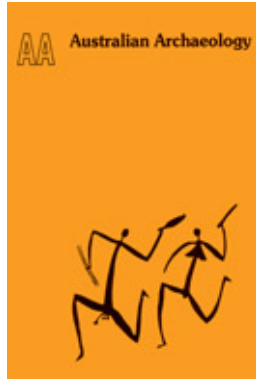


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ARCHAEOLOGY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND: A BRIEF OUTLINE

J. Hall

In July of this year the prehistory/archaeology component of anthropology at the University of Queensland turned three years of age. This report summarises the past and outlines the future development of our program.

In 1976 prehistory/archaeology consisted of one newly created lectureship and three one-semester courses augmented by two classes in material culture offered by Dr Peter Lauer of our Anthropology Museum. Student interest increased to the extent that by late 1977 we were able to put forward and win a case for a tutorship which was subsequently filled in 1978 by Mike Rowland who came to us from the University of New England. This doubling of staff has meant that, although no new courses could be added, we have been able to greatly expand the range of existing ones. Now students participate in laboratory and field work as part of their course work rather than on a volunteer 'weekend' basis, as was previously the case.

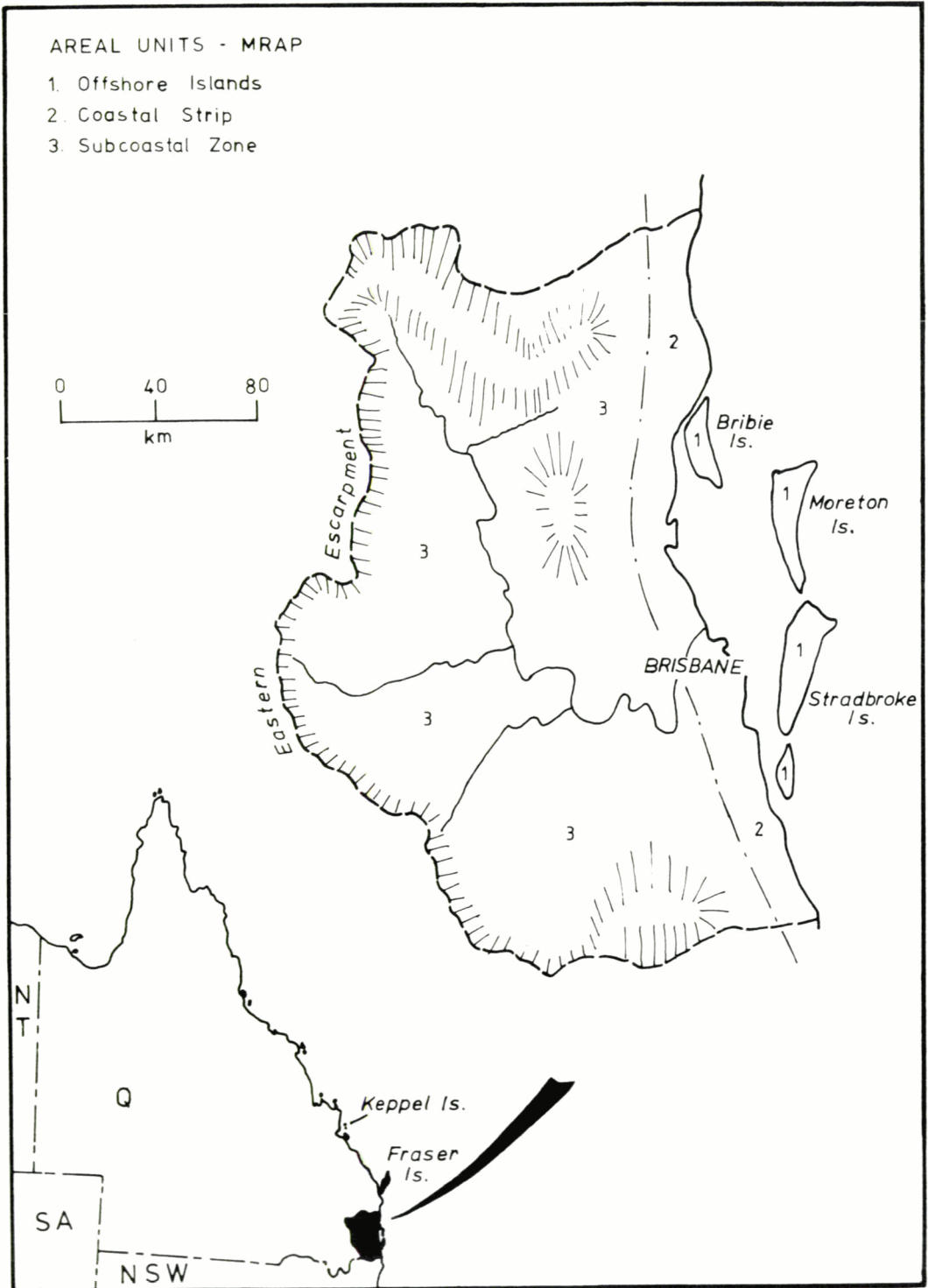
Today, all aspiring archaeologists entering our department take prerequisite courses in the general anthropology program (i.e. Human Evolution, Prehistory/Archaeology, Socio-cultural Anthropology and Linguistics) before specialising and entering the archaeological stream. Those enrolling with a view to taking a BA Honours degree are encouraged early to take courses in the natural sciences (especially geology, zoology, botany) as part of their double major requirements in anthropology. Those involving laboratory and/or field work are preferred over 'library' theses. Topics are normally restricted to the archaeology of Queensland, certainly to Australasia.

Our program is made more viable by the availability of the Anthropology Museum's facilities. Its modern well-equipped laboratory and excellent artefact collections are of great benefit to research and teaching alike. We also enjoy a close working relationship with the Queensland Museum and the Archaeology Branch, DAIA, both of whom have provided students with research as well as employment opportunities.

RESEARCH: MRAP

Late in 1976 I organised an informal group of prehistory students which met monthly to discuss the state of archaeology in the Brisbane area. We quickly recognised that if coastal and subcoastal development continued at the then present rate there would soon be few sites remaining undisturbed from Coolangatta to Noosa, coast to escarpment. This realisation served to shift immediate personal research plans away from western and northern Queensland such that by mid-1977 I had initiated the Moreton Region

Figure 1



Archaeological Project (MRAP). Since then most research undertaken by myself and students in our department has focussed on MRAP problems.

It is ironic that although the first archaeological excavation and site report in Queensland concerned the Moreton Region (Tryon 1884), this area remains so little known archaeologically almost a century later. In fact, apart from the odd brief report (cf. Jackson 1939) archaeological work was not undertaken until the mid-1960s (Ponosov 1964; Tugby and Tugby 1965). Subsequently, an increase in archaeological activity including survey, (e.g. Stockton 1975; DAIA 1976), midden excavation (Haglund-Calley and Quinell 1973) and excavation of the important Broadbeach Aboriginal burial ground (Haglund 1968, 1976) has served to found a data base from which prehistoric cultural reconstruction in SE Queensland could proceed. However, much of the material collected from previous surveys remained largely unstudied until recently and evidence from excavations provides only fragmentary information about prehistoric cultural patterns on a regional scale and offers no sort of temporal perspective at all. In sum, little is known of the region's prehistory and what is known must be integrated within a regional research framework if it is to provide meaningful answers to questions about past human occupation of the Brisbane area.

Generally the Moreton Region Archaeological Project aims to:

1. systematically locate and record sites in the Moreton Region of SE Queensland, and
2. collect and analyse sufficient data from both surface and subsurface contexts to permit
3. the development of a cultural chronology
4. the reconstruction of prehistoric cultural patterns (especially in terms of subsistence-settlement systems) with an eventual view to
5. an integration of results into current problems in Australian prehistory.

MRAP is designed as a flexible research program comprising three areal components (Fig.1). This division into island, coastal and subcoastal units represents a compromise founded on a combination of local biogeographic, ethnohistoric, logistic and salvage priority factors, the intensity of work in any one area at a given time to be largely dependent upon the latter. For example, current work on Moreton Island (the only large island whose environment and archaeological remains are relatively intact) was initiated in response to news that sand mining would commence there in the near future. Similarly, Platypus Rockshelter in the subcoastal unit was excavated not only because it possibly represented a temporal sequence but also because it will be destroyed through construction of a dam on the Brisbane River. As haphazard as such an approach may seem archaeologically, it should be noted that each excavation will be designed to answer questions of immediate local concern as well as those of sub-regional and regional significance. Furthermore, each new area surveyed and each site excavated will provide feedback data serving to redesign those original questions. It is hoped that

the next five to seven years will see a realisation of the main aims of the project. In summary, MRAP is concerned not so much with unearthing the first sites in Queensland but with salvaging what are essentially the last sites in a small portion of this vast State.

Results of work carried out in Stage I (1978-81) of MRAP have already added much to the original data base. A pit dug into Platypus Rockshelter (KB:A70) in the upper-middle Brisbane River Valley has provided an interesting faunal assemblage associated with a modest stone tool inventory. The inhabitants dined on resources from a wide range of habitats. This fare included several macropod varieties, marsupial mice, bushrats, rat-kangaroos, bandicoots, bearded dragons, freshwater tortoises, fish, three types of mussel and, of course, platypus (Steve Van Dyke, Queensland Museum, pers. comm.). Although the deposit is over a metre deep in places, only the top 20-40cm appear to contain cultural materials. Good quality wood charcoal has been recovered from the lowest part of the cultural fill and submitted for C14 analysis. Work will continue at Platypus in 1979-80 with a view to presenting a report in 1980-81. Preliminary findings were used by Ian Lilley (1978) in support of a hypothesis that prehistoric populations in the subcoastal zone of the Moreton Region dispersed away from the river during the wet summer season and coalesced in the dry winter to exploit riparian-riverine habitats. Lilley is currently conducting an extensive systematic survey in this general area as part of his MA research.

Two excavations were conducted on Moreton Island shell middens during 1978. Minner Dint Midden, on the SE (open surf) coast is a stratified deposit on the lee slope of a now truncated foredune that is undergoing continuous erosion by storm surges. A small trench produced a predominance of pipi shell plus some fish remains, a few bird (?) bones, a good quantity of carbonised Pandanus fruit and some stone flakes. Further south and on the west coast (muddy shore) an excavation of Toulkerrie Midden yielded an abundant and diverse faunal assemblage as well as a complex stratigraphic record of several shell heaps, one atop the other. The lowest stratum contained pipi shell, fish remains and charcoal, all of which was so well preserved that fish scales were abundant and shells largely unfragmented. The deposit lay on sterile beach sand and was overlain by strata containing less well-preserved oysters, pipis, cockles, mussels, whelks, several fish species, dugong, turtle, and flying fox. Carbonised Pandanus fruit was also present. Stone artefacts were scarce. Although the assemblages from both middens are still undergoing analysis, present information suggests that these sites will offer considerable insight into the settlement-subsistence pattern of the offshore island part of the Moreton Region.

Moreton Island material has provided a research focus for several post-graduate students. Richard Robins (Queensland Museum and MA candidate) is using the island as a testing area for an archaeological sampling strategy which may be employed in EIS and CRM programs. Debra Donoghue (BA Hons candidate) is using the scanning electron microscope among other techniques to aid in the identification of archaeologically recovered wood charcoal from the island. Norma Richardson (BA Hons candidate) is analysing the stone industry collected during past and recent surveys with an aim towards identifying indigenous versus exotic source materials. Finally, Ian Walters (BA Hons candidate) is conducting an analysis of the faunal remains from both excavated middens and providing, at

the same time, an excellent comparative collection, especially of Moreton Bay Fishes. In sum, by the end of 1980 we should have some understanding of the prehistoric way of life on Moreton Island and other offshore islands. Also during 1979 we shall be carrying out site survey and surface collection at selected localities along the coastal strip, especially those exhibiting pre-Holocene beach ridges (cf. Hekel et al. 1978).

MRAP also fosters research into historical sources of information about Aboriginal life in the study area. One recent study (Draper 1978) developed a hypothetical subsistence model for Moreton Bay that has yet to be tested archaeologically. Other studies are in progress which search, transcribe, and interpret hitherto little-known historic journals and documents (Langevad 1979a, 1979b).

FRASER ISLAND

Since 1976 the Anthropology Museum has been carrying out research on Fraser Island (Fig.1) and the adjacent mainland which is focussed on the immediate prehistory and protohistory of the island's population. Dr Peter K. Lauer, the Museum's curator, has recorded 224 middens and living sites along the east coast of Fraser Island. He will soon undertake similar investigations on the west coast. Major I.W. Hill is currently pursuing his MA program in which he utilises the extensive lithic collections from the island. Also Jennie Devitt (Hons BA candidate) is focussing her research on the role of environment on Fraser Island Aboriginal settlement pattern.

KEPPEL ISLANDS

Mike Rowland is presently carrying out PhD research into the archaeology of the Keppel Islands off the central Queensland coast (Fig.1). Analysis of historical, cultural and skeletal material from museums suggests that the Aboriginal inhabitants of these islands were linguistically, culturally and physically somewhat different from their mainland neighbours. These differences are thought to be due to the combined effects of isolation and adaptation to an island environment. A survey last year produced an extensive site on North Keppel Island which Mike excavated for three weeks in June. His pits revealed several strata of shell midden material separated by almost sterile sands. At the close of his field trip the deposit was more than 2m thick with promise of at least one more midden layer below this depth. Needless to say, Mike plans to return to the site in the near future.

COPROLITE RESEARCH

Since arriving in Brisbane, I have slowly but successfully managed to amass the makings of a coprolite laboratory. Last year, an investigation of privy sediment samples from an historic site in California yielded unmistakable eggs of the Chinese liver fluke, Clonorchis sinensis (Hall 1978). At present I am working on coprolites from Devil's Lair (WA), Kens Cave (Q) and from sites in the Solomon Islands sent in by Foss Leach (Otago). All three analyses should be completed by 1980.

Australian coprolites present a problem to me in that I lack a good comparative scat collection for the larger Australian animals (dingo, larger macropods etc.). It is thus difficult to make reliable statements as to the human/non-human origin of archaeologically recovered stools. If any reader is in the field and in a position to collect specifically identifiable animal scats, I would be movingly grateful to you if you bagged, labelled and posted it/them to me c/- Department of Anthropology, University of Queensland, St Lucia, 4067.

CONCLUSION

I hope that the foregoing has put AAA members in some touch with the state and scope of archaeology at the University of Queensland. The first three years have of necessity been developmental ones; it is anticipated that the next three will involve less planning and more doing. There is certainly much to be done if we are to save the prehistory of the Moreton Region from the ever-groping suburban pseudopodia of the giant amoeba that is Brisbane. All who would help are welcome.

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