

Australian Archaeology



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SWASHWAY SANDBLOW

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

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

Ian Turner

Erith Island

22 January 1978

EXTINCTION

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

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

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

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

Why did this happen, this terrible extinction,
this loss of large creatures from the Australian dominion?
Some say it was Man with his efficient tools,
his rapacious hunger and his multiplicative rules;
but others blame the climate which they say changed overnight,
leaving the creatures in an inextricable plight.

But you ask me about the extinct kangaroo.
All I can say is that I wish I knew
why it is gone and what did it do
to deserve to be expelled from God's wondrous zoo.

Don Grayson

(Certain poetic liberties have been taken with the
palaeontological record)

A NOTE ON THE FAUNA FROM DEVON DOWNS SHELTER

M. Smith

The Devon Downs rock shelter, on the lower Murray in South Australia, was the first archaeological site to be systematically excavated in Australia (Hale and Tindale 1930). The deposit spans the last 5000 years of Australian prehistory. Between November 1976 and July 1977 I re-examined the excavated material from this shelter and this work is described in detail in my BA thesis (Smith 1977). The greater part of my time was spent studying the faunal assemblage and the results of this part of my work are summarised below.

Some 38 vertebrate species, represented by 261 animals, are present in this assemblage. In addition 10 species of freshwater invertebrates were identified. The excavated area is about 8% of the total area of the site.

This material is likely to have accumulated by the actions of predators rather than by natural mortality or catastrophe. Most of the remains, with the possible exception of the rats and some of the lizards, are the food remains of a single predator, man. The carnivores, thylacine, Tasmanian devil, tiger cat and dingo frequented