, devoted fifty years to documenting the rock art of the Cape York Peninsula, laying the foundations for Richard Wright’s excavations at Mushroom Rock near Laura in 1963-1964, Andrée Rosenfeld’s work at Early Man rockshelter in 1974, and Josephine Flood’s project at Green Ant and Echidna Dreaming rockshelters on the Koolburra Plateau.¹⁰⁵ Similarly, McDonald pays tribute to the ‘prodigious recording efforts’ of curator Frederick McCarthy in the Sydney region, reflecting that ‘everywhere you go you know he’s been there before’.¹⁰⁶ Eric Brandl’s pioneering work on faunal identification in Arnhem Land, in which he described the ‘broad zone where metaphysical concept and zoological reality cannot be kept apart’, provides a framework for debates about possible megafauna in the art.¹⁰⁷ He also produced the first detailed chronology of Arnhem Land rock art styles, a sophisticated regional sequence which was enriched and expanded by rock art scholar Darrell Lewis.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰² AURA convenes an international congress every four years. The first was in Darwin in 1988.

¹⁰³ Robert G Bednarik, ‘Editorial’, *Rock Art Research* 1(1) (May 1984), 3-4, 3.

¹⁰⁴ Flood, *Rock Art of the Dreamtime*, xi.

¹⁰⁵ Andrée Rosenfeld, ‘Introduction’, in Andrée Rosenfeld, David Horton and John Winter, *Early Man in North Queensland: Art and Archaeology in the Laura Area*, Terra Australis 6 (Canberra: Australian National University, 1981), 1-3.

¹⁰⁶ McDonald, “‘Everywhere you go you know he’s been there before’”, 49.

¹⁰⁷ Eric Brandl, ‘Some Notes on Faunal Identification and Arnhem Land Rock Paintings’, *Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies Newsletter*, New Series 14 (1980), 6-13, 13.

¹⁰⁸ Eric Brandl, *Australian Aboriginal Paintings in Western and Central Arnhem Land*, Australian Aboriginal Studies No 52, Prehistory and Material Culture Series No. 9. (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal

George Chaloupka, a Czech refugee and self-instructed rock art recorder, later proposed a similar sequence for the same region and publicly advocated for the conservation of this rich heritage.¹⁰⁹ But as the field of rock art developed, and became more integrated with other disciplines, such as archaeology, palaeobotany and palaeozoology, there became less room for the charismatic individual site recorder.

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While Maynard pioneered an archaeological approach to motifs, it was Andrée Rosenfeld's work at Early Man rock shelter that decisively shifted rock art into the archaeological world. She arrived in Australia with her husband Peter Ucko in 1972, having already established an international reputation studying European Cave Art. Working out of the ANU, she initiated an archaeological project in southeast Cape York Peninsula on a series of art sites scattered along the creeks and escarpments to the east of Laura. She was drawn there by reports from Percy Trezise of a large sandstone overhang with paintings and engravings and what appeared to be a deep occupation deposit. Trezise had found the shelter in 1972 on one of his many surveys with Dick Roughsey and Eddie Oribin. They named it 'Early Man Shelter' after the weathered frieze of 'emu tracks' and circles on the shelter wall that had been 'polished smooth by time.'¹¹⁰ Rosenfeld saw it as a promising opportunity to test the antiquity of the track-and-circle art style and to search for corresponding archaeological associations.¹¹¹ In August 1974, she opened a series of trenches in the shelter, including up against the back wall. Noting a significant increase in the amount of pigment being deposited in the site and the arrangement of paintings, she suggested a transition from an early rock art tradition of pecked engravings of mostly geometric designs and tracks to a more recent tradition of figurative 'Quinkan' rock painting in the mid-Holocene. The key piece of evidence was a buried panel of deeply weathered, pecked engravings that had begun to be

Studies, 1973); Darrell Lewis, *The Rock Paintings of Arnhem Land, Australia: Social, Ecological and Material Culture Change in the Post-Glacial Period* (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports International Series 415, 1988).

¹⁰⁹ George Chaloupka, *From Palaeoart to Casual Paintings: Chronology of Arnhem Land Plateau Rock Art 17880 BP to 1973* (Darwin: Northern Territory Museums and Art Galleries, 1984); George Chaloupka, *Journey in Time: The World's Longest Continuing Art Tradition: The 50,000 Year Story of the Australian Aboriginal Rock Art of Arnhem Land* (Chatswood, NSW: Reed, 1993).

¹¹⁰ Percy Trezise, *Last Days of a Wilderness* (Sydney: Collins, 1973), 193.

¹¹¹ Andrée Rosenfeld, 'Excavations at the Early Man Shelter', in Andrée Rosenfeld, David Horton and John Winter, *Early Man in North Queensland: Art and Archaeology in the Laura Area*, *Terra Australis* 6 (Canberra: Australian National University, 1981), 5-34, 5.

covered by sediment around 14,400 years ago. It was a remarkable discovery. But was it Panaramitee?

Rosenfeld's chronological sequence largely agreed with Maynard's grand scheme, but she argued that there were 'significant differences' between the engraving tradition in Cape York and the 'Panaramitee' style from central and southern Australia.¹¹² There were fewer circles, and most were quite irregular in shape, while the 'emu tracks' were ambiguous and abstract, rather than clear representations: Rosenfeld preferred to call them 'tridents'.¹¹³ She believed the Early Man engravings represented a regional art style, distinct from the tradition observed elsewhere in the continent. Maynard, on the other hand, was happy to incorporate the panel – and the dates – into her archaeological sequence as a regional variation of a single tradition. In her mind, the buried engravings confirmed that Panaramitee was a Pleistocene art tradition.

Mike Morwood, a student at the ANU, followed Rosenfeld's lead, showing the importance of a contextual approach to the study of rock art. In 1976, he began an archaeological study in the central Queensland highlands, involving extensive surveys, four major excavations, and the recording of 92 art sites. He also drew upon the cultural history and two-part technological sequence that John Mulvaney had uncovered at Kenniff Cave in the 1960s and at nearby sites, such as the Tombs. Over the course of his project, Morwood measured and counted 17,025 motifs, which, once put onto computer coding sheets and statistically analysed by a Dec-10 computer, distinguished 'a total of 87 motif types, fifteen colours and eight techniques.'¹¹⁴ Significantly, he also believed he had detected a regional variation of the Panaramitee style engravings.

What was truly innovative about Morwood's project was how he related these designs to both the archaeology of the region and the nature of the social institutions and ideology recorded in local ethnographies. '[R]ock art,' he reflected in 2002, 'is a miniscule part of the total range of human activity and achievement. It is the connections and context of these paintings and engravings that give them an importance way beyond simple marks on rock.'¹¹⁵ Building

¹¹² Andrée Rosenfeld, 'Rock Engravings in the Laura District', in Andrée Rosenfeld, David Horton and John Winter, *Early Man in North Queensland: Art and Archaeology in the Laura Area*, Terra Australis 6 (Canberra: Australian National University, 1981), 50-89, 89.

¹¹³ Rosenfeld, 'Rock Engravings in the Laura District', 89.

¹¹⁴ Morwood, *Visions from the Past*, 212.

¹¹⁵ Morwood, *Visions from the Past*, 306.

on the new ‘information exchange theories’ of Martin Wobst and Clive Gamble, he tried to read the range of social, economic, and ritual information that is encoded in panels of rock art. He found parallels between technological changes uncovered during excavation and the variation of styles in the rock art. He also saw links between the depiction of ‘tortoises’ in art sites, the distribution of water sources, and local stories about the paths taken by ancestral beings. By examining the economic, technological and artistic evidence together, Morwood was able to identify a tightening of social networks around 3000 years ago and a corresponding change in the composition of the art panels: ‘it seems no accident that the appearance of a distinctive Central Queensland rock art coincided with the onset of the Small Tool Tradition in the region. Both suggest fundamental changes in social organisation and inter-group communication.’¹¹⁶ In this instance, rock art not only enriched the archaeology: it delivered insights into Aboriginal ideology, territoriality, resource use and social organisation that excavation could not yield on its own.

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Lesley Maynard’s proposed sequence of Australian rock art dominated the field throughout the 1980s and was hotly debated in the pages of *Rock Art Research* and at the first meeting of the Australian Rock Art Research Association (AURA) in Darwin in 1988. The ‘Panaramitee style’, in particular, came under intense scrutiny. The idea of an ancient, homogenous pan-continental tradition was challenged by growing evidence of regional variability, such as Rosenfeld’s work in Cape York and Morwood’s survey of the Carnarvon Ranges. Robert Bednarik was the greatest opponent of Panaramitee, arguing that there were too many inconsistencies at sites across the continent for the descriptor ‘Panaramitee style’ to be useful.¹¹⁷ Rosenfeld made the case that the engravings in Tasmania, tropical North Queensland and Ingaladdi, which Maynard included in her sequence, were too variable to be part of the same cultural tradition. As she reflected in 1981: ‘the great unity of style and motif of ancient art styles in Australia may have been overstated in attempts to synthesise the evidence for the antiquity of rock art in the continent.’¹¹⁸ A decade later, Rosenfeld openly

¹¹⁶ Michael J Morwood, ‘Art and Stone: Towards a Prehistory of Central-Western Queensland’, PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1979, 410.

¹¹⁷ Robert G Bednarik, ‘Comment on Frederick D. McCarthy’s “Rock Art Sequences: A Matter of Clarification”’, *Rock Art Research* 5(1) (May 1988), 35-38.

¹¹⁸ Rosenfeld, ‘Rock Engravings in the Laura District’, 89.

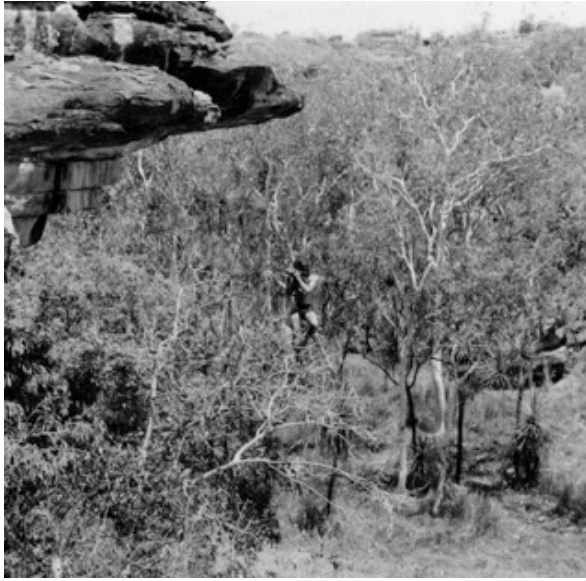


Fig. 54 Darrell Lewis photographing a thylacine painting at Ubirr, 1975 (Source: D Lewis).



Fig. 55 Andrée Rosenfeld at camp during the excavation of Early Man rockshelter, Cape York, 1974 (Source: D Lewis).



Fig. 56 Old Walter Tjampitjinpa and Johnny Warangkula Tjupurrula, drawing on hardboard, Papunya, central Australia 1972 (Source: M Jenson, NLA).

wondered whether the concept of a Panaramitee style was ‘dead or alive’.¹¹⁹ Maynard herself, bemused at the heightened debate, declared that she was ‘happy to bury “Panaramitee style”’ – although as a name, not necessarily as a cultural unit.¹²⁰

But what does this widespread tradition tell us about the social world of the engravers? The geographic context of the Panaramitee engravings intimates ritual, not secular production, and the presence of dingo tracks in some of the art panels suggests that, no matter when the tradition began, it continued until around 4000 years ago. Although it is unwise to project recent ritual practices onto the deep past, ethnography remains a powerful interpretive method. As Finnish scholar Antti Lahelma reflects, ‘We simply need to assume that certain core elements of culture, the slow-moving deep-bone structures of the *longue durée*, have remained recognisably similar over extensive periods of time, rather like the basic grammatical structures of a language.’¹²¹ Indeed, archaeologist Bruno David believes that rock art may be the key to understanding the development of those slow-moving deep-bone structures, and in particular, the religious system known as the Dreaming: ‘like all things cultural, the Dreaming must have a history; it must have arisen out of human practice some time in the deep past.’¹²² David argues that by tracing the ordered material expressions of the Dreaming, as observed in ethnographic times, it might be possible to date its historical emergence.

The ongoing debate over the age of the Panaramitee engravings thus presents two compelling visions of social and religious life in ancient Australia. Scholars such as Natalie Franklin, drawing upon multivariate analysis, argue that Panaramitee should still be understood as a distinct, pan-continental stylistic entity that began during the last Ice Age.¹²³ Others, such as June Ross and Mike Smith, believe it is a much more recent graphic tradition, largely restricted to the eastern half of the arid zone, with a major period of production beginning

¹¹⁹ Later evidence seemed to confirm this view. Steve Brown, for example, found the so-called ‘Panaramitee’ engravings in Tasmania, which supposedly confirmed the antiquity of the cultural unit, to be quite young. Andrée Rosenfeld, ‘Panaramitee: *Dead or Alive?*’, in P Bahn and A Rosenfeld (eds.), *Rock Art and Prehistory: Papers Presented to Symposium G of the AURA Congress, Darwin 1988* (Oxford: Oxbow, 1991), 136-44.

¹²⁰ Maynard, ‘Comment on Frederick D. McCarthy’s “Rock Art Sequences”’, 30.

¹²¹ Antti Lahelma, ‘Politics, Ethnography and Prehistory: In Search of an “Informed” Approach to Finnish and Karelian rock art’, in David Morris, Benjamin Smith and Knut Arne Helskog (eds.), *Working with Rock Art: Recording, Presenting and Understanding Rock Art Using Indigenous Knowledge* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2012), 113-34, 117.

¹²² Bruno David, *Landscapes, Rock-Art and the Dreaming: An Archaeology of Preunderstanding* (London: Leicester University Press, 2002), 1.

¹²³ Natalie R Franklin, *Explorations of Variability in Australian Prehistoric Rock Engravings* (Oxford: BAR International Series, 2004), 41; Morwood, *Visions from the Past*, 40, 57-58.

around 8000 years ago.¹²⁴ In both instances, the rock art is viewed as a rare archaeological insight into the spiritual life of the first Australians. If the Panaramitee engravings represent the marking out of a cultural landscape, then the increase in distinctive regional rock art styles during the late Holocene would suggest that the Dreaming is a dynamic and emergent culture, rather than an ancient, unchanging system of meaning.¹²⁵

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The ‘Panaramitee style’ lives on in contemporary art today. The characteristic track-and-circle motifs are familiar to anyone admiring the stunning acrylic paintings from the Papunya Tula art movement.¹²⁶ It is fitting, then, that the man after whom this long graphic tradition was almost named – Bob Edwards – should also have played a significant role in championing its modern incarnation.

In 1965, before taking up the job as Curator of the South Australian Museum and with the assistance of John Mulvaney, Bob Edwards embarked on six months of fieldwork across Arnhem Land and Central Australia.¹²⁷ It was ‘a great long 8000 mile journey’ which brought him in close contact with Aboriginal people and illuminated the challenges and delights of working across cultures.¹²⁸ These ‘adventures’ into remote country, often with little water and limited petrol, and always with few funds, were characterised by hardship and euphoria. Edwards was appalled by the negative attitudes towards Aboriginal people in the towns, and he lamented the damage that was being casually – and sometimes deliberately – inflicted on their cultural sites.¹²⁹ His heart ached at the loss: ‘I have seen Aboriginals stand in these ruined galleries with tears streaming down their faces.’¹³⁰ He used the photographs from these expeditions to raise public awareness of the vandalism and to make detailed legislative recommendations for the preservation of ‘Aboriginal monuments, antiquities and sites’.¹³¹ To help educate the Australian public about Aboriginal society and rock art, he allowed his diary

¹²⁴ Ross, ‘Rock Art, Ritual and Relationships’, 197; Smith, *The Archaeology of Australia’s Deserts*, 228-229.

¹²⁵ Smith, *The Archaeology of Australia’s Deserts*, 240.

¹²⁶ Smith, *The Archaeology of Australia’s Deserts*, 255.

¹²⁷ Robert Edwards, ‘Survey of Cave Paintings in Arnhem Land and Central Australia’, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, General Meeting, 19 May 1966, AIATSIS Library, PMS 539.

¹²⁸ John Mulvaney, Mike Smith, Dick Kimber, Nic Peterson, Robin Hirst and Philip Jones, ‘Bob Edwards: Museums and Archaeology’, National Museum of Australia, ‘Bob Edwards: A Tribute’, 22 March 2011.

¹²⁹ Robert Edwards to Dermot Casey, 22 July 1965, Dermot Casey Papers, AIATSIS, MS 1326/B/b/i, Box 2.

¹³⁰ Robert Edwards, ‘Clues in Quartzite’, *The Australian*, 15 April 1970.

¹³¹ Robert Edwards, ‘Tourism in Australia and Overseas: The Overseas Example’, in Robert Edwards (ed.), *The Preservation of Australia’s Aboriginal Heritage* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1975), 37-47, 46-47.

from a similar expedition to be published by *The Australian* in April 1970 as a six-part feature on 'The Rock Engravers'.¹³² His advocacy was anchored in the belief that 'While the Aborigines are the rightful owners of this heritage, all Australians are the beneficiaries of this unique cultural tradition.'¹³³

Edwards' main vehicle for change, however, was the Aboriginal Arts Board of the Australia Council, an all-Aboriginal body set up by the Whitlam Government in 1973 to distribute funds in the field of Aboriginal arts.¹³⁴ Edwards had played a key part in lobbying for its creation and he was appointed as the founding director from 1973 until 1980. He saw his role as a means to involve and empower Indigenous voices in national life. The arts, he believed, were the key to changing attitudes towards Indigenous people and their heritage. As director, he was responsible for valuing art as well as collecting artworks to exhibit around Australia and the world.¹³⁵ Initially, he found it a struggle to even give paintings away to state galleries; such was the resistance to recognising Aboriginal art as 'fine art'.¹³⁶ But over the 1970s the Board oversaw 'a renaissance in Aboriginal art'.¹³⁷ The brilliant acrylic paintings produced at Papunya from 1971 were central to the growing appreciation of Indigenous art. While Geoffrey Bardon triggered the developments in art at Papunya, historian Dick Kimber identifies Edwards as the key 'outsider' who enabled the painting to continue by arranging funds and raising awareness of the works nationally and internationally.¹³⁸ This campaign culminated with the inclusion of Aboriginal artworks in the third Biennale of Sydney in 1979 and in the *Australian Perspecta* in 1981. By the 1980s, the works of Indigenous masters

¹³² These reports not only stimulated public interest in rock art, but Edwards' description of 'an enormous rock shelter' with decorated walls and 'several engraved boulders showing circles and tracks' led Mike Smith, almost two decades later, to the richest archaeological site so far found in the central deserts, Puritjarra. Robert Edwards, 'The Rock Engravers', six-part series: 'Journey into the Past', *The Australian*, 14 April 1970; 'Clues in Quartzite', *The Australian*, 15 April 1970; 'Where No Woman Trod', *The Australian*, 16 April 1970; 'Into the Sea of Spinifex', *The Australian*, 17 April 1970; 'A Missing Link in Dreamtime', *The Australian*, 18 April 1970; 'We've Found it, Can We Save It?', *The Australian*, 19 April 1970.

¹³³ Robert Edwards, 'Deterioration and Preservation of Rock Art', in Robert Edwards (ed.), *Aboriginal Art in Australia* (Sydney: Ure Smith, 1978), 54-57, 57.

¹³⁴ Dick Roughsey, 'The Aboriginal Arts Board', in Robert Edwards (ed.), *Aboriginal Art in Australia* (Sydney: Ure Smith, 1978), 58-65, 62.

¹³⁵ Judith Ryan, 'The Quick and the Dead, Purchasing Indigenous art 1988-1990', *Art Bulletin of Victoria* 44 (2004), 71-81.

¹³⁶ Ian McLean, 'Aboriginal Art and the Artworld', in Ian McLean (ed.), *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art* (Sydney: Institute of Modern Art and Power Publications, 2011), 17-75, 32.

¹³⁷ Aboriginal Arts Board of the Australia Council, *The Arts of Aboriginal Australia and Papua Nuigini, Shepparton Civic Centre, March 22-24 1976* (Sydney: The Aboriginal Arts Board, 1976), 12.

¹³⁸ RG Kimber, 'Recollections of Papunya Tula 1971-1980', in Hetti Perkins and Hannah Fink (eds.), *Papunya Tula: Genesis and Genius* (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales in association with Papunya Tula Artists, 2000), 205-215, 205-6.

became the central focus of the contemporary art world.¹³⁹

Art historian Ian McLean places great importance on the interaction in this period between Indigenous artists and New Wave artists such as Joseph Kosuth and Marina Abramović.¹⁴⁰ He argues that this contact provided the stimulus for the New Wave generation of artists to move beyond its critique of modernism to a critique of culture. They saw in Indigenous art ‘the limits’ of their own, Western culture, which enabled a new form of expression. ‘In the 1980s Papunya Tula painting revealed to the artworld something about itself that had not yet been brought into focus by Western contemporary art,’ writes McLean. In a sense, he suggests, ‘Aborigines invented the idea of contemporary art’.¹⁴¹

Wandjuk Marika, co-founder and later Chairman of the Aboriginal Arts Board celebrated the growing recognition of Indigenous art as fine art:

Our art is being seen by more and more people. No longer is it hidden in museums, seen only by such people as curators and anthropologists. It is now attracting the interest and attention of the layman, the gallery owner and the collector; and people are learning to appreciate the artistry of my people.¹⁴²

Marika hoped, together with Edwards, that the new, intense interest in Aboriginal art would lead to a more substantial engagement with all aspects of Indigenous history and culture. He urged his fellow Australians ‘to learn more about the stories that our paintings recount, to listen to our songs and music, so that gradually there will grow up between us a bond of understanding and respect, to replace the distrust and fear of previous generations.’¹⁴³ The development of rock art research, alongside the growth of the contemporary Aboriginal art movement, has allowed a deeper appreciation of the millions of paintings and engravings that mark this country, as well as offering insights into the social worlds of the old masters who created them.

¹³⁹ McLean, ‘Aboriginal Art and the Artworld’, 30.

¹⁴⁰ Ian McLean, *Rattling Spears: A History of Indigenous Australian Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 2016), 135-38.

¹⁴¹ Ian McLean, ‘How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art’, in Ian McLean (ed.), *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art* (Sydney: Institute of Modern Art and Power Publications, 2011), 333-40, 340.

¹⁴² Marika, ‘Introduction’, 7.

¹⁴³ Marika, ‘Introduction’, 9.



Fig. 57 Banner at the Blockade during the Franklin River Campaign, 1983 (Source: R Jones).

Could you vote for a party that will destroy this?

Despite advice from his Attorney-General's Department that he has the power to intervene, Mr. Fraser has refused to prevent the flooding of the Franklin River.

Despite evidence that flooding the Franklin will be of little benefit to Tasmanians in providing power or creating jobs the dam will add only 80% to Tasmania's electricity supply, fewer than 1000 construction workers will be employed, and only 29 permanent jobs created. Mr. Fraser's Government has chosen to preserve peace in the Liberal Party rather than act to preserve an area of irreplaceable beauty.

If the Liberal Government is re-elected, this scene will be drowned, along with hundreds of other equally unique places.

Our concern is not politics, but the Franklin. Unfortunately, Mr. Fraser has made the Franklin a political issue.

And so we must ask you to vote for those parties committed to saving the Franklin.

Even though you may never have voted for them before and may never again.

We ask you, this once, to put Australia's heritage above party politics.

To vote, in the Senate, for the Australian Democrats.

And, in the House of Representatives, for the Australian Labor Party.

Because your vote, now, can save the Franklin for all time.

VOTE FOR THE FRANKLIN
BECAUSE ONLY YOUR VOTE CAN SAVE IT.

National South-West Coalition
including Tasmanian Wilderness Society
and Australian Conservation Foundation

Authorised by Dr Robert Butler, Chairman of the Senate, 1983

Fig. 58 Advertisement published in the national papers during the 1983 federal election campaign. It features Peter Dombrovskis' photo 'Morning Mist, Rock Island Bend, Franklin River' (Source: The Wilderness Society).

‘You Have Entered Aboriginal Land’

The Franklin River Campaign and the Fight for Kutikina

The Franklin River rises in the central highlands of Tasmania and descends into the most remote parts of the southwest rainforest. Its dark, tannin-stained waters, shrouded in mist, course through narrow, winding gorges, rushing over rapids, and eddying at confluences and river bends. In 1981, most archaeologists shared the general view that southwest Tasmania was ‘a true wilderness’: ‘the only part of the Australian continent never to be inhabited by Aborigines.’¹ What little archaeology had been uncovered in the region, such as ‘Beginner’s Luck’ in the Florentine valley, suggested that human occupation had been restricted to the margins of the rainforest.² The dense heart of southwest Tasmania seemed to be too wild, too remote to have been touched by humankind. ‘I thought at that time,’ Rhys Jones mused, ‘that the canoe journey down the Gordon River in 1958 by Olegas Truchanas was the first crossing of that country from east to west by any human.’³

Truchanas, a wilderness photographer and conservationist, had done much to promote this modern view of a ‘true wilderness’.⁴ Having endured the Russian and the Nazi occupations of Lithuania during the Second World War, he migrated to Tasmania in 1949 and threw himself into the depths of southwest Tasmania, climbing isolated peaks, rafting alone along the tumultuous rivers and camping beside the distinctive pink beaches of Lake Pedder.⁵ He found peace in photographing this grand, mysterious landscape, devoid of people. Truchanas’ photos were both a celebration of the natural world and the expression of an idea: that people

¹ Rhys Jones, ‘Hunters and History: A Case Study from Western Tasmania’, in Carmel Schrire (ed.), *Past and Present in Hunter Gatherer Studies* (Orlando, Florida; Academic Press, 1984), 27-65, 50.

² A Goede and P Murray, ‘Pleistocene Man in South-Central Tasmania: Evidence from a Cave Site in the Florentine Valley’, *Mankind* 11 (1977), 2-10; PF Murray, A Goede, and JL Bada, ‘Pleistocene Human Occupation at Beginners Luck Cave, Florentine Valley, Tasmania’, *Archaeology & Physical Anthropology in Oceania* 15(3) (1980), 142-52.

³ Jones, ‘Hunters and History’, 50.

⁴ Truchanas was also following the footsteps of earlier wilderness photographers in Tasmania, such as John Watt Beattie. Jarrod Hore, ‘“Beautiful Tasmania”: Environmental Consciousness in John Watt Beattie’s Romantic Wilderness’, *History Australia* 12(1) (2017), 48-66.

⁵ Natasha Cica, *Pedder Dreaming: Olegas Truchanas and a Lost Tasmanian Wilderness* (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 2011), 15-20.

could live alongside and protect and preserve such a landscape. He believed that the continued ‘wildness’ of southwest Tasmania revealed the best of humankind. It showed a respect for nature that was as much a reflection of humanity as the horrors of wartime Eastern Europe.⁶

When this vision came under threat in the 1960s with the State government’s plans to dam Lake Pedder, Truchanas led the campaign against the proposed hydro-electric development. He toured Tasmania broadcasting the landscapes fated to be flooded, pairing his photography with soaring classical music to evoke the subtle beauty of the remote glacial lake, ringed by jagged mountains.⁷ These powerful audio-visual displays instilled outrage and despair in his audiences; their strong reactions reflected the rising ecological consciousness that was emerging in many places in Australia and around the world in the 1960s.⁸ But despite vigorous protest, the dam went ahead. In July 1972 the Serpentine and Huon rivers were dammed and Lake Pedder disappeared under steadily rising waters. Truchanas did not live to see the glacial lake transformed into a hydro-electric impoundment. On 6 January 1972, while hauling his canoe over rapids on the Gordon River, Truchanas slipped and was sucked into fast-flowing waters.⁹

His body was found three days later by his young protégé, Latvian-born photographer Peter Dombrovskis. The lives of these two Baltic photographers are eerily entwined, and both were bound to the idea of wilderness. Dombrovskis migrated to Tasmania in 1950 at the age of five. He met Truchanas as a teenager and ‘to some extent became his disciple’, hiking and rafting deep into southwest Tasmania and learning the craft of photography.¹⁰ He, too, used his images to campaign against the threat of hydro-electric development in southwest Tasmania. And, in a tragic twist of fate, he also died young in the remote reaches of the landscape he loved, suffering a heart attack on 28 March 1996 while hiking alone near Mount Hayes in the Western Arthurs mountain range. He was found several days later, on his knees,

⁶ Richard Flanagan made a similar point when he compared the work of Olegas Truchanas and Peter Dombrovskis in: Richard Flanagan, ‘It’s Peter Dom’, in *And What Do You Do, Mr Gable?* (Sydney: Random House, 2011), 23-31, 30.

⁷ Max Angus, *The World of Olegas Truchanas* (Hobart: Olegas Truchanas Publishing Committee, 1975), 37-38.

⁸ Libby Robin, *Defending the Little Desert: The Rise of Ecological Consciousness in Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1998), 151-2.

⁹ Kevin Kiernan, ‘Discovering the Franklin’, in Roger Green (ed.), *Battle for the Franklin: Conversations with the Combatants in the Struggle for South West Tasmania* (Sydney: Fontana/Australian Conservation Foundation, 1984), 82-99, 95.

¹⁰ Peter Dombrovskis, ‘Discovering the Franklin’, in Roger Green (ed.), *Battle for the Franklin: Conversations with the Combatants in the Struggle for South West Tasmania* (Sydney: Fontana/Australian Conservation Foundation, 1984), 100-4, 101

in a remote alpine herbfield.¹¹ The rucksack on his back, full of camera equipment, had propped his body in a position of prayer.

These two figures provided the visual underpinnings of the early conservation movement in Tasmania, which developed alongside the first political ‘green movement’ in the world.¹² Truchanas’ influence grew with the posthumous publication of a collection of his photographs in 1975, while Dombrovskis continued to work in the region, picking up where his mentor had left off. His most famous image ‘Morning Mist, Rock Island Bend, Franklin River’ was printed in the daily newspapers during the 1983 election as a full page advertisement, under the words: ‘Could you vote for a party that would destroy this?’ The fact that a remote corner of Australia had become the centre of a national debate reflects what was at stake in the campaigns against hydro-electric development. For many, like novelist James McQueen, the Franklin was ‘not just a river’: ‘it is the epitome of all the lost forests, all the submerged lakes, all the tamed rivers, all the extinguished species.’¹³ As Kevin Kiernan, the first director of the Tasmanian Wilderness Society, wrote in 1976: ‘We have to try to sell not the wilderness experience – that is, wilderness as a recreational resource – but the right of wilderness to exist.’¹⁴ The Franklin River campaign was a fight for the survival of ‘a corner of Australia untouched by man’.¹⁵ ‘It is a wild and wondrous thing,’ Bob Brown wrote of the Franklin River in May 1978, ‘and 175 years after Tasmania’s first European settlement, the Franklin remains much as it was before man – black or white – came to its precincts.’¹⁶

On 1 July 1983, in a dramatic four-three decision, the High Court of Australia ruled to stop the damming of the Franklin River. It brought to an end the long and protracted campaign, which had helped bring down two State Premiers and a Prime Minister, as well as overseeing the rise of a new figure on the political landscape, the future founder of the Greens, Bob Brown. But it was not only the idea of ‘wilderness’ – of an ancient, pure, timeless landscape – that saved the Franklin. As two of the judges noted in the immediate aftermath of the case,

¹¹ Flanagan, ‘It’s Peter Dom’, 31.

¹² In 1972, the United Tasmania Group became the first green party in the world. Libby Robin, ‘Biological Diversity as a Political Force in Australia’, in Marco Armiero and Lise Sedrez (eds.), *A History of Environmentalism: Local Struggles, Global Histories* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 39-56, 41.

¹³ James McQueen, *The Franklin: Not Just a River* (Ringwood, Vic: Penguin, 1983), 2.

¹⁴ Drew Hutton and Libby Connors, *A History of the Australian Environment Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 161.

¹⁵ Peter Thompson, *Bob Brown of the Franklin River* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1984), 186.

¹⁶ Bob Brown as quoted in Thompson, *Bob Brown of the Franklin River*, 94.

the archaeological research that took place in the heat of the campaign was at the heart of the High Court decision.¹⁷ It was the revelation that far from being an ‘untouched’, ‘pristine’ ‘true wilderness’, southwest Tasmania had a deep human history. What was undoubtedly a natural wonder was also a cultural landscape.¹⁸

‘The battle for the Franklin,’ writes historian Frank Bongiorno, ‘remains the single greatest environmental struggle in Australian history. It signalled for white Australians a new way of relating to place, a love of country that amounted to something more complex – and attractive – than classical nationalism’s appeal to “blood and soil”.’¹⁹ But the cultural revelation at the centre of the struggle, which played such a significant role behind the scenes, only figured on the margins of the mainstream campaign. In the early 1980s, Australians were still grappling with the implications of having an ancient Indigenous past. The debates the campaign triggered about history and cultural politics, in the public sphere and within the field of Australian archaeology, anticipated the national introspection that accompanied the Bicentenary.

The Franklin River campaign thrust archaeology into the centre of national debate in a way that has not been seen before or since. The words of archaeologists were splashed across the front page of newspapers, incremental discoveries made the lead item on nightly radio and television news, and individuals such as John Mulvaney and Rhys Jones argued for cultural heritage in Senate Submissions, public lectures, and at rallies from the back of a truck outside Parliament House. The campaign was the first time that new heritage legislation, which had accumulated in every state over the preceding two decades, was put to the test in the public arena. It was a symbolic moment in the gradual shift away from the era of university-led archaeological research and towards the model of public archaeology and cultural heritage management that dominates Australian archaeology today. But at its heart, the campaign was about the value placed on heritage, both natural and cultural, and who should decide its fate. This chapter explores the tensions and collaboration that emerged between archaeologists, conservationists and a resurgent Tasmanian Aboriginal community in their fight to stop the

¹⁷ Verge Blunden, ‘What the High Court Justices had to Say’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 July 1983, 7, 19. Malcolm Fraser also believed this, see: Robyn Williams, ‘Down the Franklin by Lawn Mower’, *Australian Archaeology* 20 (1985), 151.

¹⁸ Tom Griffiths, ‘History and Natural History: Conservation Movements in Conflict?’, *Australian Historical Studies* 24(96) (1991), 16-32.

¹⁹ Frank Bongiorno, *The Eighties: The Decade that Transformed Australia* (Collingwood, Vic: Black Inc., 2015), 87.

hydro-electric development, and it directly confronts the question Isabel McBryde asked in a landmark symposium in the wake of the campaign, ‘Who Owns the Past?’

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Heritage, as an idea, has been used on and off in Australia since the 1870s, but it re-emerged in the 1960s and 70s alongside the new concern for wilderness.²⁰ It was a time when Australia was casting around for national symbols, searching for a reservoir of images and stories that would help ease the cultural anxieties that were growing in the new post-imperial world. Britain’s retreat into the European Economic Community and its withdrawal of residual military forces east of Suez had symbolically severed the familial ties between the two nations and catapulted Australia into a crisis of national identity. The naming of Australia’s new decimal currency in 1963 (from the pound to the dollar), the removal of the words ‘British Subject’ from the cover Australian passports in 1967 and the demise of Empire Day and the upgrading of Australia Day, all revealed a consensus within Australia about the need to forge a new national image.²¹ But how would Australia define itself without the old certainties of the British world? Australian flora and fauna were eagerly seized upon as a match for the cultural grandeur of empire. Areas of wilderness – so rare and foreign to Europeans – were reappraised as sources of national identity, as were distinctive elements of Australian history, including, in a tokenistic manner, Aboriginal heritage. The boomerang joined the koala in the jumbled expressions of ‘new nationalism’. And with recognition of worth came responsibility. As naturalist Jock Marshall declared in 1966, ‘Our national heritage, be it the Platypus, an old pub or a colonial document, is ours for the skinning, the bulldozing, the burning – or the keeping.’²²

Between 1965 and 1975 legislation designed to protect Aboriginal sites was passed in every Australian state.²³ The Acts were the result of long-term agitation by archaeologists and

²⁰ Tim Bonyhady, ‘The Stuff of Heritage’, in Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths (eds.), *Prehistory to Politics: John Mulvaney, the Humanities and the Public Intellectual* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996), 144-162, 144.

²¹ Robert Menzies’ initial choice for the new currency – ‘the royal’ – was almost unanimously criticised for its antiquated imperial origins. The ‘Australian dollar’ eventually won out over suggestions such as the tasman, the regal, the austral, the koala, the matilda, the austbrit, as well as some more tongue-in-cheek names: the dinkum, the sheepsback and the bobmenz. There were also a range of stylised Aboriginal words canvassed in a public naming competition, such as: the mayee, the woogoo, the nulla and the aborroo. James Curran and Stuart Ward, *The Unknown Nation: Australia After Empire* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2010), 91-96, 131.

²² AJ Marshall, ‘The World of Hopkins Sibthorpe’, in AJ Marshall (ed.), *The Great Extermination: A Guide to Anglo-Australian Cupidity, Wickedness and Waste* (London: Heinemann, 1966), 1-8, 8.

²³ Isabel McBryde, ‘Australia’s Once and Future Archaeology’, *Archaeology in Oceania* 21(1), Papers

conservationists, alongside growing public interest in Australia's natural and cultural heritage.²⁴ Frederick McCarthy and Elsie Brammel of the Australian Museum were early champions of Aboriginal heritage and in 1938 McCarthy wrote of the 'vital need for legislation for the preservation of prehistoric and aboriginal relics'.²⁵ They were concerned about the casual vandalism inflicted upon Aboriginal sites and called for them to be declared 'national monuments' in recognition of their natural and scientific importance.²⁶ John Mulvaney and Isabel McBryde added their voices to this campaign in the late 1950s and early 1960s, condemning the looting of Aboriginal sites and the destructive culture of collecting that prevailed. Together, with the likes of McCarthy, Bob Edwards, Laila Haglund and Warwick Dix, they were instrumental in establishing the foundational heritage legislation in every state and territory.²⁷ At the conference on 'Aboriginal Antiquities in Australia: Their Nature and Preservation' in 1968, which McCarthy organised with Mulvaney and Edwards, the protection of cultural heritage became a national issue.²⁸ Denis Byrne reflects on the intellectual transformation that underwrote these changes: 'While earlier campaigners had argued that Aboriginal sites were the scientifically valuable property of the nation, from the 1960s archaeologists argued that they were the heritage of the nation.'²⁹

The establishment in the mid-1960s of the Australian Council of National Trusts and the Australian Conservation Foundation reflected the parallel movement towards the preservation of natural heritage. The Whitlam government brought the two strands of natural and cultural heritage together when it ratified the UNESCO World Heritage Convention in August 1974 and passed the Australian Heritage Commission Act the following year, which set up the Register of the National Estate, as well as structures and procedures to facilitate their

Presented to John Mulvaney (Apr 1986), 13-28, 24-25.

²⁴ Sharon Sullivan, 'The State, People and Archaeologists', *Australian Archaeology* 2 (Apr 1975), 23-31, 24.

²⁵ Frederick D McCarthy, 'Aboriginal Relics and Their Preservation', *Mankind* 2(5) (1938), 120-26, 120. Hilary du Cros highlights Elsie Brammel's role in this campaign at the Australian Museum in: *Much More Than Stones and Bones: Australian Archaeology in the Late Twentieth Century* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002), 25.

²⁶ The NSW state parliament seemed to show some interest in their appeals in 1939, but the outbreak of war and a change of government postponed the campaign until 1947. McCarthy, 'Aboriginal Relics and Their Preservation', 121; Denis Byrne, 'Deep Nation: Australia's Acquisition of an Indigenous Past', *Aboriginal History* 20 (1998), 82-107, 97.

²⁷ Isabel McBryde, 'Frederick David McCarthy: 13 August 1905-18 November 1997', *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 1998(1) (1998), 51-55.

²⁸ Frederick D McCarthy (ed.), *Aboriginal Antiquities in Australia: Their Nature and Preservation* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1970).

²⁹ Byrne, 'Deep Nation', 98.

promotion and protection.³⁰ But it was not until the Franklin River campaign in the early 1980s, that the values and effectiveness of this new heritage legislation were tested on a grand scale. John Mulvaney believed the campaign signified ‘the crystallisation of a *national* consciousness regarding our natural and cultural heritage.’³¹

McBryde was reflective about her role in the advocacy of this new heritage framework. What worldview did this legislation empower? For whom were the sites protected and why? She was mindful of George Orwell’s adage ‘Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past.’³² The question of who owns the past is complex and abstract, McBryde reflected in 1983, ‘Yet in legislation there is a consistent assumption: the past in all its physical and elusive forms belongs to all Australians. At a World Heritage level, it belongs to the humans across the globe.’³³ By advocating for the preservation of Indigenous cultural sites and materials, archaeologists and other heritage practitioners across the world had positioned themselves as stewards of this knowledge. They had the power to legitimise – and delegitimise – heritage places and objects, and fight for their protection from within the law. But as Laurajane Smith has explored in a global context, the development of these new regulatory and management processes coincided with the emergence in the public consciousness of increasingly assertive Indigenous groups, who had a much larger stake in how their cultural heritage was managed and understood.³⁴ The ‘balance of power’ was rapidly changing, as Sharon Sullivan, observed in 1983, ‘Aborigines are moving from a position of abject powerlessness in the community to a position where they feel the power and the ability to express their concern about their own heritage.’³⁵

This shift in power, and the contest for knowledge it represents, is encapsulated in the fight to save the archaeological site at the centre of the Franklin River campaign, which for a time was known by two names: ‘Fraser Cave’ and ‘Kutikina’. It is an example of a place that became, in Sullivan’s words, ‘a sacred site in two cultures: sacred to archaeologists who have a cultural belief in the importance of knowledge; sacred to Aborigines who believe that the

³⁰ Sarah Colley, *Uncovering Australia: Archaeology, Indigenous People and the Public* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2002), 27.

³¹ John Mulvaney, ‘Towards a New National Consciousness’, *Forum* 21(3) (1983), 88-89, 88.

³² George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (New York: Buccaneer Books, 1949), 251.

³³ Isabel McBryde, ‘Introduction’, in Isabel McBryde (ed.), *Who Owns the Past?: Papers from the Annual Symposium of the Australian Academy of the Humanities* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1985), 1-10, 1

³⁴ Laurajane Smith, *The Uses of Heritage* (London: Routledge, 2006), 298.

³⁵ Sharon Sullivan, ‘The Custodianship of Aboriginal Sites in Southeastern Australia’ in Isabel McBryde (ed.), *Who Owns the Past?: Papers from the Annual Symposium of the Australian Academy of the Humanities* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1985), 139-156, 150

strange rituals which archaeologists perform at the site constitute desecration.’³⁶ To the resurgent Tasmanian Aboriginal community, the site represented their long occupation of the island, and a symbol around which they could forge new meanings about their cultural identity.³⁷ To archaeologists, it gave an enthralling insight into an ancient world, and it opened a new chapter in a global story.

o o o

Kevin Kiernan was the first to record Kutikina. He and Greg Middleton came across it on 13 January 1977 as part of a systematic survey of the lower and middle Gordon and Franklin Rivers by the Sydney Speleological Society. Kiernan knew the country well: he had been with Olegas Truchanas when he had disappeared into the Gordon River in 1972. Since 1974, he had returned annually with members of the Sydney Speleological Society and local cavers to explore caverns, nooks and crannies in the river gorges. By 1979 these cavers – or speleologists – had described over one hundred caves in the region.³⁸ ‘The whole campaign to find caves on the Franklin was entirely politically motivated,’ Kiernan later commented, ‘The intention was to try and find something ... maybe a big whiz-bang cave ... that would help the campaign.’³⁹ They were acutely aware that the Hydro-Electric Commission was considering this landscape for a new dam.⁴⁰ But they were looking for a natural wonder: even when confronted with evidence of human occupation they did not immediately recognise its archaeological significance. As part of their attempt to raise awareness of this threatened landscape, they started a tradition of naming rock features ‘after the political figures who would decide their fate’.⁴¹ Fraser Cave was thus named after the sitting Prime Minister, Malcolm Fraser. There was also a Bingham Arch, named after the Leader of the State Opposition Max Bingham, a Lowe Cave, named after the Tasmanian Premier Doug Lowe, as well as a Whitlam Cave and, after Bill Hayden assumed the job of Leader of the Federal Opposition in 1977, a Hayden Cave. When the Tasmanian Nomenclature Board caught wind of this tradition, they accused the members of the Sydney Speleological Society of ‘gross

³⁶ Sullivan, ‘The State, People and Archaeologists’, 30.

³⁷ Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, ‘Submission to the Senate Select Committee on South West Tasmania, 8 February 1982’, *Pugganna News* 12 (March 1982), [no page numbers].

³⁸ Rhys Jones, ‘The World Significance of Archaeology on the Franklin’, *Habitat* 10 (1982), 7-9.

³⁹ Kiernan, ‘Discovering the Franklin’, 93.

⁴⁰ Greg Middleton, ‘S.S.S. Franklin River Expedition 1977: South-West Tasmania: 8th-21st January 1977’, *Journal of the Sydney Speleological Society* 23(3) (1979), 51-91, 51.

⁴¹ Kevin Kiernan, ‘Days in a Wilderness’, *Southern Caver* 12(4) (May 1981), 72-78, 77.

impertinence' for naming caves outside their state.⁴² In mid-1982, at the suggestion of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, 'Fraser Cave' became 'Kutikina', which means 'spirit' in the oral tradition developed by the dispossessed Tasmanian community on Babel Island in Bass Strait.⁴³

A few months after the discovery of Kutikina, in May 1977, the Hydro-Electric Commission (HEC) confirmed the rumours and formally proposed a new dam on the Gordon River below its junction with the Franklin River. The HEC was a monolith. As the largest employer in the state it held immense political power. In October 1979, it released the details of the dam project in a nine-volume, \$770,300 environmental study of the region, which contained only six sentences on the Aboriginal history of the region. Without conducting any surveys or seeking any contributions from qualified archaeological personnel, its authors concluded: 'There are no known archaeological sites in the project area.'⁴⁴ In a particularly misleading use of published information, the authors supported this conclusion with a map drawn from Rhys Jones' 1974 ethnographic survey of Aboriginal Tasmania, in which he had marked the inland mountainous region of southwest Tasmania, including the proposed dam site, as 'unoccupied' between 1802 and 1834 (Fig. 60). Jones was furious when he found out: 'the point is that what happened in 1800 or any other arbitrary date is not necessarily what was the case during the prehistoric past.'⁴⁵ When Mulvaney read the report in 1981 he was 'disturbed by the cavalier treatment received by cultural heritage in this massive report'.⁴⁶

The archaeological community reacted quickly to the proposed dam, passing a resolution at the Australian Archaeological Association's annual meeting on 25 May 1980 urging the Hydro-Electric Commission to undertake archaeological surveys in the region.⁴⁷ Sandra Bowdler, as AAA President, sent word of the resolution to the Premier of Tasmania Doug Lowe, who drew it to the attention of the Minister for National Parks and Wildlife, Andrew

⁴² Tim Bonyhady, "'So much for a name'" in Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths (eds.), *Words for Country: Landscape & Language in Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2001), 140-161.

⁴³ The full story behind the name is told in Jim Everett, 'Tasmania', in Oodgeroo Noonuccal (ed.), *Australian legends and landscapes* (Milsons Point, NSW: Random House, 1990), 100-125, 121-125.

⁴⁴ Hydro-Electric Commission, Tasmania, *Report on the Gordon River Power Development Stage Two* (Hobart: The Commission, 1979), 80.

⁴⁵ Rhys Jones, 'Submission to the Senate Select Committee on South West Tasmania', Commonwealth Hansard, 19 March 1982, 1715-1764, as reprinted in *Australian Archaeology* 14 (1982) 96-106, 97.

⁴⁶ John Mulvaney, 'Submission to the Senate Select Committee on Southwest Tasmania, 7 December 1981', in *Prehistory and Heritage: The Writings of John Mulvaney* (Canberra: Department of Prehistory, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, 1990), 319-24, 319.

⁴⁷ J Hall, 'Annual General Meeting of the Australian Archaeological Association: The Minutes in Brief', *Australian Archaeology* 10 (June 1980), 112-14, 113.



Fig. 59 Kevin Kiernan on the Franklin River, 1981 (Source: R Jones, AIATSIS).

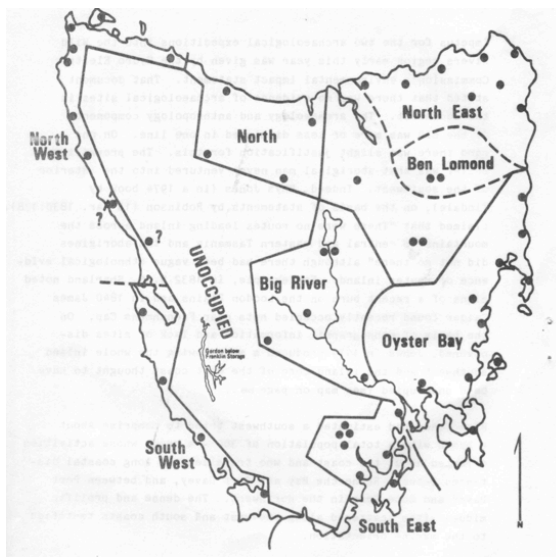


Fig. 60 A map of Aboriginal tribes in Tasmania between 1802 and 1834, misleadingly used by the Hydro-Electric Commission to support the Gordon-below-Franklin dam (Source: HEC).



Fig. 61 Barge transporting a truck along the Franklin River, 1983 (Source: R Jones, AIATSIS).

Fig. 62 (right) Cartoon caricaturing Rhys Jones and 'Electric' Eric Reece, published in *The Mercury*, 19 March 1981.



Lohrey.⁴⁸ As a result, two archaeologists, Don Ranson and Rhys Jones, joined the next expedition of cavers up the Franklin River in January 1981.

There was a great sense of drama exploring the wild reaches of the Franklin River. ‘It is a mighty stream flowing swiftly in a full river trench,’ Jones wrote excitedly in his diary on 8 January 1981. ‘It has the greatest flow of any Tasmanian river & must be one of the greatest in Australia.’⁴⁹ They passed the site of the proposed dam on their way up the gorge and camped at night in the dense rainforest, where ‘We discussed national parks, the damming of the Gordon-Franklin – rafting the rapids etc.’⁵⁰ They started their excavations in a small limestone cave near Nicholl’s Range, where they found some flakes, but no ‘unequivocal evidence for human occupation’. The main discovery on this preliminary expedition came on 11 January 1981, when Ranson, Blain and Jones spotted a tree which had fallen near the confluence of the Denison and Gordon Rivers, exposing a clean section of silt on the riverbank. On closer inspection, they found stone tools and charcoal embedded in the earth. Jones even identified a ‘conjoin’ – a single artefact split in two – suggesting that the river bank had once been used as a chipping floor and ‘a good camp site ... with a commanding view.’⁵¹ It was the first discovery of Aboriginal occupation in the inland southwest rivers region. Intriguingly, the radiocarbon dates of 250-450 years ago showed that the thick rainforest had not been as impenetrable as previously thought.⁵²

A few weeks later, Kiernan returned to the lower reaches of the Franklin River with the director of the Tasmanian Wilderness Society, Bob Brown, and its secretary, Bob Burton.⁵³ Brown was hoping to find the bones of a convict who might have perished in the region after escaping the Macquarie Harbour Penal Station: the story conjured the wildness of the country and would help bring publicity to the campaign against the dam. On 10 February, Kiernan returned to ‘Fraser Cave’, which he remembered containing a substantial ‘bone deposit’. When he climbed into the entrance chamber, he was amazed by the extent of the deposit. There were no convict bones, but: ‘Suddenly I found a stone tool in my hand, then another,

⁴⁸ Sandra Bowdler, ‘Communication Breakthrough’, *Australian Archaeology* 12 (Jun 1981), 16.

⁴⁹ Rhys Jones, ‘Gordon River, Tasmania, January 1981’, Field Journals, AIATSIS Library, Canberra, MS 5040/1/47, 8 January 1981.

⁵⁰ Jones, ‘Gordon River, Tasmania, January 1981’, 8 January 1981.

⁵¹ Jones, ‘Gordon River, Tasmania, January 1981’, 11 January 1981.

⁵² Jones initially claimed the find to be of Pleistocene antiquity. Jones, ‘Submission to the Senate Select Committee on South West Tasmania’, 99.

⁵³ Middleton, ‘Sydney Speleological Society Franklin River Expedition 1977’, 75.

then the charcoal of an ancient hearth. Whose hand had last held these tools?’⁵⁴ The ‘two Bobs’ joined him in the cave and together they surveyed the artefacts, which were scattered over an area about 100m², and collected some charcoal and pollen samples from a natural section ‘and a few surface flakes to convince perhaps armchair ridden bureaucrats back in the city.’⁵⁵ Brown was swept up by the romanticism of the Aboriginal story they had stumbled upon: ‘I thought I heard a child laugh in the distance. For a moment I saw a group of black people come through the entrance: but it was just the play of sun and shadow from the trees outside. It seemed impossible that centuries had passed since these people left this home. I imagined meeting them and learning from them. But they were gone, never to return.’⁵⁶

Don Ranson, an archaeologist at the Tasmanian National Parks and Wildlife Service, confirmed that the stones had been worked by human hand. He dubbed the find ‘the Tutankhamen of Tasmanian cave archaeology’.⁵⁷ The news made the front page of the local papers and was covered by the mainland press, but it was also greeted with scepticism and cynicism. The hydro-electricity group HEAT denounced the announcement as a political stunt, while others, such as the Chairman of the Tasmanian Legislative Council Select Committee on Power Development Harry Braid, intimated that the find was too convenient to be believed. ‘His tactic of suggesting some people were claiming it a fake was wholly successful in initiating such claims,’ wrote Kiernan, ‘although he was careful to dissociate himself from any such nasty suggestions.’⁵⁸

Three weeks later, a team of archaeologists, cavers and National Parks officers rafted down the Franklin to investigate the cave. It was already dark on 9 March 1981 when they tied their boats to the riverbank. They had a deep chill after hours navigating the fast-flowing river, hauling their aluminium punt and rubber dingy over successive rapids, journeying deeper into the dense rainforest of southwest Tasmania. The rain picked up again as they unloaded their gear and stumbled through the thick, wet scrub to the limestone outcrop perched above the river. ‘I had closed my mind to everything,’ Jones later reflected, ‘I was just following the person in front and trying to avoid these wet branches hitting me in the face.’⁵⁹ They took

⁵⁴ Kiernan, ‘Days in a Wilderness’, 75.

⁵⁵ Kiernan, ‘Days in a Wilderness’, 75.

⁵⁶ Bob Brown (with Peter Dombrovskis), *Wild Rivers* (Sandy Bay, Tas: P Dombrovskis, 1983), 6.

⁵⁷ Don Ranson, as quoted in Bonyhady, “‘So much for a name’”, 147.

⁵⁸ Kiernan, ‘Days in a Wilderness’, 76; SJ Paterson, ‘Comments on Archaeological Investigations in the Andrew River Valley, Acheron River Valley and at Precipitous Bluff’, *Australian Archaeology* 21 (Dec 1985), 148-150.

⁵⁹ Rhys Jones and Kenneth Russell Henderson, ‘The Extreme Climatic Place? An Interview with Rhys Jones’, *Hemisphere* 26(1) (Jul/Aug 1981), 54-59, 56.

shelter in the mouth of the cave, which opened ‘like a huge, curved shell’.⁶⁰ Some of the team started a small, smoky fire to cook their dinner, while the others, with the light of their torches, ventured further into the cavern. The cave opened out ‘like an aircraft hangar’ and extended for almost two hundred metres into the cliff. But it was not its scale that excited them: it was the idea that this remote cave, buried in thick ‘horizontal’ rainforest at the southernmost corner of the continent, could have once been home to a thriving human population. As Jones wrote in his journal that night: ‘We could see seas of flakes & bones & charcoal in situ.’⁶¹ Too tired to erect their tents, they unrolled their sleeping mats on the disturbed floor at the cave entrance. It later occurred to them that they were probably the first people to sleep there in around fifteen thousand years.

Over the next two days, as rain poured outside the cave, the team carefully investigated its contents. Greg Middleton mapped the extent of the cavern, Steve Harris documented the surrounding vegetation, and Barry Blain searched for a clearing that could be used as a helicopter landing site. The archaeologists, Jones and Don Ranson, surveyed the stone tools and charred animal bones scattered across the surface, and chose a place to open a small trench where the black sediment was covered by a thin layer of soft stalagmite. The stratigraphy was intriguing: a complex of overlapping layers of charcoal, burnt clay, ochre, fragments of charred animal bone, stone tools, and occasional sterile layers. While wet-sieving the buckets coming out of the excavation in the river, Harris watched as the loamy soil ‘melted’ away, ‘revealing glistening stone tools of handsome quality, along with huge amounts of broken bone.’⁶² By early afternoon he had already filled several plastic bags with artefacts. The test pit only extended to a depth of 1.2 metres before it met bedrock, but it yielded an extraordinary 75,000 artefacts and 250,000 animal bone fragments, which were counted, analysed and written up very quickly, due to the intense political imperatives. The small test pit represented about one per cent of the artefact-bearing deposit, making the cave one of the richest archaeological sites in Australia. ‘In terms of the number of stone tools,’ Jones remarked to one journalist, ‘much, much richer than Mungo.’⁶³

The archaeological remains told a remarkable story. The stone tools appeared to be a regional variant of the ‘Australian core tool and scraper tradition’, found across the mainland during

⁶⁰ Jones and Henderson, ‘The Extreme Climatic Place?’, 56.

⁶¹ Rhys Jones, ‘Trip to Franklin River’, Field Journals, AIATSIS, MS 5040/1/50, 9 March 1981.

⁶² Stephen Harris, ‘A Narrative of an Archaeological Expedition to the Franklin River’, *Southern Caver* 12(4) (May 1981), 79-84, 81.

⁶³ Jones and Henderson, ‘The Extreme Climatic Place?’, 55.



Fig. 63 Archaeological team inside Kutikina, 1981 (Source: R Jones, AIATSIS).



Fig. 64 Don Ranson outside Kutikina, 1981 (Source: R Jones, AIATSIS).

the Pleistocene, suggesting immense chains of cultural connection before the creation of Bass Strait. Some tools had been knapped out of ‘Darwin-glass’, which had been collected from a crater a few days’ walk northwest, where an ancient meteorite impact had melted the surface rock into a fine natural glass. The bone fragments were also curious. Most had been charred or smashed to extract marrow, and almost all (95 per cent) were wallaby bones, suggesting a finely targeted hunting strategy.⁶⁴ But most surprisingly, underneath the upper layer of hearths, there were angular fragments of limestone that appeared to have shattered and fallen from the cave roof at a time of extreme cold, forming rubble on the floor. It was one of the main pieces of evidence that led Jones to speculate in his diary on 12 March 1981: ‘Is this the late glacial technology? Are we at say 13k – 15k BP?’⁶⁵ Kiernan asked similar questions in his notes as he investigated the limestone cave system: ‘the gravels overlying bedrock do represent some sort of higher energy stream environment. Might they be late Last Glacial?’⁶⁶

The possibility of Ice Age dates conjured the image of a dramatically different world. Pollen records in the region revealed that what is now rainforest was once an alpine herbfield like the tundra found in Alaska, northern Russia and northern Canada.⁶⁷ At the height of the Last Glacial Maximum the mighty trees of ancient Gondwanaland had retreated to the river gorges, where they were irrigated and sheltered from fire, while wallabies and wombats roamed the high, open plains. The cold blast of Antarctica, only one thousand kilometres to the south, had dropped temperatures by around 6.5°C. A sixty-five square kilometre ice cap presided over the central Tasmanian plateau, feeding a twelve kilometre-long glacier that gripped the upper Franklin Valley. Icebergs floated off the Tasmanian coast.⁶⁸ After voyaging to Antarctica in 1986, Jones compared the conditions in southwest Tasmania at the LGM to those in Heard Island today.⁶⁹

When the carbon dates were returned in December 1981, they confirmed that the cave had been occupied twenty thousand years ago. ‘I have spent eighteen years looking for archaeological sites in Australia,’ Jones declared on his return. ‘This is the site I have been

⁶⁴ Jones, ‘Submission to the Senate Select Committee on South West Tasmania’, 101.

⁶⁵ Jones, ‘Field Journals, Trip to Franklin River, S.W. Tasmania’, 12 March 1981.

⁶⁶ Kevin Kiernan, ‘An Alternative Chronology for the Cave Deposits’, 13 March 1981, in Jones, ‘Trip to Franklin River, S.W. Tasmania’.

⁶⁷ MK Macphail, ‘Late Pleistocene Environments in Tasmania’, *Search* 6 (1975), 295-300; MK Macphail, ‘Vegetation and Climates in Southern Tasmania Since the Last Glaciation’, *Quaternary Research* 11 (1979), 306-341.

⁶⁸ Rhys Jones, ‘From Kakadu to Kutikina: The Southern Continent at 18,000 Years Ago’, in Olga Soffer and Clive Gamble (eds.), *The World at 18,000 BP* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 264-295, 278-9.

⁶⁹ Rhys Jones, ‘Voyage 6 Anare, Jan-Feb, 1987’, Rhys Jones Papers, NLA, Acc 04/142, Box 2.

looking for.⁷⁰ At the height of the last Ice Age, Kutikina was home to the southernmost humans on earth. In southern Patagonia, the oldest sites of human occupation cluster around ten thousand years ago; in New Zealand, the first voyagers arrived on the southern shores around one thousand years ago; but in southwest Tasmania, twenty thousand years ago, people hunted red-necked wallabies on the broad open slopes of Franklin valley, they collected fine stone from glacial melt water gravels and knapped them into tools, and they sheltered in the mouths of deep, limestone caverns, warming themselves beside crackling camp fires. ‘They alone,’ Jones reflected, ‘may have experienced the high latitude, glacier-edge conditions of a southern Ice Age.’⁷¹

Jones was immediately taken by the similarities between the archaeology in the caves of southwest Tasmania and the celebrated Ice Age sites of the Dordogne. He found comparisons between the shape and size of the stone tools, the form of the hearths and the deposit, and the narrowly targeted hunting patterns. Ochre pigment in the deposit even raised the possibility that the walls of Kutikina might once have borne art, like the limestone caverns of southern France. ‘Although the sites are nearly twenty thousand kilometres apart, the fundamental thing you can say about them is how similar was the experience of their inhabitants.’⁷²

Around fifteen thousand years ago, the climate warmed, the glaciers began to melt, and, in Europe, the ice retreated to expose ploughed and enriched fertile soils, which became the stage for the human dramas of the agricultural and industrial revolutions. In Tasmania, the rainforest re-emerged from the gorges to invade the slopes above and people seem to have retreated to the region’s more hospitable margins. The Bassian Plain became a Strait and a thin stalagmite formed over the old hearths upon which they once lived.⁷³ These ‘two paths’, Jones mused, so closely aligned during the Ice Age, ‘came together again only a hundred and fifty years ago with saddening effects for the descendants of these early men from the Franklin and Gordon Rivers.’⁷⁴ When Tasmanian Aboriginal leader Michael Mansell visited Kutikina for the first time in 1982, he described the experience as ‘like coming home’.⁷⁵

A political reporter, Hendrik Gout, made a brief documentary of the test excavation and by

⁷⁰ Rhys Jones as quoted in McQueen, *The Franklin*, 41.

⁷¹ Jones, ‘From Kakadu to Kutikina’, 290-91.

⁷² Jones and Henderson, ‘The Extreme Climatic Place?’, 59.

⁷³ Jones, ‘Submission to the Senate Select Committee on South West Tasmania’, 100-1.

⁷⁴ Jones and Henderson, ‘The Extreme Climatic Place?’, 59.

⁷⁵ McQueen, *The Franklin*, 43.

the time the team returned to Strahan the news of their finds had already been broadcast nationally on television and radio. ‘Again the cameras whirled and the presses pressed,’ recalled Kiernan.⁷⁶ The State Labor government incorporated the new finds into their plans for the region and, on 30 April 1981, Premier Doug Lowe proclaimed the Franklin-Lower Gordon Wild Rivers National Park. He also gained the support of Malcolm Fraser to nominate the region for World Heritage Listing on the basis of its natural and cultural values. Nevertheless, these measures were seen by many as largely tokenistic: the Lake Pedder dam had gone ahead in 1972, despite being proclaimed a national park eighteen years earlier.⁷⁷

Lowe was lukewarm about HEC’s proposal to dam the Franklin, but he was also hesitant to pick a public fight with the largest employer in the state. As a compromise, he suggested a different, less destructive hydro-electricity plan: the Gordon-above-Olga dam, as opposed to the Gordon-below-Franklin. The public would have the chance to decide between the two dams at a referendum called for 12 December 1981. The compromise made Lowe few friends. The HEC, the Tasmanian Wilderness Society, and his own party all opposed it. When he tried to add a ‘no dams’ option to the ballot, a party coup on 11 November replaced him as Premier with Harry Holgate, ensuring that both major parties were now in favour of flooding the Franklin.⁷⁸

At the 1981 Power Referendum 47 per cent of the electorate voted in favour of the Gordon-below-Franklin dam, seemingly sealing the fate of Kutikina. But, remarkably, there was also a 45 per cent informal vote. Tens of thousands of voters had scrawled ‘no dams’ on their ballots papers.⁷⁹ The unprecedented ‘write-in’ had been organised by the Tasmanian Wilderness Society, led by the tall, plain-speaking medical doctor, Bob Brown. Buoyed by the success of the campaign, Brown sought to repeat the result nationally, organising volunteers to protest the dam at local, state and federal elections throughout 1982. In March 1982, 12 per cent of voters wrote ‘no dams’ on their ballot papers in the federal by-election of Lowe in NSW; in June, 40 per cent of voters cast ‘no dams’ ballots in the ACT House of Assembly election; and in December, 41 per cent of voters registered a ‘no dams’ protest on their ballots at the federal by-election of Flinders in Victoria. As a sign of the political

⁷⁶ Kiernan, ‘Days in a Wilderness’, 76-77.

⁷⁷ Greg Buckman, *Tasmania’s Wilderness Battles: A History* (Crow’s Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin/Jacana Books, 2008), 14-29, 45.

⁷⁸ Patrick Weller, ‘The Anatomy of a Grievous Miscalculation: 3 February, 1983’, in Howard R Penniman (ed.), *Australia at the Polls: The National Elections of 1980 and 1983* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1983), 248-280, 264.

⁷⁹ Hutton and Connors, *A History of the Australian Environment Movement*, 161-2.

potency of the issue, Liberal MP Peter Reith won the Flinders by-election by cultivating the 'no dams' vote, and was voted out at the general election three months later after failing to intervene in the Franklin Dam dispute.⁸⁰

At a state level, the Franklin controversy continued to dog the Labor government. Lowe resigned from the Australian Labor Party, depriving Holgate of his majority and forcing him to an early election in May 1982, which he then lost to Liberal Robin Gray. The new Premier immediately passed a bill to proceed with the construction of the dam and (unsuccessfully) called on Fraser to withdraw the pending nomination for World Heritage listing. 'For eleven months of the year,' Gray famously declared, 'the Franklin River is nothing but a brown ditch, leech-ridden, unattractive to the majority of people. You've got to be superbly fit or mentally ill to go rafting down there at any time of the year.'⁸¹ In late July 1982, work on the dam began.

The federal leader of the Australian Democrats, Don Chipp, recognised the mood of the electorate against the dam and in late 1981 initiated an inquiry into 'the federal responsibility in assisting Tasmania to preserve its wilderness areas of national and international importance.'⁸² The Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, Jones, Mulvaney, and the executive of the Australian Archaeological Association were among the many to make submissions to the new Senate Select Committee on South West Tasmania. The Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre drew upon the archaeological research in their submission, highlighting especially the comparisons with the Dordogne region of France as a sign of the cave's 'great historical importance'. But they also made a more personal plea. The Franklin River caves 'form part of us – we are of them and they of us. Their destruction represents a part destruction of us.'⁸³

In response to these submissions, several members of the Senate Select Committee flew into the Franklin valley on 3 March 1982 to see the ongoing archaeological work for themselves. After the success of the two 1981 expeditions, a larger team had returned to see if there were other sites like Kutikina in the Franklin Valley. They found several new sites, including

⁸⁰ Weller, 'The Anatomy of a Grievous Miscalculation', 264-70; Hutton and Connors, *A History of the Australian Environment Movement*, 161-2.

⁸¹ Gray, as quoted in Thompson, *Bob Brown of the Franklin River*, 160.

⁸² Don Chipp, 'Select Committee on South West Tasmania', *Senate Hansard*, 19 August 1981, 44.

⁸³ Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, 'Submission to the Senate Select Committee'.

Deena Reena, all of which would be destroyed by the new dam.⁸⁴ The Chairman of the Senate Select Committee, Liberal Senator Brian Archer, was impressed by the work and took detailed notes.⁸⁵

Mulvaney himself visited the site three days later as Acting Chairman of the Australian Heritage Commission.⁸⁶ 'It resembled the set of a horror movie,' he later wrote, 'The floor was littered with bone and stone fragments.'⁸⁷ Since he had first read the HEC report on the area in October 1981, he had been vocal in his opposition to the dam. One of the proposals being promoted by state government representatives was to 'salvage' the Franklin sites by impregnating the earth with resin and removing the cave floors completely. It was this suggestion that drove Mulvaney to commit to the campaign 'boots and all'.⁸⁸ When the Minister for Home Affairs and Environment, Tom McVeigh, advocated this 'salvage' option in December 1982, Mulvaney resigned in protest from his position on the Interim Council of the National Museum, within McVeigh's portfolio.⁸⁹ The President of the Australian Archaeological Association Ron Lampert wrote a telegram to Fraser, Hayden and Chipp as a measure of support:

We completely endorse Professor Mulvaney's stand on this issue STOP Cabinet's scheme to preserve caves is utter nonsense and its claim that bulk removal of deposit will preserve heritage is willfully misleading STOP We regard this decision as cowardly and irresponsible.⁹⁰

It was a rare example of the AAA taking an overtly political stance. And Chief HEC Geologist SJ Paterson took to the pages of *Nature* and *Quaternary Australasia* in 1983-84 to accuse the archaeological profession of subordinating science in the promotion of a cause.⁹¹

⁸⁴ Rhys Jones, Don Ranson, Jim Allen and Kevin Kiernan, 'The Australian National University: Tasmanian National Parks and Wildlife Service Archaeological Expedition to the Franklin River, 1982: A Summary of Results', *Australian Archaeology* 16 (1983), 57-70, 69.

⁸⁵ Rhys Jones, 'Franklin River Archaeological Trip, Feb-Mar 1982', Field Journals, AIATSIS Library, MS 5040/1/56, 3 March 1982.

⁸⁶ Jones, 'Franklin River Archaeological Trip, Feb-Mar 1982', 6 March 1982.

⁸⁷ John Mulvaney, *Digging up a Past* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2011), 234-5.

⁸⁸ John Mulvaney, 'The World Stage', in Roger Green (ed.), *Battle for the Franklin: Conversations with the Combatants in the Struggle for South West Tasmania* (Sydney: Fontana/Australian Conservation Foundation, 1984), 218-227, 218.

⁸⁹ Mulvaney, *Digging up a Past*, 236.

⁹⁰ Mulvaney felt that the archaeological community had been slow to support his interventions. RJ Lampert, telegram to Malcolm Fraser, Bill Hayden and Don Chipp, in Rhys Jones Papers, NLA, MS ACC 05/191, Item 41, Box 4.

⁹¹ Paterson undertook the initial survey for the HEC in May 1983 and, after the High Court intervened to stop the dam in July 1983, he continued to survey the region to gather evidence for the HEC to challenge the

On the basis of his own, two-week search for archaeological cave sites in the wider region (without a qualified archaeologist), Paterson had concluded that the Franklin Valley archaeological sites were neither exceptional nor significant: ‘Clearly the Franklin Caves are not unique and the statements made by Prof. Mulvaney, Dr. Jones and Dr. Allen are not scientifically objective.’⁹² Moreover, he argued that the obstruction of development under the guise of ‘World Heritage’ was ‘an abomination’, especially considering: ‘The Franklin Caves contain the discards of hunter-gatherers, they have not been shown to contain priceless Palaeolithic cave art similar to the Lascaux Cave of the Dordogne.’⁹³ In Mulvaney’s fiery response he explained that the value of the Tasmanian evidence was that it directly challenged this archaic and ‘Europocentric version of prehistory’.⁹⁴ As for criticisms about the politicisation of archaeology, he reflected in an interview with Roger Green, ‘There are political aspects, but if this area is destroyed, and the scientific world just lets it happen passively because it’s not their point to make political interventions, I think they’re just abnegating moral duty.’⁹⁵ As Jim Bowler wrote to the President of the Australian Academy of Science, AJ Birch, in the heat of the campaign: ‘To remain objective in this debate is one thing; to ignore it is quite another.’⁹⁶

There were many archaeologists active in the fight to save Kutikina, behind the scenes and on the blockade, but Jones became the other public face of the campaign, communicating the finds to the Senate Select Committee and giving interviews and public talks around the country, including a lecture to the Canberra Archaeological Society titled ‘Cavers of the Lost Karst’: a nod to the recent release of the first Indiana Jones film.⁹⁷ On 4 September 1982, he and Mulvaney arranged for a full page advertisement to appear in *The Australian*, signed by

decision. SJ Paterson, R Underwood, RK Tarvydas, DR Wilson and FJ Baynes, ‘Geological Report No. 644-94-23’, in Hydro-Electric Commission, Tasmania, *Report on the Gordon River Power Development Stage Two, Cave Survey* (Hobart: The Commission, 1983), 12; SJ Paterson, ‘Franklin Valley Not So Special?’, *Nature* 305 (29 Sept 1983), 354; John Mulvaney, ‘Franklin Valley Defended’, *Nature* 306 (15 Dec 1983), 636; Rhys Jones, ‘Franklin Valley sites’, *Nature* 306 (22/29 Dec 1983), 726; SJ Paterson, ‘The Lesson of Franklin Valley’, *Nature* 309 (10 May 1984), 108; Paterson, ‘Comments on Archaeological Investigations’.

⁹² SJ Paterson, ‘Quaternarists in Confrontation: The Franklin Controversy – A Rebuttal’, *Quaternary Australasia* 2 (1-2) (May 1984), 1-7, 2.

⁹³ Paterson, ‘Quaternarists in Confrontation’, 2-3.

⁹⁴ Mulvaney, ‘Franklin Valley Defended’, 636.

⁹⁵ Mulvaney, ‘The World Stage’, 225.

⁹⁶ Jim Bowler to AJ Birch, 19 January 1983, Rhys Jones Papers, NLA, MS ACC 05/191, Item 41, Box 4.

⁹⁷ The 1981 Indiana Jones film was titled ‘Raiders of the Lost Ark’. Rhys Jones, ‘Cavers of the Lost Karst’, undated, Canberra Archaeological Society Flyer, Rhys Jones Papers, NLA, MS ACC 05/191, Box 4, Item 41. Isabel McBryde reflected on the many behind-the-scenes contributions by other archaeologists during the campaign in her interview with Martin Thomas, 17-19 August 2004, National Library of Australia, sound recording, ORAL TRC 5194/4.

25 prominent international scholars, with the headline: ‘Do people overseas care more about preserving Australia’s treasures than our own government?’⁹⁸

Their advocacy had a profound influence. When the Senate Select Committee presented its report on the *Future Demand and Supply of Electricity for Tasmania and Other Matters* on 24 November 1982, the archaeology dominated the ‘other matters’. The ‘expert witnesses’ had persuaded them of the international significance of the finds: ‘apart from any other reasons for preserving the area,’ they concluded, ‘the caves are of such importance that the Franklin River be not inundated.’⁹⁹ The next day, Susan Ryan singled out Rhys Jones’ ‘compelling evidence’ in the Senate:

Dr Jones makes it very clear to all of us what our collective responsibility to protect the region really amounts to. We are not talking about an area of parochial interest, we are not talking about a States rights matter, we are not indeed even talking about a national issue; we are talking about an area which is part of the cultural heritage of mankind, as Dr Rhys Jones has so clearly stated. ... Of course this means the dam must not be built.¹⁰⁰

Fraser heeded the conclusions of the report. He did not want the Franklin dam built and was tired of the thousands of letters he was receiving about the affair.¹⁰¹ Although as a farmer he thought of land ‘with economic overtones’, his actions in office had earned him the label of ‘closet greenie’ foisted upon him by Doug Lowe.¹⁰² He had opposed the inundation of Lake Pedder, stopped sandmining on Fraser Island, banned whaling in Australian waters and prevented the Great Barrier Reef from being drilled for oil – often in the face of great internal criticism.¹⁰³ But he was reluctant to intervene in the Franklin River campaign, despite the

⁹⁸ The full text of the advertisement read: ‘In our opinion, Fraser Cave and other archaeological sites are of great international significance. They symbolise the spirit and adaptability of humankind during its colonisation of the globe, in that they constitute the most southern limits of Last Ice Age settlement.’ *The Australian*, 4 September 1981.

⁹⁹ Senate Select Committee on South West Tasmania, *Future Demand and Supply of Electricity for Tasmania and Other Matters* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, November 1982), 204.

¹⁰⁰ Susan Ryan, Second Reading of the ‘World Heritage Properties Protection Bill 1982’, *Hansard*, 25 November 1982, 2857-61, 2858.

¹⁰¹ Malcolm Fraser and Margaret Simons, *Malcolm Fraser: The Political Memoirs* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2015), 580.

¹⁰² Fraser and Simons, *Malcolm Fraser*, 555-7.

¹⁰³ Anne Summers, *Gamble for Power: How Bob Hawke Beat Malcolm Fraser: The 1983 Federal Election* (Melbourne: T Nelson Australia, 1983), 105-6.

recommendations of the Senate Select Committee. His hesitancy hinged on a curious point of principle. He considered the decision about the dam to be a state matter, and he was eager to uphold what he regarded as one of the main checks of power: the clear divide between states' rights and the federal government. 'If Fraser had not believed this,' Margaret Simons wrote with Fraser in his memoirs, 'he could hardly have advocated the right of the Senate to block supply and bring down Whitlam.'¹⁰⁴ To intervene and stop the dam would be to renege on the principle that brought him to power. As a compromise, he sought to resolve the issue by offering Tasmania \$500 million to fund an alternative electricity scheme. 'The offer is on the table,' he wrote to Gray on 19 January 1983, 'it is for the Tasmanian government to take it up or decline as it sees fit'.¹⁰⁵ Gray did not believe the offer was serious and rejected the money within an hour of hearing of it.¹⁰⁶ Construction on the dam continued.

By that stage, the Franklin blockade was already in full swing. On 14 December 1982, the same day that the region was formally listed as a World Heritage site for its natural and cultural values, a chain of rubber rafts blocked the main landing sites, protestors occupied the dam site and rallies were held in cities across Australia.¹⁰⁷ When the archaeological team returned in February 1983, the strong police presence and helicopters constantly whirring overhead made the Tasmanian Wilderness Society's camp at Verandah Cliff feel 'like an eco-Viet Nam.'¹⁰⁸ On 24 February, they watched as police 'evicted' protestors from public land: 'a monstrous abuse of powers'.¹⁰⁹ By autumn 1983, 1272 protestors had been arrested, and nearly 450 had done time in Hobart's Risdon Prison, including Tasmanian Aboriginal leaders Michael Mansell and Rosalind Langford, who were charged with trespass on their return from visiting Kutikina and were remanded without the offer of bail.¹¹⁰ On 16 December, Bob Brown was also charged with trespass and held in Risdon Prison into the New Year. While incarcerated, he received *The Australian's* nomination as Australian of the Year for displaying 'qualities of sincerity, courage and determination in fighting for what he believes

¹⁰⁴ Fraser and Simons, *Malcolm Fraser*, 556.

¹⁰⁵ Fraser to Gray, 19 January 1983, as quoted in Fraser and Simons, *Malcolm Fraser*, 581.

¹⁰⁶ Thompson, *Bob Brown of the Franklin River*, 172.

¹⁰⁷ Thompson, *Bob Brown of the Franklin River*, 162-66.

¹⁰⁸ Rhys Jones, 'Expedition to the Lower Franklin and Gordon Rivers, Feb-Mar 1983', Field Journals, AIATSIS Library, MS 5040/1/66, 18 February 1983; Barry Blain, Richard Fullagar, Don Ranson, Jim Allen, Steve Harris, Rhys Jones, Eric Stadler, Richard Cosgrove and Greg Middleton, 'The Australian National University-Tasmanian National Parks and Wildlife Service Archaeological Expedition to the Franklin and Gordon Rivers, 1983: A Summary of Results', *Australian Archaeology* 16 (1983), 71-83.

¹⁰⁹ Jones, 'Expedition to the Lower Franklin and Gordon Rivers', 24 February 1983.

¹¹⁰ McQueen, *The Franklin*, 43.

is right.’¹¹¹ When he finally signed the bail conditions on 4 January, he walked out of the courthouse and into a seat in State Parliament, where he continued to campaign against the dam.¹¹² A week after his release, while walking home in Strahan, he was assaulted by four men, one wielding a wheel brace.¹¹³ It was a violent example of the ways in which the dam dispute divided Tasmanian society and the heated passions that swirled and eddied around the Franklin River blockade.

While the blockade continued, and with a federal election just around the corner, the Australian Labor Party made a snap change in their leadership on 3 February 1983. They replaced Bill Hayden, who had voted against Labor’s policy to stop the dam at the party’s national conference, with the rising, ambitious Bob Hawke, who had voted for it.¹¹⁴ And in a tumultuous few hours of Australian political history, Fraser called an early election on the same day. ‘Fraser had gambled on Labor being unable to effect a clean change of leadership,’ wrote Anne Summers in her dissection of the event, ‘Labor had gambled by replacing a leader with Ministerial experience with a man who had been in the Parliament a little over two years.’¹¹⁵ Hawke recognised the symbolism of the Franklin River dispute and harnessed its momentum to make the dam a defining issue in the election campaign.¹¹⁶ The day after the election was called, on 4 February 1983, twenty thousand people rallied at Franklin Square in Hobart, where Langford led the crowd in a chant of ‘Land rights to save the sites’.¹¹⁷

Neither Fraser nor Hawke believed the dispute over the Franklin River dam decided the 5 March 1983 election, instead citing broader concerns with the economy. But there is a strong case that it swung the result in Hawke’s favour. The Wilderness Society, continuing their highly organised, campaign-oriented strategy, placed three thousand volunteers at Save the Franklin polling booths in marginal seats and arranged the widespread publication of Peter Dombrovskis’ iconic image of Rock Island Bend.¹¹⁸ The outgoing Deputy Prime Minister, Doug Anthony, was adamant: ‘There is no doubt that the dam was the issue that lost the

¹¹¹ Thompson, *Bob Brown of the Franklin River*, 168.

¹¹² Thompson, *Bob Brown of the Franklin River*, 170-171.

¹¹³ Thompson, *Bob Brown of the Franklin River*, 170-171.

¹¹⁴ Geoff Law, *The River Runs Free: Exploring and Defending Tasmania’s Wilderness* (Camberwell, Vic: Penguin, 2008), 188.

¹¹⁵ Summers, *Gamble for Power*, 12.

¹¹⁶ Phillip Toyne and Simon Balderstone, ‘The Environment’, in Susan Ryan and Troy Bramston (eds.), *The Hawke Government: A Critical Retrospective* (Melbourne: Pluto Press, 2003), 170-83.

¹¹⁷ Law, *The River Runs Free*, 189.

¹¹⁸ Thompson, *Bob Brown of the Franklin River*, 177.

government the election.’¹¹⁹ In Tasmania, as a backlash for his ‘interventionist’ approach to the dam, there was a 4.5 per cent swing against Hawke. But the overall national swing towards Hawke was 4 per cent, which gave him control of the House of Representatives and shared power in the Senate with the Australian Democrats. In his victory speech just after midnight on 6 March 1983, Hawke declared: ‘The dam will not go ahead’.¹²⁰

On 31 March, the Hawke government passed regulations under the Australian National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act preventing further construction on the Franklin dam.¹²¹ Premier Gray took the matter to the High Court, challenging the constitutionality of Hawke’s ‘interventionist’ legislation and setting in motion the landmark case ‘Commonwealth v Tasmania’. The legal challenge included claims from counsel that Kutikina could not be of special significance to Aboriginal people because the Tasmanian race was extinct.¹²² In response, the members of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre signed angry affidavits affirming their cultural identity, while in Canberra, Jones and Mulvaney were called in as archaeological advisors on the case: ‘We spent almost the whole of Easter locked in the Attorney General’s department (the Gorton Building in Canberra) preparing drafts of what became our submission to the High Court in the case.’¹²³ Their submission built on their previous advocacy, outlining the recent history of Aboriginal dispossession, the new archaeological story that had emerged from the Franklin valley, and the international heritage significance of the caves.

On 1 July 1983, by the narrowest of margins, the High Court announced in Hawke’s favour. The judges in the majority considered that the Commonwealth had a clear obligation to use its External Affairs power to stop the proposed dam, as the inundation of ‘the Franklin River, including Kutikina Cave and Deena Reena Cave’, would breach the World Heritage Properties Conservation Act and damage Australia’s international standing. They also invoked the Commonwealth power under Section 51(26) to make laws with respect to Aboriginal people. As Justice Lionel Murphy stated:

The history of the Aboriginal people of Australia since European settlement is that they have been the subject of unprovoked aggression, conquest, pillage, rape,

¹¹⁹ Doug Anthony, as quoted in Thompson, *Bob Brown of the Franklin River*, 178.

¹²⁰ Bob Hawke, *The Hawke Memoirs* (Melbourne: Heinemann, 2004), 138-39.

¹²¹ Thompson, *Bob Brown of the Franklin River*, 179.

¹²² Lyndall Ryan, *Tasmanian Aborigines: A History Since 1803* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2012), 319.

¹²³ Mulvaney, *Digging up a Past*, 237.

brutalisation, attempted genocide and systematic and unsystematic deconstruction of their culture. Parliament was entitled to act ... to preserve the material evidence of the history and culture of the Tasmanian Aboriginals.¹²⁴

Although the case is publicly seen as a green victory, behind the scenes it was the Aboriginal story that pushed the decision over the line. The archaeological evidence featured in every report about the decision, and Malcolm Fraser considered it to be the deciding factor in the court case.¹²⁵ Within days of the decision, barges laden with trucks and bulldozers withdrew from the area to Strahan. The Franklin River campaign had finally come to an end. For the archaeological profession, however, the political ramifications had only just begun.

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During the campaign, archaeologists, conservationists and Tasmanian Aboriginal people converged occasionally at the Tasmanian Wilderness Society's camp at Verandah Cliff. The archaeologists and speleologists shared information with the 'greenies' about how to navigate the region and protestors such as JE Downie showed the archaeologists stone tools they had encountered during the blockade.¹²⁶ It was a productive, albeit tense alliance. As Mulvaney later reflected, 'We claimed an Ice Age environment of tundra-like grasslands, where their dearly loved primeval forest was supposed to have stood eternally. By discrediting the image of a forest wilderness, we were ruining their image and battle cry!'¹²⁷ Even Bob Brown, who was receptive to the views of the different players in the campaign, could not fully accommodate the archaeological insights that emerged from Kutikina. He wrote of his yearning to meet the Pleistocene inhabitants of Kutikina, remarking 'We would have so little in common – except the wilderness environment.'¹²⁸ The eternal nature of the wilderness ideal clashed with the particularities of archaeological and ecological history, which told a story of transformation.¹²⁹

Added to these tensions was the animosity the Tasmanian Aboriginal community felt towards both the archaeologists, for fossicking on their land, and the conservationists, for suggesting

¹²⁴ Blunden, 'What the High Court Justices Had To Say', 7, 19.

¹²⁵ Williams, 'Down the Franklin by Lawn Mower', 151.

¹²⁶ JE Downie, 'Vehicles Churn Up Evidence of Prehistoric Tasmanians', *Australian Archaeology* 16 (1983), 84-86.

¹²⁷ Mulvaney, *Digging up a Past*, 238.

¹²⁸ Brown, *Wild Rivers*, 7.

¹²⁹ Richard Flanagan, *A Terrible Beauty: History of the Gordon River Country* (Melbourne: Greenhouse, 1985), 3.

they had never lived there. In late January 1982, Rosalind Langford publicly rebuked the Tasmanian Wilderness Society for their silence on Aboriginal rights.¹³⁰ At the Australian Archaeological Association meeting in Hobart later that year, she confronted the archaeological profession in a powerful, eloquent and angry speech titled ‘Our Heritage – Your Playground’. She invoked the amateur anthropologist William Crowther’s grave-robbing at the start of the twentieth century as an example of archaeology’s complicity in the colonial project: ‘You, as a profession, have a lot of ground to makeup.’¹³¹ And on behalf of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community, she asserted her ownership of the Aboriginal sites that had been excavated on the Franklin. ‘The issue is control,’ she told the audience of archaeologists:

You seek to say that as scientists you have a right to obtain and study information of our culture. You seek to say that because you are Australians you have a right to study and explore our heritage because it is a heritage to be shared by all Australians, white and black. From our point of view we say – you have come as invaders, you have tried to destroy our culture, you have built your fortunes upon the lands and bodies of our people and now, having said sorry, want a share in picking out the bones of what you regard as a dead past. We say that it is our past, our culture and heritage and forms part of our present life. As such it is ours to control and it is ours to share on our terms. ... You can either be our guests or our enemies.¹³²

But at the end of her address, in what came as a surprise to her audience, Langford extended an ‘olive branch’ to the archaeological community, contrasting Crowther’s grave-robbing with a different, more consultative approach:

We are not hostile to ‘proper’ science and we love our heritage and our culture. But until we can share that knowledge we must be secure with control of our land and our culture.¹³³

As Jim Allen later reported, it was through the grudging recognition of ‘proper science’ that

¹³⁰ Bonyhady, “‘So much for a name’”, 152.

¹³¹ Rosalind F Langford, ‘Our Heritage – Your Playground’, *Australian Archaeology* 16 (Jun 1983), 1-6, 6.

¹³² Langford, ‘Our Heritage – Your Playground’, 2, 5.

¹³³ Langford, ‘Our Heritage – Your Playground’, 6.

archaeologists and Aboriginal custodians were able to establish an uneasy truce and to focus their discussions on future interactions.¹³⁴ At the Australian Archaeological Association AGM, the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre proposed four motions, all of which were adopted: to acknowledge Aboriginal ownership of their heritage and to seek permission before excavating Aboriginal sites; to consult with the Aboriginal community before accepting private funding for research in southwest Tasmania; to actively support Aboriginal land rights campaigns ‘in acknowledgement of the debt owed to the Aboriginal people by the archaeological profession’; and to support the establishment of a majority-Aboriginal advisory committee that would oversee all further work on Tasmanian Aboriginal sites.¹³⁵ The final motion was the only one to pass unanimously. The question of ‘Aboriginal ownership of their heritage’ fuelled the most discussion, with many taking the philosophical view that no one can own the past, while others – and ultimately the majority – sympathised with Langford’s statement: ‘if we Aborigines cannot control our own heritage, *what the hell can we control?*’,¹³⁶

The 1982 AAA conference, and the subsequent meetings between archaeologists and Aboriginal custodians, was a moment of healing. Through dialogue, a protocol was established for proper consultation, direct lines of communications were opened between communities about sites, and Aboriginal people were invited to join all future archaeological investigations in Tasmania.¹³⁷ As a result of the meetings, Langford and Mansell travelled to Kutikina Cave in late December 1982. Mansell later wrote of this visit in an essay in *Pugganna News* titled ‘That Cave Is Ours’. When they entered, ‘the sad dampness of the Cave and the feeling of being close now to my people – the old people – was in the air.’¹³⁸ In the back chamber, Langford started to hum and then sing songs familiar to the Tasmanian Aboriginal community. A cool wind and a flicker of sunlight alerted them to an ancestral presence. Near the entrance, she draped an Aboriginal flag across the cave floor as a mark that ‘No whites can go there’.¹³⁹ Mansell described the rediscovery of the cave as ‘the most important cultural thing that’s ever happened to us.’¹⁴⁰ And while he and Langford were adamant that no further archaeological work be conducted in this sacred place – ‘the most

¹³⁴ Jim Allen, ‘Aborigines and Archaeologists in Tasmania, 1983’, *Australian Archaeology* 16 (Jun 1983), 7-10, 7.

¹³⁵ Allen, ‘Aborigines and Archaeologists in Tasmania, 1983’, 7-8.

¹³⁶ Emphasis in the original. Langford, ‘Our Heritage – Your Playground’, 4.

¹³⁷ Allen, ‘Aborigines and Archaeologists in Tasmania, 1983’, 9.

¹³⁸ Michael Mansell, ‘That Cave is Ours’, *Pugganna News* 15 (Sept 1983).

¹³⁹ Rosalind Langford as quoted in: Mansell, ‘That Cave is Ours’.

¹⁴⁰ McQueen, *The Franklin*, 43.

sacred thing in the state’ – he also recognised the value of the history that had been uncovered: ‘The fact that the Aborigines could survive physically and culturally in adverse conditions and over such a long period of time ... helps me counteract the feeling of racial inferiority and enables me to demonstrate within the wider community that I and my people are the equal of other members of the community.’¹⁴¹ By the start of 1983 the signs of ‘No Dams’ and ‘Think Globally, Act Locally’ on the blockade were joined by a new one: ‘You Have Entered Aboriginal Land’.¹⁴² It was a statement of time as well as place.

Despite this working rapprochement, some antagonism from the Tasmanian Aboriginal Community towards archaeologists remained. Jones in particular was singled out because of his role in the controversial film *The Last Tasmanian*. As he wrote from the ‘Greenie’s camp’ on 19 February 1983, ‘Vague rumour about Aborigines slagging us for digging a hole in Fraser Cave – looking for skeletons etc!’¹⁴³ In the fallout from the Hobart AAA conference he felt similar hostility from his colleagues: ‘well is there no respite?!’ He implored in his diary, ‘I think I must start to exact a cost for such attacks!’¹⁴⁴ The wound remained raw.

Mulvaney was sympathetic to the connections with the deep past that Mansell and Langford articulated after visiting Kutikina. As he wrote in a letter to Hawke on 24 March 1983, before the government had legislated to stop the damming of the Franklin:

Unknown two years ago to the 3000 or more Tasmanians who identify as Aboriginal Tasmanians, [the caves in the Franklin Valley] have become places of deep emotional experience. This cannot be dismissed as any cynical or opportunistic “political” move. It is a fact of their cultural life henceforth, and a major fact in their assertion of cultural identity. ... As a person deeply concerned with Aboriginal culture, I urge your government to take this matter very seriously.¹⁴⁵

But he was also distressed by the Tasmanian Aboriginal community’s decision to cease research into the Franklin valley caves and was concerned that a few members of a modern community could exercise the power of exclusive ownership over the deep past. What

¹⁴¹ Mansell as quoted in Ryan, *Tasmanian Aborigines*, 319.

¹⁴² Lesley Head, *Second Nature: The History and Implications of Australia as Aboriginal Landscape* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 133.

¹⁴³ Jones, ‘Expedition to the Lower Franklin and Gordon Rivers’, 19 February 1983.

¹⁴⁴ Jones, ‘Expedition to the Lower Franklin and Gordon Rivers’, 18 March 1983.

¹⁴⁵ John Mulvaney to The Honourable R.J. Hawke, Prime Minister, 24 March 1983, Rhys Jones Papers, NLA, MS ACC 05/191, Item 41, Box 4.

implications would this have for bringing Aboriginal history into the national and global story? When does a place or an object move from being an individual's heritage – a family matter – to common heritage? Where should one draw the line between the Pleistocene and the present? These questions came to a head at the end of the decade with the reburial of the Pleistocene skeletal remains from Kow Swamp.

In August 1990, acting under an order from the Governor-in-Council, the Museum of Victoria presented the Echuca Aboriginal Cooperative with the bones of some forty individuals who had lived and died at Kow Swamp between 9000 to 15,000 years ago, and which palaeoanthropologist Alan Thorne had found and excavated from an eroding irrigation channel between 1967 and 1972. The remains were subsequently reburied by the Aboriginal community at an undisclosed location. Mulvaney was one of the few archaeologists who spoke publicly about the reburials, which he regarded as a form of 'vandalism'. He saw the decision to rebury the Kow Swamp remains through the same lens as the proposed destruction of the occupation caves of the Franklin valley. Both were examples of irreplaceable, Pleistocene cultural heritage; both spoke to a profound and ancient human story; both were something to treasure and to celebrate. In a frank and passionate essay in the wake of the reburials, he questioned our moral duty, as humans, towards the past and the future.¹⁴⁶ The destruction of the Pleistocene skeletal remains, in his eyes, had deprived future generations of Aboriginal researchers of the opportunity to gain information about their ancestors. His proposed 'middle ground' had fallen on deaf ears: the creation of a Keeping Place, controlled by scientists and Aboriginal custodians, where cultural heritage such as the Kow Swamp remains could be held, untouched, until dialogue had taken full course and mutual trust and understanding had been reached.

Colin Pardoe, along with Isabel McBryde, represented an alternative view within the discipline. Although Pardoe was opposed to the reburial of any skeletal remains as 'the value of these to archaeology and understanding the past is inestimable', he ultimately concluded that 'it is not my decision':

By accepting Aboriginal ownership and control of their ancestors' bones, I accept their decisions on the disposition of those remains. My optimism stems from the hope

¹⁴⁶ John Mulvaney, 'Past Regained, Future Lost: The Kow Swamp Pleistocene Burials', *Antiquity* 65(246) (Mar 1991), 12-21.

that by demonstrating the value of skeletal studies the day may come when Aboriginal people might wish to preserve those remains “in the name of science”!¹⁴⁷

The key to his optimism was dialogue. For over three decades, Pardoe’s main intellectual output has appeared in the form of plain English ‘community reports’. In beautiful, simple prose, he renders his research on ancient skeletal remains into evocative and information-rich prose-pictures for the relevant Aboriginal communities, with subheadings such as ‘Who was he?’, ‘How old?’, ‘Ancient life’ and ‘Death by Misadventure’. Occasionally, he includes ‘A request’, in which he outlines some future work he would like to do, why he is curious, what he might discover, what he would need to do to uncover that information: ie chemically test (and destroy) a small amount of bone. ‘I would like to find out how long ago the Taronga Drive man died,’ he writes in one report. ‘Rest assured I won’t go ahead without permission. If the community doesn’t want this dating done, it’s no big deal. If you do, I will certainly get the information back when it comes out.’¹⁴⁸

Pardoe’s approach, where possible, empowers custodians whose distant ancestors’ lives are being investigated and it delivers the information to those with the greatest stake in that history. ‘My concern,’ Mulvaney countered, ‘is that, despite this seemingly democratic and conciliatory approach, it is wrongly assumed that local communities fully appreciate the future implications of re-burial and the emotional appeal of populist leaders is allowed full scope.’¹⁴⁹ He was particularly concerned about the state’s involvement in reburials, as he believed it reflected a lack of interest and investment in Australian and Aboriginal heritage. He saw the Kow Swamp remains, as rare survivals from the millions of burials across the past fifteen thousand years, as amongst the Museum of Victoria’s ‘greatest treasures’.¹⁵⁰ What would the reaction be ‘should French nationalist “owners” re-bury the Cro-Magnon human remains or overpaint Lascaux, if Ethiopians cremated “Lucy”, or the pyramids became a stone quarry and the Taj Mahal was razed to build apartments’?¹⁵¹ The decision to repatriate the remains, without investigating all avenues for dialogue or for their preservation

¹⁴⁷ Colin Pardoe, ‘Sharing The Past: Aboriginal Influence on Archaeological Practice, a Case Study from New South Wales’, *Aboriginal History* 14 (1990), 208-223, 222.

¹⁴⁸ Pardoe, ‘Sharing the Past’, 220.

¹⁴⁹ Mulvaney, ‘Past Regained, Future Lost’, 17.

¹⁵⁰ Mulvaney, ‘Past Regained, Future Lost’, 21.

¹⁵¹ Mulvaney, ‘Past Regained, Future Lost’, 18.

in a ‘Keeping Place’, represented ‘a triumph of bureaucracy and irrationality over prudence and positive, collaborative, racial relations.’¹⁵²

But Mulvaney found himself in an increasingly lonely position challenging claims to exclusive Aboriginal ownership of the deep past. Where did the ‘deep past’ even begin? In 1984 and 1987 the AAA, in conjunction with the Museum of Victoria, attempted to draw a line between the Pleistocene and the present.¹⁵³ Palaeoanthropologist Steve Webb suggested that remains older than six or seven thousand years ago be regarded as common heritage, as that was when Greater Australia shrank to its present size. The National Museum of Australia drew the line at the beginning of what has become known as the Common Era, around two thousand years ago.¹⁵⁴ But after a decade of tense discussion, in 1994, the AAA instituted a Code of Ethics which made no distinction between the management of a fifty-year-old artefact and a fifty-thousand-year-old artefact: both belonged to the custodians of the land upon which they were found. The code reflects the philosophy of the motions passed in the wake of Langford’s landmark speech in 1982. It acknowledges the importance of cultural heritage to the survival of Indigenous cultures, and recognises their rights to own, manage, and control that heritage.¹⁵⁵

There were dissenting voices to this unequivocal statement of ownership. Jim Allen highlighted the complexities of the issue when he pointed out that there might be other claimants to Kutikina, such as mainland Indigenous people, considering Tasmania was connected to Australia while the valley was inhabited.¹⁵⁶ But the most vivid illustration of the debate belonged to Jones. In a complex essay that drew together histories, symbols and folk traditions he made a claim on behalf of his Welsh ancestors to be the legal owner of Stonehenge:

‘Côr y Cewri’ we Welsh call it – ‘Court of Giants’, that hulking mass of stones that the English call ‘Stonehenge’. Our word is old. ... There *was* an ancient British past,

¹⁵² Mulvaney, ‘Past Regained, Future Lost’, 12.

¹⁵³ In 1984, the AAA advocated the repatriation of all ‘known individuals’, but believed ‘that all other Aboriginal skeletal remains are of scientific importance and should not be destroyed by being reburied or cremated.’ Betty Meehan, ‘Aboriginal Skeletal Remains’, *Australian Archaeology* 19 (1984), 122-47, 127.

¹⁵⁴ Mulvaney, ‘Past Regained, Future Lost’, 16.

¹⁵⁵ Australian Archaeological Association, ‘Code of Ethics’, *Australian Archaeology* 39 (1994), 129.

¹⁵⁶ Jim Allen, ‘The Politics of the Past’, *Australian Archaeology* 49 (1999), 34-43, 41.

and its strengths and sinews are the spirits that live in the Welsh culture today. In this way we, the dispossessed, have recovered our history...¹⁵⁷

The essay tried to illuminate the ways in which culture and history are appropriated, and the danger of asserting exclusive ownership over the deep past. In the final passages, drawing direct parallels with ‘the politics of ethnic identity in Tasmania’, he withdrew the land claim on the basis that:

Stonehenge does not ‘belong’ to the Welsh, or to any one else. Rather, it is a thing to be known and held in common by all who regard it. Like the Ice Age occupation caves of the Tasmanian Pleistocene, it forms a part of the common heritage of mankind.¹⁵⁸

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Although no further work has been done on Kutikina since the campaign, the success of the High Court judgement in 1983 initially encouraged archaeology in the southwest, outside the Franklin Valley. Jones’ parallels between the Tasmanian archaeology and northern hemisphere Ice Age communities sparked more than a decade of concentrated fieldwork in south-western Tasmania, producing the most complete regional sequence of late Pleistocene archaeology in Australia.¹⁵⁹ Jim Allen and Richard Cosgrove directed much of this work under the umbrella of the Southern Forests Archaeological Project, including uncovering a detailed 35,000-year history of occupation at Warreen in the Maxwell River Valley, south of Kutikina.¹⁶⁰ In 1987, driven in part by a political struggle to extend the World Heritage area, another intense burst of field research led to the rediscovery of several more occupation sites in the river valleys of southwest Tasmania – the Florentine, Weld, and Cracroft rivers.¹⁶¹ Again archaeology was conducted at the last minute to protect a region from impending development, and through timely fieldwork, combined with public advocacy, archaeologists

¹⁵⁷ Rhys Jones, ‘Sylwadau Cynfrodor Ar Gôr Y Cewri; or a British Aboriginal’s land claim to Stonehenge’, in Christopher Chippendale *et al* (eds.), *Who Owns Stonehenge?* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd, 1990), 62-87, 62, 87.

¹⁵⁸ Jones, ‘Sylwadau Cynfrodor Ar Gôr Y Cewri’, 87.

¹⁵⁹ Jillian M Garvey, ‘Preliminary Zooarchaeological Interpretations From Kutikina Cave, South-West Tasmania’, *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 1 (Spring 2006), 57-62.

¹⁶⁰ Jim Allen and Richard Cosgrove, ‘Background History of the Southern Forests Archaeological Project’, in Jim Allen (ed.), *Report of the Southern Forests Archaeological Project, Volume 1, Site Descriptions, Stratigraphies and Chronologies* (Melbourne: La Trobe University, 1996), 3-19, 9.

¹⁶¹ Jones, ‘From Kakadu to Kutikina’, 277.

and conservationists provided the basis for the government to intervene and incorporate large tracts of the Southern Forests into the World Heritage listing.¹⁶²

But despite these successes, archaeological work in Tasmania eventually became embroiled in controversy. Although excavations continued to be carried out in consultation with the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, and with a paid Tasmanian Aboriginal consultant overseeing all work, the Southern Forests Project came to an untimely end. When Allen sought to renew his permits, as per the *Tasmanian Aboriginal Relics Act* (1975), in order to allow for the ongoing analysis of excavated material at La Trobe University, he was flatly refused and was asked to return the materials within the year. As his team had not finished analysing the stone tools – and to return the finds without analysis would be to lose the history the artefacts held – he asked the Tasmanian Aboriginal Land Council for more time. His appeal was unsuccessful. The relevant ministers refused to intervene. In July 1995, under the threat of a legal injunction, he and Tim Murray returned the artefacts with their fate undecided: reburial was the favoured option.¹⁶³ In the wake of the ‘Tasmanian affair’, Allen observed, ‘the current view of TALC apparently is that there should be no further excavation in Tasmania. I am sorely tempted to agree with this view on the grounds that sites and assemblages are safest where they are until social attitudes to the values of archaeology change once more.’¹⁶⁴ This is an archaeologist’s view of time. It exasperated him that ‘the work of eight years’ had been ‘torn down by people with little interest in it’.¹⁶⁵

The Franklin River Campaign was a rare example where archaeology captured and held public attention with profound political results. Kutikina stopped the Gordon-below-Franklin because of the history it revealed: a history that placed the people of ancient Australia into a global narrative. Aboriginal heritage, by being recognised as part of the world’s heritage, could be protected and celebrated as Australian heritage. But despite the success of the campaign, Mulvaney worried about some of the sentiments it had dredged from private depths into the public realm. In his correspondence, he returned often to a comment about Kutikina by the second-most senior official of the Tasmanian Hydro-Electric Commission,

¹⁶² Jones and Mulvaney were again instrumental in listing an area of the southwest for its natural and cultural heritage values. Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths, ‘The Making of a Public Intellectual’, in Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths (eds.), *Prehistory to Politics: John Mulvaney, the Humanities and the Public Intellectual* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996), 1-19, 13-14.

¹⁶³ Tim Murray and Jim Allen, ‘The Forced Repatriation of Cultural Properties to Tasmania’, *Antiquity* 69 (1995), 871-874.

¹⁶⁴ Jim Allen, ‘A Short History of the Tasmanian Affair’, *Australian Archaeology* 41 (Dec 1995), 42-48, 48.

¹⁶⁵ Allen, ‘A Short History of the Tasmanian Affair’, 48.

Bill Gaskell, in 1982: ‘I honestly don’t see the point of keeping it. What can old bits of flint and bones tell you? By all means, come and dig it up, photograph it, record it – why keep it? What good does it do anyone?’¹⁶⁶ Mulvaney was dismayed, after almost three decades working in the field, that there remained such a lack of interest in the history of ancient Australia and so little understanding of the creative potential of archaeology. The government’s intervention in the Kow Swamp reburials, and its refusal to intervene in the demise of the Southern Forest Project, reflected a similar disconnect with the value of Aboriginal heritage. Both decisions represented a lack of political will to foster dialogue and protect invaluable chapters of the national story. As Jones lamented, ‘Politicians sometimes find it easier to give Aboriginal names to national parks, or to grant Heritage rights, than any meaningful land or financial restitution. Giving back the past is easy.’¹⁶⁷ But recognising the multiple meanings of the past, and the responsibilities and possibilities it generates, is hard.

¹⁶⁶ Gaskell spoke these words to a public meeting of the Victorian branch of the Royal Australian Planning Institute in November 1982. John Mulvaney and Rhys Jones quote the passage at length in an un-addressed letter dated 4 January 1983 in Rhys Jones Papers, NLA, MS ACC 05/191, Item 41, Box 4. Josephine Flood provides the context for Gaskell’s words in: Josephine Flood, ‘Letter to the Editor: Philistines in Tasmania’, *The Canberra Times*, 19 November 1982, 2.

¹⁶⁷ Rhys Jones, ‘Landscapes of the Mind: Aboriginal Perceptions of the Natural World’, in John Mulvaney (ed.), *The Humanities and the Australian Environment* (Canberra: Australian Academy of the Humanities, 1991), 21-48, 43.

Australians to 1988

The idea of ‘Aboriginal history’, as a distinctive, discursive field, emerged in the long and tumultuous lead-up to Australia’s Bicentenary. In 1975, historian Bain Attwood reflects, ‘the term, let alone the concept of Aboriginal history, was a novel one.’¹ Yet it was adopted quickly and relatively simultaneously in the public arena and in the academy in the mid-1970s. Its popular usage has much to do with the Whitlam Government’s ‘Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections’, known as the Pigott Report, which had been commissioned as part of a push to express a new Australian nationalism, removed from the traditional strains of empire. Two of its main authors, John Mulvaney and Geoffrey Blainey, advocated the creation of a new museum for Australia which focused on three interlinking themes: the history of the natural environment, ‘the history of Europeans in Australia’, and ‘Aboriginal history stretching over some 40,000 years’.² The use of the term in this report saw it regularly invoked in parliamentary debates and in newspaper coverage.

Within the academy, ‘Aboriginal history’ as a historiographical movement emerged alongside the founding in 1977 of the journal bearing its name. Niel Gunson first mooted the idea for such a journal in the 1960s, but the primary achievement of *Aboriginal History*, as Attwood has shown, rests with the close-knit community of scholars at the Australian National University in the 1970s and in particular the historian and anthropologist Diane Barwick, who edited the journal for its first seven years.³ Barwick, along with those closest to her on the editorial board, linguist Luise Hercus and archaeologist Isabel McBryde, advocated an interdisciplinary approach to the writing of Aboriginal history and emphasised the importance of including Aboriginal perspectives. As Barwick wrote emphatically in December 1976, this journal ‘must focus on Aboriginal history not white men’s opinions.’⁴ The first volume opened with WEH Stanner’s detailed account of European dispossession in

¹ Bain Attwood, ‘The founding of Aboriginal History and the forming of Aboriginal history’, *Aboriginal History* 36 (2012), 119-171, 119.

² PH Pigott, *Museums in Australia 1975: Report of the Committee of Inquiry on Museums and National Collections including the report of the Planning Committee on the Gallery of Aboriginal Australia* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1975), 71.

³ Attwood, ‘The founding of Aboriginal History’, 119.

⁴ Barwick, as quoted in Attwood, ‘The founding of Aboriginal History’, 139.

Sydney, “‘The History of Indifference Thus Begins’”.⁵ The second volume included an article by the young historian Henry Reynolds, who had already begun his campaign to understand and enliven ‘the other side of the frontier’.⁶

The impetus for creating the journal in 1977, Isabel McBryde later remarked, was sharpened by the political debates over history that had been dredged up by the Aboriginal land rights movement.⁷ Over the following decade, from 1979-1988, these debates escalated as Australian historians embarked on the ambitious, collaborative enterprise known as the *Australian Bicentennial History Project*. Historian Ken Inglis oversaw the writing of the eleven-volume series, arranging for John Mulvaney and Peter White to edit the archaeological contribution, *Australians to 1788*. On 22 May 1980 Barwick, McBryde and Mulvaney convened a symposium at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies to discuss how to integrate Aboriginal history into the series. They invited suggestions on how to incorporate oral history alongside documentary sources, how to recognise the diversity of Aboriginal experiences across Australia, such as their roles on the pastoral frontier and in the two World Wars, and how to accommodate a long view of Aboriginal history that encompassed the story of Pleistocene and Holocene Australia.⁸ They received a wide range of submissions. Eugene Stockton argued for an emphasis on the continued development of Aboriginal culture, in the form of art, music, language and religion, in the face of the colonising culture.⁹ White advocated for the inclusion of ‘the present political uses of prehistory (e.g. in land right cases) as well as the historic ones.’¹⁰ Tim Murray even suggested ‘A section on the history of Australian archaeology.’¹¹ In planning and shaping the volume, Mulvaney and White actively sought involvement and advice from many Aboriginal scholars. All invitations to contribute, however, were declined ‘because they considered that any bicentennial enterprise was necessarily a celebration of their people’s dispossession,

⁵ WEH Stanner, ‘The History of Indifference Thus Begins’, *Aboriginal History* 1 (1977), 3-26.

⁶ Henry Reynolds, “‘Before the Instant of Contact’: Some Evidence from Nineteenth-century Queensland”, *Aboriginal History* 2 (1978) 63-69. See also Henry Reynolds, ‘The Other Side of the Frontier: Early Aboriginal Reactions to Pastoral Settlement in Queensland and Northern New South Wales’, *Historical Studies* 17(66) (1976), 50-63.

⁷ Isabel McBryde, ‘Perspectives of the Past: An Introduction’, in, Valeries Chapman and Peter Read (eds.), *Terrible Hard Biscuits: A Reader in Aboriginal History* (St Leonards: Journal of Aboriginal History and Allen & Unwin, 1996), 1-15, 3.

⁸ John Mulvaney, ‘Aboriginal Australians and the Bicentennial History Project’, *Aboriginal History* 4(2) (1980), 191-93.

⁹ John Mulvaney and J Peter White, ‘Aboriginal Australians and the Bicentennial History: A Progress Report’, *Australian Archaeology* 11 (Dec 1980), 53-64, 59.

¹⁰ Mulvaney and White, ‘Aboriginal Australians and the Bicentennial History’, 59.

¹¹ Mulvaney and White, ‘Aboriginal Australians and the Bicentennial History’, 59.

extermination and degradation.’¹² Some criticised the very idea of Aboriginal history that was written by non-Aboriginal people.¹³ But Mulvaney and White believed that the benefits of including Aboriginal people in this national enterprise outweighed any accusations of appropriation or subjugation levelled in their direction. As editors, they modelled themselves, and those who contributed to the volume, as ‘*translators*’ of the Indigenous past.¹⁴

Mulvaney’s support for the bicentennial project, like his advocacy for a new national museum, reflected his broader belief that archaeologists should have a voice in public debates, whether they relate to heritage legislation and assessment, conservation issues or broader discussions about Australian history.¹⁵ His own efforts as a public intellectual provided a model for others to follow. In 1981, he urged his colleagues ‘to accept the reality that their discipline no longer consists of a small band of scholars happily doing “their own thing”. They have a vital educational role to play, involving some form of public presence, both in the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities.’¹⁶

Mulvaney’s friend and one-time student Geoffrey Blainey shared his vision for bringing the humanities into Australian public life, and the importance of a deep appreciation of Aboriginal history. He had gained first-hand experience of archaeology as a field assistant during the excavation of Fromm’s Landing in 1956, and it was at Mulvaney’s urging that he turned to write about the economic history of Aboriginal Australia. ‘Dear Skipper,’ he reported back on 29 May 1972: ‘I gave the lectures on Ab history, as ordered. I think they aroused a fair amount of interest and if I’d prepared them more carefully they would have been more stimulating.’¹⁷ Three years later, in 1975, these lectures were published as Blainey’s ground-breaking book *Triumph of the Nomads*, which wove the rapidly emerging archaeological discoveries into an accessible continental narrative.¹⁸ It was the first to attempt to write a popular history of ancient Australia. His more recent iteration, *The Rise and Fall of*

¹² John Mulvaney and J Peter White, ‘Introduction’, *Australians to 1788* (Sydney: Fairfax, Syme & Weldon Associates, 1987), xv-xvi, xvi.

¹³ Marcia Langton, ‘Preparing Black History: Report on Working Party of Aboriginal Historians for Bicentennial History’, *Identity* 4(5) (1981), 7-8.

¹⁴ Italics in original. Mulvaney and White, ‘Introduction’, xvi.

¹⁵ See Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths (eds.), *Prehistory to Politics: John Mulvaney, the Humanities and the Public Intellectual* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996).

¹⁶ John Mulvaney, ‘What Future for Our Past’, *Australian Archaeology* 13 (1981), 16-27, 25.

¹⁷ Geoffrey Blainey to John Mulvaney, 29 May 1972, John Mulvaney Papers, National Library of Australia, Canberra, MS 9615/1/34, Box 5.

¹⁸ Geoffrey Blainey, *The Triumph of the Nomads: A History of Ancient Australia* (South Melbourne: Macmillan, 1975).

Ancient Australia, volume one of his two-volume ‘story of Australia’s people’, affirms the importance he places on Indigenous history in the national narrative.¹⁹

Blainey drew upon ethnography, as well as modern evidence of environmental change, to inform his historical imagination. He described the Pleistocene eruptions of the volcanoes of western Victoria, for example, by transplanting the tremors, fissures, sparks and smoke from the volcanic events at Paricutin in Mexico in 1943-1952. He envisaged local inhabitants responding with fright to the explosive events, fleeing the lava which ‘glided like a long molten snake across the plains’ and watching from afar as the fierce ‘red rim of the cone’ lit up the night sky: ‘the new mountain cones or the rims of craters could not have been meaningless,’ he speculated, ‘for they towered above their tribal territory and happened in the centre of their world.’²⁰ The most enduring insight that emerged from his book was his rendering of the rising seas at the end of the last Ice Age: ‘Nothing in the short history of white men in Australia ... can be compared with the ancient rising of the seas, the shaping of thousands of new harbours, the swamping of scores of tribal territories and the wiping out of the evidence of the aboriginal life once lived on those drowned lands.’²¹

Blainey’s powerful prose style captured the drama of these natural and cultural events, and his narrative helped the Australian public populate the immense time span of ancient Australia with moments, images, and climatic trends. The story he told challenged the long-held belief that the first Australians were an unchanging people in an unchanging land. ‘This assumption can no longer be held,’ he declared, ‘It is incinerated by the firestick.’²² But although *Triumph of the Nomads* strikes a triumphant tone, celebrating the ‘impressive achievements’ of the first Australians and the ‘ingenuity’ of their economic life, the book is also filled with the same coded political language that Blainey employed to critique the emerging strain of Aboriginal history.²³ He refers to the first Australians, for example, as ‘the invaders’, an odd turn of phrase in what is an explicitly human history of an until then unpeopled continent; and the dedication page to *The Rise and Fall of Ancient Australia* bears

¹⁹ Geoffrey Blainey, *The Story of Australia’s People: The Rise and Fall of Ancient Australia* (Melbourne: Penguin Books, 2015), xi.

²⁰ Blainey, *Triumph of the Nomads*, 10-14.

²¹ Blainey, *Triumph of the Nomads*, 14. Blainey was used and critiqued by Sandra Bowdler in ‘The Coastal Colonisation of Australia’, in Jim Allen, Jack Golson and Rhys Jones (eds.), *Sunda and Sahul: Prehistoric Studies in Southeast Asia, Melanesia and Australia* (London: Academic Press, 1977), 205-246. David Frankel also cites him in ‘The Australian transition: real and perceived boundaries’, *Antiquity* 69(265) (1995), 649-55.

²² Blainey, *Triumph of the Nomads*, 83.

²³ See Mark McKenna, ‘Different Perspectives on Black Armband History’, *Research Paper 5* (Canberra: Department of the Parliamentary Library, 1997).

a similarly veiled sentence: ‘Every newcomer to Australia was a discoverer...’ Such statements serve to neutralise the act of dispossession, suggesting that Indigenous people have no greater claim to the continent than those who forged the modern nation. As Blainey wrote in a British paper to mark the Bicentenary, ‘Time for Australia to shed its guilt complex’: ‘the Aboriginals’ tragedy is one side of the coin. The shinier side is that in the last two centuries the world’s driest continent ... has been turned into a prolific economy which is one of the largest exporters of minerals, fibres and foods.’²⁴

Nevertheless, as the first historian to attempt to write such a vast history, Blainey was refreshingly open about the limitations of his sources. His sentences are filled with speculative words such as ‘could’, ‘might’, and ‘it is possible’, and when faced with the unknown, he fills the gaps in his deep-time narrative with rich ethnographic evidence. Tim Murray and Peter White have condemned the book for portraying the history of ancient Australia as ‘simply nineteenth-century ethnography retroacting for 50 millennia’.²⁵ And while this is an important and valid criticism to make, the challenges that Blainey faced remain hard to resolve: how do we write dynamic histories of the deep past without essentialising the societies that emerge in the written evidence?

Archaeologist Josephine Flood confronted these questions in the early 1970s when she sought to understand the Indigenous history of the Australian Alps. In her book *The Moth Hunters*, she painted a vivid picture of Aboriginal life across a vast region, focusing on the massive seasonal gatherings in the Alps where different clans and family groups would converge for months to harvest and feast on the region’s rich, creamy bogong moths.²⁶ This cultural phenomenon was recorded in oral histories and primary sources, but it was not easily recognisable in the archaeological materials. Moth husks are biodegradable, and the stone tools that survived in the region were not obviously associated with the moths they once crushed, ground and processed. The story of these cultural events could only be told by

²⁴ Geoffrey Blainey, ‘Time for Australia to Shed its Guilt Complex’, *The Sunday Telegraph*, 31 January 1988, reprinted in: Bob Layton and Elizabeth Williams, ‘Salute from the Poms? One View of Aborigines and the Bicentenary’, *Australian Archaeology* 28 (1989), 111-114, 114.

²⁵ Tim Murray and J Peter White ‘Cambridge in the Bush? Archaeology in Australia and New Guinea’, *World Archaeology* 13(2) (1981), 255-63, 258.

²⁶ Josephine Flood, *The Moth Hunters: Aboriginal Prehistory of the Australian Alps* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1980).

combining the archaeology with written and oral sources. As Flood concluded, ‘No ethnography, no moth hunters.’²⁷

In the 1980s, Flood took on the role of championing the finds and practice of archaeology to the wider public. Unlike Mulvaney’s pioneering syntheses on *The Prehistory of Australia*, and Peter White and James O’Connell’s sophisticated update *A Prehistory of Australia, New Guinea and Sahul*, which were directed at students and practitioners of the discipline,²⁸ Flood wrote explicitly ‘for the general reader, for Aborigines interested in learning more of their own heritage, and for secondary and tertiary students.’²⁹ And unlike Blainey, Flood favoured detailed regional summary over continental narrative synthesis. In a decades-long project of outreach, she published a popular overview of the *Archaeology of the Dreamtime* (1983), a cultural tourists’ guide to *The Riches of Ancient Australia* (1990), a portrait of the *Rock Art of the Dreamtime* (1997) and an archaeologically informed history of *The Original Australians* (2006).³⁰ Her books, written in clear prose with simple, logical structures, helped make Australian archaeology accessible to a wider audience at a time when it was attracting greater public interest. She encouraged people to visit archaeological sites, to approach them with respect, and to develop an appreciation of their natural and cultural significance. And she wove a sense of excitement into her chapters, emphasising evidence of the ‘oldest’ and seeking ancient parallels with European history to highlight the richness and complexity of Aboriginal society. Many of the words and phrases she popularised continue to resonate today. ‘The longest continuing cultural history in the world’, for example, is repeated so often these days that it seems a truism.³¹ But what does Flood mean by this, and how does it inform our view of Aboriginal society through time? This is a question that is confronted in chapter nine.

²⁷ Josephine Flood, ‘No Ethnography, No Moth Hunters’, in Betty Meehan and Rhys Jones (eds.), *Archaeology with Ethnography* (Canberra; Department of Prehistory, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, 1988), 270-276.

²⁸ John Mulvaney, *The Prehistory of Australia* (New York: Praeger, 1969); John Mulvaney, *The Prehistory of Australia* (Ringwood, Vic: Penguin Books, 1975); J Peter White and James F O’Connell, *A Prehistory of Australia, New Guinea and Sahul* (Sydney: Academic Press, 1982).

²⁹ Josephine Flood, *Archaeology of the Dreamtime: The Story of Prehistoric Australia and its People* (Sydney: Collins, 1983), 12.

³⁰ Flood, *Archaeology of the Dreamtime*, revised in 1989, 1992, 1995, 1999, 2004, 2010; Josephine Flood, *The Riches of Ancient Australia: A Journey into Prehistory* (St. Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1990), revised in 1993, 1999; Josephine Flood, *Rock Art of the Dreamtime: Images of Ancient Australia* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1997); Josephine Flood, *The Original Australians: Story of the Aboriginal People* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2006).

³¹ Flood, *Archaeology of the Dreamtime*, 16.

When the long anticipated Bicentenary celebrations arrived in 1988, Aboriginal protesters drew readily upon insights thrown up by the recent wave of scholarship into Aboriginal history. Alongside posters reading ‘White Australia has a Black History’, was another: ‘You have been here for 200 years, we for 40,000’. The comparison threatened the legitimacy of British and European Australia and undermined its cultural authority. It was an example, Rhys Jones reflected, of how deep time ‘has become a potent symbol for cultural autonomy and emancipation’.³² The date of 26 January 1988 was marked by light-hearted patriotism and quiet mourning. But perhaps the most profound symbolic act of the day took place in England, when Aboriginal activist Burnum Burnum ‘annexed’ the white cliffs of Dover on behalf of the Aboriginal nation.

Frank Bongiorno describes the winding and treacherous road towards the Bicentenary as a ‘history war’, entangled in ideology, ‘in which contending understandings of the nation’s past were upheld or condemned’.³³ It marks a period of prolonged national introspection which helped drive a dramatic shift in Australian historical consciousness. Aboriginal history moved from the periphery of the national story to its centre. ‘As two generations of historians have shown,’ Mark McKenna observed in 2016, ‘there was no history of Australia that was non-Indigenous.’³⁴

³² Rhys Jones, ‘Dating the Human Colonization of Australia: Radiocarbon and Luminescence Revolutions’, *Proceedings of the British Academy* 99 (1999), 37-65, 57.

³³ Frank Bongiorno, *The Eighties: The Decade that Transformed Australia* (Collingwood, Vic: Black Inc., 2015), 241.

³⁴ Mark McKenna, *From the Edge: Australia’s Lost Histories* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2016), xviii.



Fig. 65 (above) Harry Lourandos and Rhys Jones in Tasmania (Archives Office of Tasmania).

Fig. 66 (left) Sylvia Hallam at the Avon Downs Stone Arrangement (Source: B Wright, *Fire and Hearth Forty Years On*).

Fig. 67 (below) Sketch by William Thomas of a group of huts in western Victoria (Source: State Library of Victoria).



A Social History of the Holocene

Sylvia Hallam, Harry Lourandos and the ‘Inventive Phase’

In 1975, Sylvia Hallam published one of the most innovative and enduring histories of Aboriginal society, *Fire and Hearth: A study of Aboriginal usage and European usurpation in south-western Australia*. Combining archaeological survey with historical investigation, she elucidated the myriad ways in which Aboriginal people had cultivated and transformed the country around the Swan River over millennia. Her wide-ranging study explored the diversity and antiquity of Aboriginal burning traditions, the social, political, spiritual, and economic bases of fire, and how burning was integrated into culture through language, art, myth and ritual. ‘The land the English settled was not as God made it,’ Hallam declared in her iconic opening passage. ‘It was as the Aborigines made it.’¹

Many of her arguments have re-emerged recently through historian Bill Gammage’s passionate continental history of Aboriginal burning, *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia*.² Amassing an impressive array of ethnohistoric sources, Gammage calls upon his readers to see the first Australians as masters of their domain, harnessing detailed local and regional knowledge to manage an entire continent in accordance with the sacred dictates of the Dreaming. When the British arrived in 1788, he argues, Aboriginal people were living in a state of ‘harmony’ with their environment, managing and improving their diverse ecological regions as part of one, universal system. His reason for bringing this array of local evidence into a continental system rests in his understanding of the Dreaming as a constant, governing force. Since ‘All Australia obeyed the Dreaming’, ‘the Dreaming made the continent a single estate.’³

¹ Sylvia Hallam, *Fire and Hearth: A Study of Aboriginal Usage and European Usurpation in South-Western Australia* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1975), vii.

² Bill Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia* (Crows Nest, N.S.W: Allen & Unwin, 2011).

³ Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth*, 125, xix.

The case for Indigenous landscape transformation is undeniable, and Gammage's book has played an important role in bringing the insights of 'fire-stick farming' – a term coined by Rhys Jones in 1969 – back into the public sphere.⁴ But surprisingly, in a book that champions the advantages and particularities of historical evidence, Gammage chose not to address questions of time depth in his history, nor does he draw upon insights from the field of palaeobotany, which uses charcoal and pollen records to date burning traditions and vegetation change. Although he describes Aboriginal fire management as 'an ancient philosophy' demanding many 'learning centuries', he collapses the histories of these burning regimes into a single, continental practice observed at the moment of European arrival. The long and dynamic history of Aboriginal Australia is telescoped into the year 1788.

Gammage's argument remains vital. 'If we are to survive, let alone feel at home, we must begin to understand our country,' he concludes. 'If we succeed, one day we might become Australian.'⁵ The history of Aboriginal Australia is central to this learning process. But it is a history that can only be understood by acknowledging complexity, diversity and change over time. Gammage's arguments can be grouped with a range of studies that celebrate Aboriginal society through a lens that stresses 'continuity' and 'universalism'.⁶ It is a lens that quickly reaches its historical limits. Archaeologist Peter Hiscock sees oft-repeated slogans such as 'Aboriginal culture is the longest continuing culture in the world' as damaging to our understanding of Aboriginal history, for they imply a lack of change and hide a remarkable record of adaptation. 'This is not an issue of cultural authenticity,' Hiscock argues, 'We do not need to authenticate Aboriginal culture by insisting, like nineteenth-century cultural evolutionists, that it was frozen in time. We can and should hold a view of the history of Aboriginal culture as impressively transformative.'⁷

In the 1980s, the question of change, not continuity, took centre stage in the field of Australian archaeology. As the date for the human colonisation of Australia plateaued around forty thousand years, the search for the 'oldest' – the hunt for the Pleistocene – stalled, and many archaeologists began to focus their research questions on the more recent past. Harry Lourandos' articles on 'intensification', in particular, ignited debates about the variety of

⁴ Rhys Jones, 'Fire-stick Farming', *Australian Natural History* 16 (1969), 224-228, 227.

⁵ Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth*, 323.

⁶ See Denis Byrne's discussion of this essentialist genre in 'Deep Nation: Australia's Acquisition of an Indigenous Past', *Aboriginal History* 20 (1998), 82-107, 101-102.

⁷ Peter Hiscock, 'Creators or Destroyers? The Burning Questions of Human Impact in Ancient Aboriginal Australia', *Humanities Australia* 5 (2014), 40-52, 43.

social and economic transformations that seemed to emerge across Australia over the last few thousand years and the supposed ‘complexification’ of Aboriginal society.

This chapter explores some of the efforts to understand the dynamic changes in Aboriginal societies during the epoch known as the Holocene, the most recent interglacial, which began around 11,700 years ago. It offers a portrait of two archaeologists, Sylvia Hallam and Harry Lourandos, who both worked backwards in time from the rich descriptions of Aboriginal life at contact to try to understand how these societies had developed over time. It explores their innovative attempts to write a social history of the Holocene.

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The insights of *The Biggest Estate on Earth* are drawn from a long tradition within the fields of ecology, archaeology and history. Many ecologists suggested that Aboriginal burning contributed to the establishment and maintenance of certain fire-climax vegetation patterns in the mid-twentieth century, and in 1959, Norman Tindale suggested that Aboriginal people should be recognised as ‘ecological agents’.⁸ But it was not until 1968 that the significance of Aboriginal fire regimes became a burning question in Australian archaeology. In that year, Rhys Jones and Western Australian palaeontologist Duncan Merrillees independently suggested that Aboriginal burning had played a profound role in shaping the flora and fauna of Australia.⁹ Sylvia Hallam (née Maycock) was inspired by their thinking and in 1971-72 expanded upon their lines of argument in her history of the south-western corner of the continent. The wide-ranging insights she kindled in that regional study have been stoked and tended by many scholars over the intervening decades, including Stephen Pyne’s ‘fire history of Australia’, *Burning Bush*.¹⁰ Gammage’s contribution, aside from his exhaustive documentary research, was to expand Jones’ concept of ‘firestick farming’ to a continental scale by linking it to the Dreaming.

⁸ Norman B Tindale, ‘Ecology of Primitive Aboriginal Man in Australia’, in A Keast, RL Crocker and CS Christian (eds.), *Biogeography and Ecology in Australia* (Den Haag, Netherlands: W Junk, 1959), 36-51; for early ecological studies on Aboriginal burning see, for example, CA Gardner, ‘The Fire Factor in Relation to the Vegetation of Western Australia’, *Western Australian Naturalist* 5 (1957), 166-73; 1959; JL Davies, ‘A Vegetation Map of Tasmania’, *Geography Review* 54 (1964), 249-253; and WD Jackson, ‘Vegetation’, in JL Davies (ed.), *Atlas of Tasmania* (Hobart: Lands and Surveys Department, 1965), 30-35.

⁹ Rhys Jones, ‘The Geographical Background to the Arrival of Man in Australia’, *Archaeology and Physical Anthropology in Oceania* 3 (1968), 186-215; Duncan Merrillees, ‘Man the Destroyer: Late Quaternary Changes in the Australian Marsupial Fauna’, *Journal of the Royal Society of Western Australia* 51 (1968), 1-24. Hallam acknowledges their influence in: Hallam, *Fire and Hearth*, 8.

¹⁰ Stephen J Pyne, *Burning Bush: A Fire History of Australia* (New York: Holt, 1991).

Sylvia Hallam's 'topographic' approach to archaeology left her well equipped to study the transformative history of Indigenous burning. She grew up in and around Kettering in the East Midlands of the UK and in 1945 won a State scholarship to study Natural Sciences at Newnham College at Cambridge University.¹¹ She became enamoured of the same scholars that would captivate Isabel McBryde a decade later, especially OGS Crawford and Cyril Fox, who showed that archaeology had 'as much to do with maps as with museums'.¹² Gradually Hallam drifted away from biochemistry towards archaeology, and in 1949 she embarked on a decade-long study of the landscape patterns of Roman and peasant settlements in The Fenland, east of her hometown, during the Roman occupation of Britain.¹³ When her husband and fellow Cambridge graduate Herbert Hallam gained a post teaching Medieval History at the University of Western Australia in 1961, their young family migrated to Perth. 'Dad's medieval,' their four children were fond of saying, 'but Mum's prehistoric.'¹⁴

There was no archaeological department in Western Australia when the Hallams arrived in 1961, but Sylvia quickly became a familiar face at UWA, lecturing in the departments of classics and ancient history, geography and anthropology, alongside raising a family. In 1973, she founded and developed the first department of prehistoric archaeology, within the department of anthropology. An independent department of archaeology was established with the appointment of Sandra Bowdler in 1983.

In a volume in honour of Hallam's work, John Mulvaney reflected upon the challenges that she had faced in her career due to the 'east-west factor'.¹⁵ McBryde similarly regretted that the 'tyranny of distance' had limited their opportunities to discuss ideas and practicalities while they were both conducting similar regional field surveys on either side of the continent.¹⁶ The expense of flying across Australia meant that no scholars from Western Australia were invited to contribute to the landmark seminar series in late 1968, *Aboriginal Man and Environment in Australia*.¹⁷ Nevertheless, Hallam fostered her own intellectual

¹¹ Caroline Bird, 'Preface', in Caroline Bird and R Esmée Webb (eds.), *Fire and Hearth Forty Years On: Essays in Honour of Sylvia J. Hallam* (Perth: Western Australian Museum, 2011), x-xi, xi.

¹² Sylvia J Hallam, 'Review of A Matter of Time', *The Agricultural History Review* 9(2) (1961), 120-122, 120.

¹³ Sylvia J Hallam, 'Villages in Roman Britain: Some Evidence', *The Antiquaries Journal* 44(1) (1964), 19-32.

¹⁴ Bird, 'Preface', x.

¹⁵ John Mulvaney, 'A View From the East', in Caroline Bird and R Esmée Webb (eds.), *Fire and Hearth Forty Years On: Essays in Honour of Sylvia J. Hallam* (Perth: Western Australian Museum, 2011), 1-3.

¹⁶ Isabel McBryde, 'Foreword', in Caroline Bird and R Esmée Webb (eds.), *Fire and Hearth Forty Years On: Essays in Honour of Sylvia J. Hallam* (Perth: Western Australian Museum, 2011), vi-ix, vi.

¹⁷ John Mulvaney and Jack Golson (eds.), *Aboriginal Man and Environment in Australia* (Canberra: ANU Press, 1971).

community in the west. She was able to share insights with Richard and Betsy Gould, who were attached to the UWA department of anthropology while they conducted their research in the Western Desert in the late 1960s.¹⁸ She was part of the team that excavated at Puntutjarpa rock shelter, and it was Richard Gould who passed on the note that led her to Orchestra Shell Cave in April 1970, which would become her most important archaeological site.¹⁹ Hallam also found colleagues at the Western Australian Museum in Charlie Dortch and Ian Crawford, both of whom had trained at London's Institute of Archaeology, as well as Duncan Merrilees and Bruce Wright, a headmaster-turned-archaeologist, who recorded thousands of rock engravings in the Pilbara.²⁰

In 1970, with a grant from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Hallam embarked on an archaeological survey of the coastal plain around the estuary of the Swan River and the moist, largely forested region to the southwest.²¹ She made her fieldtrips short and frequent, so that they would fit around family commitments; trained students unfamiliar with survey methods; and drew upon her experience studying settlement patterns in Roman Britain to plan and map out the region in a grid-reference system. The fact that her region of study encompassed Perth also allowed her to capture information that was being threatened by the ever-encroaching urban sprawl. 'In that sense,' Mulvaney reflected, 'it was a salvage project in addition to an orthodox survey.'²² Like McBryde in New England, Hallam was alert to the range of different sites that could be read archaeologically. Alongside stratified excavations, she located and recorded surface scatters and stone arrangements, hunting traps and yam fields, rock art sites and ceremonial grounds, fish weirs and fresh-water wells, open

¹⁸ Gould praised Hallam for directing aspects of the excavation at Puntutjarpa and 'for her meticulous and accurate recording' of a complex feature. Richard A Gould, 'Puntutjarpa Rockshelter and the Australian Desert culture', *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History* 54 (1), 1-187 (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1977), 5-6, 76.

¹⁹ The cave was initially recorded by Ian Murray as part of a survey of 'some 120 odd caves' in the region. The note he passed on to Richard Gould on 13 February 1970 read: 'a limestone cave ... shaped like an orchestra shell ... which I have always suspected of being an aboriginal haven.' Murray also accompanied Hallam on her first visit to the site in April 1970 with John Glover (Geology, UWA). Sylvia J Hallam, 'Excavations in the Orchestra Shell Cave, Wanneroo, Western Australia: Part II. Archaeology (Continued)', *Archaeology & Physical Anthropology in Oceania* 9(2) (Jul 1974), 134-155, 134.

²⁰ Sylvia J Hallam, 'Research in Anthropology in Western Australia: Origins and prehistory', *Westerly* 1 (Mar 1971), 45-49, 47.

²¹ Sylvia J Hallam, 'An Archaeological Survey of the Perth Area, Western Australia: A Progress Report on Art and Artefacts, Dates and Demography', *Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies Newsletter* 3(5) (1972), 11-19. See also, Sylvia Hallam, 'Recent Archaeological Research in Western Australia', *Australian Archaeology* 6 (Apr 1977), 13-27, 19-22.

²² Mulvaney, 'A View From the East', 1.

grasslands and cleared paths.²³ She read the country with an eye for past social landscapes, hoping to derive ‘lore from localities’: ‘we must not ignore anything which can elucidate the social mechanics of grouping, spacing, territorial attachment and the scheduling of the ceremonial and economic year.’²⁴ Her methods resonated with those whose history she was studying. As Jill Milroy, a Noongar elder and academic from southwest Australia, reflected in 2013: ‘My mother and grandmother always taught me ... that it is not people who are the best storytellers: the birds, the animals, the trees, the rocks and the land, our mother, have the most important stories to tell us. These stories exist in place, and by “mapping” these story systems we fundamentally alter the way in which we can “know” Country.’²⁵

By the end of Hallam’s methodical survey, she had identified over 120 sites and collected over ten thousand artefacts.²⁶ She had also scoured the local ethnographic literature, searching for documents ‘where history intersects with prehistory; where the populations, territories, resources and interactions we wish to elucidate are seen, if fitfully and patchily, in the flickering light of the often unsystematic observations of literate observers.’²⁷ Ideally, Hallam reflected, this task should fall to the documentary historian who would work alongside the more fieldwork-oriented archaeologist. ‘In practice,’ she lamented in the mid-1970s, ‘few Australian historians, or ethnographers, have studied particular Aboriginal populations in the first years of European settlement; and fewer still with those questions in mind which are relevant for the student of terrain, resources, exploitation and demography.’²⁸ The rise of Aboriginal history was still just over the horizon.²⁹ Resigned to her role as a ‘jack-of-all-trades’ – as a historian and ecologist, as well as an anthropologist and archaeologist – Hallam immersed herself in the published accounts of explorers and early settlers.

²³ Sylvia Hallam, ‘Ecology and Demography in Southwestern Australia’, in D Merrilees, WC Dix, SJ Hallam, WH Douglas, and RM Berndt, ‘Aboriginal Man in Southwestern Australia’, *Journal of the Royal Society of Western Australia* 56 (1973), 44-55, 48.

²⁴ Sylvia Hallam, ‘Topographic Archaeology and Artifactual Evidence’, in RVS Wright (ed.), *Stone Tools as Cultural Markers: Change, Evolution and Complexity* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1977), 169-77, 173.

²⁵ Jill Milroy and Grant Revell, ‘Aboriginal Story Systems: Remapping the West, Knowing Country, Sharing Space’, *Occasion: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities* 5 (2013), 1-24, 2.

²⁶ Sylvia J Hallam, ‘An Archaeological Survey Project, the Perth area, Western Australia: Being a Report to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies on Investigations Carried Out During Part of the Time Between 1 April 1970 and 31 March 1972’, 1972, AIATSIS Library, PMS 2206, Acc. 8896, 8.

²⁷ Sylvia J Hallam, ‘Population and Resource Usage on the Western Littoral’, *Memoirs of the Victorian Archaeological Survey* 2 (1977), 16-36, 16.

²⁸ Hallam, ‘Population and Resource Usage on the Western Littoral’, 18.

²⁹ Bain Attwood, ‘The founding of Aboriginal History and the forming of Aboriginal history’, *Aboriginal History* 36 (2012), 119–171, 119.

She was especially drawn to the diaries of George Grey, who had been shipwrecked in Gantheaume Bay, near Kalbarri, in 1839 and forced to walk some five hundred kilometres south to the nearest settlement on the Swan River.³⁰ She considered him a rare witness to Aboriginal life who allowed himself ‘to be persuaded by his own observations’, rather than guided by cultural preconceptions.³¹ On his trek southwards, he described watching women harvesting and cropping yams in a careful, systematic manner across the alluvial plains; and coming across fertile fields extending ‘three and a half consecutive miles’ where the ground had been perforated by digging sticks. Grey was impressed by the ‘hard manual labour’ of these women and described the Aboriginal use of fire to improve these fields as ‘a sort of cultivation’.³² The yam fields were connected to other rich areas by ‘well-marked roads’, chains of ‘deeply sunk wells’, and ‘villages’ of clay-plastered and turf-roofed huts which seemed to support ‘a large and comparatively speaking resident population’.³³ ‘What do these descriptions mean?’, Hallam wondered, ‘What do they imply about Aboriginal landholding, land management and settlement on the west coastal plain? How extensive in space and time, are the phenomena described?’³⁴ She found answers in the social contract between people and fire. The ways in which the land had been burnt and cropped, she realised, gave insight into ‘a close and controlled mesh of usage rights and responsibilities’.³⁵

Grey described learning of a ‘law that no plant bearing seeds is to be dug up after it has been flowered’ and he recorded a system of ‘rules’ that designated who could burn, where and when.³⁶ Burning was thus a political and social process, a statement of ownership, a ritual as well as an economic and ecological practice. It was this insight that led Gammage, forty years after Hallam’s work, to describe the continent as a single estate, governed by the sacred dictates of the Dreaming. Hallam, on the other hand, sought to deepen her understanding of the spiritual dimensions of fire by focusing on specific stories from her region. She investigated the associations between serpent legends and dark caves, such as her site at Orchestra Shell Cave, where fire was ‘an essential element in both the myth and the ritual

³⁰ George Grey, *Journals of Two Expeditions of Discovery in North-West and Western Australia, during the years 1837, 1838 and 1839, Volume II* (London: T and W Boone, 1841).

³¹ Hallam, *Fire and Hearth*, 13.

³² Grey, *Journals of Two Expeditions of Discovery, Volume II*, 20.

³³ Grey, *Journals of Two Expeditions of Discovery, Volume II*, 20.

³⁴ Sylvia Hallam, ‘Yams, Alluvium and “Villages” on the West Coastal Plain’, in GK Ward (ed.), *Archaeology at ANZAAS 1984* (Canberra: Canberra Archaeological Society: 1986), 116-132, 116.

³⁵ Hallam, *Fire and Hearth*, 42.

³⁶ Grey, *Journals of Two Expeditions of Discovery, Volume II*, 292, 270.

aspects of the tradition.’³⁷ The ‘serpent-fire’ theme, she argued, illuminated ‘the ancient and essential bond between the ritual and the ecological aspects of the use of fire’.³⁸

Her study was not continental, but rather regional, local, historical, and ecological. In 1975 she warned against a homogenous view of Aboriginal burning. Each type of environment would have responded differently to Aboriginal burning, and different ecologies would have been burnt in a different way: ‘There is room for a multiplicity of detailed local studies.’³⁹ In her review of *The Biggest Estate on Earth*, Hallam welcomed ‘this important and amazing book’, but she issued a similar caution: ‘Commonalities and linkages do not cancel local peculiarities and specificities, societal and ecological.’⁴⁰ By allowing for diversity and change within her history of fire, she also accommodated the possibility that the system of land management had not always been harmonious. While in some places Aboriginal burning created new and balanced ecosystems, opening up lush grasslands and intricate ecological mosaics; in others it may have exacerbated erosion, caused local faunal extinctions, altered the nutrients in the soil, and perhaps increased levels of salinity. She noted that ‘Aboriginal legends in southwestern Australia tell of once fresh water becoming salty.’⁴¹ The implications of Aboriginal burning were dramatic, but also varied and complex. ‘There was transformation,’ as Peter Hiscock comments, ‘but it was not always Eden that was wrought.’⁴²

But perhaps most significantly, Hallam approached the various social and economic phenomena that Grey had observed from a deep-time perspective. She sought to present ‘a long view’ of Aboriginal society by drawing upon emerging palaeobotanical evidence alongside Dortch and Merrillie’s early archaeological work at Devil’s Lair and her own excavations at Orchestra Shell Cave. She argued that Aboriginal burning had a history stretching over tens of millennia, but that it had played an increasingly important role in social and economic life during the mid- to late Holocene. She linked vegetation change detected in pollen records around five thousand years ago, and again two thousand years ago and five hundred years ago, with technological changes in the archaeological evidence.⁴³

³⁷ Hallam, *Fire and Hearth*, 84.

³⁸ Hallam, *Fire and Hearth*, 84.

³⁹ Hallam, *Fire and Hearth*, 46.

⁴⁰ Sylvia J Hallam, ‘Review of *The Biggest Estate on Earth*’, *Australian Aboriginal Studies* (2011/2), 123-26, 126.

⁴¹ Hallam, ‘Topographic Archaeology and Artifactual Evidence’, 175.

⁴² Hiscock, ‘Creators or Destroyers?’, 48.

⁴³ Hallam, *Fire and Hearth*, 103.

‘The increasing, and increasingly regulated, use of fire,’ she suggested in *Fire and Hearth*, ‘was part of an overall pattern of increasing exploitation and population.’⁴⁴ She considered the changes in fire regimes over recent millennia to be a reflection of a growth in population, a diversification of resource use, and a raft of social changes encompassing new territorial rights and responsibilities.

Hallam was not alone in noticing a trend towards more intensive and varied forms of archaeology in the mid- to late Holocene. In 1969, based mainly on his work at Kenniff Cave, John Mulvaney argued for the last five or six thousand years to be regarded as ‘the Inventive Phase’ of Australian history.⁴⁵ Although older technological traditions continued throughout the Holocene, the ‘Inventive Phase’ witnessed the introduction and wide diffusion of new technologies. He labelled a further period of creativity around fifteen hundred years ago the ‘Adaptive Phase’. Richard Gould elaborated the scheme through his work at Puntutjarpa, naming the complex of technological changes that emerge in the mid-Holocene ‘the Australian Small Tool Tradition’.⁴⁶ It was this technological shift that Hallam recognised at Orchestra Shell Cave, and which she linked to the changes in the pollen records and the emergence of new burning regimes. When Mulvaney initially proposed ‘the Inventive Phase’, he connected it to two external events: the stabilisation of the coastlines around six thousand years ago after millennia of rising seas, and the arrival of the dingo in the north around four to five thousand years ago. By the mid-1970s, it was becoming increasingly clear that ‘the Inventive Phase’ was far more than a technological shift: it appeared to usher in an unprecedented period of cultural and social transformation in ancient Australia. And there were intimations that it might not be a result of external events.

o o o

In the 1970s, a young Greek-Australian archaeologist by the name of Harry Lourandos sought to understand the mechanism behind the mid-Holocene transformation. Lourandos had been drawn to History, and in particular classical Greek history, from a young age. ‘Coming from a Greek–Australian family,’ he reflected, ‘it empowered me.’⁴⁷ But he was

⁴⁴ Hallam, *Fire and Hearth*, 105, 107, 112.

⁴⁵ John Mulvaney, *The Prehistory of Australia* (New York: Praeger, 1969), 107.

⁴⁶ Richard A Gould, ‘Puntutjarpa Rockshelter: A Reply to Messrs Glover and Lampert’, *Archaeology and Physical Anthropology in Oceania* 4 (1969), 229-37.

⁴⁷ Harry Lourandos, Bruno David, Bryce Barker, and Ian J McNiven, ‘An Interview with Harry Lourandos’, in Bruno David, Bryce Barker, Ian J McNiven (eds.), *The Social Archaeology of Australian Indigenous Societies* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2006), 20-39, 20.

also curious about the other-half of his heritage: ‘I deeply felt that as I lived in Australia, I needed to concentrate on the (pre)history of this region and its Indigenous people.’⁴⁸ In 1963, at the age of eighteen, he enrolled in Arts-Law at the University of Sydney, taking a few classes in Near Eastern archaeology. He quickly gravitated towards the new ‘prehistory’ section of the anthropology department, finding inspiration in the seminars of the recently appointed Rhys Jones, who was giving voice to ‘a new brand of archaeology’ that integrated economic studies with the natural sciences. Lourandos was ‘hooked’ after he joined Jones on his second expedition to north-western Tasmania in 1964-65 and helped excavate the iconic site of Rocky Cape.⁴⁹ The following summer, he continued his archaeological apprenticeship with Wilfred Shawcross in New Zealand.⁵⁰ As soon as he finished his honours year, he walked into the newly created position of Research Archaeologist at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery in Hobart.

While Lourandos was keen to learn more about Aboriginal history and culture, he was also excited about the theoretical possibilities presented by the relatively new field of Australian archaeology. ‘It was a time of change,’ he later reflected, ‘As the discipline was new and largely untested, there were opportunities here to introduce new approaches and also new interpretations.’⁵¹ In the late 1960s, together with Jones, Lourandos conducted an extensive survey along the east and south-east coasts of Tasmania, with a few forays inland to the glacial moraine of the central plateau.⁵² He hoped to investigate ‘cultural variation’ across the region and how it had changed over time, or, in the language he favoured at the time, ‘its spatial-functional aspects, but also its diachronic’.⁵³ In his findings, initially published in 1968, and enriched as a Master’s thesis at the ANU in 1970, he argued that there were distinct differences in the diets and economies of the societies that lived on the east and west coasts of Tasmania, and that these reflected different social structures: ‘A nomadic organisation is interpreted for the Eastern sites, and a semi-sedentary or seasonally-sedentary organisation for the West and North-West coastal sites.’⁵⁴ Sandra Bowdler described the

⁴⁸ Lourandos *et al*, ‘An Interview with Harry Lourandos’, 21.

⁴⁹ Lourandos *et al*, ‘An Interview with Harry Lourandos’, 21.

⁵⁰ Wilfred Shawcross to Grahame Clark, 26 February 1969, Sir Grahame Clark: archaeological papers, Cambridge University Library, Department of Manuscripts and University Archives, Cambridge, GBR/0012/MS Add.9409/82.

⁵¹ Lourandos *et al*, ‘An Interview with Harry Lourandos’, 22.

⁵² Harry Lourandos, ‘Coast and Hinterland: The Archaeological Sites of Eastern Tasmania’, MA thesis, Australian National University, 1970, 2.

⁵³ Lourandos, ‘Coast and Hinterland’, 2.

⁵⁴ Harry Lourandos, ‘Dispersal of Activities: The East Tasmanian Sites’, *Papers and Proceedings of the Royal Society of Tasmania* 102 (1968), 41-46.

1968 paper as ‘a Trojan horse dragged into the citadel of his mentors’, for it not only challenged elements of Jones’ Tasmania-wide sequence, but explicitly introduced new – and in Australia, relatively unfashionable – theoretical language.⁵⁵ As a student, he was particularly drawn to the cultural theory of Lewis Binford. As he later recalled, ‘I leapt upon the New Archaeology bandwagon – more a life raft of survival – in the late 1960s, to explain the results from my Tasmanian (and later Victorian) research. It offered fertile new perspectives, especially regarding spatio-geographical and ecological frameworks. ... But it proved less helpful in *explaining* change through time; oddly, it was *ahistorical* in many ways.’⁵⁶ He found more comfortable theoretical grounding in the Neo-Marxist and post-processualist schools of thought that were gaining momentum in the United Kingdom, which privileged social and political explanations for change over environmental or economic determinants.

After a short hiatus from archaeology, in which he travelled to his ancestral homeland and briefly considered opening a restaurant in Ithaca selling Vegemite sandwiches, he returned to the University of Sydney in 1973 and began casting around for a new research project.⁵⁷ In May and August, as a Teaching Fellow, he embarked on an extended reconnaissance of Victoria’s southwest coast in search of archaeological sites to investigate for a doctoral project on ‘Aboriginal subsistence systems’.⁵⁸ He surveyed stone quarries and surface scatters, limestone shelters by the sea and shell middens perched on cliff tops and eroding out of dunes.⁵⁹ But the most important aspect of this reconnaissance was reading in the Mitchell Library in Sydney.⁶⁰ Like Hallam, he found inspiration in the flickering glimpses of Aboriginal society captured in the jottings of early settlers and explorers.

Lourandos was particularly taken with the journals of George Augustus Robinson, who travelled through the western district of Victoria in 1841 as Chief Protector of Aborigines. Robinson’s diary included descriptions of durable domed huts of wood and clay, sometimes

⁵⁵ Sandra Bowdler, ‘Harry Lourandos’ Life and Work: an Australian Archaeological Odyssey’, in Bruno David, Bryce Barker, Ian J McNiven (eds.), *The Social Archaeology of Australian Indigenous Societies* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2006), 40-49, 41.

⁵⁶ Emphasis in original. Lourandos *et al.*, ‘An Interview with Harry Lourandos’, 23.

⁵⁷ Bowdler, ‘Harry Lourandos’ Life and Work’, 43.

⁵⁸ Harry Lourandos, ‘Field Report of an Archaeological Coastal Survey in South-Western (and South-Eastern) Victoria’, 1974, AIATSIS Library, Canberra, PMS 1039/p9279, 1.

⁵⁹ Harry Lourandos, ‘Interim Report on Archaeological Field Work in South-Western Victoria, 1974/75’, 1975, AIATSIS Library, PMS 1040/12058, 2.

⁶⁰ Harry Lourandos, ‘Forces of Change: Aboriginal Technology and Population in South Western Victoria’, PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 1980, 16.



Fig. 68 George Augustus Robinson's sketch of an Aboriginal drainage system at Mount William. This sketch depicts just over half of the six-hectare maze of artificial channels he described by Robinson (Source: Mitchell Library).

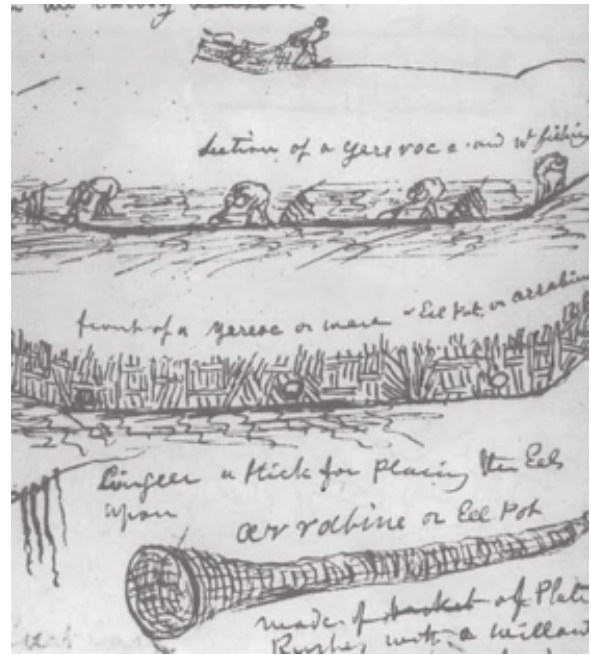


Fig. 69 Sketches by George Augustus Robinson of Aboriginal people collecting eels at basketry weirs in western Victoria, 1841 (Source: Mitchell Library).



Fig. 70 Gunditjmara elder John King shows John Evans, right, and Rex Morgan, left, Aboriginal fish traps in central Victoria, 23 April 1985 (Source: J McKinnon, NLA).

with stone foundations and walls, which clustered in ‘villages’ beside lakes and rivers. One hut bordering a swamp near Mount Napier ‘measured ten feet in diameter by five feet high, and [was] sufficiently strong for a man on horse back to ride over.’⁶¹ During times of seasonal abundance, Robinson observed, these ‘villages’ were inhabited by up to one thousand people, as family groups and clans converged to trap birds and collect eggs, sow and harvest various cereals, tubers and fruits, and lure whales to shore with flames and feast on their stranded carcasses.⁶² The gatherings were also accompanied by ceremonial activities, large-scale hunting drives, and increased burning: to open up hunting grounds and drive marsupials and emus, to rejuvenate swamplands, and to clear grasses and expose roots for harvesting.⁶³ Some of the food gathered during these times of abundance was stored for leaner periods: eels and whale meat were dried and buried, vast quantities of the edible acacia gum were cached, and other plants were elaborately processed. ‘The root of the bracken fern,’ Lourandos drew out as an example, ‘was pounded to extract its starch, which was then baked on the ashes as a form of bread.’⁶⁴

But Lourandos was most interested in the extensive ‘eel traps’ that Robinson described. The intricately engineered network of eel traps at Mount William, which extended over six hectares, resembled, to Robinson, ‘the work of civilised man but ... on inspection were found to be the work of aboriginal natives.’⁶⁵ Over 130 years later, Lourandos found his assumptions similarly challenged: was this evidence consistent with the idea of a ‘hunter-gatherer’ society? Thousands of yards of ‘trenching and banking’ had been excavated with traditional digging sticks to create a maze of artificial channels that funnelled eels between swamps and into traps.⁶⁶ The sheer size of the structure, Lourandos mused, must have left an archaeological footprint. A similar eel trap had been recorded by Aldo Massola in 1962 at Toolondo in northern Victoria.⁶⁷ In 1974, Lourandos decided to enlarge the scope of his study from Aboriginal subsistence strategies in south-western Victoria to the distribution of

⁶¹ Lourandos, ‘Interim Report’; Robinson as in AS Kenyon, ‘The Aboriginal Protectorate of Port Phillip’, *Victorian History Magazine* 12 (1928), 134-172, 150.

⁶² Harry Lourandos, ‘Aboriginal Spatial Organization and Population: South-Western Victoria Reconsidered’, *Archaeology and Physical Anthropology in Oceania* 12 (1977), 202-25; Harry Lourandos, ‘Swamp Managers of South-Western Victoria’, in DJ Mulvaney and JP White (eds.), *Australians to 1788* (Sydney: Fairfax, Syme & Weldon, 1987), 292-307, 299.

⁶³ Harry Lourandos, ‘Change or Stability?: Hydraulics, Hunter-Gatherers and Population in Temperate Australia’, *World Archaeology* 11 (1980), 245-64, 250, 254.

⁶⁴ Lourandos, ‘Swamp Managers of South-Western Victoria’, 298.

⁶⁵ Robinson’s observation was made on 7 July 1841, as quoted in: Lourandos, ‘Interim Report’, 3.

⁶⁶ Lourandos, ‘Change or Stability?’, 252.

⁶⁷ Aldo Massola, ‘The Native Fish Trap at Toolondo, in the Wimmera’, *Victorian Naturalist* 79 (1962), 162-66.

Aboriginal drainage systems and ‘the question of complexity (complexification) within hunter-gatherer society’.⁶⁸

Over the summer of 1974-75, with a team of six students, Lourandos followed Robinson’s footsteps to the Mount William area, walking the land, talking with landowners, and studying aerial photography. He found that few people in the region were aware of the eel traps, and that little visible evidence of these structures remained: the intricate network of channels had been collapsed by hooves and levelled by ploughs. At Toolondo, the team surveyed the eel trap Massola had recorded: a 2.5 kilometre drainage channel – or dike – between two ponds.⁶⁹ It had survived due to the concerted efforts of one landholder, Mr D McKenry, who had recognised it as an ‘Aboriginal fish trap’ and preserved it for posterity.⁷⁰ Other landholders, in the district and across the country, did not always show this level of respect for Indigenous heritage. The surviving portions, which were around two metres wide and one metre deep near the mouth of the swamp, cut through low rises to connect naturally separated ponds.⁷¹ ‘With the coming of the rains and as the swamps overflowed,’ Lourandos realised, ‘eels (and other fish) would have been flushed out of the swampy ground, and into the drains where an elaborate series of traps would be constructed.’⁷²

What intrigued him most was the possibility that these drainage systems were more than traps: they seemed to have been designed to control the availability and extend the natural range of eels.⁷³ As artificial water controls, the channels operated as a form of swamp management, distributing excess water during floods, retaining water in times of drought, and directing eels to new parts of the country. And ‘[s]ince eels flourish in watercourses of this kind,’ Lourandos observed, ‘the drainage ditches might also have increased the local eel population.’⁷⁴ The eels, some of which are more nutritious than salmon, were speared year-round, but during their annual migration in March and April people from across the district would gather to trap them in elaborate stone, clay and brush weirs built across waterways.⁷⁵ It was a finely tuned, sustainable system, which shared much with the practices of

⁶⁸ Lourandos *et al*, ‘An Interview with Harry Lourandos’, 32.

⁶⁹ Massola, ‘The Native Fish Trap at Toolondo, in the Wimmera’.

⁷⁰ Lourandos, ‘Interim Report’, 6; Harry Lourandos, ‘Aboriginal Settlement and Land Use in South-Western Victoria: A Report on Current Field Work’, *The Artefact* 1(4) (1976), 174-93, 185.

⁷¹ Lourandos, ‘Aboriginal Settlement and Land Use in South-Western Victoria’, 185.

⁷² Lourandos, ‘Change or Stability?’, 253.

⁷³ Lourandos, ‘Interim Report’, 7.

⁷⁴ Lourandos, ‘Swamp Managers of South-Western Victoria’, 306-7.

⁷⁵ Lourandos, ‘Change or Stability?’, 254.

contemporary commercial eel fisheries in Europe and Japan.⁷⁶ ‘The people of southwestern Victoria and their neighbours,’ Lourandos marvelled in 1987, ‘were more numerous, more sedentary and far more ingenious than we ever imagined.’⁷⁷

But when had this eeling economy begun? In February 1976, Lourandos returned to Toolondo to excavate the system, but he could only find very young charcoal samples to date, ‘indicating the final stages of the drain’s operation’.⁷⁸ He hoped to gain insight into the construction of the eel traps by putting the site into a regional chronology.

He found what he was looking for in the deep, stratified limestone caves at Bridgewater near Portland, which had been relatively continuously occupied over the course of the Holocene. Mulvaney had initially examined the caves in the early 1960s, and despite considerable vandalism in the intervening years, the deposit was rich with material: even some vegetable remains had survived.⁷⁹ The excavation helped Lourandos create a regional sequence, but it also presented him with a conundrum. Around twelve thousand years ago, when the sea was twenty-five kilometres away, the caves were used relatively sporadically by a group of foragers with little interest in eating marine life.⁸⁰ As the sea came closer, the archaeological deposit became much denser: there was a dramatic increase in the range of technology and raw materials, many more animal bones began to accumulate, and a shell midden formed in the cave. But while the surrounding vegetation reacted to the encroaching coast, with *Banksias* and *Casuarinas* giving way to herbfield and shrubland, it took people several thousand years to change their eating habits and begin to exploit the nearby marine resources.⁸¹ What had caused this time lag between the changes in the environment and the changes in economic and cultural materials? Perhaps, Lourandos suggested, it was evidence of adaptation driven by internal social factors, rather than external forces of change.⁸²

His excavations at Seal Point near the lighthouse at Cape Otway gave him a vivid glimpse of what might have accompanied this late Holocene social change. While excavating the eroding middens, his team found ten large circular depressions which seemed to ‘conform to

⁷⁶ Lourandos, ‘Swamp Managers of South-Western Victoria’, 301.

⁷⁷ Lourandos, ‘Swamp Managers of South-Western Victoria’, 307.

⁷⁸ Lourandos, ‘Change or Stability?’, 253.

⁷⁹ Lourandos, ‘Interim Report’, 9-10.

⁸⁰ Lesley Head, ‘Pollen Analysis of Sediments from the Bridgewater Caves Archaeological Site, Southwestern Victoria’, *Australian Archaeology* 20 (Jun 1985), 1-15, 12-13.

⁸¹ Head, ‘Pollen Analysis of Sediments from the Bridgewater Caves Archaeological Site’, 12-13.

⁸² This sentence evokes the title of Lourandos’ PhD thesis, ‘Forces of Change’.

ethnographic descriptions of Aboriginal house pits into which huts were constructed.⁸³ The deposit was rich in seal, fish and bird bones, and included some foreign materials, such as a greenstone edge-ground axe, which had been carried or traded there from the Hopkins River area.⁸⁴ Based on its location and size, Lourandos speculated that Seal Point was the principal base-camp in the Cape region over the past fifteen hundred years and that this period of ‘intense human occupation’ had changed ‘the ecological balance in the region’.⁸⁵

When put alongside other research on south-western Victoria, especially the prodigious dating efforts of Edmund Gill and the contemporary work of the Victorian Archaeological Survey, his excavations seemed to reveal a compelling regional chronology.⁸⁶ Although some archaeological sites in western Victoria dated to the end of the last Ice Age, most seemed to cluster around three to four thousand years ago, with a more intensive phase of occupation over the past two thousand years. He interpreted these changes in occupation as evidence of significant social transformations, including the development of new alliance systems and exchange networks, the occupation of marginal environments, and an increase in sedentism and ceremonial activity. The eeling economy was probably a part of these changes, he concluded, with the large traps most likely dating to around three to four thousand years ago.⁸⁷ In 1983, he proposed a new name for the raft of social and economic transformations that seemed to begin in the mid- to late Holocene: ‘intensification’.⁸⁸

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As Hallam and Lourandos were uncovering these complex forms of archaeology in their respective regions, the idea of the mid-Holocene ‘Inventive Phase’ was gaining traction across the continent. In a 1977 PhD thesis, John Beaton described the ways in which toxic cycad groves had been promoted through Aboriginal burning in the central Queensland Highlands, as well as the elaborate processes by which people leached these nuts of their poisons, milled them using specialised seed grindstones, and then baked and consumed them

⁸³ Harry Lourandos, ‘Archaeological Field Work in South-Western Victoria 1974/75’, *Australian Archaeology* 4 (1976), 9-10; Lourandos, ‘Forces of Change’, 220-224.

⁸⁴ Lourandos, ‘Forces of Change’, 262.

⁸⁵ Harry Lourandos, ‘Intensification: A Late-Pleistocene–Holocene Archaeological Sequence from South-Western Victoria’, *Archaeology in Oceania* 18 (1983), 81-94, 85.

⁸⁶ Although this interpretation has been thoroughly critiqued by Caroline Bird and David Frankel in *An Archaeology of Gariwerd: From Pleistocene to Holocene in Western Victoria* (St Lucia, Qld: Tempus 8, University of Queensland, 2005), esp. 28-29.

⁸⁷ Lourandos, ‘Change or Stability?’, 255.

⁸⁸ Lourandos, ‘Intensification’; Lourandos, ‘Forces of Change’, 422.

on a large-scale.⁸⁹ The origins of this ‘dangerous harvest’ seemed to coincide with the technological emergence of Gould’s ‘Australian small tool tradition’ around five thousand years ago.⁹⁰ In a parallel PhD thesis in the Carnavon Gorge region, ‘Art and Stone’, Mike Morwood also indentified technological changes around 4300 years ago, which he connected to a shift in the art, from uniform track-and-circle pecked engravings to complex wet pigment and stencil art.⁹¹ And in a third ANU thesis, in 1978, Roger Luebbers identified a range of changes in settlement patterns along the south-east coast of South Australia, which he interpreted as evidence of increased population and more intensive use of resources in the late Holocene.⁹²

Along the south coast of New South Wales, Ron Lampert and Philip Hughes were uncovering similar changes, recording a dramatic increase in sedimentation rates over the last four thousand years and an established pattern of economic change within coastal communities.⁹³ Further north, Val Attenbrow’s survey of the wider Sydney area appeared to reveal an intensive phase of occupation beginning around four thousand years ago and perhaps ending around one thousand years ago.⁹⁴ Eugene Stockton identified a similar trend in the Blue Mountains region, while Josephine Flood also noticed economic and social shifts in the southern uplands around four thousand years ago.⁹⁵ Even within Lourandos’ own region, a number of scholars were investigating demographic change during the mid- to late

⁸⁹ John M Beaton, ‘Fire and Water: Aspects of Australian Aboriginal Management of Cycads’, *Archaeology in Oceania* 17 (1982), 59-67; John M Beaton, ‘Dangerous Harvest: Investigations in the Late Prehistoric Occupation of Upland South-East Central Queensland’, PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1977.

⁹⁰ Brit Asmussen has recently demonstrated that the assemblages Beaton interpreted as evidence of large-scale ceremonial feasting are consistent with ‘intermittent low-intensity, subsistence use of seeds and plants by small groups within a broad based hunter-gatherer subsistence strategy.’ See Brit Asmussen, ‘Anything More Than a Picnic? Re-considering Arguments for Ceremonial *Macrozamia* Use in Mid-Holocene Australia’, *Archaeology in Oceania* 43 (3) (2008), 93-103, 99.

⁹¹ Michael J Morwood, ‘Time, Space and Prehistoric Art: A Principal Components Analysis’, *Archaeology and Physical Anthropology in Oceania* 15 (1980), 98-109.

⁹² Roger A Luebbers, ‘Meals and Menus: A Study of Change in Prehistoric Coastal Settlements in South Australia’, PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1978.

⁹³ RJ Lampert and PJ Hughes, ‘Sea Level Changes and Aboriginal Adaptations’, *Archaeology and Physical Anthropology in Oceania* 9 (1974), 226-235, 233-34; PJ Hughes and RJ Lampert, ‘Prehistoric Population Change in Southern Coastal New South Wales’, in Sandra Bowdler (ed.), *Coastal Archaeology in Eastern Australia* (Canberra: Department of Prehistory, Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National University, 1982), 16-28; RJ Lampert, *Burrill Lake and Currarong: Coastal Sites in Southern New South Wales, Terra Australis* 1 (Canberra: Department of Prehistory, Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National University, 1971).

⁹⁴ Val Attenbrow, ‘The Archaeology of Upper Mangrove Creek Catchment: Research in Progress’, in Sandra Bowdler (ed.), *Coastal Archaeology in Eastern Australia* (Canberra: Department of Prehistory, Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National University, 1982), 67-78.

⁹⁵ Eugene Stockton summarises these changes in his overview ‘Archaeology of the Blue Mountains’, in Eugene Stockton and John Merriman (eds.), *Blue Mountains Dreaming: the Aboriginal Heritage* (Lawson, NSW: Blue Mountain Education and Research Trust, 2009), 41-72; Josephine Flood, *The Moth Hunters: Aboriginal Prehistory of the Australian Alps* (Canberra, Australian Institute of Aboriginal studies, 1980), 279.

Holocene, while Isabel McBryde's work on the axe trade at Mount William showed the intricate cultural and economic networks that were developing between communities across southeast Australia during the Holocene.⁹⁶

Archaeology is always biased towards the more recent past, as organic materials decay and disappear over time. The question was whether preservation alone could explain the diversity of the developments over the past few thousand years.⁹⁷ The many economic and social changes, seemingly occurring in parallel in disparate regions across the continent, were the major topic of discussion at the 1981 Southeast Australian Study Group Conference organised by McBryde. 'It should be possible,' Nicholas Thomas wrote that same year, 'to interpret all this information into some kind of coherent model.'⁹⁸ Lourandos took up the challenge. His major contribution was to draw this emerging evidence into an elegant general theory: to refine Mulvaney's broad framework and provide the field with the language to debate mechanisms for change.⁹⁹

Lourandos' theoretical focus was unusual in Australian archaeology.¹⁰⁰ The early curator-anthropologists, such as Norman Tindale, mostly outsourced their theoretical frameworks to the American anthropologist Joseph Birdsell, whose brand of environmental determinism was famous for attempting to connect changes in Aboriginal population numbers to annual rainfall statistics.¹⁰¹ (Although his later publications moved away from such explicit

⁹⁶ See, for example, Anne Ross, 'Holocene Environments and Prehistoric Site Patterning in the Victorian Mallee', *Archaeology in Oceania* 16(3) (Oct 1981), 145-155; Isabel McBryde, 'Kulin Greenstone Quarries: The Social Contexts of Production and Distribution for the Mt William Site', *World Archaeology* 16 (1984), 267-85.

⁹⁷ Philip Hughes and Peter Hiscock had even proposed methods to measure 'intensity' of site usage over time. Peter Hiscock, 'Comments on the Use of Chipped Stone Artefacts as a Measure of "Intensity of Site Usage",' *Australian Archaeology* 13 (Dec 1981), 30-34, 32.

⁹⁸ Nicholas Thomas, 'Social Theory, Ecology and Epistemology: Theoretical Issues in Australian Prehistory', *Mankind* 13 (1981), 165-77, 173.

⁹⁹ He saw these 'distinct regional and local signatures' as embedded in 'patterns on a general continental scale'. Harry Lourandos, *Continent of Hunter-Gatherers: New Perspectives in Australian Prehistory* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 306.

¹⁰⁰ Australian archaeologists have tended to be reluctant theoreticians, as discussed in, for example: J Peter White and James F O'Connell, *A Prehistory of Australia, New Guinea and Sahul* (Sydney; London: Academic Press, 1982), 1-4; Peter Hiscock, 'Stone Sools as Cultural Markers? The Last Two Decades of Stone Artefact Analysis in Australian Archaeology', *Australian Archaeology* 16 (1983), 48-56, 51-2. Iain Davidson suggests that this lack of interest in theory is another example of the influence of Cambridge University, and in particular Grahame Clark, on Australian archaeology. Iain Davidson, 'Beating about the Bush? Aspects of the History of Australian Archaeology', *Australian Archaeology* 17 (1983), 136-144, 137. Tim Murray has encouraged archaeologists to engage with the work of Gordon Childe to overcome the 'theoretical cultural cringe' in Australian archaeology. Tim Murray, 'Second Childehood? Gordon Childe and Australian Archaeology', *Australian Archaeology* 30 (Jun 1990), 14-17, 16.

¹⁰¹ Joseph B Birdsell, 'Some Environmental and Cultural Factors Influencing the Structuring of Australian Aboriginal Populations', *American Naturalist* 87 (1953), 171-207.

correlations.)¹⁰² The approach introduced by Mulvaney emphasised environmental explanations for change, but he also accommodated human agency, cultural preferences, and aesthetic values in his interpretations of the past. He saw Aboriginal people as dynamic individuals who managed their environment, but whose lives were also shaped by forces outside their control. Jones and Hallam expanded this approach by illuminating the many ways in which Aboriginal people had transformed their environment, blurring the lines between natural and cultural causes of environmental change, while McBryde added a social lens through her study of trade patterns in New England, showing how social and economic networks could be connected to the spread of ideas, technologies and ideologies across a landscape. Although elements of the so-called ‘new archaeology’ filtered into Australian research, such as Gould’s ‘ethno-archaeological’ work at Puntutjarpa and Meehan’s statistical study of shell collecting, the range of new ecological and economic approaches that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s were largely absorbed into the existing theoretical framework.¹⁰³ A complex view of Aboriginal society had emerged in Australia, but it remained understated. Fieldwork, not theory, was the driving force in Australian archaeology.¹⁰⁴

Lourandos was part of a new generation of archaeologists who were challenging this pragmatic, fieldwork-oriented approach. The subtitle of the landmark 1977 volume *Stone Tools As Cultural Markers – ‘Change, Evolution, Complexity’* – signalled the direction the field was taking, away from ideas of stability and continuity and towards more localised and dynamic interpretations of past societies. The rapid accumulation of data over the preceding decades had created opportunities to make connections and explore trends. As Hiscock argued in 1980: ‘whilst in some regions we have sufficient data to begin to extract patterns of variation we still lack a theoretical basis sufficient to do so.’¹⁰⁵ In 1981, in parallel with ‘the post-processual movement’ underway in the United Kingdom, anthropologist and historian Nicholas Thomas challenged his colleagues to interrogate the assumptions inherent in their archaeological interpretations: ‘All research involves theory, but adequate research must

¹⁰² See Ian Lilley, ‘Of Cowboys and Core-Tools: Revisionist Reflections on Rhys Jones and “The Great Intensification Debate”’, in Atholl Anderson, Ian Lilley and Sue O’Connor (eds.), *Histories of old Ages: Essays in Honour of Rhys Jones* (Canberra: Pandanus Books, ANU, 2001), 79-88.

¹⁰³ Bernard MJ Huchet, ‘Theories and Australian Prehistory: The Last Three Decades’, *Australian Archaeology* 33 (Dec 1991), 44-51, 45-46.

¹⁰⁴ Jim Allen and Rhys Jones suggest that this ‘Australian school’ of archaeology was the result of a ‘hybridisation’ of Cambridge and other international influences combined with the particularities of the Australian situation, especially the rich ethnographic record. Jim Allen and Rhys Jones, ‘Facts, Figures and Folklore’, *Australian Archaeology* 16 (1983), 165-167;

¹⁰⁵ Peter Hiscock, ‘Stone Tools as Cultural Markers: Change, Evolution, Complexity (Book Review)’, *Archaeology & Physical Anthropology in Oceania* 15(3) (Oct 1980), 172-176, 174.

involve explicit theory.’¹⁰⁶ He was especially critical of the prevailing notion that ancient individuals were ‘rational actors’, forever searching out the highest sources of protein, conducting activities to manage sustainable population sizes, and controlling the land for their greatest economic advantage. ‘Where is the rationality of the system?’ Thomas argued, ‘Individuals cannot make the long-term adaptive choices, since their decisions are bound up with short term economic interests and irrational ideologies.’¹⁰⁷ He urged Australian archaeologists to come up with a ‘social approach’ to the past.¹⁰⁸

In a landmark article published in *Archaeology in Oceania* in 1983, Lournados proposed a social mechanism for change, which he connected to international debates about ‘intensification’.¹⁰⁹ Instead of searching for external variables, such as environmental fluctuations, he suggested that the main drivers of change were *internal*. ‘The development of increasingly complex and competitive social networks and their related ceremonial institutions,’ he argued, ‘appear to be central influences in the process of change.’¹¹⁰ To illustrate his theory, he drew upon the drainage systems of western Victoria.

Lourandos’ central insight, as Marcia Langton observes, was to view the eel traps as social landscapes: ‘He regarded the network of manufactured channels and eel-holding ponds as social and political phenomena, not just narrow, economic events.’¹¹¹ Drawing upon the work of the cultural theorist Aram Yengoyan and the Marxist perspectives of Maurice Godelier, Lourandos speculated on the social significance of these ‘inter-group’ meetings. The operation and maintenance of the traps, he reasoned, demanded cooperation and collaboration between clans, and would have generated new social and political dynamics. The interactions that marked such events helped to regulate the relationships between competing groups, resolve disputes and trade valued resources. There were even peaceful displays of competitiveness, such as friendly bouts of wrestling and football matches using a possum-

¹⁰⁶ Thomas, ‘Social Theory, Ecology and Epistemology’, 174.

¹⁰⁷ Thomas, ‘Social Theory, Ecology and Epistemology’, 170.

¹⁰⁸ Thomas, ‘Social Theory, Ecology and Epistemology’, 174.

¹⁰⁹ He especially drew upon the contemporary work of Barbara Bender and David Harris. Barbara Bender, ‘Gatherer-Hunter to Farmer: A Social Perspective’, *World Archaeology* 10 (1978), 204-222; David Harris, ‘Alternative Pathways Towards Agriculture’, in CA Reed (ed.), *The Origins of Agriculture* (The Hague: Mouton, 1977), 179-243.

¹¹⁰ Lourandos, ‘Intensification’, 92.

¹¹¹ Marcia Langton, ‘Earth, Wind, Fire and Water: The Social and Spiritual Construction of Water in Aboriginal Societies’, in Bruno David, Bryce Barker, Ian J McNiven (eds.), *The Social Archaeology of Australian Indigenous Societies* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2006), 139-160, 159.

skin ball (*marngrook*): the origins of the game of the Australian Football League.¹¹² ‘The survival of these social networks,’ Lourandos reasoned, ‘thus depended mainly upon eels, as did the prestige of individual clan elders and their following. Everybody involved in these competitive politics had therefore an incentive to work a little harder – in this case by digging ditches and constructing weirs and eel traps – in order to ensure a dependable supply of eels.’¹¹³ He argued that this intensifying social rivalry, focused as it was on economic events, would have produced new innovations, which in turned allowed them to regulate the availability of resources, move towards a more sedentary social organisation, and be better placed to contribute to the demands of increased ceremonial and intergroup activities.

Lourandos defined the ‘intensification’ model against the ‘traditional’ environmentally deterministic view of prehistory that Birdsell promoted in the 1950s, and which he saw as being perpetuated by the following generation. In particular, he singled out his mentor, Rhys Jones, who considered the environment, and not cultural innovation, as the main driver of population change in Aboriginal societies. Lourandos saw this as an echo of Birdsell’s infamous rainfall-population hypothesis, and in 1980 accused Jones of portraying Aboriginal culture as essentially ‘static’.¹¹⁴ In his 1983 ‘intensification’ article, he went a step further and asserted that Jones believed ‘that little effective technological/economic change has taken place throughout Australia’s lengthy prehistory.’¹¹⁵ This was a misrepresentation of Jones’ work, as Ian Lilley notes: ‘Jones not only repeatedly emphasised the dynamism of the mid- to late Holocene but saw that dynamism in a light which also illuminated Lourandos’ views.’¹¹⁶ The overstatement, along with the broad attack on the ‘traditional’ approaches of the previous generation, fuelled much of the ferocity of what became known as ‘the Great Intensification Debate’.¹¹⁷ But this exchange should not take away from the essence of Lourandos’ argument: that cultures have their own dynamics, and this shapes how they transform over time. Social factors can assume a key (even a determining) role in shaping cultural, technological and economic patterns in Aboriginal society.

¹¹² Lourandos, ‘Swamp Managers of South-Western Victoria’, 296; Jenny Hocking and Nell Reidy, ‘Marngrook, Tom Wills and the Continuing Denial of Indigenous History: On the origins of Australian football’, *Meanjin* 75(2) (Jun 2016), 83-93.

¹¹³ Lourandos, ‘Swamp Managers of South-Western Victoria’, 307.

¹¹⁴ As evidence, Lourandos singled out a sentence Jones published in 1977: ‘One of the most important results from the study of Aboriginal demography, has been to show that Aboriginal population levels were proportional to resources and not to technology’. Lourandos, ‘Change or Stability?’, 256.

¹¹⁵ Lourandos, ‘Intensification’, 81.

¹¹⁶ Lilley, ‘Of Cowboys and Core-Tools’, 80.

¹¹⁷ Harry Lourandos and Anne Ross, ‘The Great “Intensification Debate”’: Its History and Place in Australian Archaeology’, *Australian Archaeology* 39 (Dec 1994), 54-63.

Lourandos also received significant criticism for the final line of his 1983 ‘intensification’ paper, in which he wrote:

Intensification of social and economic relations would appear to have been increasingly taking place during the Holocene period on the Australian mainland, the process being nipped in the bud by the coming of the Europeans.¹¹⁸

Like Jones’ heightened prose about Tasmanian Aboriginal people ‘doomed to a slow strangulation of the mind’, Lourandos found himself in an uncomfortable position after publishing this ‘tag line’.¹¹⁹ The sentence seemed to suggest that Aboriginal people were on an evolutionary trajectory towards a more complex, more agricultural way of life, and that they had ceased to change and adapt in the years since the invasion. Lourandos believed that his critics had misunderstood the line, along with the concept of complexity at the heart of the ‘intensification’ model.¹²⁰ As his students Bruno David and Tim Denham reflected, ‘intensification’ was not about unilinear, progressive change: it questioned ‘the very notion of predetermination, set in the conviction that Aboriginal cultures were moving in their own directions, untethered to the other modes of production documented by anthropologists elsewhere in the world.’¹²¹ Nevertheless, Lourandos’ use of the language of ‘intensification’ inevitably linked Aboriginal Australia to the long-running archaeological debate about the origins of agriculture.

British archaeologist Barbara Bender originally outlined the concept of ‘intensification’ in her 1978 article, ‘Gatherer-hunter to farmer: a social perspective’.¹²² Lourandos’ adoption of the term, and his portrayal of ‘intensification’ as a process occurring at an increasing rate, rang alarm bells for many in the field. In 1991, Caroline Bird and David Frankel expressed their concerns about the depiction of change ‘as cumulative and directional’ and wondered about the implications of Aboriginal society being portrayed as moving towards a different

¹¹⁸ Lourandos, ‘Intensification’, 92.

¹¹⁹ Jones, ‘The Tasmanian Paradox’, 203; Lourandos described it as a ‘tag line’ in Lourandos *et al.*, ‘An Interview with Harry Lourandos’, 28.

¹²⁰ Lourandos *et al.*, ‘An Interview with Harry Lourandos’, 28.

¹²¹ Bruno David and Tim Denham, ‘Unpacking Australian [pre]History’, in Bruno David, Bryce Barker, Ian J McNiven (eds.), *The Social Archaeology of Australian Indigenous Societies* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2006), 52-71, 67.

¹²² Bender, ‘Gatherer-Hunter to Farmer’.

social and economic mode.¹²³ This was certainly how many of those inspired by Lourandos interpreted his model. Elizabeth Williams used her work on Victorian mound complexes, for example, to suggest ‘that in time, the groups of the Western District would have gone on to develop agriculture. All the preconditions for the development of food production were there.’¹²⁴ Sue O’Connor reflected on the irony of the situation: ‘in an effort to escape from the environmental determinist paradigm we may have unwittingly embraced evolutionary determinism.’¹²⁵

The vexed question of ‘why did Aborigines not become farmers?’ has long haunted the study of Indigenous society.¹²⁶ It is a question that is bound up with colonial assumptions about evolutionary hierarchies, whereby every society is on a ladder climbing towards the ultimate destination of agriculture. Aboriginal society has long been regarded as residing on one of the lower rungs. The categories of ‘hunter-gatherer’ and ‘agriculturalist’, Jones wrote in 1975, ‘denote what has been seen as the fundamental division in human history, the watershed which separates savagery from civilization.’¹²⁷ In 1954, anthropologist AP Elkin suggested that Aboriginal people did not know that plants grew from seeds.¹²⁸ Catherine and Ronald Berndt, along with Marshall Sahlins, put a more positive spin on the conundrum, arguing that Aboriginal people were too well off to bother about agriculture and husbandry.¹²⁹ The idea that Aboriginal people had not worked the land was the lie at the heart of *terra nullius*. (And, as John Hirst noted, it is no coincidence that the court decision that overruled this colonial

¹²³ Caroline Bird and David Frankel, ‘Chronology and Explanation in Western Victoria and South-East South Australia’, *Archaeology in Oceania* 26(1) (Apr 1991), 1-16, 1.

¹²⁴ Elizabeth Williams, *Complex Hunter-Gatherers: A Late-Holocene Example from Temperate Australia* (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1988), 222.

¹²⁵ Sue O’Connor, ‘The Stone House Structures of High Cliffy Island, North West Kimberley, WA’, *Australian Archaeology* 25 (Dec 1987), 30-39, 36.

¹²⁶ For a recent iteration see the first chapter of John Hirst, *Australian History in 7 Questions* (Melbourne: Black Inc., 2014). In 1971, Peter White asked why there was agriculture in Torres Strait, Cape York and southwest New Guinea, but not in Australia. He called it the ‘Neolithic problem’. Forty years later, in a volume honouring the work of Sylvia Hallam, he returned to the question and revised his earlier conclusions: ‘The more we learn about varieties of subsistence, the less clear definitions of “agriculture” become, and the harder it is to see the Australian and New Guinean data as falling into separate classes.’ J Peter White, ‘New Guinea and Australian Prehistory: The “Neolithic problem”’, in John Mulvaney and Jack Golson (eds.), *Aboriginal Man and Environment in Australia* (Canberra: ANU Press, 1971), 182-95; J Peter White, ‘Revisiting the “Neolithic Problem” in Australia’, *Records of the Western Australian Museum* 79 (2011), 86-92, 86.

¹²⁷ Rhys Jones, ‘The Neolithic, Palaeolithic and the Hunting Gardeners: Man and Land in the Antipodes’, in RP Suggate and M Cresswell (eds.), *Quaternary Studies* (Wellington: Royal Society of New Zealand, 1975), 21-34.

¹²⁸ AP Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines: How to Understand Them* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 3rd ed. 1954), 15.

¹²⁹ Marshall Sahlins, ‘Notes on the Original Affluent Society’, in Richard B Lee and Irven Devore (eds.), *Man the Hunter* (Chicago: Aldine, 1968), 84-89; Ronald M Berndt and Catherine H Berndt, *Arnhem Land* (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1954), 38.

fallacy, the *Mabo* case, was decided over a gardening society who tended their crops on a small island in the Torres Strait over a period of several thousand years.)¹³⁰ The work of scholars in many fields over the past six decades has served to destabilise this evolutionary ladder and expose the question ‘why did Aborigines not become farmers?’ as a null hypothesis.¹³¹ There is no inherent value to a farming or a foraging way of life, neither signifies greater sophistication, and both are amorphous categories that are better understood on a spectrum of subsistence practices.

Sylvia Hallam highlighted the limitations of the ‘hunter-gatherer’ tag by illuminating the ways in which Indigenous communities had ‘cropped’ their land and managed ‘their stock of herbivores’ in Australia’s southwest. In Victoria, ethnobotanist Beth Gott demonstrated the Indigenous cultivation of the daisy yam *Microseris lanceolata*, which was grown by ‘the millions’ and harvested ‘year-round’.¹³² The different methods of soil preparation, fertilising through burning, and tilling by harvesting has led Ian Keen to conclude that ‘the boundary between foraging and farming is blurred ... it might be more appropriate to classify Aboriginal subsistence production as that of hunter-gatherer-cultivators.’¹³³ Jones used similar language on return from his year with the Anbarra people of central Arnhem Land.¹³⁴ On many occasions, he and Betty Meehan had observed their hosts, especially the women, ‘cropping’: digging up yams, but leaving the top of the tuber intact in the ground so that ‘soon the yam would grow again’; sowing fruit seeds in the richest soils of camp midden heaps to create a convenient supply of edible fruit trees; and trading the seeds of highly prized introduced species, such as the watermelon, to other late wet-season camps to spread their distribution.¹³⁵ As Jones wrote in 1975, ‘man-plant relationships in Aboriginal economies are far more complex, and have far more features in common with so called “agricultural” processes than has been generally realised.’¹³⁶ But Jones resisted the claim that Aboriginal societies were ‘agricultural’. They may have been ‘hunting-gardeners’ and ‘fire-

¹³⁰ Hirst, *Australian History in 7 Questions*, 11.

¹³¹ Alistair Paterson, ‘Once Were Foragers: The Archaeology of Agrarian Australia and the Fate of Aboriginal Land Management’, *Quaternary International* (In Press, March 2017), 1-13, 11.

¹³² Beth Gott, ‘Murnong – *Microseris Scapigera*. A Study of a Staple Food of Victorian Aborigines’, *Australian Aboriginal Studies* (1983), 2-17, 10.

¹³³ Ian Keen, *Aboriginal Economy & Society: Australia at the threshold of colonisation* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2003), 96.

¹³⁴ Jones, ‘The Neolithic, Palaeolithic and the Hunting Gardeners’, 21.

¹³⁵ Jones, ‘The Neolithic, Palaeolithic and the Hunting Gardeners’, 23.

¹³⁶ Jones, ‘The Neolithic, Palaeolithic and the Hunting Gardeners’, 25.

stick farmers’, but they remained, in his eyes, hunters. His view is echoed in Gammage’s recent words: ‘People farmed in 1788, but were not farmers.’¹³⁷

This debate has re-emerged in Australia with the publication in 2014 of Bruce Pascoe’s award-winning book, *Dark Emu: Black Seeds: Agriculture or Accident?*. Pascoe, an Indigenous writer, scholar and storyteller, has made a passionate case for Aboriginal societies to be viewed through the lens of ‘agriculture’. He draws together the immense ethnographic evidence of Aboriginal land management, burning, tilling, irrigating, harvesting, baking and construction to argue ‘that Aboriginals did build houses, did cultivate and irrigate crops, did sew clothes and were not hapless wanderers across the soil, mere hunter-gatherers.’¹³⁸ In his attempt to contest the negative racial attitudes that remain prevalent in Australian society, and to restore ‘Aboriginal pride in the past’, he seeks to ‘re-classify’ the first Australians as farmers and horticulturalists. It is a fascinating and provocative argument, building on a long scholarly debate, and it raises important questions about the ways in which Indigenous history is written and perceived. As Pascoe implores his readers after a discussion of the antiquity of seed grinding in Australia: ‘Why don’t our hearts fill with wonder and pride?’¹³⁹ But what does the language of ‘progress’ – articulated as the move from hunter-gatherers to farmers – do to our understanding of change and dynamism over the last several millennia? Is it necessary to turn to Eurocentric language and ideas to acknowledge the richness and complexity of Indigenous economies? ‘Is it meaningful,’ Hallam wonders, ‘to separate “agriculture” as one unitary category throughout space and time?’¹⁴⁰

The challenges of using Eurocentric terminology to describe Aboriginal society run far deeper than the debates over agriculture, as Anne Clarke has vividly illustrated through her study of the stone features at Lake Condah in Victoria.¹⁴¹ While Lourandos was investigating the drainage systems at Toolondo, a team led by Peter Coutts and Jane Wesson were intensively surveying the area to the south with the Victorian Archaeological Survey. Over several summer schools between 1977 and 1981 they recorded over two hundred stone structures around Lake Condah, which they variously described as house sites, walls, cairns,

¹³⁷ Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth*, 281.

¹³⁸ Bruce Pascoe, *Dark Emu: Black Seeds: Agriculture or Accident?* (Broome: Magabala Books, 2014), 156.

¹³⁹ Pascoe, *Dark Emu*, 156.

¹⁴⁰ Hallam, ‘The Biggest Estate on Earth (Book Review)’, 125.

¹⁴¹ Anne Clarke, ‘Romancing the Stones: The Cultural Construction of an Archaeological Landscape in the Western District of Victoria’, *Archaeology in Oceania* 29(1) (Apr 1994), 1-15.

traps, races and canals.¹⁴² In 1990, Clarke re-examined these features to create a management plan for cultural tourism in the area, but she quickly realised ‘that not all of the stone features previously recorded as “stone houses” were necessarily cultural constructions.’¹⁴³ Alongside features clearly made by Aboriginal people were others that were natural formations, whether associated with ancient lava flows or created by long-dead trees whose roots had lifted surface basalt blocks around their base. Some were European structures, such as modern hunting blinds. ‘The use of terms such as race, weir and canal may have suited the political and ideological points that Coutts et al. may have been trying to make when calling the report *Engineers of the Western District*,’ Clark reflected in her article ‘Romancing the Stones’, but the invocation of western industrial parallels has ‘contributed to the myth-making process at Lake Condah’.¹⁴⁴

John Beaton was also wary of using western terms to argue for the significance of Indigenous heritage and he bristled at the suggestion that Aboriginal society is ‘semi-agricultural’: ‘For me, Aboriginal culture is full-time Aboriginal culture, and that is its great strength. It need not doff its cap to Europe’s industrial revolution, the Near East’s agricultural origins or Meso-America’s evolution of complex societies.’¹⁴⁵ John Mulvaney similarly urged his colleagues to understand Aboriginal society on its own terms and appreciate it for what it is, not for what it may or may not have become:

Before posing the “why no neolithic?” question, therefore, it must be observed that an Aboriginal was possibly healthier than a peasant in classical Rome and better adjusted than a New York apartment dweller. Pharaoh’s pyramid testifies to his society’s technological mastery, but it perished; archaeology hints at an extraordinary continuity of social adjustment and spiritual life within Australia.¹⁴⁶

Lourandos regarded ‘hunter-gatherer’ and ‘agricultural’ societies as existing on a spectrum,

¹⁴² PJF Coutts, RK Frank and P Hughes, *Aboriginal Engineers of the Western District, Victoria*, Records of the Victorian Archaeological Survey 7 (Melbourne: Ministry for Conservation, 1978), 12-16.

¹⁴³ Clarke, ‘Romancing the Stones’, 4.

¹⁴⁴ Clarke, ‘Romancing the Stones’, 9.

¹⁴⁵ John M Beaton, ‘The Riches of Ancient Australia: An Indispensable Guide for Exploring Prehistoric Australia (Book Review)’, *Australian Aboriginal Studies* (2) (1993), 101-103, 103. The original quote comes from Josephine Flood, *The Riches of Ancient Australia: An Indispensable Guide for Exploring Prehistoric Australia* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1993), 26.

¹⁴⁶ John Mulvaney, *The Prehistory of Australia* (Ringwood, Vic: Penguin Books, 1975), 239.

and with the ‘intensification’ debate he tried to move the discussion beyond categories, which create arbitrary boundaries, to the ‘grey areas’ in between: ‘labels, along with their cultural baggage, only impede our progress.’¹⁴⁷ In his own work, he acknowledged that the term ‘hunter-gatherer’ was a colonial artefact, but he also worked with it and sought to enlarge our understanding of the societies it represents. He titled his book-length history of Aboriginal Australia, *Continent of Hunter-Gatherers*. ‘The main question is no longer “Why or why not agriculture?”’, he argued in 1981, ‘but “Why change?”’¹⁴⁸

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Lourandos’ model was received internationally as an important contribution to ongoing theoretical discussions about ‘intensification’ led by scholars such as Barbara Bender and David Harris.¹⁴⁹ The reaction in Australia, however, was more complex.¹⁵⁰ Beaton was the most vocal critic of ‘intensification’. He agreed that a broad explanatory model was required to explain the changes in the archaeological record, but he took issue with the separation of social change and economic change, arguing that both are so intimately associated that the ‘analytical separation of the two seemed impossible, or indeed unwarranted’.¹⁵¹ Such systems evolve together. Drawing on his experience living in Aboriginal hunting camps on the Mitchell River, Beaton also defended the complexity of the so-called ‘traditional’ views of Aboriginal society: ‘archaeologists who tend to phrase their broader statements in ecological terms are not necessarily dismissive of social factors.’¹⁵² As an alternative to ‘intensification’, he used his research from Princess Charlotte Bay to argue that ‘a simple population increase model’ could explain the social transformations of the mid-Holocene. After the seas stabilised and the climate improved around six thousand years ago, Beaton reasoned, a combination of local crowding and a gradual increase in population over several hundred

¹⁴⁷ Harry Lourandos, ‘Australia and the Origins of Agriculture (Book Review)’, *Australian Archaeology* 70 (Jun 2010), 75-77, 76-77.

¹⁴⁸ Harry Lourandos, ‘Comment on B Hayden, “Research and Development in the Stone Age: Technological Transitions among Hunter-Gatherers”’, *Current Anthropology* 22(5) (1981), 536-7, 536.

¹⁴⁹ Bender, ‘Gatherer-Hunter to Farmer’; Harris, ‘Alternative Pathways Towards Agriculture’. Lourandos was invited to key academic conferences in Britain and the United States and his ideas were prominently aired in academic volumes and journals. See, for example, Lourandos, ‘Comment on B Hayden’, 536; Harry Lourandos, ‘Comment on DG Sutton, “Towards the Recognition of Convergent Cultural Adaptation in the Subantarctic Zone”’, *Current Anthropology* 23(1) (1982), 89-90.

¹⁵⁰ Deborah Brian, ‘Harry Lourandos, the “Great Intensification Debate”, and the Representation of Indigenous Pasts’, in Bruno David, Bryce Barker, Ian J McNiven (eds.), *The Social Archaeology of Australian Indigenous Societies* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2006), 107-122, 111.

¹⁵¹ John M Beaton, ‘Does Intensification Account for Changes in the Australian Holocene Archaeological Record?’, *Archaeology in Oceania* 18 (1983), 94-7, 95.

¹⁵² Beaton, ‘Does Intensification Account for Changes?’, 95

years would have created demand for more resources, which in turn would have led to economic innovations, cultural changes, and further increases in population.¹⁵³ Hallam had suggested something similar in the early 1970s, although she added that human manipulations of the environment would have also spurred on population change.¹⁵⁴

In Lourandos' fiery response, he bemoaned the lack of theoretical sophistication in Australian archaeology, and the enduring 'environmental determinism' of Beaton's model.¹⁵⁵ Population growth is a complex process, he argued, and should neither be invoked as an 'independent variable nor as prime-mover' of cultural change.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, he believed Beaton had 'trivialised' the discussion by introducing personal anecdotes, and urged him to place his broad reflections on 'the general ecology of people' into a specific 'body of literature'.¹⁵⁷

While some scholars embraced and expanded upon the 'intensification' model, demonstrating other 'trends toward social complexity' in the form of artificially constructed mound sites and demographic changes in Victoria.¹⁵⁸ Others wondered whether the idea of 'intensification' masked more than it explains. 'If this is "intensification,"' Norman Yoffee wrote of Anne Ross' work in the Mallee, 'it is a very unintensified form of intensification'.¹⁵⁹ Sue O'Connor agreed that the term had been overused, but welcomed the fact that it provided the language to talk about social change alongside environmental change: 'it has usefully freed us from the constraints of the rigid divisions of simple and complex societies and all that they imply.'¹⁶⁰ There is a lot of truth to statistician George EP Box's aphorism that 'all models are wrong, but some are useful.'¹⁶¹

Over a decade after proposing the 'intensification' model, in 1994, Lourandos and Ross,

¹⁵³ John M Beaton, 'Evidence for a Coastal Occupation Time-Lag at Princess Charlotte Bay (North Queensland) and Implications for Coastal Colonization and Population Growth Theories for Aboriginal Australia', *Archaeology in Oceania* 20 (1985), 1-20, 17-18.

¹⁵⁴ Hallam wrote: 'High Aboriginal populations – and, in large part, the resources which supported them – were the result of long interactions over time, not of purely climatic and geomorphic factors.' Hallam, 'Topographic Archaeology and Artifactual Evidence', 173.

¹⁵⁵ Harry Lourandos, 'Problems with the Interpretation of Late-Holocene Changes in Australian Prehistory', *Archaeology in Oceania* 10 (1985), 37-9.

¹⁵⁶ Harry Lourandos, 'Changing Perspectives in Australian Prehistory: A Reply to Beaton', *Archaeology in Oceania* 19 (1984), 29-33, 32.

¹⁵⁷ Lourandos, 'Changing Perspectives in Australian Prehistory', 32.

¹⁵⁸ See, for example, Anne Ross, 'Archaeological Evidence for Population Change in the Middle to Late Holocene in Southeastern Australia', *Archaeology in Oceania* 20(3) (Oct 1985), 81-89.

¹⁵⁹ Norman Yoffee, 'Perspectives on Trends Towards Social Complexity in Prehistoric Australia and Papua New Guinea', *Archaeology in Oceania* 20 (1985), 41-49, 46.

¹⁶⁰ O'Connor, 'The Stone House Structures of High Cliffy Island', 36.

¹⁶¹ George EP Box and NR Draper, *Empirical Model-Building and Response Surfaces* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1987), 424.

reflected on the debate that it had spawned. They suggested that it had taken ‘Australian archaeology away from the “cowboy” era of data collection, where theory played a minor role, and linked the discipline with the contemporary philosophical discourses of anthropology.’¹⁶² Jack Golson made a similar observation in 1993, remarking on the ‘theoretical hypersophistication of the age’.¹⁶³ Nevertheless, as Bernard Huchet argued in his overview of the use of theory in Australian archaeology, there remains a profound ambiguity in the theoretical approaches used in Australia.¹⁶⁴ The ‘Neo-Marxist/historical materialist’ approaches that Lourandos introduced through the intensification debates were not revolutionary: rather, as with other waves of theory, they were gleaned for insights and incorporated into the dominant interpretative lens pioneered by the likes of Golson, Mulvaney, McBryde and Jones. ‘Rather than bite into the historical materialist cake,’ Huchet wrote of Lourandos’ peers, ‘these researchers have attempted to force intensification into the more familiar cultural materialist framework.’¹⁶⁵

Mulvaney did not consider this pragmatic use of theory a bad thing. ‘Australians may not theorise in the American manner,’ he reflected in 2012, ‘but their “theory” lies in the application of ethnographic or written ethno-historic evidence that is unavailable elsewhere in such complexity for hunter-gatherer studies.’¹⁶⁶ Instead of approaching the past through international debates, most Australian archaeological interpretations – like Lourandos’ elegant ‘intensification’ theory – emerge from deep engagement with ethnohistorical sources and patient, systematic fieldwork. ‘This is how archaeology actually advances,’ Hallam observed in 1971, ‘not by obsessive introspection on significance, relevance, definitions, aims and methodology’, but by ‘bringing to bear curiosity, energy, expertise, and experience’ on the information gathered through the ‘mud, dust and sweat’ of fieldwork.¹⁶⁷

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In the years since the ‘intensification’ model was first proposed, it has been enriched and complicated by more discoveries. The deserts became a centre for research, opening new

¹⁶² Lourandos and Ross, ‘The Great “Intensification Debate”’, 59.

¹⁶³ Jack Golson, ‘The Last Days of Pompeii?’, in MA Smith, M Spriggs and B Fankhauser (eds.), *Sahul in Review: Pleistocene Archaeology in Australia, New Guinea and Island Melanesia* (Canberra: Department of Prehistory, ANU, 1993), 275-280, 278.

¹⁶⁴ Huchet, ‘Theories and Australian Prehistory’, 46.

¹⁶⁵ Huchet, ‘Theories and Australian Prehistory’, 49.

¹⁶⁶ John Mulvaney, *Digging up a Past* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2011), 329.

¹⁶⁷ Sylvia J Hallam, ‘Reflections on Burrill Lake: Archaeologist as Ecologist’, *Anthropological Forum* 3(2) (1972), 197-204, 200.

lines of inquiry into mobility, ceremony and seed grinding. The discovery of Pleistocene dates for occupation in the heart of the arid zone also undermined a core tenant of the ‘intensification’ model: that these were marginal landscapes, only occupied during the late Holocene.¹⁶⁸ Yet other supposedly ‘marginal’ landscapes, such as tropical offshore islands in north-eastern and north-western Australia have been found to have been colonised or more intensively used in the mid-Holocene.¹⁶⁹ The chronology and mechanism of ‘intensification’ was also hotly contested on the banks of the Murray River: the most populated part of Australia in the Holocene.¹⁷⁰

The variety of new regional histories that have emerged over the last few decades has challenged the idea of a continent-wide socioeconomic transformation. The model has even been called into question within Lourandos’ own region. In 1991, Caroline Bird and David Frankel reviewed the western Victorian evidence that Lourandos had drawn upon in the 1970s and struggled to confirm the associations between alliance networks, productivity and settlement patterns that underpinned the idea of ‘intensification’.¹⁷¹ Although they recognised that sites like ‘mounds’ were a recent phenomenon, they questioned the link between their appearance and the fundamental shift in settlement structure proposed by Lourandos and Williams. They suggested that some of the social transformations Lourandos recorded, such as eeling, may be much older than a few thousand years, and that the proliferation of late Holocene sites could be a reflection of existing archaeological datasets, rather than a demonstration of population increase. By focusing on the particularities of the archaeological sites, they reframed the questions they were asking of the same evidence. What might seem connected, cumulative and directional under an intensification model, they argued, could also

¹⁶⁸ Mike Smith, *The Archaeology of Australia’s Deserts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 273.

¹⁶⁹ Sue O’Connor, ‘The Stone House Structures of High Clifty Island, North West Kimberley, WA’, *Australian Archaeology* 25 (Dec 1987), 30-39.

¹⁷⁰ Paleoanthropologist Steve Webb argued that local crowding and social clustering on the central Murray River created a new ‘infectious environment’ in the late Holocene. These changes could be read in the skeletal evidence, which features increasing levels of disease and starch build-up on teeth. He reasoned that a shift towards a high carbohydrate diet, along with nutritional stress and disease were the natural consequence of any ‘large, sedentary population’. Webb then used the construction of large collections of oven mounds or ‘living quarters’ around three thousand years ago to directly link the changes to socioeconomic intensification. However, Colin Pardoe’s work on cemeteries further upstream, along with Grahame Pretty’s excavations at Roonka, suggest that the region was densely populated from at least the late Pleistocene, and that economic intensification seems to have preceded social intensification. Stephen Webb, *Palaeopathology of Aboriginal Australians: Health and Disease across a Hunter-Gatherer Population* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 279; Colin Pardoe, ‘The Pleistocene is still with us: analytical constraints and possibilities for the study of ancient human remains in archaeology’, in MA Smith, M Spriggs and B Fankhauser (eds.), *Sahul in Review: Pleistocene Archaeology in Australia, New Guinea and Island Melanesia* (Canberra: Department of Prehistory, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, 1993), 81-94.

¹⁷¹ Bird and Frankel, ‘Chronology and Explanation in Western Victoria and South-East South Australia’, 10. This discussion is enriched in Bird and Frankel, *An Archaeology of Gariwerd*, 27-36.

be interpreted as local, short-term adaptations to specific changes in the immediate environment.¹⁷²

In 2012, one of Lourandos' students, Ian McNiven, in partnership with the Gunditj Mirring community, led an excavation of the eel traps at Lake Condah in western Victoria. Their findings suggested the initial channel in the basalt bedrock surrounding the lake had been created sometime before 6600 years ago. But as the channel filled with sediment over time, it needed to be reconstructed, with more basalt blocks added over the past 800 years to create walls to help funnel the water. They noted that the early date of construction coincides with higher water levels in Lake Condah, which would have probably stimulated the eel population and provided ideal conditions to trap them in such canals.¹⁷³ But McNiven's team was also cautious not to undermine the intensification theory or overstate the antiquity of eeling: 'despite suggesting a much longer chronology for the trapping systems, our results do not discount the possibility that most traps do indeed date to the past 3000 years.'¹⁷⁴ In particular, they point out that their research provides empirical support for Lourandos' hypothesis that Aboriginal people in southwest Victoria created water controls 'to regularize and stabilize the availability of resources' at a time of late Holocene drying.¹⁷⁵

Although there were undoubtedly dramatic changes in the Holocene, the idea of a continental 'inventive phase' or a period of socioeconomic 'intensification' over the last four thousand years seems less clear-cut than it appeared in the late 1970s and early 1980s.¹⁷⁶ Although internally driven social change was a major factor in the history of ancient Australia, the climatic, ecological and environmental consequences of the end of the last Ice Age, the rising of the seas, and irregular effects of the El Niño–Southern Oscillation also played a significant role. The arrival of the dingo on Australian shores four to five thousand years ago may have

¹⁷² This sentence paraphrases David Frankel, 'The Australian Transition: Real and Perceived Boundaries', *Antiquity* 69(265) (1995), 649-55, 653.

¹⁷³ Ian J McNiven, J Crouch, T Richards, Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation, N Dolby, and G Jacobsen, 'Dating Aboriginal Stone-Walled Fishtraps at Lake Condah, Southeast Australia', *Journal of Archaeological Science* 39(2) (2012), 268-286, 282-3.

¹⁷⁴ McNiven *et al.*, 'Dating Aboriginal Stone-Walled Fishtraps at Lake Condah', 284.

¹⁷⁵ McNiven *et al.*, 'Dating Aboriginal Stone-Walled Fishtraps at Lake Condah', 284.

¹⁷⁶ Alan N Williams, 'A New Population Curve for Prehistoric Australia', *Proceedings: Biological Sciences* 280 (1761) (22 June 2013), 1-9, 1.

played a more influential role in restructuring societies across the continent than was acknowledged in the debate over social intensification.¹⁷⁷

But the key insight is that many of the innovations thought to have emerged in the Holocene appear to have precedents in the Pleistocene. As Frankel reflects, there has been a tendency to overstate the significance of the Holocene-Pleistocene transition. He sees this as both a methodological inheritance from Europe, where theorists are drawn to the emergence of agriculture around 10,000 years ago, and a result of preservation-bias.¹⁷⁸ Where rich evidence of Pleistocene occupation has survived in Australia, it provides glimpses of sophisticated and diverse societies adapting to different circumstances through changing economic, technological and social practices.¹⁷⁹ Even as Hallam and Lourandos were completing their field surveys, there was a wealth of evidence of complex technological innovation dating back into the Pleistocene: Carmel Schrire had unearthed a twenty-thousand-year-old axe in western Arnhem Land; Jim Bowler had encountered evidence of ceremony and ritual burials over forty thousand years old in the Willandra Lakes and not far away, in the Darling Basin, Harry Allen had uncovered evidence of societies processing seed grains over fifteen thousand years ago; and at Wylie Swamp in South Australia, Roger Luebbers had recovered a handful of ten-thousand-year-old wooden implements, including a boomerang, a spear, at least two types of digging stick, and a barbed javelin fragment.¹⁸⁰ As Luebbers wrote in 1975, 'We can therefore see the Australian Aborigine emerging from the Pleistocene equipped with a tool kit as vital to the exploitation of the local environment then as it was yesterday, and just as complex.'¹⁸¹

There are fewer models and continental systems proposed in Australian archaeology today. Those which have been put forward, such as the population curve Alan Williams' has inferred from his dataset of radiocarbon dates from occupation sites across the continent,

¹⁷⁷ Although, as Jane Balme and Sue O'Connor note, dingos were incorporated into different communities in a variety of ways. Jane Balme and Sue O'Connor, 'Dingoes and aboriginal social organization in Holocene Australia', *Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports* 7 (Jun 2016), 775-81.

¹⁷⁸ David Frankel, 'Pleistocene Chronological Structures and Explanations: A Challenge', in M Spriggs, DE Yen, W Ambrose, R Jones, A Thorne and A Andrews (eds.), *A Community of Culture: The People and Prehistory of the Pacific* (Canberra: Department of Prehistory, Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National University, 1993), 24-33, 26-27.

¹⁷⁹ Peter Hiscock, *Archaeology of Ancient Australia* (London: Routledge, 2008), 120; Pardoe, 'The Pleistocene is still with us'.

¹⁸⁰ Roger Luebbers, 'Ancient Boomerangs Discovered in South Australia', *Nature* 253 (1975), 39.

¹⁸¹ Luebbers, 'Ancient Boomerangs Discovered in South Australia', 39. Although Darrell Lewis has expressed doubts about the Pleistocene antiquity of spear thrower technologies. Darrell Lewis, *The Rock Paintings of Arnhem Land, Australia: Social, Ecological and Material Culture Change in the Post-Glacial Period* (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports International Series 415, 1988).

have been promoted as ‘first-order frameworks’ to be used alongside detailed regional research.¹⁸² Many of the grand continental narratives that were proposed in the 1970s and 1980s, such as Lourandos’ intensification model, Lesley Maynard’s three-part rock art sequence and Sandra Bowdler’s coastal colonisation model, are being challenged and complicated by rich regional evidence. Australian archaeology is becoming more local. This emphasis on regionalism does not imply that Aboriginal societies existed in isolation; they were intimately connected to neighbouring groups through trade, marriage and ceremony.¹⁸³ But while there remain many continental commonalities, the overwhelming insight into the social history of the Holocene resonates with Hallam’s understanding of Aboriginal burning regimes: there were different histories of change in every region, as distinct societies responded to their own social, environmental and ecological circumstances.

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In the wake of the intensification debate, Lourandos retreated from the spotlight to work on the archaeology of Aboriginal social landscapes in Queensland. He and Ross believed that ‘the Great Intensification Debate’ had ‘democratised the discipline’, by moving the academic focus from rare Pleistocene sites to a more widespread and complex recent phenomenon.¹⁸⁴ It certainly showed that the Holocene had interesting things to say. His contribution, as the ‘inspiration’ for a socially oriented archaeology of Aboriginal Australia, was recently celebrated in a book on the subject.¹⁸⁵ In 2011, he also reflected on his personal appreciation of Sylvia Hallam’s work and how he had found ‘encouragement’ in her survey of Australia’s southwest, which followed ‘similar themes’ to his own: ‘I will always remember her enthusiastically taking me on a day-long tour of the archaeological sites she had excavated around the wider region outside Perth and her hospitable and generous personality.’¹⁸⁶

Meanwhile, Hallam, who always valued the role of documentary evidence in her archaeological practice, has moved closer to history. While Lourandos was reading the work

¹⁸² See, for example, Alan N Williams, Peter Veth, Will Steffen, Sean Ulm, Chris SM Turney, Jessica M Reeves, Steven J Phipps and Mike Smith, ‘A Continental Narrative: Human Settlement Patterns and Australian Climate Change Over the Last 35,000 years’, *Quaternary Science Reviews* 123 (2015), 91-112, 106.

¹⁸³ Sean Ulm, ‘“Complexity” and the Australian Continental Narrative: Themes in the Archaeology of Holocene Australia’, *Quaternary International* 285 (Feb 2013), 182-192, 189.

¹⁸⁴ Lourandos and Ross, ‘The Great “Intensification Debate”’, 59.

¹⁸⁵ Bruno David, Bryce Barker and Ian J McNiven (eds.), *The Social Archaeology of Australian Indigenous Societies* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2006).

¹⁸⁶ Harry Lourandos, ‘Review of “Fire and Hearth” Forty Years on: Essays in Honour of Sylvia J. Hallam edited by Caroline Bird and R. Esmée Webb’, *Australian Archaeology* 73 (Dec 2011), 79-81, 81. See also Lourandos, ‘Forces of Change’, 417-418.

of theorists like Barbara Bender in the late 1970s, Hallam was admiring an emerging strain of historical scholarship, led by Henry Reynolds, which attempted to understand the Aboriginal response to their conquest and dispossession. The documentary historians she had yearned for when she embarked on her archaeological survey in 1970 had finally arrived on the scene. In 1983, after falling seriously ill with diphtheria, she joined this new vein of scholarship, redirecting her research away from fieldwork towards the archives. She wrote about gender dynamics in Aboriginal Australia, the changing nature of land usage and territoriality, and histories of the usurpation of yam fields and hunting grounds. Her historical research began with landscape transformations, social structures and demography, but in order to understand the ways in which populations had changed over time, she started counting people in the ethnographic literature. This, in turn, led her to write personal stories. Having sought to understand the ‘long view’ of Aboriginal society over the Holocene and into the Pleistocene, she became a biographer of Indigenous lives in colonial Australia, presenting a subtle, intimate ‘view from the other side of the western frontier’.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ She collaborated with Neville Green as a biographer for the Aboriginal volumes of the *Bicentennial Dictionary of Western Australia*. Bird, ‘Preface’, x; Sylvia J Hallam, ‘A View from the Other Side of the Western Frontier: Or “I Met a Man Who Wasn’t There...”’, *Aboriginal History* 7 (1983), 134-156.



Fig. 71 The 1989 excavation team at Madjedbebe (Malakunanja II) (l-r) Bert Roberts, Mike Smith, Rhys Jones and an unidentified fieldworker (Source: M Smith).



Fig. 72 Richard Fullagar at Jinnium, 1994 (Source: R Jones, AIATSIS).

Hunting the Pleistocene

The history and politics of Jinmium and Madjedbebe

On 31 May 1992, three days before the landmark *Mabo* decision was handed down in the Australian High Court, a small archaeological team sank a trench beside a weathered sandstone boulder in the far east of the Kimberley region. The site was known as Jinmium. It had been found during a survey of Aboriginal campsites associated with the late-nineteenth century pastoral industry and it was being excavated as part of a wider investigation into Aboriginal resource management in the region.¹ The team leader, Richard Fullagar, was particularly interested in the ways in which stone artefacts had been used to gather and process bush foods over time. Under a microscope he could read the history of a stone tool from the wear patterns and residues left behind: plant fibres and seeds, blood and bone. ‘It seems preposterous that stone artefacts have anything significant to tell us about culture,’ he reflected in 1994, ‘especially in recent Aboriginal Australia, where simple stone chips pale to insignificance alongside the complex social life of Aboriginal people.’² The key is to link stone artefacts with the complex social, economic and ideological worlds in which they were crafted, and in which they played a role. At the site of Jinmium, he hoped to make these connections and, in the process, unravel the history of human interaction with the environment in the Keep River region. As his wife and fellow excavator, ecologist and geographer Lesley Head, reflected, ‘We’re in the middle of a process of coming to terms with Australia as a cultural landscape.’³

Head and Fullagar’s team was given permission to excavate by the Aboriginal landowners, the Murinpatha, Jaminjung and Gadgerong people, especially senior Gadgerong man Mr Paddy Carlton and Murinpatha woman Mrs Bidy Simon, who explained the significance of

¹ RLK Fullagar, DM Price and LM Head, ‘Early Human Occupation of Northern Australia: Archaeology and Thermoluminescence Dating of Jinmium Rock-Shelter, Northern Territory’, *Antiquity* 70(270) (Dec 1996), 751-73.

² Richard Fullagar, ‘Traces of Times Past: Stone Artefacts into Prehistory’, *Australian Archaeology* 39 (1994), 63-73, 64.

³ Lesley Head, in Geoffrey Burchfield (prod.), *The Sands of the Dreamtime: Burden of Proof* (1997), Sydney: ABC TV, Quantum.

the site and told them the story of how Jinnium got its name. Jinnium forms one link in a song cycle that stretches across the Keep River region and connects the locations of important economic and ceremonial resources. The Dreaming track marks the path of a male spirit figure, Djibigun, in pursuit of Jinnium, a female spirit being. Driven by desire, he tracked her across the desert and over creeks, past the red ochre hills and the Bungyala stone quarry, until he caught her at Jinnium. But she eluded him by transforming into the 130-foot-high sandstone monolith that rises above the wooded plains today.⁴ While Jinnium towers over the landscape, Djibigun still haunts it in the form of a small quail (*Coturnix australis*). ‘According to old people,’ Mr Carlton explained, ‘... that fella [Djibigun] keep walking, keep walking through all of my country, across the river.’⁵ Head and Fullagar hoped to investigate the tangible elements of this story through their archaeological excavation. They were trying to understand the Dreaming track within the deep-time story. They were searching for clues that could demonstrate connections between sites on the route followed by Djibigun and Jinnium, such as stone and ochre that could be traced to their source and starchy ‘yam’ residues on excavated pounding tools that might reveal ecological pathways.⁶ ‘The things that are continuous,’ wrote Fullagar and Head, ‘are those that can be most closely linked to the story of Djibigun and Jinnium.’⁷

But these fine-grained research goals were sidelined by the preliminary dates that emerged from the 1992 field season. Jinnium, the samples suggested, had been occupied for around sixty thousand years, making it possibly the oldest site in Australia. On their return visit, on 19 May 1993, Fullagar reported the dates to Mrs Simon. ‘She was very excited,’ Fullagar wrote in his journal.⁸ ‘See,’ she told him, ‘you come to the right place you see.’⁹ The archaeologists shared her excitement, but they were also suspicious of the old date and wary of catapulting the site into the most politically charged debate in Australian archaeology: the timing of the arrival of humans on the Australian continent. ‘We were worried about these dates initially because, as you can imagine, with such antiquity, it flies in the face of other

⁴ Fullagar *et al.*, ‘Early Human Occupation of Northern Australia’.

⁵ Paddy Carlton, in Burchfield, *The Sands of the Dreamtime*.

⁶ Richard Fullagar and Lesley Head, ‘Exploring the Prehistory of Hunter-Gatherer Attachment to Place: An Example from the Keep River Area, Northern Territory, Australia’, in P Ucko and R Layton (eds.) *The Archaeology and Anthropology of Landscape* (London: Routledge, 1999), 322-335, 326-327.

⁷ Fullagar and Head, ‘Exploring the Prehistory of Hunter-Gatherer Attachment to Place’, 333.

⁸ Fullagar, as quoted in James Woodford, ‘Unearthed: Australia’s Lost Civilisation’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 Sept 1996, 29, 32, 29.

⁹ Woodford, ‘Unearthed’, 29.

material.’¹⁰ But under pressure from their main funding source, the Australian Research Council, they made deep time, rather than land use, the central focus of their 1993 excavation.¹¹

David Price, who had set up Australia’s first thermoluminescence dating laboratory in 1972, accompanied the team in 1993 and took new samples from the wall of the pit. Rock art specialist Paul Taçon also joined them to study some circular engravings (or pecked cupules) uncovered on the buried rock shelter wall and on a fallen sandstone fragment bearing abraded grooves. Similar engravings were scattered in chains around the region, providing an insight into how people had added to the existing cultural landscape.¹² The dates they uncovered in that field season, both for the evidence of occupation and for the art, were, in Fullagar’s words, ‘pretty outrageous’.¹³ They discussed them with the local community and Fullagar returned to the site in July 1995 with Rhys Jones and another luminescence expert, Bert Roberts, to retest the site.¹⁴ In the meantime, they submitted an initial site report to the prestigious British journal *Antiquity*.¹⁵ The results should have been published in December 1996 in a peer-reviewed academic forum. But after a series of leaks in the months preceding publication, the archaeologists decided to go public and announce the dates via the media.¹⁶ It was a decision made, in part, to include, rather than alienate, the Indigenous people on whose land they were working.¹⁷

On 21 September 1996, Australians awoke to news that a ‘lost civilisation’ had been discovered in the Kimberly, including an ‘outback Stonehenge that will rewrite our history’. In a lavish front-page exclusive, Fairfax journalist James Woodford reported that Jinnium had been occupied for as long as 176,000 years – ‘possibly tripling the period of occupation of Australia’ – and that the rock engravings that Taçon had recorded were 75,000 years old:

¹⁰ Graeme Leech, ‘Experts at odds over archaeological dating’, *The Australian*, 23 Sept 1996, 5.

¹¹ Woodford, ‘Unearthed’, 32; Anon., ‘We believe it is better to present the evidence’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 Sept 1996, 33.

¹² Stephen Brook, ‘Carvings May Mark a Pathway for Nomads’, *The Australian*, 23 Sept 1996, 4.

¹³ As quoted in: Ann Gibbons, ‘Doubts Over Spectacular Dates’, *Science*, New Series 278(5336) (10 Oct 1997), 220-222, 220.

¹⁴ Richard G Roberts, Michael Bird, Jon Olley, Rex Galbraith, Ewan Lawson, Geoff Laslett, Hiroyuki Yoshida, Rhys Jones, Richard Fullagar, Geraldine Jacobsen and Quan Hua, ‘Optical and Radiocarbon Dating at Jinnium Rock Shelter in Northern Australia’, *Nature* 393 (28 May 1998), 358-362.

¹⁵ Fullagar *et al*, ‘Early Human Occupation of Northern Australia’; See also Paul SC Taçon, Richard Fullagar, Sven Ouzman and Ken Mulvaney, ‘Cupule Engravings from Jinnium-Granilpi (Northern Australia) and Beyond: Exploration of a Widespread and Enigmatic Class of Rock Markings’, *Antiquity* 71(274) (Dec 1997), 942-965.

¹⁶ Paul SC Taçon and Richard Fullagar, ‘Living with the past’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 Sep 1996, 13; James Woodford, ‘The Dating Game’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 Sept 1996, 33.

¹⁷ Lesley Head, ‘Headlines and Songlines’, *Meanjin* 55(4) (1996), 736-743, 737.

‘pushing back dramatically the date when humans began to create art’.¹⁸ The feature stretched over many pages and was coordinated with the *New York Times*. It explored the implications of the find for human evolution and how people had colonised the globe, the nature of art and the extinction of the continent’s megafauna, as well as profiles of ‘the people behind the discoveries’ and the reasoning behind publishing the dates in this way.¹⁹ Even the most modest date arising out of the site report – 116,000 years – was still twice the age of the next oldest site in Australia. ‘It changes enormously the way we think about Australian prehistory,’ Fullagar told the media, ‘To suggest that Aborigines have been in Australia for over 100,000 years really does change a lot of things.’²⁰

The academic community was divided. As Alan Thorne reflected, ‘This is going to cause a huge flutter around the world because there are so many theories (about the evolution and spread of modern humans) tied up in this debate. And one side is wrong.’²¹ Kim Ackerman heralded the dates as ‘stupendous ... I have no problem contemplating a 100,000 to 200,000 year occupation of Australia’,²² while Peter White, reflecting on the transformations over the previous decades, commented to one reporter: ‘One-hundred-and-twenty-thousand is going to make us rethink some of our models, but there’s no reason why not. We’re amazed, fairly surprised and rather pleased.’²³ Many Indigenous Australians embraced the new dates. Within weeks of the Jinnium announcement, a group of Aboriginal dancers were promoting their performance as being ‘176,000 years in the making’.²⁴

There were also immediate voices of doubt, especially about the way the story had been broken. ‘I would not dream of taking a major discovery to the media first,’ Robert Bednarik said, ‘They’ve gone about this the wrong way.’²⁵ Mike Morwood came forward as one of the referees for the *Antiquity* paper, declaring that he had recommended against publication due

¹⁸ James Woodford, ‘Unveiled: outback Stonehenge that will rewrite our history’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 Sept 1996, 1.

¹⁹ John Noble Wilford, ‘In Australia, Signs of Artists Who Predate Homo Sapiens’, *The New York Times*, 21 Sept 1996; James Woodford, ‘The arrival of man and nature of art’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 Sept 1996, 33; Anon, ‘We believe it is better to present the evidence’; Anon, ‘The people behind the discoveries’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 Sept 1996, 33.

²⁰ Woodford, ‘Unveiled’.

²¹ Graeme Leech, ‘Scientists split over rock find’s implications for evolution: challenge to the origin of man’, *The Australian*, 23 Sept 1996, 1.

²² Woodford, ‘Unveiled’, 1.

²³ Woodford, ‘The Dating Game’, 33.

²⁴ Paul Willis, ‘Jinnium Revisited’, *The Slab: In the News* (25 Mar 1999).

²⁵ Nicolas Rothwell, ‘Politics Etched in Stone’, *The Australian*, 23 Sept 1996, 1, 4, 4.

to concern with the lack of cross-checks in the thermoluminescence dating methods used.²⁶ Rhys Jones also expressed ‘serious doubts’ about the dating methods, whilst hastily adding: ‘But I’m not a hostile witness. The site is extremely interesting and extremely old – possibly the oldest in Australia. Its implications will challenge contemporary views of modern sapiens. But it has got to be based on believable results.’²⁷ The dates were vigorously discussed in the first session of the Australian Archaeological Association conference on 5 December 1996, coinciding with the release of the publication of the research in *Antiquity*.²⁸

The news was heightened by the political context into which the dates were delivered. After the groundswell that followed the *Mabo* decision, the election of the Howard Government on 2 March 1996 and the rise of Pauline Hanson’s One Nation Party had changed the tenor of debate about native title in Australia. ‘I am fed up with being told, “This is our land”’, Hanson declared in her maiden speech, ‘Well, where the hell do I go? I was born here, and so were my parents and children.’²⁹ The *Wik* case, which was being heard in the High Court in 1996, framed the discovery, as the region incorporating the Keep River Area was subject to a native title claim by the Miriuwung and Gajeroong people.³⁰ Some journalists latched onto the motivations of the archaeologists in announcing a big date and questioned what the Aboriginal community got out of this announcement. Maria Ceresa of *The Australian* wrote a series of articles about the money some members of the Aboriginal community were making out of guiding visitors to the site.³¹ ‘Reinterpreting the past, in a country where native title is at issue, involves contention, and that contention has swept like a whirlwind through this field,’ wrote Nicolas Rothwell in an essay on ‘the politicisation of Australian archaeology’, ‘...it would be hard to imagine an archaeologist pursuing a research project that tended to work against Aboriginal interests.’³² The cartoonist Ron Tanberg summarised the political climate with a simple sketch (Fig. 73).³³

²⁶ Mike Morwood, ‘Jinmium and the dilemmas of dating’, *The Australian*, 24 Sept 1996, 13.

²⁷ Graeme Leech, ‘Scientists query dating methods in historic rock find’, *The Australian*, 24 Sept 1996, 1, 4.

²⁸ Jill Rowbotham, ‘Jinmium trio face peers’, *The Australian*, 5 Dec 1996, 7.

²⁹ Hanson, as quoted in Ann Curthoys, ‘Expulsion, Exodus and Exile in White Australian Mythology’, *Journal of Australian Studies* 23(61) (1999), 1-19, 17-18.

³⁰ The case, *Ben Ward and Others v. The State of Western Australia and Others*, is explored in Libby Riches, ‘Exploring Encounter: A New Relationship Between Archaeologists and Indigenous People?’, in Tim Murray (ed.), *Archaeology from Australia* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2004), 151-167, 157.

³¹ Maria Ceresa, ‘Territory will extend park to protect site’, *The Australian*, 23 Sept 1996, 5; Maria Ceresa, ‘Rock that holds fingerprints of life’, *The Australian*, 25 Sept 1996, 1.

³² Rothwell, ‘Politics Etched in Stone’, 4.

³³ Lesley Head brilliantly deconstructs Tanberg’s image in: ‘Risky Representations: The “Seduction of Wholeness” and the Public Face of Australian Archaeology’, *Australian Archaeology* 46 (Jun 1998), 1-4.



Fig. 73 Ron Tanberg, *Sydney Morning Herald*, December 1996.

‘That old archaeological dates in Australia are front-page news tells us more about our own society than about prehistoric ones,’ Lesley Head reflected in 1996. ‘Many Australians are now passionately interested in Aboriginal prehistory; it is one of the paths by which we are coming to terms with our own social and ecological role on the continent.’³⁴ But the credibility of the site suffered from being drawn into the world of media exclusives and newspaper rivalries, and the Jinmium story became as much about the scientific process as it did about the timescale of Australian history. *The Australian* editorialised in favour of ‘caution and objectivity’.³⁵ Rothwell in particular criticised the *Sydney Morning Herald*’s coverage: ‘the atmospherics, the “spin” surrounding the news was profoundly disquieting. This was, after all, science. Yet the event was tightly managed; splashily presented; given, by the researchers who put it forward, an overtly political context.’³⁶ Archaeologist Claire Smith joined him in criticising the media representation, lambasting the description of Jinmium as ‘an outback Stonehenge’ because it assumed ‘a need to assert value for Aboriginal cultural achievements through reference to a European counterpart. This view fails to recognise that Aboriginal achievements have value in their own right.’³⁷

³⁴ Head, ‘Headlines and Songlines’, 736.

³⁵ Editorial, ‘Jinmium find calls for caution’, *The Australian*, 24 Sept 1996, 12.

³⁶ Rothwell, ‘Politics Etched in Stone’, 1.

³⁷ Claire Smith, ‘Why caution is the best technique’, *The Australian*, 24 Sept 1996, 13.

Within two years, the supposedly 176,000-year-old site was found to be less than ten thousand years old.³⁸ Quartz grains from a decomposing rock had become mixed with the surrounding sand, giving dates closer to the age of the rock, rather than the human occupation of the site. Fullagar was pilloried by the press and by his colleagues for having ‘gone off half-cocked in search of fame’ and for having taken Australian history on ‘a chronological roller-coaster ride’.³⁹ The irony, Fullagar later reflected, was that he had not gone in search of the Pleistocene at Jinnium: the research stemmed out of a long engagement with a community and an interest in resource use over time. ‘We were not out to find the oldest age,’ he reflected to journalist Graeme Leech, ‘We were not out to create some controversy. It’s long-term research which began in 1987. I’ll still be there in 20 years, I’ve no doubt.’⁴⁰ Head searched for the positives in the controversy: ‘the public response to Jinnium suggests to us that many Australians, and many kinds of Australians, are not only passionate about the prehistory of the continent, but are also looking to archaeology to help them articulate their place in it.’⁴¹

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The revolution in Australia’s timescale since the 1960s has opened the eyes of the Australian public to the antiquity and complexity of Indigenous history, but it has also laid fertile ground for wild claims to take root. We need to be able to understand the difference between a history that extends over 40,000, 60,000 or 100,000 years. There is a ‘Gee whiz’ element to any dates that transcend our ordinary understanding of time as lived experience.⁴² The dates become numbers. And aside from being ‘a long time ago’ they are hard to grasp imaginatively. The Jinnium controversy is simply one example of dates escaping their context.⁴³ But in context, dates do tell a story.

³⁸ Roberts *et al*, ‘Optical and Radiocarbon Dating at Jinnium Rock Shelter in Northern Australia’; Alan Watchman, Paul Taçon, Richard Fullagar and Lesley Head, ‘Minimum Ages for Pecked Rock Markings from Jinnium, North Western Australia’, *Archaeology in Oceania* 35(1) (Apr 2000), 1-10.

³⁹ Graeme Leech, ‘Our origins on rocky ground; The discovery of ancient rock carvings and primitive tools at Jinnium in the Northern Territory’, *The Australian*, 28-29 Sept 1996, 27; Bruce Bower, ‘Australian Site Jumps Forward in Time’, *Science News* 153(22) (1998), 343.

⁴⁰ Graeme Leech, ‘Dates for the rock art site at Jinnium (NT) may have been miscalculated’, *The Australian*, 21 Feb 1997, 13.

⁴¹ Head, ‘Risky Representations’, 1.

⁴² George Seddon as quoted in Kirsty Douglas, *Pictures of Time Beneath: Science, Heritage and the Uses of the Deep Past* (Melbourne: CSIRO Publishing, 2010), 11.

⁴³ There are many others. In 2016, Giles Hamm published a site report on a rockshelter in the Flinders Ranges featured intriguing new information about human interaction with megafauna, early evidence for different types of stone and bone technology, as well as the use of ochre, and a 49,000-year-old date for occupation in arid

Old dates make careers and attract grants. They change history books and, for better or worse, lend a sense of legitimacy to Aboriginal claims to country. They are also fraught with internal, disciplinary politics. ‘The field of archaeology is full of wild claims,’ Rhys Jones reflected to a reporter in 1990: ‘And if you get it wrong, you can expect to be knee-capped.’⁴⁴ The search for sensational or revolutionary discoveries is also inextricably entwined with questions of gender, as feminist scholars such as Evelyn Fox Keller have shown.⁴⁵ While nuanced and humanistic research is often associated with the work of female scientists, Western masculine science is bound to the act of discovery. ‘As it is seen in archaeology,’ writes Stephanie Moser, ‘the Western masculine model of science can be related to a preoccupation with questions of antiquity and origins – discovering the oldest sites, locating the deepest deposits, and finding the most unique sites or data.’⁴⁶ Since 1984, this hyper-masculine preoccupation in Australian archaeology has been gently parodied each year with the ‘Big Man Award’, which is bestowed upon the archaeologist who makes ‘the most outrageous statement’ at the annual AAA conference.⁴⁷ Although other titles for the award have been proposed and introduced over the years, from the ‘Big It Award’ to the ‘Small-Boy Award’, the ‘Big Man’ has endured as the main event. ‘Given that many of these academics are male and that many have been particularly interested in pursuing “big” things for their research topics (e.g. the oldest site, the coldest site, the hottest site, and so on),’ Elizabeth Williams, the inaugural winner, reflected, ‘I thought it was strange that they hadn’t won more Big Man awards.’⁴⁸ The same paradox is true in the hunt for the Pleistocene. Although Sharon Sullivan has characterised the search for old dates as an exercise in machismo – ‘My Pleistocene sequence is bigger than your Pleistocene sequence’⁴⁹ – Australian research into antiquity, origins and routes of colonisation has been led by women as much as men, from Carmel Schrire’s ground-breaking discovery of a twenty-thousand-year-old axe in 1964 to Sandra Bowdler’s discovery of a Pleistocene occupation record on Hunter Island in the Bass

Australia. When the results filtered into the media the paper was reduced to the headline ‘Humans settled in Australian interior 10,000 years earlier than thought’. In the breathless pace of news journalism, this was soon repeated as the subtly different, but much more substantial claim: ‘human activity might have taken place in Australia 10,000 years earlier than previously thought’. Anon. ‘Humans settled in Australian interior 10,000 years earlier than thought’, *news.com.au*, 3 November 2016; Sean Kelly, ‘A healthy dose of paranoia’, *The Monthly Today*, 3 November 2016.

⁴⁴ Lenore Nicklin, ‘The Prehistory Cowboy Strikes Again’, *The Bulletin*, 12 Jun 1990, 92-93, 93.

⁴⁵ Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

⁴⁶ Stephanie Moser, ‘Science, Stratigraphy and the Deep Sequence: Excavation versus Regional Survey and the Question of Gendered Practice in Archaeology’, *Antiquity* 70(270) (Dec 1996), 813-823, 818.

⁴⁷ RJ Lampert and Betty Meehan, ‘The Big Man Award’, *Australian Archaeology* 25 (1987), 113-4.

⁴⁸ Elizabeth Williams, ‘AAA Big Man Award’, *Australian Archaeology* 39 (1994), 134.

⁴⁹ Sharon Sullivan, comment in Andrew Pike and Ann McGrath (dir.), *Message from Mungo* (2014), Canberra: Ronin films.

Strait, and her proposed coastal colonisation model, which set the agenda for Pleistocene archaeology in the 1970s.⁵⁰

The failure of the public to understand and absorb old dates for human occupation stems from a broader disconnect with the deep Indigenous history of the continent. This chapter follows the quest to uncover the oldest dates for occupation.⁵¹ It focuses on the controversies and possibilities that surround Jinmium and the current oldest site in Australia, Madjedbebe (formerly Malakunanja II), near the border of Arnhem Land and Kakadu National Park.⁵² It explores its excavation and re-excavation in 1973, 1989, 2012 and 2015. The second half of this chapter attempts to put this key archaeological site in its global context. I do this in the belief that dates only become meaningful when they are placed within a story and a history. ‘Build on the sands of data,’ Lydia and Stephen Pyne reflect, ‘and you will be swept away by the next flash flood of discovery. ... To be powerful, a narrative must be anchored in art and philosophy, since aesthetic closure and moral resolution are what convey the context that endows facts with enduring meaning.’⁵³

At the heart of the hunt for the Pleistocene is a shift in control within the discipline of archaeology, from history to science. ‘Why does the world think it is so special?’ asked Christopher Chippindale, the editor of *Antiquity*, when the peer-reviewed report on Jinmium was finally published: ‘Because of the numbers.’⁵⁴ The debate came to centre on the means of getting the numbers, and in particular the benefits of optically stimulated luminescence dating compared with thermoluminescence dating.⁵⁵ It was a mark of how much archaeologists had ceded control to dating specialists, often referred to as ‘time lords’; or, in Taçon’s words, ‘the high priests and sages of science, gowned in white robes and armed with

⁵⁰ This interpretation does not contradict Laurajane Smith and Hilary du Cros’ observation in 1993 that, statistically, ‘the majority of work done on the Pleistocene is done by men’. Hilary du Cros and Laurajane Smith, ‘Introduction’, in Hilary du Cros and Laurajane Smith (eds.), *Women in Archaeology: A Feminist Critique* (Canberra: Department of Prehistory, Research School of the Pacific and Asian Studies, The Australian National University, 1993), xvii-xx, xviii.

⁵¹ John Mulvaney and Johan Kamminga, *Prehistory of Australia* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999), 143.

⁵² The name was formally changed in 2013 by the Mirarr people to better reflect its location on their country.

⁵³ Lydia V Pyne and Stephen J Pyne, *The Last Lost World: Ice Ages, Human Origins, and the Invention of the Pleistocene* (New York: Viking, 2012), 37.

⁵⁴ Christopher Chippindale, ‘In science, publication is always provisional’, *The Australian*, 6 Dec 1996, 11.

⁵⁵ Nigel Spooner, ‘Human Occupation at Jinmium, Northern Australia: 116,000 Years Ago or Much Less?’, *Antiquity* 72(275) (1998), 173-178; RF Galbraith, RG Roberts, GM Laslett, H Yoshida and JM Olley, ‘Optical Dating of Single and Multiple Grains of Quartz from Jinmium Rock Shelter, Northern Australia, Part I, Experimental Design and Statistical Models’, *Archaeometry* 41 (1999), 339-364; RG Roberts, RF Galbraith, JM Olley, H Yoshida and GM Laslett, ‘Optical Dating of Single and Multiple Grains of Quartz from Jinmium Rock Shelter, Northern Australia, Part II, Results and Implications’, *Archaeometry* 41 (1999), 365-395.

hi-tech and seemingly “magical” instruments capable of counting time down to the nanosecond.⁵⁶

Gordon Childe foreshadowed this loss of disciplinary authority in the weeks before his death in 1957, suggesting, in light of the radiocarbon revolution, that ‘archaeologists will abandon responsibility for chronology or themselves become nuclear physicists. In any case every prehistorian must master enough mathematics, physics and chemistry to appreciate the limitation of the information the latter can provide.’⁵⁷ Jones suggests that the enormous uncertainty that followed the radiocarbon revolution was part of the reason Childe, the great archaeological synthesiser, took his own life.⁵⁸ John Mulvaney shared Childe’s concerns about the increasingly lab-based nature of archaeological practice. He continued to advocate an historical approach to archaeology and was critical of the Jinnium team for presenting dates to the media in relative isolation: ‘They should have forgotten the dating parts all together and they should have presented the evidence of the site... the art, the archaeology and the possible ages and had discussions on that; then I think it would have carried more conviction.’⁵⁹

In the 1950s, Norman Tindale’s 8700 year-old carbon date from Cape Martin, South Australia was the oldest reliable date for human occupation in Australia. In Grahame Clark’s 1961 review of *World Prehistory*, he confidently declared that Australia was the last continent to be colonised: ‘there is no convincing evidence for the immigration of man into Australia before Neothermal times’ – in other words, the Holocene.⁶⁰ Since Mulvaney learned of the first Pleistocene date for Indigenous occupation at Kenniff Cave in 1962, the rapid expansion of Australia’s timescale has forced a dramatic rewriting of the global story of humankind.⁶¹ By 1975, there were over thirty Pleistocene sites in Australia.⁶²

The advent of radiocarbon dating – that ‘radical new technology of archaeological investigation’ – drove this escalation of the Australian timescale. The nuclear chemist

⁵⁶ Paul SC Taçon, ‘Tracking Time: The Story of a Human Concern’, *The Slab*, 30 Sept 1999.

⁵⁷ As quoted in Sally Green, *Prehistorian: A Biography of V. Gordon Childe* (Bradford-on-Avon: Moonraker Press, 1981), 167; Rhys Jones also explored this in ‘Dating the Human Colonization of Australia: Radiocarbon and Luminescence Revolutions’, *Proceedings of the British Academy* 99 (1999), 37-65.

⁵⁸ James R Arnold interviewed by Rhys Jones and Mike Smith, ANU, 28 September 1993, Transcript, Rhys Jones Papers, National Library of Australia, Canberra, MS ACC 03/250, Folder 112, Box 23, 7.

⁵⁹ Benjamin Haslem, ‘Scientist blasts peers on carvings’, *The Australian*, 18 Oct 1996, 3.

⁶⁰ Grahame Clark, *World Prehistory: An Outline* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 243.

⁶¹ Rhys Jones, ‘Australia Felix – The Discovery of a Pleistocene Prehistory’, *Journal of Human Evolution* 6(4) (1977), 353-61, 357.

⁶² Rhys Jones, ‘Emerging Picture of Pleistocene Australians’, *Nature* 246 (1973), 275-81.

Willard Libby first realised the dating potential of measuring decaying carbon-14 isotopes in 1946, while working on the Manhattan project. In 1949, he and James Arnold published what Jones described as ‘the single most important paper of the 20th century in prehistoric archaeology’, outlining the application of the dating method.⁶³ Libby got the Nobel Prize for the breakthrough. ‘A new time machine has been invented,’ Mulvaney wrote excitedly in 1951.⁶⁴ The Curator of Fossils at the National Museum of Victoria, Edmund D Gill, recognised the significance of the new technology and ensured that Australian radiocarbon samples were among the first tested and published in the world: a midden near Warrnambool was among the first corrected list of dates that Libby published in 1951.⁶⁵ Gill continued to gather early radiocarbon dates for Victoria in the 1950s, corresponding with ‘Dr Suess’ of the US Geological Service to ascertain the age of the terraces at Keilor.⁶⁶

The radiocarbon technique relies on carbon: that prime signature of life. While an organism is alive, carbon is constantly flowing through it; when it dies, this exchange stops. No carbon is taken in and the radioactive isotope, ¹⁴C, gradually decays. The radiocarbon dating technique measures from this time of death. It compares the decaying isotope, ¹⁴C, with the steady isotope ¹²C. The rate of decay is the key to getting a date.

But carbon decays frustratingly quickly. After 5700 years, roughly half of the ¹⁴C is gone, and after 38,000 years, only 1 per cent of ¹⁴C that was present in the living organism survives.⁶⁷ There remain further challenges. The proportion of carbon in the atmosphere changes over time and thus dates need to be calibrated to produce an age in ‘calendar years’: this is the reason for variations in many old dates. But, more significantly, carbon acts like a sponge. It can be contaminated by something as small as a skin cell from a human hand or even organic matter carried in ground water. If the sample is young, and there is still plenty of ¹⁴C, then the impact of contamination is minimal. In Tim Flannery’s words, ‘It is a bit like being one dollar out when counting a thousand.’ But when a sample is old, he continues, ‘The contamination may then be like miscounting by a dollar when there are only two dollars!’⁶⁸ It

⁶³ Arnold interviewed by Jones and Smith, 10.

⁶⁴ John Mulvaney, ‘A New Time Machine’, *Twentieth Century* 8 (Spring 1952), 16-23, 16.

⁶⁵ F Johnson, ‘Radiocarbon Dating Mem 8, Society of American Archaeology’, Supplement to *American Antiquity* 17 (1951).

⁶⁶ Edmund D Gill, National Museum of Victoria, to Hans Suess, U.S. Geological Survey, 27 April 1954, Ref. 859-1964, courtesy of John Tunn; in possession of the author.

⁶⁷ Martin Aitken, *Science-Based Dating in Archaeology* (London: Longman, 1990).

⁶⁸ Tim Flannery, *The Future Eaters: An Ecological History of the Australasian Lands and People* (Sydney: Reed New Holland, 1994), 151.

is rare to get a date older than forty thousand years: for a long time this was considered to be the radiocarbon barrier.⁶⁹ Even with latest advances in radiocarbon dating, such as Accelerator Mass Spectrometry (AMS), which uses magnetism to measure carbon atoms directly, and Acid Base Oxidation and stepwise combustion (ABOX), which uses acid to remove potential micro-layers of contamination, there is an instrumental limit to the technique of 50,000 years, at which point the radiocarbon concentration in a sample becomes one part per thousand trillion.⁷⁰

One of the most significant early sites for dating the antiquity of Australia's human past was Charlie Dortch's work at Devil's Lair, south of Perth in Western Australia.⁷¹ In the 1970s, Dortch carefully excavated an extensive five-metre deep trench in the cave, uncovering an intricate local history told in blackened and broken bones, hearths and shells, and stone and bone artefacts. He found a continuous stream of occupation debris in layers of sediment that had built up over thirty thousand years. There were also lower artefacts. A flake of opal was uncovered at a 35,000 year-old level and a piece of charcoal was dated to around 38,000 years ago.⁷² But there the dates plateaued. Like other sites around the continent, such as the fresh-water middens at Lake Mungo and hearths found within clay terraces on the Upper Swan River, the oldest samples were all around the age of 37,000 to 38,000 years.⁷³

In 1989, Jim Allen took this cluster of 37-38,000-year-old dates at face value. He interpreted them as evidence that the first Australians made landfall no earlier than 40,000 years ago and had spread to every corner of the continent by 35,000 years ago.⁷⁴ He was supported in this assessment by many of his colleagues, such as Sandra Bowdler, who concluded that 'there is no evidence that *Homo sapiens* was present in southeast Asia before 40,000 BP'.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Rhys Jones, Richard G Roberts and Michael A Smith, 'Beyond the Radiocarbon Barrier in Australian Prehistory', *Antiquity* 68 (Sep 1994), 611.

⁷⁰ Henry Polach has demonstrated that AMS is capable of dating extremely high-quality samples to around 65,000 years, but such large samples are rarely preserved in the upper layers of archaeological sites, let alone near the bottom. Claudio Tuniz, Richard Gillespie and Cheryl Jones, *The Bone Readers: Atoms, Genes and the Politics of Australia's Deep Past* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2009), 33.

⁷¹ Charles Dortch, *Devils Lair: A Study in Prehistory* (Perth: Western Australian Museum, 1984).

⁷² Dortch, *Devils Lair*; Rhys Jones, 'The Southern Continent: An Episode in Human Colonization', in NW Bruce (ed.), *Perspectives in Human Biology* (Nedlands, WA: University of Western Australia, 1988), 75-98, 81.

⁷³ Richard G Roberts, 'Luminescence Dating in Archaeology: From Origins to Optical', *Radiation Measurements* 27(5/6) (1997), 819-892, 853; Jones, 'Dating Australian Colonisation', 45.

⁷⁴ Jim Allen, 'When Did Humans First Colonize Australia?', *Search* 20(5) (1989), 149-154.

⁷⁵ Sandra Bowdler, 'Sunda and Sahul: A 30 kyr BP Culture Area?', in M Spriggs, DE Yen, W Ambrose, R Jones, A Thorne and A Andrews (eds.), *A Community of Culture: The People and Prehistory of the Pacific* (Canberra: Department of Prehistory, Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National University, 1993), 60-70, 65.

Rhys Jones, on the other hand, thought it was no coincidence that the earliest dates all clustered at around the same time as carbon-14 disappeared from a deposit.⁷⁶ He suspected that the oldest dates ‘were so close to the theoretical limits of the radiocarbon methods that maybe the “plateau” was really an illusion.’⁷⁷ Indeed, he viewed some of these dates as minimum age estimates, owing to sample contamination by modern carbon.⁷⁸ As early as 1979, Jones had intuited a date of fifty thousand years (‘or even more’) for initial human settlement.⁷⁹ When it came to the state of early Australian archaeology, he liked to fall back on the rather morbid metaphor of a condemned man at the gallows. Every few years, it was as if a trapdoor had opened beneath the field; the dates for human occupation of Australia plunged, only to be jagged to an abrupt halt by the limitations of radiocarbon dating. ‘Rope-bound theory’, Jones called it.⁸⁰

Jones’ search for old dates led him back to Arnhem Land in 1981, to the west of where he had lived in 1972-73.⁸¹ Over a decade and a half, throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, he embarked on a large-scale survey of deep, stratified rock shelters, many of which had been identified in earlier phases of research by Carmel Schrire, Jo Kamminga and Harry Allen. He relished the experience of exploring ‘very remote country’ with Aboriginal men during these surveys, and, in the mode of George Augustus Robinson, constantly plied them with questions, filling his journals with notes about their wide-ranging ecological and geographical knowledge.⁸² They also guided him to sites and helped him to dig and sieve them. On his 1981 visit he excavated Nauwalabila I in Deaf Adder Gorge, which was known colloquially as the Lindner site, after the crocodile catcher Dave Lindner who played an important role in facilitating archaeological work in the top end. Mulvaney regarded him as ‘our man in the north’.⁸³ When I was introduced to him in 2012, his name was accompanied by the hushed preliminary, ‘the legendary’.

⁷⁶ Rhys Jones, ‘Ions and Eons: Some Thoughts on Archaeological Science and Scientific Archaeology’, in WR Ambrose and P Duerden (eds.), *Archaeometry: An Australasian Perspective* (Canberra: Australian National University, Research School of Pacific Studies, Department of Prehistory, 1982), 22-35, 30.

⁷⁷ Jones, ‘Dating the Human Colonization of Australia’, 45-46.

⁷⁸ Jones, ‘Ions and Eons’.

⁷⁹ Rhys Jones, ‘The Fifth Continent: Problems Concerning the Human Colonisation of Australia’, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 8 (1979), 445-466, 460.

⁸⁰ Jones, ‘Different Strokes for Different Folks’.

⁸¹ Rhys Jones (ed.), *Archaeological Research in Kakadu National Park* (Canberra: Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service, 1985), 165-228.

⁸² Rhys Jones, ‘Kakadu. Archaeological expedition to the Kakadu National Park, Book 1’, 27 May-4 August 1981, Field Journals, AIATSIS Library, MS 5040/1/55, 42.

⁸³ John Mulvaney to Dave Lindner, 10 September 1969, John Mulvaney Papers, National Library of Australia, Canberra, MS 9615/1/6, Box 1.

The shelter at Nauwalabila I (the Lindner Site) had been formed by a massive rock falling off the cliff face and landing on an angle on the valley floor, creating a cool area with deep shade. Jones and Ian Johnson's team dug a narrow three-metre pit straight into the earth: a 'telephone booth' shaft. Jones regarded his time in the bottom of that pit in 1981 as 'one of those turning points in one's life as an archaeologist':

I'm in this section, down at the base, which is three metres high, it's full of artefacts ... but the problem is that the carbon only goes down about halfway ... and from then on the artefacts are there, but there's no carbon. It's all been oxidised. ... and I thought to myself then, this was in 1981, I will never know the age of the base of that site.⁸⁴

Although these initial field seasons in and around Kakadu turned up a range of old dates, none could overcome the limitations of the radiocarbon technique.

In early 1987, geochronologist Bert Roberts, who was doing a PhD on the sand sheets of the Magela Creek catchment, called Jones to ask whether he would be interested in returning to Nauwalabila I to resolve the site's chronology.⁸⁵ He suggested comparing the existing radiocarbon dates with those that could be gained from the relatively new technique of thermoluminescence.⁸⁶ Instead of carbon, this method dates the moment an individual grain of sand last saw sunlight. The general idea behind luminescence dating is that when a grain of quartz is buried and protected from light, it is bombarded by background radioactivity from the surrounding sediment. Electrons from this radioactivity become trapped in the crystal lattice of the quartz, steadily building up a charge. When the grain of sand is heated (thermoluminescence) or exposed to light (optically stimulated luminescence), the charge is released and for a moment the quartz grain luminesces. The intensity of this light – a brief glow – is proportional to the number of electrons stored in the grain. And since the rate at which electrons are trapped is as regular as clockwork, this luminescence process tells us when the quartz grain was last exposed to sunlight.

The errors of this method were still relatively high (5 to 10 per cent), but it was capable of

⁸⁴ Jones, comment in Burchfield, *The Sands of the Dreamtime*; Rhys Jones and Ian Johnson, 'Deaf Adder Gorge: Lindner Site, Nauwalabila I', in Rhys Jones (ed.), *Archaeological Research in Kakadu National Park* (Canberra: Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service, 1985), 165-228.

⁸⁵ Richard G Roberts, 'Sediment Budgets and Quaternary History of the Magela Creek Catchment, Tropical Northern Australia', PhD thesis, University of Wollongong, 1991.

⁸⁶ Richard G Roberts, 'The Celtic Chronologist: Rhys Jones and the Dating of the Human Colonisation of Australia', in Atholl Anderson, Ian Lilley and Sue O'Connor (eds.), *Histories of Old Ages: Essays in Honour of Rhys Jones* (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2001), 89-93, 89.

dating anything from a few hundred years old to several hundred thousand years old. And although it lacks the symbolic attraction that carbon has of once being alive, there is a certain romantic quality to the idea that it reveals a surface in time. It speaks directly to the vision Mike Smith articulates in *The Archaeology of Australia's Deserts* of an archaeological site as a layer cake: a palimpsest of different landscapes, 'stratified in time, stacked one above another'.⁸⁷ It allows us to glimpse a world in a grain of sand.⁸⁸

Due to 'sorry business' (Aboriginal funeral rites) in Deaf Adder Gorge, Jones and Roberts could not return to Nauwalabila I, so they instead visited two known sites further to the north, Madjedbebe, which Kamminga had investigated in 1973 as part of the Alligator Rivers Fact-Finding Study, and Malangangerr, where Schrire had uncovered her famous axe finds in 1964.⁸⁹ In September 1988, together with Christopher Chippindale, they collected TL samples from both sites by hand-auger.⁹⁰ The initial dates for the lowest artefacts at Madjedbebe came back between 50,000 and 60,000 years. 'A hush descended on Rhys when I told him the results,' Bert Roberts later wrote, '– a reaction that I now recognise as Rhys in contemplative rapture – and for a while we enjoyed the simple pleasure of being the only two people on the planet to know the age of a momentous event in human prehistory: the time of the arrival of people in Australia.'⁹¹ A third member of the team, an archaeologist known for his 'conservative' interpretive approach, Mike Smith, joined the following year 'to tighten up the credibility' of the preliminary dates.⁹² 'And so the three of us – the "cowboy", the conservative, and the chronologist – duly excavated the Malakunanja II [Madjedbebe] deposits in July 1989,' Roberts reflected, 'under the watchful eye of Big Bill [Neidjie], the traditional Aboriginal custodian of the site.'⁹³ Once more they dug a 'telephone booth' shaft, four-and-a-half metres into the earth.⁹⁴ But while the shaft was expedient from a time and money perspective, by the end of the dig the team was approaching it with 'trepidation'.⁹⁵ At

⁸⁷ Mike Smith, *The Archaeology of Australia's Deserts* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2013), iv.

⁸⁸ Billy Griffiths, 'A World in a Grain of Sand: The Malakunanja II Diaries', *Griffith Review* 41 (2013), 162-77.

⁸⁹ The death of Nipper Kapirrigi, who had been involved in previous excavations in the area, meant that they had to delay their re-excavation until 1989, which ultimately allowed the more advanced optically-stimulated luminescence technique to be used on the Nauwalabila samples. Richard G Roberts, Rhys Jones and Michael A Smith, 'Optical Dating at Deaf Adder Gorge, Northern Territory, Indicates Human Occupation between 53,000 and 60,000 Years Ago', *Australian Archaeology* 37 (Dec 1993), 58-59.

⁹⁰ Nicklin, 'The Prehistory Cowboy Strikes Again', 93.

⁹¹ Roberts, 'The Celtic Chronologist', 90.

⁹² Nicklin, 'The Prehistory Cowboy Strikes Again', 93.

⁹³ Roberts, 'The Celtic Chronologist', 91.

⁹⁴ The excavation lasted from 23-27 July 1989. Rhys Jones, 'Kakadu, July-August 1989 (Thermo Luminescence)', 16-27 July 1989, Field Journals, AIATSIS Library, MS 5040/1/76.

⁹⁵ Mike Smith, 'Field notes: archaeological excavations at Malakunanja II: July-August 1989', 1989, Field

the bottom, the light was dim and the scent of dirt and sweat pungent. A long ladder leaned against one of the walls and an enormous rock hung ominously over the edge of pit, mocking the flimsy plastic hardhats the excavators wore. Perhaps it is no surprise that four years later each of the three men sought a gravedigger's licence.⁹⁶

The great virtue of the shaft was that it extended well into sterile deposits. From the base of the pit, with a torch in hand, they could study the land before human impact. The oldest dates at the bottom – around 110,000 years ago – told of naturally changing sand aprons, made of different quantities of fluvial sediments and wind-blown sand. At some point on the wall, the sediment began to build up faster and the first signs of human presence appeared in the form of small stone artefacts. This is the most cryptic level of the site. The stratigraphy is compacted and each scrape of the trowel wiped away around 350 years of history. Organic material had not survived at this depth and there was no charcoal to date. Besides, the excavators were well beyond the radiocarbon barrier.

The initial findings, published in *Nature*, suggested that people had been living in Australia for fifty-five thousand years, plus or minus five thousand.⁹⁷ Jones often spoke of a human antiquity in Australia of sixty thousand years. He revelled in the fact that this was twenty thousand years earlier than any modern human site in Europe: it 'really caused people to raise their eyebrows.'⁹⁸ A commendation was passed in the Australian Senate noting 'with interest': 'the discovery of Dr Rhys Jones of the Australian National University, and his team, of art and artefacts in the Malakunanja II [Madjedbebe] rock shelter in Kakadu that have been dated as at least 60,000 years old, a discovery that has been described as "the most sensational archaeological discovery in 3 decades" which may prompt major revisions to site dating on this continent and enlarge our understanding of the prehistoric spread of humans across our planet.'⁹⁹

The importance of these findings cannot be understated. The New World had become the Old. The radiocarbon barrier had been shattered. As American paleoanthropologist Richard Klein remarked, 'If the dates hold up it will force an enormous amount of rethinking.'¹⁰⁰ But

Journals, AIATSIS Library, Canberra.

⁹⁶ See 'Grave Digging Course', Rhys Jones Papers, NLA, MS ACC 05/191, Item 192, Box 17.

⁹⁷ Roberts *et al*, 'Thermoluminescence Dating of a 50,000 year-old Site'.

⁹⁸ Virginia Morell, 'The Earliest Art Becomes Older – And More Common', *Science* 267 (Mar 31 1995), 1908.

⁹⁹ Irina Dunn, Notices of Motion to the Senate, *Hansard*, 16 May 1990, 425.

¹⁰⁰ Klein, as quoted in Morell, 'The Earliest Art Becomes Older', 1908.

there are many who remain sceptical, and when the site is discussed it often carries that same disclaimer: ‘if the dates hold up’. As Jones, Roberts and Smith reflected, ‘We feel that confirmation of our claims that the human colonization of the Greater Australian continent happened c. 50 kyr ago can only finally rest with replication at other sites; with the establishment of a pattern of dates of this order of antiquity. Further archaeological applications of TL dating over the next few years should settle the matter.’¹⁰¹ Dates for Nauwilabila also came in at over fifty thousand years, suggesting that Madjedbebe might not be an outlier, but these were also contested.¹⁰² Some criticise Madjedbebe for the use of the relatively new method of luminescence dating; some for the fact that the 1989 dig was never written up with a full site report; others question whether ‘human treadage’ or termite activity might be behind the artefacts in the lowest levels.¹⁰³ ‘In the small community of Australian archaeologists,’ Mulvaney and Kamminga reflected in 1999, ‘there is now more disagreement and deeper division over the issue of earliest human settlement than there was a decade ago.’¹⁰⁴

In 1998, Jim Allen again reviewed the evidence for early dates in Australia, this time with Jim O’Connell, and concluded, ‘that initial occupation dates to about 40,000 radiocarbon years ago.’¹⁰⁵ In 2004, they pushed this date back a few thousand years, writing ‘that while the continent was probably occupied by 42-45,000 BP, earlier arrival dates are not well-supported.’¹⁰⁶ In 2014, they reviewed new claims and again updated their estimate, concluding that ‘the first humans arrived in Sahul shortly after 50 ka – on current evidence not earlier than 47-48 ka.’¹⁰⁷ The incremental shift, and the rejection of the Madjedbebe and Nauwilabila dates, reflects the caution of accepting dates that are outside the general pattern of the oldest sites. This suspicion of outliers carries the baggage of the sensational and

¹⁰¹ Richard G Roberts, Rhys Jones and Michael A Smith, ‘Early Dates at Malakunanja II: a Reply to Bowdler,’ *Australian Archaeology* 31 (Dec 1990), 94-97.

¹⁰² Peter Hiscock, ‘How old are the artefacts at Malakunanja II?’, *Archaeology in Oceania* 25 (1990), 122-124; Richard G Roberts, Rhys Jones and Michael A Smith, ‘Stratigraphy and Statistics at Malakunanja II: reply to Hiscock’, *Archaeology in Oceania* 25 (1990), 125-129; Sandra Bowdler, ‘50,000 Year-old Site in Australia – Is It Really That Old?’, *Australian Archaeology* 31 (Dec 1990), 93; Roberts *et al.*, ‘Early Dates at Malakunanja II’; Sandra Bowdler, ‘Some Sort Of Dates At Malakunanja II: A Reply To Roberts Et Al.’, *Australian Archaeology* 32 (Jan 1991), 50-51; Roberts *et al.*, ‘Optical Dating at Deaf Adder Gorge’; Sandra Bowdler, ‘Letter to the Editors re Roberts et al. 1993’, *Australian Archaeology* 40 (Jun 1995), 67.

¹⁰³ Peter Hiscock gives an overview of these criticisms in *Archaeology of Ancient Australia*, 34-37, 42-44.

¹⁰⁴ Mulvaney and Kamminga, *Prehistory of Australia*, 138.

¹⁰⁵ James F O’Connell and Jim Allen, ‘When did humans first arrive in Greater Australia, and why is it important to know?’, *Evolutionary Anthropology* 6 (1998) 132-146, 142.

¹⁰⁶ James F O’Connell and Jim Allen, ‘Dating the colonization of Sahul (Pleistocene Australia-New Guinea): a review of recent research’, *Journal of Archaeological Science* 31(6) (Jun 2004), 835-853.

¹⁰⁷ Jim Allen and James F O’Connell, ‘Both Half Right: Updating the evidence for dating first human arrivals in Sahul’, *Australian Archaeology*, 79 (Dec 2014), 86-108, 103.

discredited Jinmium claims.¹⁰⁸ As William F Keegan remarked, in light of the revised dates for colonisation from 38,000 to 40,000 to 42,000 to 45,000 to 48,000, ‘Archaeologists seem to face far more complications in making the crossing to Sahul than the people who accomplished this feat about 50 [thousand years ago].’¹⁰⁹

In a small field like Australian archaeology, personalities and disciplinary politics have a part to play in this ‘long and sometimes acrimonious debate’.¹¹⁰ Jones’ long-held belief in an ancient date for Australian occupation, combined with his popular flair and desire to be at the frontiers of archaeological knowledge, caused many of his colleagues to question his objectivity.¹¹¹ The hesitancy to accept the Madjedbebe dates also reflects a wariness to hastily destabilise a global narrative. As Jim Allen wrote early in the debate, in 1994,

Archaeologically there is little basis for rejecting the Arnhem Land luminescence dates on present evidence. However, accepting them has fundamental implications not only for ideas about water crossings and the initial colonisation of Greater Australia, but also for understanding the nature of subsequent settlement, the multi-regional model of human evolution, modern human behaviour and the spread of early modern humans, prehistoric art, and the human role in the extinction of the Australian megafauna, to note but a few topics.¹¹²

Should the history of humanity in Australia be older than fifty thousand years, it would have dramatic implications for the global story of how *Homo sapiens* moved around the world – and the effects they had on the lands they colonised.

o o o

In 2012, a team of archaeologists led by Chris Clarkson, Lynley Wallis and Mike Smith returned to Madjedbebe in the Northern Territory to re-excavate the site in partnership with the Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation. They hoped that recent advances in dating techniques would resolve the lingering questions about the antiquity of the site, and, by opening a larger trench, they sought to verify its structural integrity and better understand the

¹⁰⁸ Allen and O’Connell, ‘Both Half Right’, 103.

¹⁰⁹ William F Keegan, ‘Now Bring Me That Horizon’, comment on JF O’Connell and J Allen, ‘The restaurant at the end of the universe: Modelling the colonisation of Sahul’, *Australian Archaeology* 74 (2012), 5-31, 22.

¹¹⁰ Allen and O’Connell, ‘Both Half Right’, 86.

¹¹¹ Hiscock, *Archaeology of Ancient Australia*, 35.

¹¹² Jim Allen, ‘Radiocarbon Determinations, Luminescence Dating and Australian Archaeology’, *Antiquity* 68 (1994), 339-343.



Fig. 74 Chris Clarkson and Jo Kamminga at Madjedbebe, 2012 (Source: B Griffiths).



Fig. 75 The final day of fieldwork at Madjedbebe, 2012 (Source: D Lewis).



Fig. 76 The rock wall above and below the surface, Madjedbebe (Source: B Griffiths).



Fig. 77 Bert Roberts beside the mark of his 1988 auger hole, Madjedbebe, 2012 (Source: B Griffiths).



Fig. 78 Mike Smith beside the 1989 trench at Madjedbebe, 2015 (Source: B Griffiths).

natural processes by which it had formed.¹¹³ I joined the team as the camp manager and cook.¹¹⁴ In 2015, I returned with another team, led by Clarkson, who was keen to gain a nuanced picture of the site at its deepest levels. He wanted to see if he could discern a pattern from the oldest stone tools that might illuminate the technology of the colonisers. He had conducted similar excavations in India, on the route that people took from Africa to Australia. We were hosted by the Mirarr people, who took pride in having the oldest site for human occupation on their land and cautiously supported our curious fascination with the earth.

Madjedbebe is really no more than a slight overhang: a decorated rock wall leaning out from the Arnhem Land escarpment, a last remnant of the plateau before the landscape gives way to wet, scrubby plains. As we dug, the back wall receded and slowly the rock shelter was revealed. The pit had a musty aroma, occasionally sweetened by the scent of honey wafting in from a nearby hive of feral European bees. The rock wall is ornamented with over a thousand motifs in reds and yellows and whites: amidst the array of Dreaming creatures there is a wagon wheel, a macassan prau, and several guns. There is also a figure in white kaolin clay, pipe in mouth, broad-brimmed hat and hands on hips: the familiar whitefella stance. The contact art illustrates the changing relationship between the newcomers and Aboriginal people, reflecting a growing familiarity with their different cultures and an increasing reliance on each other.¹¹⁵ The signs of contact continue below the surface too. In the first week of the 2012 excavation, Clarkson cut his foot on some debris left behind from the first time this site was excavated by Kamminga in 1973. A can of Carlton Draught and a bottle of Scram! insect spray had been backfilled to a thirty-thousand-year-old depth. Another archaeological signature followed us all the way down the length of the pit: a neat scar of black soil from the refilled auger hole that Roberts and Jones twisted into the earth in 1988, and which led to the excavation in 1989.

We found hundreds of pieces of ground haematite and crayons of red and yellow ochre scattered throughout every layer of the site. This pigment was mined from the Cahill formation, which is now mined for uranium; they were traded or carried to this shelter by thousands of people over thousands of generations; and here they were worn to a

¹¹³ Chris Clarkson *et al*, 'The Archaeology, Chronology and Stratigraphy of Madjedbebe (Malakunanja II): A Site in Northern Australia with Early Occupation', *Journal of Human Evolution* 83 (2015), 46-64.

¹¹⁴ I wrote about this experience in Griffiths, 'A World in a Grain of Sand'.

¹¹⁵ Sally K May *et al*, 'Symbols of Power: The Firearm Paintings of Madjedbebe (Malakunanja II)', *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* (2017), 1-18, 15.

recognisable nub. What the haematite was used for is harder to tell. Perhaps it was ground to paint rock and skin, or to preserve food and tools. Perhaps it coloured a ritual object. As Philip Jones reminds us in *Ochre and Rust*, red ochre is the symbolic equivalent to sacred blood. It ‘is a medium of transcendence, from sickness to health, death to renewal, ritual uncleanness to cleanness, the secular to the sacred, the present reality to the Dreaming.’¹¹⁶

To our surprise, we also encountered human burials. Over several days we watched as a tall, upright stone emerged from the earth. It was surrounded at its base by a ring of evenly spaced large stones. Beneath that was a fully articulated human skeleton. It was one of seventeen individuals who had been buried within the midden several thousand years ago.¹¹⁷ The discovery brought the excavation to an immediate stop. It was only through a process of quiet, respectful negotiation with the Mirarr board that work was allowed to continue. Although affronted by the idea of disturbing the Old People, the Mirarr also recognised this as an opportunity. They were interested in the genetics of the ancient remains, for these can act as a baseline or a control to compare to the modern situation.¹¹⁸ Radium, for example, behaves very similarly to calcium inside the human body. Tooth enamel locks in background radioactivity. If one were to compare the teeth of an individual from pre-mining times to the teeth of someone born and raised beside the Ranger Uranium mine, some compelling results might be found. The deep past can act as a powerful tool in the political present.

o o o

Deep-time scholars, such as Jared Diamond and Steven Mithen, place the birth of history at around fifty thousand years ago. ‘Or thereabouts.’¹¹⁹ This is the time of Diamond’s so-called Great Leap Forward, the moment when humans went from being a species no more exceptional than ‘beavers, bowerbirds, and army ants’ to becoming ‘the first species, in the history of life on Earth, capable of destroying all life.’¹²⁰ There was no stark anatomical change to mark this shift; rather, it is suggested, this was an inner event: a revolution within

¹¹⁶ Philip Jones, *Ochre and Rust: Artefacts and Encounters on Australian Frontiers* (Kent Town: Wakefield Press, 2007), 349.

¹¹⁷ Kelsey M Lowe *et al*, ‘Ground-Penetrating Radar and Burial Practices in Western Arnhem Land, Australia: GPR and Burials in Arnhem Land, Australia’, *Archaeology in Oceania* 49 (2014), 148-157.

¹¹⁸ Griffiths, ‘A World in a Grain of Sand’, 175.

¹¹⁹ Steven Mithen, *After the Ice: A Global Human History 20,000 – 5000 BC* (London: Phoenix, 2004), 3; Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel: A Short History of Everybody for the Last 13,000 years* (London: Vintage, 1998), 39.

¹²⁰ Jared Diamond, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Chimpanzee* (London: Radius, 1991), 48.

the mind.¹²¹ Why did this happen then? Was it, as Tim Flannery argues in *The Future Eaters*, colonisation into the ‘new’ lands that sparked the change? Was it the development of the modern voice box and thus a more sophisticated manner of communication? Or indeed is this idea of an inner event a misnomer, a ‘coming-of age’ invented by Eurocentric minds obsessed by revolution?¹²² Steven Oppenheimer, in his book *Out of Africa’s Eden*, argues convincingly that ‘Africans were fully modern, singing, dancing, painting humans long before they came out of their home continent.’¹²³ The debate rages on. And so it should. For at its heart is that most fundamental of questions: what does it mean to be human?

For most of the twentieth century, the prevailing human evolutionary paradigm was the multiregional hypothesis, which suggests that *Homo sapiens* evolved from *Homo erectus* simultaneously in different parts of globe. But in the 1980s, this was radically replaced by the rival ‘out of Africa’ model as strengthening fossil and DNA evidence showed that all people had a shared African ancestry.¹²⁴ These competing hypotheses have been central to debates over the origins of the first Australians. Alan Thorne (a multiregionalist) suggested that Australia had been home to two different hominids, one characterised by the robust features of the skeletons uncovered at Kow Swamp and the other with the gracile features of Mungo Lady and Mungo Man. More recently, Colin Pardoe and Peter Brown have revealed these variations to be the result of local climates, gender and head pressing, rather than multiple waves of colonisation. Australia was colonised by one population and they were anatomically modern *Homo sapiens*, like you and me.¹²⁵

It is now clear that *Homo sapiens* emerged in Africa around 200,000 years ago. Human evolution, of course, has a far greater antiquity. At least 3.5 billion years have passed since the origin of life, some 7 million years or so since our lineage split from that of the chimpanzee, and around 1.8 million years since our cousins, the wanderlusting *Homo erectus*, first ventured out of the wide plains and rift valleys of Africa to spread around the

¹²¹ Pyne and Pyne, *The Last Lost World*, 195.

¹²² This so-called revolution is often referred to as ‘The Upper Palaeolithic Mirage’. Sally McBrearty and Alison S Brooks, ‘The Revolution That Wasn’t: A New Interpretation of the Origin of Modern Human Behavior’, *Journal of Human Evolution* 39 (2000), 453-563.

¹²³ Steven Oppenheimer, *Out of Africa’s Eden: The Peopling of the World* (Jeppestown: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2003), 55.

¹²⁴ The key article for the ascendancy of the ‘out of Africa’ hypothesis was: Rebecca L Cann, Mark Stoneking and Allan C Wilson, ‘Mitochondrial DNA and Human Evolution,’ *Nature* 325 (6099) (1987), 31-36.

¹²⁵ Peter Brown, ‘Pleistocene Homogeneity and Holocene Size Reduction: The Australian Human Skeletal Evidence’, *Archaeology in Oceania* 22(2) (Jul 1987), 41-67; Colin Pardoe, ‘Australian Biological Anthropology for Archaeologists’, in Tim Murray (ed.), *Archaeology from Australia* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2004), 131-150, esp 132-36.

world.¹²⁶ The full name of our species, *Homo sapiens sapiens*, is a kind of taxonomic stutter meaning ‘double-wise man’. As James Shreeve points out, ‘The redundancy drives home the point that our turbocharged intelligence distinguishes us not only from other animals on earth but also from the other members of the hominid family that came before us.’¹²⁷

The interglacial around 128,000 years ago created the conditions for *Homo sapiens* to move north out of Africa, but this first journey ended in tragedy with a brief but devastating global freeze.¹²⁸ There is an outside possibility that a small relict population survived in a green refuge near Egypt, but this is a matter of heated debate.¹²⁹ Most likely, our direct ancestors, modern humans, migrated by foot out of Africa in a single exodus around seventy thousand to eighty thousand years ago. They moved along the river valleys of the Arabian Peninsula and into India, where there was a population expansion.¹³⁰ Some groups moved rapidly south into Southeast Asia and Australia; others meandered north into Asia and northwest back into Europe.¹³¹ Along the way they met their hominid cousins and slowly came to replace them.

There are two key events for defining this movement out of Africa. The first was the Mount Toba super-eruption in Sumatra around 71,000-75,000 years ago. It was by far the biggest eruption of the Pleistocene. In the words of Oppenheimer, ‘this mega-bang caused a prolonged nuclear winter and released ash in a huge plume that spread to the north-west and covered India, Pakistan, and the Gulf region in a blanket 1-3 metres (3-10 feet) deep.’¹³² For six years winter reigned on Earth, and the thousand years that followed were colder on average than the previous glacial maximum. The Toba eruption had dramatic regional implications for people, animals and ecosystems. But for archaeologists, as they try to trace the early movements of our species, it is a blessing. Distinct and datable, Toba ash is found in the Greenland ice-record, in submarine cores in the Indian Ocean, and as a crisp black stratum in archaeological deposits throughout Asia. It is an invaluable date mark and it has

¹²⁶ Mithen, *After the Ice*, 3.

¹²⁷ James Shreeve, *The Neanderthal Enigma: Solving the Mystery of Modern Human Origins* (New York: William Morrow and Company Inc, 1995), 8-9.

¹²⁸ Oppenheimer, *Out of Africa's Eden*, 54-63.

¹²⁹ P Vermeersch *et al*, ‘A Middle Palaeolithic Burial of a Modern Human at Taramsa Hill, Egypt’, *Antiquity* 72 (277) (Sep 1998), 475-84; Oppenheimer, *Out of Africa's Eden*, 54-56.

¹³⁰ Quentin D Atkinson, Russell D Gray and Alexei J Drummond, ‘mtDNA Variation Predicts Population Size in Humans and Reveals a Major Southern Asian Chapter in Human Prehistory’, *Molecular Biology and Evolution* 25(2) (Mar 2008), 468-74.

¹³¹ Vincent Macaulay *et al*, ‘Single, Rapid Coastal Settlement of Asia Revealed by Analysis of Complete Mitochondrial Genomes’, *Science* (13 May 2005), 1034-1036.

¹³² Stephen Oppenheimer, *The Real Eve: Modern Man's Journey Out of Africa* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2004), 82.

inspired a wealth of research questions: are there modern human tools beneath the blanket of Toba ash, or only above it? What effect did the Toba eruption have on modern humans?¹³³

The other key event in calibrating the movement of *Homo sapiens* out of Africa was the colonisation of Australia. The endless debates surrounding when modern humans emerged and spread around the world ultimately come to rest on when people arrived at the southernmost extremity of their migration. Archaeologists from around the globe have long been preoccupied with the question of whether the first Australians were adventurers or castaways.¹³⁴ A popular theory in the 1950s suggested that Australia was colonised by ‘a boat or raft of castaways from one of the Pacific Islands driven far out of its proper course by stormy conditions’.¹³⁵ But recent finds reveal that we have consistently underestimated our ancestors’ technological capacities.¹³⁶ The colonisation of Australia was no small feat. It required the traverse of a passage of water around a hundred kilometres wide to a land where no hominid had roamed before. Based on the array of technical, symbolic and linguistic capabilities it required, psychologist-archaeologist duo William Noble and Iain Davidson have argued that ‘Archaeologically, this is the earliest evidence of modern human behaviour.’¹³⁷ As Indigenous journalist Stan Grant reflected in 2016, ‘When the first footprints of my ancestors touched the northern shoreline of this land, humanity itself had crossed a threshold.’¹³⁸

The earth was a different place when *Homo sapiens* charged southwards. The ice caps bulged and today’s shallow seas were dry. A great plain connected northern Australia and New Guinea; Tasmania was still part of the mainland. This giant land mass is known as Sahul. It was also a period of acute Quaternary climate change. Although the regular seasonal cycles of wet and dry climates continued, a trend towards greater aridity, beginning around 300,000

¹³³ There is a suggestion that people had reached India before the Toba eruption and strong evidence that its effects were regional. See: Chris Clarkson, Sacha Jones and Clair Harris, ‘Continuity and change in the lithic industries of the Jurreru Valley, India, before and after the Toba eruption’, *Quaternary International* 258 (May 2012), 165-179.

¹³⁴ This was the subject of the First Mariners Project, in which a team of archaeologists constructed and tested a variety of watercrafts to ascertain the navigational skills and cognitive and technological capabilities required to cross into Australia. Robert G Bednarik, ‘Replicating the first known sea travel by humans: the lower pleistocene crossing of Lombok Strait’, *Human Evolution* 16 (3-4) (Jul-Dec 2001), 229-242.

¹³⁵ Jane Ada Fletcher, *The Stone Age Man of Tasmania: A Brief Account of His Life and Conditions* (Hobart: Tasmanian Education, 1956), 1.

¹³⁶ Tools dated at 840,000-years-old found beneath lava flows in Flores show that *Homo erectus* did cross the treacherous Lombok Strait and, in doing so, Wallace’s Line. Adam Brumm et al, ‘Early Stone Technology on Flores and its Implications for Homo Floresiensis’, *Nature* 441(7093) (2006), 624-8.

¹³⁷ William Noble and Iain Davidson, *Human Evolution, Language and Mind: A Psychological and Archaeological Inquiry* (Hong Kong: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 217.

¹³⁸ Stan Grant, *Talking to My Country* (Sydney: HarperCollins, 2016), 10.

years ago, began to intensify as people prepared to cross into Sahul. As Mike Smith writes, ‘a critical environmental threshold appears to have been breached around 60 000-65 000 years ago’.¹³⁹ It was a period of global cooling and in Australia the dawn of another era of desertification, which created new environmental pressures for Australian flora and fauna, especially the giant marsupials and reptiles known as the ‘megafauna’.

People knew about Australia before they saw it. Smoke billowing above the sea spoke of a land that lay beyond the horizon. A dense cloud of birds traversing the trans-Siberian flyway from the south in March, and returning in October each year, may have pointed the way. But the first voyagers were sailing into the unknown. The first Australians were probably swept to the Sahul Rise: a low-lying, fan-like formation of skeletal limestone, riddled with tidal channels.¹⁴⁰ The landing site, along with many signs of early occupation, now lies submerged on the Arafura Sea shelf.¹⁴¹

In 1977, American anthropologist Joseph Birdsell proposed that Australia was colonised by ‘a constant if somewhat straggling trickle of small groups of human beings’ who took the shortest possible water crossings to Sahul and quickly populated the entire continent within five thousand years.¹⁴² Under this model, there would be no perceivable difference between the earliest colonisation dates for any parts of Australia. Sandra Bowdler, on the other hand, proposed that ‘Australia was colonised by people adapted to a coastal way of life’ and thus they stayed with what they knew, moving along the coastline and up the major river systems, where their coastal economies were ‘transliterated’ to freshwater conditions.¹⁴³ Her theory of marginal settlement was reinforced by the state of Australian archaeology in the mid-1970s. With the exception of the finds on the desiccated lakeshores of the Willandra Lakes region, archaeological activities tended to hug the coast. Even Richard Gould’s excavation at Puntutjarpa had not produced an early Pleistocene date. The desert and the inland, she argued, presented the true barriers to colonisation.

¹³⁹ Mike Smith, ‘Genyornis: Last of the Dromornithids’, in Libby Robin, Robert Heinsohn and Leo Joseph (eds.), *Boom and Bust: Bird Stories for a Dry Country* (Melbourne: CSIRO Publishing, 2009), 147-183, 163, 180-81.

¹⁴⁰ Mulvaney and Kamminga, *Prehistory of Australia*, 111.

¹⁴¹ The earliest sites in Papua New Guinea were found on the Huon Peninsula and have been dated to between 52,000 and 61,000 years old.

¹⁴² Joseph B Birdsell, ‘The Recalibration of a Paradigm for the First Peopling of Greater Australia’, in Jim Allen, Jack Golson and Rhys Jones (eds.), *Sunda and Sahul: Prehistoric Studies in Southeast Asia, Melanesia and Australia* (London: Academic Press, 1977), 113-67, 123.

¹⁴³ Sandra Bowdler, ‘The Coastal Colonisation of Australia’, in Jim Allen, Rhys Jones and Jack Golson (eds.), *Sunda and Sahul: Prehistoric Studies in Southeast Asia, Melanesia and Australia* (London: Academic Press, 1977), 205-246, 205, 213.

A range of finds in the arid zone in the 1980s began to destabilise the ‘coastal colonisation’ model.¹⁴⁴ Mike Smith’s discovery at Puritjarra in Central Australia of a few stone tools at 45,000 years ago and a continuous stream of occupation debris from 35,000 years ago demonstrated that people moved into the arid zone early and stayed in well-watered locales throughout the dramatic climatic changes of the Last Glacial Maximum.¹⁴⁵ In 1989, Peter Veth developed an influential biogeographic framework to explain human movements across the interior between ‘refuges’, where fresh water was always available; ‘corridors’, which might have been occupied or abandoned depending on climatic conditions; and ‘barriers’, like the harsh desert dunefields, which were only occupied after people learnt to tap groundwater.¹⁴⁶ Peter Hiscock and Lynley Wallis have added another layer to this model, suggesting that people colonised the arid interior during a favourable period of higher rainfall and then adapted to the changing conditions as the desert transformed around them.¹⁴⁷

Recent genetic studies indicate that Australia had a single, large and diverse founding population. The DNA also suggests that after exploring the continent around 50,000 years ago, many of these groups retained distinct regional identities over tens of millennia.¹⁴⁸ Powerful examples of this kind of regionalism emerge in the Dampier archipelago – the Franklin of the northwest – and the Kimberley, which have been a focus of archaeological activity since the 1960s. Archaeologists have brought together evidence of rock art, occupation debris, and stone arrangements to paint a dynamic picture of the Indigenous societies that lived in the northwest of the continent, where the desert meets the sea. Ken Mulvaney has interpreted the vast body of rock art from the northwest as evidence for ‘differentiation in the symbolic structuring of people’s lives relatively early after

¹⁴⁴ The coastal colonisation model has been further challenged by the lack of coastal archaeological sites on the Arabian Peninsula and on the Indian Ocean rim: it seems that *Homo sapiens* favoured river valleys over the coast on their long journey out of Africa. Huw S Groucutt *et al*, ‘Rethinking the Dispersal of Homo Sapiens Out of Africa’, *Evolutionary Anthropology* 24(4) (Jul-Aug 2015), 149-64, 161.

¹⁴⁵ Smith, *The Archaeology of Australia’s Deserts*, 89.

¹⁴⁶ Veth put these ideas forward in his PhD, later published as: Peter Veth, *Islands in the Interior: The Dynamics of Prehistoric Adaptations within the Arid Zone of Australia* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: International Monographs in Prehistory, 1993).

¹⁴⁷ Peter Hiscock and Lynley Wallis, ‘Pleistocene Settlement of Deserts from an Australian Perspective’, in Peter Veth, Mike Smith and Peter Hiscock (eds.), *Desert Peoples: Archaeological Perspectives* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2005), 34-57.

¹⁴⁸ K Huopenen, TG Schurr, Y-S Chen, and D Wallace, ‘Mitochondrial DNA Variation in an Aboriginal Australian Population: Evidence for Genetic Isolation and Regional Differentiation’, *Human Immunology* 62 (2001), 954-69; Ray Tobler *et al*, ‘Aboriginal Mitogenomes Reveal 50,000 Years of Regionalism in Australia’, *Nature* (8 March 2017), 180-187; Anna-Sapfo Malaspinas *et al*, ‘A Genomic History of Aboriginal Australia’, *Nature* 538 (13 Oct 2016), 207-214.

colonisation'.¹⁴⁹ This supports the idea that innovation and regionalism are also Pleistocene expressions.

There is evidence to suggest that people carried knowledge of fire with them on their voyage to Australia. In 1985, palynologists Gurdip Singh and EA Geissler gained a long view of Australian fire history from a deep pollen profile drawn from sediments in Lake George in NSW near Canberra.¹⁵⁰ By identifying the cycle of glacial (few trees in area) and interglacial events (well wooded), they could read 700,000 years of history in the accumulation of pollen in the lake sediment. During a recent interglacial, they encountered an enigma. For the first time in the record, the dominant vegetation changed from Casuarina woodland to the fire-adapted Eucalyptus woodland, while fragments of charcoal increased. Singh and Geissler struggled to find a natural explanation for the ecological transformation, so they suggested a cultural one: the vegetation composition had been altered by the introduction of a human fire regime. The challenge was, when correlated with the deep sea palaeotemperature cores, the ecological transformation corresponded with the interglacial around 128,000 years ago, which when published as evidence for human occupation caused a media sensation. But when Richard Wright carefully scrutinised this chronology alongside the excavated radiocarbon-dated sequence, he re-dated the ecological shift to around 60,000 years ago, suggesting that as soon as the people arrived in Australia they began to transform it.¹⁵¹

In 1968, Duncan Merrilees suggested that the arrival of humans in Australia had a destructive effect on the native fauna.¹⁵² Through fossilised remains found eroding from river banks and beach dunes, in ancient swampy peat bogs and dried-up salt lakes, archaeologists had long been aware that megafauna had once roamed Australia. These large extinct animals included a marsupial lion (*Thylacoleo*), a two-metre tall flightless bird (*Genyornis*), the giant short-faced kangaroo (*Procoptodon*), a seven metre-long goanna (*Megalania*), and the largest known marsupial ever to have lived, *Diprotodon*, sometimes described as a rhinoceros wombat. Perhaps, Merrilees mused, people drove the megafauna to extinction through their burning. Jones also pursued the idea, wondering aloud: 'if man had *not* managed to cross the

¹⁴⁹ Ken Mulvaney, 'Iconic Imagery: Pleistocene Rock Art Development Across Northern Australia', *Quaternary International* 285 (Feb 2013), 99-110, 99.

¹⁵⁰ Gurdip Singh and EA Geisler, 'Late Cainozoic History of Fire, Lake Levels and Climate at Lake George, New South Wales, Australia', *Philosophical Transactions, Royal Society of London* 311 (1985), 379-447, 438.

¹⁵¹ These debates show how archaeological insights have entered Quaternary conversations. Richard Wright, 'How Old Is Zone F at Lake George?', *Archaeology in Oceania* 21(2) (Jul 1986), 138-139.

¹⁵² Duncan Merrilees, 'Man the Destroyer: Late Quaternary Changes in the Australian Marsupial Fauna', *Journal of the Royal Society of Western Australia* 51 (1968), 1-24.

last water channel of Wallacea those distant tens of millennia ago ... would at least some large beasts, lumbering down to the water's edge, have graced the sketchbooks of a Joseph Banks or a Charles Lesueur?'¹⁵³

This question was at the heart of Tim Flannery's elegant and provocative work, *The Future Eaters*, in which he argued that the first Australians hunted the megafauna to extinction. In a new land, he reasoned, released from the grip of coevolution, 'every hunt would have been successful': 'Without predators and surrounded by naïve prey, people would have become, in a sense, gods. For they were now all-powerful beings in a land of plenty.'¹⁵⁴ As part of a large-scale interdisciplinary dating effort in 2001, he and Bert Roberts concluded that most species of megafauna died out in a continental extinction around 46,000 years ago.¹⁵⁵ He also suggested that this extinction event led to widespread ecological disruptions, as what was once food for herbivores became fuel for wildfire. These destructive fires transformed the landscape, changed the nutrients in the soil, and ultimately stimulated the first Aboriginal burning regimes.¹⁵⁶ These arguments about the deep past quickly became mired in the politics of contemporary Indigenous land management.¹⁵⁷

There were international precedents for the 'overkill' hypothesis, notably the work of Paul Martin, who suggested in the 1970s that the first Americans decimated the native megafauna within one thousand years of colonisation.¹⁵⁸ There are also many examples of animals disappearing from islands soon after the arrival of people. As Chris Johnson observed: 'Wherever humans have harvested from their environment, long-lived, slow-breeding and slow maturing species, living in situations that guaranteed high exposure to people, have been the most likely to disappear.'¹⁵⁹ But a continent is not comparable to an island. Lesley Head has cautioned against highlighting specific causes for the extinction of the megafauna, instead emphasising the complex interplay between people and the environment over Australia's

¹⁵³ Rhys Jones, 'The Neolithic, Palaeolithic and the Hunting Gardeners: Man and Land in the Antipodes', in RP Suggate and M Cresswell (eds.), *Quaternary Studies* (Wellington: Royal Society of New Zealand, 1975), 21-34, 29-30.

¹⁵⁴ Flannery, *The Future Eaters*, 160.

¹⁵⁵ Richard G Roberts *et al*, 'New Ages for the Last Australian Megafauna: Continent-Wide Extinction About 46,000 Years Ago', *Science* 292(5523) (2001), 1888-1892.

¹⁵⁶ Tim Flannery, 'Pleistocene Faunal Loss: Implications of the Aftershock for Australia's Past and Future', *Archaeology in Oceania* 25 (1990), 45-67.

¹⁵⁷ Marcia Langton, *The Quiet Revolution: Indigenous People and the Resources Boom*, Boyer Lectures 2012 (Sydney: Harper Collins, 2013), 24-27; Tuniz *et al*, *The Bone Readers*, 64, 130; Lesley Head, 'Meganesian Barbecue: Reply to Seddon', *Meanjin*, 54 (1995), 702-9.

¹⁵⁸ Paul S Martin, 'The Discovery of America', *Science* 179 (4077) (9 Mar 1973), 969-974, 969.

¹⁵⁹ Chris Johnson, *Australia's Mammal Extinctions: A 50,000 Year History* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 114.

long history: ‘I have come to the conclusion that the term “impact” should be reserved for meteorites and that the concept of “interaction” is more useful.’¹⁶⁰

Although Flannery’s book has been criticised for promoting the controversial ‘overkill’ hypothesis, its great insight was in highlighting the ecological sensitivity of the continent before the arrival of people. As environmental historians Libby Robin and Tom Griffiths write, ‘*The Future Eaters* confronted Australians with truths about their land that they have not yet fully assimilated: that Australia has the poorest soils in the world, a stressful, unreliable climate, a fragile and heavily interdependent ecology, and great biodiversity.’¹⁶¹ Australia’s delicate and capricious environment may have had a greater role in the extinction of the megafauna than any human activities. After all, megafauna had been dying out for millennia before the arrival of humans, and many smaller species also died out. In a sense, David Horton observed, ‘Australia’s design is such that it has always been a close call, the megafauna teetering on the edge of the table... Just a little bit drier on the margins, the desert just a bit bigger, just a few less active rivers and waterholes, and there are massive impacts on a few species that had survived hundreds of thousands of years of smaller fluctuations previously. And the presence of humans is of no more significance than that there was an audience for the losses.’¹⁶²

The megafauna debate rolls on. And there are important deep-time insights embedded in the arguments. In particular, the range of evidence warns us against using blanket categories when writing histories of people, animals or the environment. ‘Continental’ extinction was simply the end point of a series of smaller local extinctions. Every glacial cycle had its own character, triggering different climatic and ecological changes in each region, which animals and people responded to in a variety of ways. The megafauna, too, were diverse, with different diets and reproductive cycles. Their extinction and their size define them, but it is worth remembering that some ‘megafauna’ survived to live alongside us today, such as the red kangaroo, the emu and the saltwater crocodile. The most intriguing development in recent years has been the increasing evidence of coexistence between people and megafauna in ancient Australia, as the idea of an ‘extinction event’ around 46,000 years ago fades. In 2017,

¹⁶⁰ Lesley Head, ‘The (Aboriginal) face of the (Australian) earth’, The Jack Golson Lecture series, Centre for Archaeological Research, Australian National University, 2006, 15.

¹⁶¹ Libby Robin and Tom Griffiths, ‘Environmental History in Australasia’, *Environment and History* 10(4) (Nov 2004), 439-74, 458.

¹⁶² David Horton, *The Pure State of Nature: Sacred Cows, Destructive Myths and the Environment* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 122.

for example, Michael Westaway's team published evidence that suggests that the large, lumbering wombat-like marsupial, *Zygomaturus trilobus*, survived for some seventeen thousand years after people moved into the Willandra Lakes district.¹⁶³ While the arrival of the first Australians certainly changed the environment, this evidence of extended coexistence seems to discredit the idea that humans rapidly hunted the megafauna to extinction.

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When people first started visiting Madjedbebe, the climate was mild and stable. They camped in a wooded valley with a river nearby. Around thirty-five thousand years ago, Australia entered an age of extreme aridity. Global temperatures cooled, and the sea receded as more and more water became locked in the polar ice caps. The vegetation in the region became shorter and sparser, and fresh water became scarce. Temperatures dropped by between 6-10 degrees Celsius.¹⁶⁴ The monsoon failed for perhaps twenty thousand years in the tropical north.¹⁶⁵ Twenty-one thousand years ago marked the peak of the Last Glacial Maximum. The sea had retreated, leaving the shelter 300 kilometres inland.

Then came the flood. Between seventeen thousand and seven thousand years ago the extended polar ice caps melted and the sea level rose by around 125 metres.¹⁶⁶ At its most rapid rate, between thirteen thousand to eleven thousand years ago, the ocean submerged the poorly vegetated Arafura plain at the rate of one metre per week (110 kilometres in two thousand years).¹⁶⁷ With every tide, the sea advanced further.

¹⁶³ Michael C Westaway, Jon Olley and Rainer Grün, 'At Least 17,000 Years of Coexistence: Modern Humans and Megafauna at the Willandra Lakes, South-Eastern Australia', *Quaternary Science Reviews* 157 (Feb 2017), 206-211. See also Giles Hamm *et al*, 'Cultural Innovation and Megafauna Interaction in the Early Settlement of Arid Australia', *Nature* 539 (7628) (2016), 280-283.

¹⁶⁴ Hiscock, *Archaeology of Ancient Australia*, 56-57.

¹⁶⁵ See David MJS Bowman, 'The Australian Summer Monsoon: a Biogeographic Perspective', *Australian Geographical Studies* 40 (2002), 261-277, 267.

¹⁶⁶ There has been a range of estimates for the sea-level lowstand in the Australasian region, from 110 metres to 175 metres, with general agreement for a post-glacial sea-level rise of 120 to 130 metres. Stephen E Lewis *et al*, 'Post-Glacial Sea-Level Changes Around the Australian Margin: A Review', *Quaternary Science Reviews* 74 (2013), 115-138, 124; G Hope, PJ Hughes and J Russell-Smith, 'Geomorphological Fieldwork and the Evolution of the Landscape of Kakadu National Park', in Rhys Jones (ed.), *Archaeological Research in Kakadu National Park* (Canberra: Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service, 1985), 229-40, 238.

¹⁶⁷ There are differences between the rate of flooding and the rate of sea-level rise, due to contours in the Sunda Shelf. During an earlier pulse, between 14,300 and 14,600 years BP, the sea level rose about sixteen metres in only 300 years. TJJ Hanebuth, K Statterger and PM Grootes, 'Rapid Flooding of the Sunda Shelf: A Late-Glacial Sea-Level Record', *Science* 288 (2000), 1033-1035, 1034.



Fig. 79 Looking up from the bottom of the archaeological site at Madjedbebe, 2012 (Source: B Griffiths).



Fig. 80 The 1989 section drawing, which depicts a record of over 55,000 years of human occupation at Madjedbebe (Source: M Smith).

Around six thousand years ago, the sea level stabilised. Mainland Australia looked much as it does today. Close to three million square kilometres of land around the margins of the continent had been flooded. The loss for those who survived it must have been immense. Vast territories, invaluable resources, and sacred features would have been submerged in the flood.¹⁶⁸ The advancing coastline pushed people inland, forcing local crowding, the mixing of cultures, and, most likely, causing conflict.¹⁶⁹ Paul Taçon and Christopher Chippindale believe this to be the cause of ‘great battle scenes’ that they claim entered the rock art of Arnhem Land at around this time. These would be among the earliest depictions of warfare in any world art tradition.¹⁷⁰ Darrell Lewis disagrees, and offers a more peaceful perspective to this story. Rising seas increased social tension, but he links this with the appearance in the rock art of the composite Rainbow Serpent. Instead of warfare, Lewis suggests that a more conciliatory philosophy emerged amongst these crowded communities: ‘The Rainbow snake symbolises the possibilities of alliance among clan groups.’¹⁷¹

The sea drowned the wooded river valleys of the South Alligator and East Alligator Rivers, bringing mangroves and tidal conditions up to the edge of the shelter. Then, as recently as 1400-1000 years ago, the estuarine conditions retreated. Sedimentation behind the intertidal zone had gradually built up levees, which protected the coastal plains from saltwater inundation and allowed the formation of the freshwater wetlands and lagoons that we see today.¹⁷² For the past thousand years, people have gathered at Madjedbebe in the dry season to harvest fish, turtles, crabs, goannas and freshwater mussels from the rich surrounds.

This is the history as is it told in stones and bones, in coastal maps and shoreline graphs, in oral history and Dreaming stories. But data can only take us so far. As Carmel Schrire reminds us in *Digging Through Darkness*, ‘Only imagination fleshes out the sound and taste of time past, anchoring the flavour of lost moments in the welter of objects left behind.’¹⁷³

¹⁶⁸ Mulvaney and Kamminga, *Prehistory of Australia*, 121.

¹⁶⁹ Paul Taçon and Sally Brockwell, ‘Arnhem Land Prehistory in Landscape, Stone and Paint’, *Antiquity* 69 (1995), 676-95.

¹⁷⁰ Paul Taçon and Christopher Chippindale, ‘Australia’s Ancient Warriors: Changing Depictions of Fighting in the Rock Art of Arnhem Land, N.T.’, *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 4 (1994), 211-48.

¹⁷¹ Darrell Lewis, *The Rock Paintings of Arnhem Land, Australia: Social, Ecological and Material Culture Change in the Post-Glacial Period* (Oxford: BAR International Series 415, 1988), 90-91.

¹⁷² Rhys Jones, ‘Recommendations for Archaeological Site Management in Kakadu National Park’, in Rhys Jones (ed.), *Archaeological Research in Kakadu National Park* (Canberra: Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service, Special Publication 13, 1985), 305-6.

¹⁷³ Carmel Schrire, *Digging Through Darkness: Chronicles of an Archaeologist* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 11.

The dates from the latest excavations at Madjedbebe are due to come out in *Nature* in July 2017. They will take time to absorb. They speak to a remarkable story of resilience, adaptation and survival, and throw up questions which are not easily resolved. But let us not be dazzled by old dates – nor become numb to their power. The history of Jinnium, at ten thousand years old, remains ancient. It is twice as old as Stonehenge and tells a rich local story of economic innovation and the creation of a cultural landscape. ‘Changes in the numbers rewrite a certain kind of history,’ as Lesley Head reminds us, ‘but it is not the only interesting or important one.’¹⁷⁴

While Pleistocene dates may dominate the headlines, some of the most exciting contemporary archaeology focuses on recent histories, such as the emergence of social traditions associated with shell mounds in the Torres Strait over the last five hundred years or the ways in which people shaped the vegetation of Bentinck Island, which was once a hill on the edge of Lake Carpentaria.¹⁷⁵ The archaeological story of Aboriginal Australia also continues today. ‘The enduring perception of timeless territoriality has imagined Aboriginal culture as a sheet of glass, strong and cohesive in isolation but highly vulnerable to the hammer blow of colonial impact,’ writes historian and archaeologist Paul Irish. ‘The reality could not be more different.’¹⁷⁶ Since the 1960s, led by Judy Birmingham’s work at Wybalenna mission and Jim Allen’s excavation of the Port Essington settlement, the field of historical archaeology has chronicled the myriad ways in which Aboriginal people shaped colonial Australia.¹⁷⁷ As a field, it has enriched stories about Australia’s past by giving agency to those who existed on the margins of the documentary record, from the role of individuals in the pastoral and whaling industries to the experiences of communities on the Victorian goldfields and in the heart of early Sydney.¹⁷⁸ These histories of cultural

¹⁷⁴ Head, ‘Headlines and Songlines’, 743.

¹⁷⁵ Duncan Wright, *The Archaeology of Community Emergence and Development on Mabuyag in the Western Torres Strait* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2015); Patrick Moss *et al*, ‘Environmental Context for Late Holocene Human Occupation of the South Wellesley Archipelago, Gulf of Carpentaria, Northern Australia,’ *Quaternary International* 385 (2015), 136-144.

¹⁷⁶ Paul Irish, *Hidden in Plain View: The Aboriginal People of Coastal Sydney* (Sydney: New South Publishing, 2017), 18-19.

¹⁷⁷ Judy Birmingham, *Wybalenna: The Archaeology of Cultural Accommodation in Nineteenth Century Tasmania: A Report of the Historical Archaeological Investigation of the Aboriginal establishment on Flinders Island* (Sydney: Australian Society for Historical Archaeology, 1992); Jim Allen, *Port Essington: The Historical Archaeology of a North Australian Nineteenth Century Military Outpost* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2008).

¹⁷⁸ Susan Lawrence and Peter Davies, *An Archaeology of Australia Since 1788* (New York: Springer, 2010).

entanglement are just as wondrous as the global story told at Madjedbebe. They link the deep past more immediately with the present, enlivening our understanding of the social, economic and spiritual worlds of the people who thrived on these shores at the moment of invasion, and who continue to shape Australian society.

Australia's Classical Culture

On the drive back to Mildura, after a few days exploring the shores of Lake Mungo, I dream of deep time. As the ethereal expanse of the Willandra region fades behind me, my mind lingers on the scattered shells, kitchen hearths and ancient footprints that mark the desiccated lakes system. I strive to imagine the lives of the people who left these traces: the ancestors of the Mutthi Mutthi, Ngyiampaa and Paakantyi peoples who fished, hunted, cooked, sang, laughed, danced, loved and died beside the lake shores at the height of the last Ice Age. While the texture of their lives may forever elude us, the last few decades of research in the region has opened a small window on the world they inhabited. It is a radical insight.

As I approach the outskirts of town, my reverie is broken by a different vision of the deep past. Looming high above the road, a thirty-foot pharaoh sits imperiously in the car park of 'Tutankhamen's Bistro', his plaster arms clutching his knees, his light-bulb eyes staring emptily across a vast Aboriginal landscape. It is a striking image, and a jarring reminder of the dissonance at the heart of Australian cultural life. The monument encapsulates the anxieties of a settler nation still struggling to come to terms with its deep Indigenous history, fumbling for foreign symbols to fill an unfamiliar land.

The chapters of this thesis challenge the Pharaoh's hollow gaze. They echo art historian Bernard Smith's appeal for Australians to seek 'a more balanced, a more archaeological, a more humanist view of our history'.¹ Smith sought a historical enquiry that drew upon words, but which also moved beyond them to embrace the sensuous materiality of Australian history, encompassing the arts as well as artefacts. It is an approach that brings the deep and dynamic history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples into Australian consciousness. 'It is this culture that is the Iliad and Odyssey of Australia,' Noel Pearson

¹ Bernard Smith, 'History and the Collector' (1974), in *The Death of the Artist as Hero: Essays in History and Culture* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1988), 97-98.

wrote of the songlines of the women of central Australia, ‘It is these mythic stories that are Australia’s Book of Genesis.’²

In 1986, while archaeologists explored his land in northern Kakadu, Gaagudju elder Big Bill Neidjie wondered openly about the antiquity of the Dreaming:

When that law started?
I don’t know how many thousand years.
European say 40,000 years,
but I reckon myself probably was more because...
it is sacred.³

In these words, we can appreciate the differences between the two worldviews invoked in my title: the deep-time history, which is bound to notions of linear time, and the active, continuous time of the Dreaming, which is a self-referencing and self-affirming system of meaning. Yet despite these differences, historian David Christian observes, both worldviews are foundational: ‘they speak to our deep spiritual, psychic, and social need for a sense of place and a sense of belonging.’⁴ In his landmark work, *Maps of Time*, Christian brings together insights from the fields of physics, geology, biology and archaeology to create a Western account of origins, ‘a map of time that embraces the past at all scales’, from the ‘big bang’ to the present. Such a project, he acknowledges, is a form of a ‘modern creation myth’. It constitutes ‘what indigenous Australians might call a modern “Dreaming” – a coherent account of how we were created and how we fit into the scheme of things.’⁵ In writing ‘big history’, Christian is also taking up Bernard Smith’s appeal, moving beyond the traditional bounds of the historian to tell a ‘story that attempts to grasp reality whole’.

Through the lens of ‘big history’, the Australian nation quickly becomes a shallow stratum in a richly layered Indigenous place. While such a rendering could be perceived as a threat to the legitimacy and cultural authority of the society that has formed here since 1788, it also holds promise. It is only through a long view of Australian history that we can come to understand the Australian landscape, which is as much cultural as it is natural. It is a scale

² Noel Pearson, ‘A Rightful Place: Race, Recognition and a More Complete Commonwealth’, *Quarterly Essay* 55 (2014), 36.

³ Bill Neidjie, Stephen Davis and Allan Fox, *Kakadu man...Bill Neidjie* (Darwin: Mybrood, 1986), 48.

⁴ David Christian, *Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 2.

⁵ Christian, *Maps of Time*, 3.

that allows us to grasp the immensity of human experience on this continent and learn lessons about resilience, adaptability and connections to country which will become vital in a warming world. A deep-time perspective also presents an opportunity for us to recognise cultures and histories that for so long have gone unrecognised.

‘My expectation of a good Australia,’ Aboriginal activist Charles Perkins told historian Peter Read in 1989:

is when White people would be proud to speak an Aboriginal language, when they realise that Aboriginal culture and all that goes with it, philosophy, art, language, morality, kinship, is all part of their heritage. And that’s the most unbelievable thing of all, that it’s all there waiting for us all. White people can inherit 40 000 or 60 000 years of culture, and all they have to do is reach out and ask for it.⁶

Perkins’ plea places Indigenous culture and the archaeological story of ancient Australia at the heart of Australian identity. But these words were uttered in despair. At fifty-three years of age, Perkins felt that his attempts to share his history, to bring his culture into national life, were falling on deaf ears. When he walked the streets of Sydney, he felt like a foreigner in his own land. He too struggled with the vexed question of belonging in Australia. ‘We know we cannot live in the past,’ he reflected in an Australia Day address, ‘but the past lives with us.’⁷

In the generation since Perkins talked with Read about the promise of reconciliation, the landmark *Mabo* and *Wik* judgements have passed in the High Court, acknowledging Indigenous rights to country; the injustices of the stolen generations have been the subject of a prime ministerial apology; and the campaign to recognise Indigenous Australians in the Constitution has now been accompanied by calls for the establishment of a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and a First Nations Voice to be enshrined in the Constitution. Archaeological insights have featured in each of these national conversations, as Australians gradually respond to Perkins’ invitation and seek to understand and celebrate all that Indigenous history and culture has to offer. ‘With substantive constitutional change and structural reform,’ the Indigenous leaders at the 2017 National Constitutional Convention at Uluru announced, ‘we believe this ancient sovereignty can shine through as a fuller expression of Australia’s

⁶ Perkins, as quoted in Peter Read, *Charles Perkins: A Biography* (Melbourne: Viking, 1990), 315.

⁷ Perkins’ 1984 Australia Day address in Melbourne, as quoted in Read, *Charles Perkins*, ix.

nationhood. ... When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.’⁸

This thesis has offered an episodic view of the cultural, intellectual and political developments in the second half of the twentieth century that underpin the 2017 Uluru statement. It has analysed the activities and motivations of a handful of scholars who, through dialogue, sweat and imagination, have dramatically enlarged our understanding of Australian history. It has presented a critical commentary on a disciplinary story, and it has contextualised moments of cross-cultural conflict, as well as collaboration, in the quest to uncover ancient Australia.

Over the past sixty years, Australian archaeology has grown from the efforts of a few isolated scholars into a thriving, multi-dimensional discipline. Within a generation of the first attempts to establish a historical framework for the continent, archaeologists were engaging with complex questions of cultural exchange, the creation of social landscapes and theories of change over time. Large-scale continental models have gradually been replaced by an appreciation of the distinctive regional and temporal character of Indigenous society. The changing research agenda reflects the pace with which scholars like John Mulvaney developed broad syntheses, as well as the quiet contributions of others like Isabel McBryde, who demonstrated the magnitude of the insights that could emerge from the minutiae of local, regional research.

As the field has expanded it has also diversified, opening new areas of specialisation, incorporating a dazzling array of chemical, ecological and mathematical techniques, and becoming increasingly integrated with heritage legislation. Although technological advances have pushed the field towards the laboratory, archaeology remains a discipline that straddles the border between the humanities and the sciences. There has been no dominant theoretical force within Australian Aboriginal archaeology, as with the ‘new archaeologists’ in America and the ‘post-processualists’ in the United Kingdom. Rather, Australian research is distinctive for its close engagement with the culture and politics of the first Australians and their histories of invasion, dispossession, adaptation and self-determination. Archaeological questions and conclusions are shaped as much by the use of ethnography, history, and dialogue with Indigenous custodians as they are by categorising stone tools, weighing shells

⁸ First Nations National Constitutional Convention, ‘Uluru Statement from the Heart’, Press Release, 26 May 2017.

and measuring motifs. Australian research, as this thesis has shown, demands archaeologists be cultural scholars too.

The enduring question asked in the wake of the Franklin River campaign – ‘Who owns the past?’ – continues to haunt archaeological practice in Australia. There remains conflict between those who approach the past from a critical, deep-time perspective and those who view it as a living heritage: an affirmation of cultural identity. This is the central tension within the discipline today. But, as two generations of scholarship have shown, it can be a creative tension. There are dozens of collaborative investigations currently underway in Australia, with archaeologists working in partnership with traditional custodians to generate inspiring local, regional and social histories. There are also a growing number of Indigenous archaeologists, harnessing Western techniques to investigate their own past through excavation and survey.

Archaeology will perhaps always face political challenges, not only for the cultural sensitivities of its subject matter, but also because it cannot help but interact with great human stories and symbolic narratives that readily translate into icons, dates and slogans. Like history, it beckons when we search for origins and understanding, and since at least the 1970s it has been inextricably bound to questions of national identity. This is a radical shift, archaeologist Denis Byrne observes, because ‘until the 1960s Australian national identity had been constructed partly in *opposition* to Aborigines’.⁹ But Byrne remains sceptical of nationalistic attempts, in Harry Allen’s words, to graft ‘white culture directly onto an Aboriginal root’.¹⁰ It is a project that has gained traction through the creation of a ‘detached’ and tokenistic version of Aboriginal culture: a timeless and traditional ‘Other’ upon which the contemporary nation can build.

The archaeological archive of Australia offers a more dynamic understanding of Indigenous histories and cultures over millennia. It is a story that has emerged from rock shelters and shell middens, art sites and urban spaces, archives and laboratories, lore and local knowledge. It is a complex, contoured, and ongoing history of human endurance and achievement in the face of great social, environmental and climatic change. Perkins’ hope that all Australians would come to identify with this deep history as their own, as a source of wisdom and pride,

⁹ Emphasis in original. Denis Byrne, ‘Deep Nation: Australia’s Acquisition of an Indigenous Past’, *Aboriginal History* 20 (1998), 82-107, 99.

¹⁰ Harry Allen, ‘History Matters: A Commentary on Divergent Interpretations of Australian History’, *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 2 (1988), 79-89, 83.

was not an open invitation. It carried obligations, too. The act of ‘inheriting’ demands the respectful acknowledgement of all that has happened – and still is happening – in mediating rights and understanding between peoples and their histories. It asks that we not only engage with the deep past as a dynamic human history, but also with the ways that we have come to know about Australians across aeons of time. It calls for us to reflect upon the tumultuous road of the past two centuries and to adopt ‘a more humanist, a more archaeological’ approach to the past. It is only then that we can appreciate the ancient voyages of the first Australians as the opening chapters of Australian history, and the songs, paintings and traditions of their descendants as the classical culture of this continent.



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