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Archaeological Aspects Of Aboriginal Settlement

Of The Period 1870-1970

In The Wiradjuri Region

by

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Frontispiece: Above - unidentified household at their bough shelter, Condobolin 1932
Below - bulldozing an Aboriginal camp, 1965 (Aborigines Welfare Board of NSW photographs)
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[Signature]

Pete Maroon Kramer.
Synopsis

This study explores the archaeology of the lives of the descendants of Wiradjuri Aboriginal people of central New South Wales, Australia (fig. 1.1), through an investigation of the new forms of settlements that arose in the period following European arrival. The historical process of dislocation and resulting settlement patterns are used to reflect upon the question "Who are Wiradjuri?".  

The study contains a survey and analysis of over 50 Aboriginal missions, fringe camps and community settlements in southeastern Australia, geographically based on the former Wiradjuri Aboriginal language region, and of the disappearing ways of life that such places document. The study covers approximately a one hundred year time frame stretching from the consolidation of pastoral land holdings and small selections in Wiradjuri country circa 1870 to the resettlement of the region's Wiradjuri descendants into suburban houses after 1970. While the extent of the study area is based on a previous estimate of a region covered by the now-extinct Wiradjuri Aboriginal language, the study also includes several places outside the region which have strong connections with Wiradjuri people. Wiradjuri are seen not in isolation, but in the light of post-colonial time and space.

Combining ethnography, archaeological survey and theoretical approaches from other disciplines, the author seeks to understand Aboriginal people's experience of home-building and urbanisation in country which their ancestors knew in a very different way. Methodology for the recording and analysis of settlement is examined. The methods developed by this work differ substantially from previous archaeological and historical treatments. The approach is interdisciplinary and compares information from the written record and oral testimony with the direct observation of archaeological and architectural features, resulting in reconstructions of settlement layouts. This developed approach is then employed in the work to assist in analysing the distribution and layout of the surveyed settlements, and to shed light on a wide range of historical and social questions.

Vulnerability of Aboriginal people to other's representations of them is a central concern of the work. The approach taken here is that Aboriginal people were specific to their time and therefore cannot be understood simply by imposing the categories of the present. The author's analysis confronts many of the contradictions between cultural continuity and change, and helps create a bridge between indigenous people of the past and those of the present.

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1 In this work Wiradjuri has been used without the definite article. The purpose of avoiding the phrase "the Wiradjuri" is to eliminate the idea that there is any simple homogeneity of identification, views or understandings about what it means to be Wiradjuri or how one claims to be Wiradjuri. It is also to make it clear that the author makes no claim to speak for or represent all Wiradjuri and follows a practice for referring to Ngun(a)wal in Peterson and Carr (1998: 10).
Acknowledgments

In the 1980s I became interested in exploring the way in which archaeological survey would illuminate recent Aboriginal community experience. Like most archaeologists I had done fieldwork on prehistoric Aboriginal stone scatters. But unlike most archaeologists I came from a design/construction and graphic background rather than a literary background because I practise as an architect. I found help amongst three archaeologists who have helped me bridge the gap between my visual approach to telling the story and the essay-writing approach of my archaeological colleagues. They at various times provided criticism, advice and encouragement. Isabel McBryde suggested the project as a natural extension of my earlier work on Warangesda Mission. Ian Farrington and Wilfred Shawcross helped to resolve some of the tensions inherent in the use of language in this project, which aimed to reach three quite different audiences: the archaeologists with a theoretical "bent", the Aboriginalists and members of the general reading public.

For my original ideas in this work I am indebted to the many Aboriginal people whose reminiscences and views I have recorded and to some extent absorbed. They contributed their personal memories and helped with the interpretation of surface surveys. The amount of collaborative work with Aboriginal people ranged from a single telephone conversation to research over weeks, when I returned time after time to "fine tune" earlier impressions. Everyone contributed in their own way. I am grateful particularly to:

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Archaeology requires fieldwork involving students and teamwork in which people from other disciplines have often assisted. In the fieldwork I received help from Ian Brady, Michael Brown, Simon Lewis, Kyle Moffitt, Dominic O'Dwyer and Darren Rowsell. Tim Power, Assistant ACT Statistician, provided recent census data. From time to time, specialists commented on particular artefacts, particularly Theo Bishoff, antique bottle specialist, and Michael Jones, ceramics valuer. Fieldwork was partly funded by research grants from the NSW Heritage Office, sponsored by the Wiradjuri Regional Aboriginal Land Council. The PhD scholarship provided by the Australian National University assisted immensely in feeding my household of five while simultaneously carrying out research.

No researcher is an island, to paraphrase the well-known saying, and every project is likely to overlap other research work being done within the academic community. I conferred with fellow researchers who read parts of the fieldwork reports or manuscript or offered advice on their fields of expertise: Lindsay Smith on the archaeology of ethnicity; Tom Knight and Ben Evans on stone tool analysis; Wilfred Shawcross on designing categories for artefact analysis and Dr Annie Clark on chapter layout. This work was also helped by the critical eye of Prof. Peter Dennis who offered editorial assistance and proof reading of the final draft.

The production of the work required many illustrations. While I am well versed with technical drawing, I am particularly grateful to Edward Radclyffe for applying his artistic rendering skills to some of my drawings. My father Prof. Algis Kabaila has been resident computer adviser throughout this project and my wife Amanda Gaunt agreed to put up with it all by shouldering much of the load of our architectural practise while the research was being written up. My greatest friend in the thesis writing process was my supervisor Ian Farrington, who agreed to read chapter drafts many times through various stages of their progress. Ian also applied his gift of being able to quickly diagnose where the problems lay and find approaches for their solution. Notwithstanding the assistance of all of these people, any errors or omissions are my responsibility alone.
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