New insights into Bronze Age cloth production in South East Asia, and new analysis of Anbangbang fibre artefacts; Kakadu National Park:

In August, Judith Cameron continued her research into the archaeological evidence for cloth production in Southeast Asia, spending several days analyzing tools found during the joint Thai Fine Arts Department/University of Pennsylvania excavations of Ban Chiang, one of the most important Bronze Age sites in Southeast Asia. She is pictured recording details of the spindle whorls in the storage section of the Ban Chiang National Museum not far from the Lao-Tian border. The aim of her research is to compare that data to data from the Bronze Age sequences at Ban Non Wat. Judith's recently published chapters on Ban Non Wat's spinning tools in Higham's multi-volumed works on the Ban Chiang National Museum not far from the Laotian border.

One of the most interesting findings of our Future Fellow’s latest research was that one Bronze Age woman was buried with more than 60 spinning tools at Ban Chiang, suggesting not only that cloth production was of economic significance during this period but that the woman buried with such large numbers of tools may have been a great craftsman. Judith is pictured recording details of the spindle whorls housed in the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory that had been recovered more than 30 years previously during the landmark excavations of Anbangbang Rockshelter in Kakadu National Park led by Rhys Jones. The research was made possible by a RSAP Research Development Grant (2012) to Sally Brockwell and Judith Cameron to analyze the wooden and fibre artefacts from the 1981 excavations. Although the fibre artefacts were briefly mentioned by Dr Annie Clark in the original report (Jones 1985) they have never been systematically analyzed. Although Judith’s analysis is in its preliminary stages, she reports that the assemblage not only contains some of the earliest extant Aboriginal basketry specimens but also some very interesting fragments of cordage made from animal fibres (possibly possum and kangaroo).

Dr Judith Cameron’s research at Ban Chiang National Museum and The Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory

With few exceptions, publications of prehistoric sites in Thailand tend to focus on burial remains and associated ‘prestige’ items, for overshadowing the extremely important occupation evidence. These volumes provide several stimulating contributions concerning the more quotidian remains that will be of interest to regional archaeologists because they begin to flesh out hitherto unappreciated aspects of daily life. Here we can note as examples Boer-Mah’s systematic study of adzes and their sourcing (Vol. 4), Cameron’s thoughtful presentation of spindle whorls (Vol. 5) and the butchery floors described by Isepy (Vol. 6). Let us hope that chapters like these presage a trend for regional archaeologists to increase their attention on what can be learned of Thailand’s prehistory beyond mortuary remains.

The Archaeology of Sulawesi

In September Prof. Sue O’Connor, Rose Whitau and Tim Maloney from the ANU, Dr. Emma St Pierre from the University of Queensland and Dr. Ben Marwick from University of Washington joined with and our Indonesian collaborators Dr. Fadhila Aziz and team from ARKENAS and Balai Arkeologi Makassar to undertake the final field season for ARC funded project “The Archaeology of Sulawesi”. Despite initial setbacks such as landslides covering the roads leading to our village, and unseasonal rain which made use of even 4WD impossible, the field season was very successful. Excavation efforts focused on the new cave site that we located in 2012, Talimbue. This large cave had a deep deposit and we excavated a 2m x 1m trench to a depth of 4.2m. This involved quite elaborate shoring and the construction of ladders and pulleys to get the buckets of excavated sediments to the surface. The stone artifact assemblage was large and had large numbers of patterned artefacts such as retouched flakes with steep angled retouch and polish. Bone artefacts were also abundant and diverse throughout the assemblage. We have submitted samples for dating and anticipate we will have results by the end of the year.

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Vanuatu Archaeological Field School

The 2013 ARCH 8002 advanced archaeological field school was held in the village of Anelcauhat on the island of Aneityum, Vanuatu. We had a large team of twelve students who were led by ANH staff members Mat Prebble, Stuart Bedford and Jack Fenner along with A&A staff member Matthew Spriggs, ANU PhD candidate Bee Gunn, and Richard Shing from the Vanuatu Cultural Centre. Invaluable support was provided by many Anelcauhat villagers hired to help with the field school. The weather was generally unpleasant—rainy and cool—but the accommodations were excellent. As was the archaeology. Students excavated a series of test pits which revealed an extensive Lapita occupation underlying an important 18th Century AD mission site. Starting in 1848 John Geddie established the first permanent mission in Vanuatu at Anelcauhat, and portions of his stone house and a stone church dating to the mission period remain standing at Anelcauhat. Students uncovered abundant metal, ceramic, coin, and bone artefacts dating to the mission period, investigated the foundations and construction of Geddie’s house, and began to excavate the mission’s printing press building (recovering thousands of pieces of lead type in the process). The Lapita occupation produced fairly abundant pottery and shell artefacts. During the field school students also exposed and mapped a large cemetery dating to the mission period and collected sediment samples from a nearby swamp to use in palaeo-environmental estimation. The artefacts and sediment samples from this fieldwork are undergoing analysis, in many cases by the field school students themselves as part of independent study research projects. We are learning much about two vitally important events—the first human colonisation of Vanuatu and the first extended European residence amongst the indigenous people of Vanuatu—and we plan to return next year for another field school to extend our investigation of both the Lapita and mission periods.
Between 17th and the 27th September I travelled to Europe to submit my PhD thesis, which in Oxford, must be handed over to Examination schools in person - no online submission at this 800(ish - they don’t actually know how old the university is) year old university.

As it happened, the 3rd annual European Society of Human Evolution (www.eshe.eu) conference was being held at the University of Vienna (Vienna, Austria) the week before I was due to submit. This society was formed in 2011 primarily by the crew at Max Planck (Leipzig, Germany), and is steadily growing in size. Held each year in an attractive European city (2011 Leipzig; 2012 Bordeaux; 2013 Vienna; 2014 Florence; 2015 London), this conference brings together leading scientists and exciting projects in the field of human evolution. A (happy) quirk of these conferences (which was started by Bordeaux - not surprisingly) is the inclusion of a local bottle of wine in the conference pack. I would definitely recommend that anyone working in Modern Human Origins research to consider attending the future conferences!

This year, in Vienna, the contribution of Australian archaeologists became more noticeable. Michael Haslam (Oxford) presented the first paper of the conference on what is generally referred to as ‘monkey archaeology’ (the conference proceedings begin with the earliest archaeological contexts to be discussed and moves forward ‘chronologically’). Kathryn Fitzsimmons (formerly of ANU) also presented a paper, and I myself presented two posters (one with a German colleague - Martin Street of the RGZM). A number of Australian researchers also attended the meeting; including Richard Fullagar, Iain Davidson, Phil Habgood and Natalie Franklin.

Another bonus of the ESHE conferences is the field trips. These trips allow participants to visit important Palaeolithic sites located near the venues - this year the trip was to Willendorf (of Venus figurine fame) and Krems-Wachtberg (site of a Gravettian infant double burial). The excavators of each site are on hand to introduce you to the site and explain the context of the most well-known finds. These trips also tend to include boat trips down the local river (this time the Danube) and stops to local wineries - so all in all - the field trips are a very archaeological experience (that is, great archaeology and great wine all rolled into one day).

After this ‘working holiday’ in Vienna, it was time to head to Oxford to submit the theses copies which had been weighing down my suitcase. Oxford was still full of tourists and students were only just beginning to return for the start of the academic year at the beginning of October. Luckily, thesis submission didn’t require me to wear sub-fusc (the Oxford academic uniform) as walking around in these garments tends to make you a target of photo happy tourists. I now have a 2 month break before having to return to Oxford for my viva (which does require me to wear sub-fusc!) and am now busy writing up the PhD research into publishable papers here in CAP.
New Dates For Old Bones:

By Dr. Richard Gillespie

Last April on a visit to Vertebrate Palaeontology at Museum Victoria, I selected two bones from Spring Creek, a megafauna site in western Victoria, for analysis. After establishing in my home shed lab that both bones had collagen, standard Longin gelatin was prepared and taken to the Radiocarbon Facility in RSES. With the able assistance of Rachel Wood, the Spring Creek bone gelatin samples were hydrolysed. The resulting amino acids were purified using the non-ionic resin XAD-2, graphitised and measured by Stewart Fallon on the small accelerator housed where the old scintillation counting laboratory built by Henry Polach in the 1960s used to be. Preliminary results indicate that the partial humerus of *Palorchestes azael*, previously dated inconclusively ca. 25-35,000 BP by two overseas laboratories, is actually >50,000 BP and thus not a late surviving megafauna taxon. The other bone dated was a metatarsal from an extant red kangaroo (*Osphranter rufus*), which Tim Flannery had suggested should not belong with the megafauna assemblage. Our result came out around 12,000 BP, confirming Tim’s hypothesis. We are confident that these new results will stand because a MIS 5e bone previously measured on ultra-filtered gelatin by the Oxford laboratory at >50,000 BP came out in our control sample also >50,000 BP using the XAD-2 protocol employed for the Spring Creek bones.

Recent Publications

For all those of you who said ‘what?’ when I mentioned that I was attending the 2013 ASHA conference! It held at the Former Kings School in Parramatta, NSW on the 5th and 6th of October 2013. I had never been to Parramatta before and was astonished. It is ‘Australia’s second oldest city, part of the World Heritage Convict Sites Listing and home to a significant Aboriginal and Historical archaeological resource which is increasingly threatened by fast paced urban development’ and it is rather lovely. I spent some time in the beautifully conserved and much loved St John’s Anglican Cathedral (1802 – put that in your Canberra Centenary!), saying g’day to many ghosts of the early settlers of Sydney whose commemorations are there. I learned that in 1788 Governor Philip chose this site as the furthest navigable point inland on the Parramatta River to begin farming for the colony (the soil and conditions around the Harbour where not the best for agriculture).

Modern day accommodation was tight as there was a Parramala Bollywood type festival on around us, the Fleet was in the Harbour and the local football grand final was on Sunday 6th.

The program began for me with a Parramatta Archaeological Sites Walking Tour on Friday 4th, led by Dr Siobhan Lavelle of the NSW Heritage Division. We visited some archaeological sites that were conserved over a decade ago, notably the old hospital site in the forecourt of the Courthouse buildings. Award-winning structures protect the remains while allowing and interpreting viewing, but the surrounding new buildings with several floors of underground car parks have altered the hydrology and the sandstone footings and drains now require annual removal of lush growths of ferns and tobacco. In company with most heritage authorities, funds for ongoing management are hard to persuade out of government pockets. There were some good news stories too, with convict gardens and huts interpreted in bank and apartment buildings and an early building associated with the first hospital well conserved and used. Siobhan’s comments and frank sharing of difficulties as well as wins made the tour very useful.

The conference theme highlighted the archaeology of urban places, to return the conference to its roots with a focus on all aspects of archaeological practice. Presentations considered the results of archaeological investigations of urban sites and what these narratives can tell us about the development of the environments we live in, including people, places, and technology. For me it was like coming home as I used to attend most of the ASHA Conferences and having only one session at a time takes away the pain of choosing which talks to miss and trying to find the right venue.

The presenters followed suggestions to focus on the meanings of places, how people see them, use them and present them, rather than mere data. The variety was exciting, including some NZ missionary tales, archaeological exposure of some notorious historical figures, old burial grounds, reclamation and waterfront development, the production and advertising of beers, an early silk hat, dendrochronology of kauri and the archaeology of incarceration. I learned a lot from the thoughtful consideration of the presentation of historic sites and what they mean to the owners, including Indigenous groups. Steve Brown won the best presentation prize by entertaining us with the story of how he salted a bucket from a dig on a former mission site and describing his auto-ethnology of belonging, the finds from digs around his own house. And yes, he did get permits to dig!

Next year ASHA will be held at the same time as AAA, in Cairns, so I can recommend taking in at least some of their presentations. As I work in both historic and deep time archaeology, I can’t see the sense in sticking entirely to one or the other in a country with such a recent imported history which quickly becomes shared history.

I’ll leave you with a picture of our conference dinner location – actually in a marquee out the back, but we did get a detailed guided tour of the House from devoted National Trust volunteers.

New investigations into the prehistory of the Talaud Sangihe Archipelagos

In September and October 2013 a joint research team including Balai Arkeologi Manado, Universitas Gudjah Mada, and the Australian National University were involved in the exploration of new late Quaternary prehistoric sites on the Talaud and Sangihe islands, northeastern Indonesia. From the ANU’s department of Archaeology and Natural history were Dr Christian Reepmeyer, Dr Julien Louys, Feli Hopf, and Stuart Hawkins. Over three weeks were spent on the Talaud islands of Karakelang and Salibabu. During that time, two archaeological excavations were undertaken at rockshelters – the first at Mande’et, where archaeological and faunal material was recovered to a depth of ~40cm – and the second from a newly discovered cave called Pangindirawan. Extensive surveys of the island were also completed, but yielded few additional potential sites. A week was spent in Sangihe Besar, mainly in trying to locate the source of the stegodon fossils that had been reported from the island. Unfortunately, the stratigraphic origin of the fossils was not discovered, although the fossils were examined by the team.

…I learned that in 1788 Governor Philip chose this site as the furthest navigable point inland on the Parramatta River to begin farming for the colony…”
Wandering and Wondering in Weipa:
By Billy Ó Foghlú

Last month, Dr Sally Brockwell, Dr Jack Fenner, Helen Cooke and myself journeyed back up to the Cape York Peninsula for the final fieldwork season in what has been a gigantic and all-encompassing project. Helen spent a number of scorching days studying the old Running Creek cattle yards, and interviewing former workers in order to reconstruct a picture of what life was like for the traditional owners who worked in this industry. The site, though prominent in both the landscape and the memories of the traditional owners, is disappearing more and more with every bushfire, which makes Helen’s work that much more important. Helen also discovered a number of traditional campsites in the Running Creek area from the 1970’s, and was able to trace back the traditional family groups who had created each site. By bringing members of the Traditional Owner community out onto Country, Helen could document their history as they recounted in detail how, why and where they once lived and camped in days gone by. Helen also made a number of prehistoric discoveries around the old cattle yards that point to the site being a hub of prehistoric activity as well, and also spent a great deal of time working with Traditional Owners out on country in other parts of Weipa; recording old songs and stories and histories that future generations will now be able to hold on to.

Dr Jack Fenner was able to record and map a large number of historic and prehistoric sites, and Dr Sally Brockwell and myself were able to continue our studies into the Earth Mound sites of Weipa. In this season, I was able to excavate a number of earth mounds that differ from those in seasons past in a number of interesting ways. For instance, the dominant shellfish species discovered on this season’s sites, is not *anadara granosa* (of mighty shell mound fame), but *polymesoda coaxans* and this represents the exploitation of a different resource through the same (and at times mysterious) means. Whether these sites date to a different time or the same time as the *anadara granosa* dominated sites, it represents a new, riveting aspect of this site typology that has not been explored until now. I also had the good fortune to survey and record a number of modern traditional oven sites, and was able to talk to the traditional owners who had constructed and used them. This enables me to better paint the picture of how oven building and oven use changed (or indeed remained the same) over the course of two millennia in the Wathayn region. I was also lucky enough to find a number of stone artefacts in situ in my earth mound sites, which is for Weipa, and indeed many parts of Cape York, a respectively minute artefactual representation when one considers the reliance the people of the past had on organic implements in such stone poor areas. However, far superseding any other aspect of the fieldwork season was my chance sighting of the famous “Bauxite Bill”, Weipa’s celebrity crocodile, who was actively engaged in the task of chasing a tugboat out of Albatross Bay for reasons known only to himself.
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Research in Archaeology and Natural History at the ANU School of Culture, History and Language aims to understand prehistoric human societies, the environments in which they developed and the environmental consequences of human presence. Departmental research ranges from southeast Asia and the Pacific, through the tropical forests of New Guinea and the savannas of Australia, to the islands of Oceania.

Field research in ANH is supported by well-equipped laboratories that were fully updated and refurbished during 2009. Our laboratories support research into prehistoric textiles, archaeobotanical remains, rock art, prehistoric environments, zoological material and ceramics. ANH houses the largest pollen reference collection in Australia, as well as plant, bone, shell and ceramic collections. We also have access to world-class ANU facilities for archaeological dating, stable isotope analysis, and electron microscopy.

Upcoming Events ...

Morning Teas
24th October: Hosted by Mark
5th of November: Hosted by Fenja and Billy

Lunchtime Talks
Please sign up for empty time slots with Janelle.

Conferences

AAA2013 will be hosted by Archaeology and Palaeoanthropology, University of New England. The theme for 2013 will be 'Complexities of Scale' and we hope to embrace a variety of approaches that explore the diverse spatial and temporal scales in understanding archaeologi- cal data sets in the context of radiometric and other chronologies, environmental and climatic data and explanatory frameworks. The conference venue will be the beautiful Novotel Pacific Bay Resort, Coffs Harbour.

The conference will take place over 3 or 4 days, following a welcome reception on the evening of Sunday 1st December 2013.

The conference paper sessions have now been announced. For further information please refer to http://www.australianarchaeology.com/conferences/aaa2013-conference/