

## **SESSION 16**

### **Aboriginal archaeology and cultural heritage**

Convener:

**Professor Iain Davidson**

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Archaeologists are committed to the view that material remains of past behaviour can be used to construct histories. Yet the vast majority of archaeological work in Australia, conducted through the Cultural Heritage Assessment process, has contributed rather less than it could. One reaction to this has been changes in legislation in various states which tends to put the power (back) into the hands of the Aboriginal peoples whose history might be written in these stones and bones. At the same time, archaeologists have not always convinced Aboriginal peoples that the history they could write from their archaeology will add significantly to Aboriginal knowledge. Under these circumstances, no one may really be satisfied by the outcomes of much archaeological research in Australia. This conference session will explore the issues arising from this situation.

All speakers have worked closely with Aboriginal traditional owners or other community members, and these collaborators will either be joint authors of the presentations or attend the conference.

The presentations will assess what archaeology can contribute to historical questions in particular areas of expertise. In keeping with the conference theme, presenters have been asked to consider where studies in that area of expertise were in 1967 and in 1974 at the time of the 'Ucko conference'.

*Session comprises eight presentations:*

#### **1. Archaeology and Aboriginal heritage—an overview**

**Iain Davidson**

University of New England <Iain.Davidson@une.edu.au>

#### **ABSTRACT**

In this review, I shall begin by assessing the state of archaeology and cultural heritage in the late 1960s, the mid 1970s and now by a meta-analysis of relevant publications, including the three books on archaeological topics that were published from the 1974 AIAS conference.

I then consider some issues about the relationship between archaeology and cultural heritage arising from my own experiences in archaeological research related to cultural heritage assessments in southeastern Australia, northwestern Queensland and the northwest of Western Australia.

## **2. Developments in the application of regional archaeological perspectives to Aboriginal cultural heritage management**

**Malcolm Ridges**

New South Wales Department of Environment and Climate Change  
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**Shaun Hooper**

C/o Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute

### **ABSTRACT**

Archaeology has traditionally been used as an approach to identify Aboriginal cultural values in a landscape, and as a partial means to assessing its significance for protecting and conserving. This talk examines new approaches to representing cultural values using archaeology, but does so from the perspective of identifying accumulated impacts on the archaeology and setting conservation priorities in the context of these. It also illustrates how these priorities can be combined with non-archaeological values in a landscape to develop priorities that Aboriginal communities can use to promote their own conservation objectives.

## **3. Aboriginal peoples and Aboriginal sites**

**Dave Johnston**

C/o The Australian National University <davej@iimetro.com.au>

## **4. Stone artefacts**

**Simon Holdaway**

University of Auckland <sj.holdaway@auckland.ac.nz>

**Warlpa Thompson**

### **ABSTRACT**

That stone artefacts are the most ubiquitous heritage items in Australia is well known. One might expect, therefore, that they feature prominently in discussions between Aboriginal peoples, archaeologists and heritage managers concerning approaches to the study of heritage. In fact they do not and this, as we argue here, is largely because there are fundamental issues concerning the interpretation of the Australian archaeological record that have not been addressed. Our concern here is to reflect on these issues with reference to the types of narrative that we are able to provide based on our fieldwork in western New South Wales. Here we are involved in a long-term research project oriented towards understanding the archaeological record in relation to landscape, chronology, environment and the lifeways of past Aboriginal peoples. Rather than report on an integrated set of results where an Aboriginal view of the past is closely matched by archaeological interpretations we conclude that there remains a substantial gap between what is expected and what an archaeologist can deliver. To overcome this mismatch we need to be clear about what types of inferences are possible using the archaeological record. More than forty years ago, Peterson presaged a series of problems that confront archaeologists today by discussing the different temporal scales at which the ethnographic data was constructed. We use this work as the foundation from which to reconsider how well a later

generation of archaeologists has addressed issues raised by the nature of the archaeological record in general and stone artefacts in particular.

## **5. From edge to centre: Aborigines and megafaunal extinctions in Australia**

**Chris Boney and Brett Cochrane**

Brewarrina Local Aboriginal Land Council, Brewarrina

**Tom Cochrane**

Goodooga

**Judith Field**

Australian Key Centre for Microscopy and Microanalysis, and

School of Philosophical Inquiry, The University of Sydney <judith.field@emu.usyd.edu.au>

**Garry Lord**

Brewarrina Local Aboriginal Land Council, Brewarrina

### **ABSTRACT**

Study of the Australian megafauna and the likely reasons for their extinction has attracted considerable academic debate since the discovery of bones of *Genyornis*, the giant flightless bird, and other extinct animals at Wellington Caves in the 1830s. Over the last 40 years there have been subtle and important changes to the approach to this topic and the media profile it has attracted. Notably, in recent years numerous researchers have run strong arguments for a human role in the extinction process. These explanations take the form of over-hunting and landscape modification by fire. An alternative explanation is climate change as wrought by the last two ice ages, where climatic instability led to conditions unsuitable for the survival of these animals. Finding evidence to test these proposals has been slow in coming. In 1967 few sites were known or systematically investigated. In the late 70s, as dating techniques were more readily available, the role of humans in the extinction process was canvassed more widely. The last 17 years has seen a case for the role of humans gaining wide popular support, particularly following the publication of Tim Flannery's paper in *Archaeology in Oceania* in 1990. Modelling, fossil pollen, and animal studies have been invoked to support the human overkill argument, mostly in the absence of any direct evidence supporting this position. Where do indigenous people stand with regard to these arguments and at what level are they involved in these issues? We present our experiences at the Cuddie Springs site in northwestern New South Wales where an inclusive approach to the investigation of this important site has resulted in the local Aboriginal community playing a central role in the excavation of the archaeological and megafauna bearing deposits.

## **6. Shared stories: Rock-art research and its relevance to Aboriginal communities**

**June Ross**

University of New England <jross24@une.edu.au>

**Leo Abbott**

Ilpurla Aboriginal Corporation, Wallace Rockhole and Ilpurla Communities

### **ABSTRACT**

On arriving in Australia just five years after the 1967 Referendum, the newly appointed Principal of AIAS, the late Dr Peter Ucko, found that, in relation to the study of Aboriginal art, researchers formed an isolated and disparate group, insulated from the broader world and practices. Today, with the introduction of new theoretical approaches, regular attendances at international conferences and a growing awareness among the general public of the contemporary significance of rock art, such an assessment of research could not be supported. What is evident today is that, despite advances, many of the questions pertinent to rock art researchers forty years ago remain fundamental to our present understanding of art assemblages. In this paper, we will review recent rock-art studies in central Australia and elsewhere to assess whether the histories constructed from such questions provide stories relevant to both academic research and Aboriginal communities today. We will discuss the ways in which these histories have impacted at community level.

## **7. W(h)ither an Indigenous Australian physical anthropology?**

**Mike Green**

Museum Victoria <mgreen@museum.vic.gov.au>

**Mark Dugay-Grist**

Aboriginal Affairs Victoria

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper will explicitly address the question of whether or not the academic study of ancestral Australian Indigenous skeletal remains has a future in this country. In keeping with the session's key themes, it will look at the state of the discipline in 1967 and 1974, its contributions to an emerging narrative on Aboriginal prehistory, and then move on to a summary of recent key events. This will include the rise of Indigenous concerns relating to the maintenance of collections of Aboriginal ancestral remains in universities and museums, the advent and impact of repatriation, first as a major museum, and more recently as a government, policy initiative, and the ongoing engagement between cultural heritage management and Aboriginal community concerns in a modern policy context.

## **8. A forty-year perspective on cultural heritage management**

**Jeanette Hope**

River Junction Research

**Wilfred Shawcross**

O'Connor, ACT

with **Don Bell**

Canberra

### **ABSTRACT**

We present a personal view of the last forty years of archaeology and heritage management in Australia and elsewhere, based on our experiences in academic research, government heritage management and archaeological consulting. Both our careers began before Aboriginal people participated in these endeavours, but for many years now we have worked with and built up relationships with Aboriginal communities. Following an overview of the historic development of cultural heritage management especially in NSW, we provide some examples of how Aboriginal concerns have influenced the work of consulting archaeologists. We also discuss the impact, or lack of it, of information from consulting studies on the broader understanding of Aboriginal archaeology and history, and the imperviousness of some non-Aboriginal narratives about Aboriginal history to new information from both Aboriginal and archaeological sources.

## **9. Concluding discussion**