

RESULTS OF AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE HUNTER RIVER VALLEY, NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA

Part II: Problems of the lower Hunter and contacts with the Hawkesbury Valley

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INTRODUCTION

The first part of this report, published in 1970, described the survey and excavations carried out in the upper Hunter Valley from its source down to the Singleton area and in the Goulburn Valley from its rising on the watershed of the Divide down to its junction with the Hunter near Denman. The sites selected for excavation were all found to be Bondaian throughout (i.e. backed blades and microliths predominated). The valley sites were dated to around 2000 BP, whereas the one site excavated outside the valley on the Divide, near the headwaters of the Goulburn, appeared to date from about 7750 BP. (But see note at end of introduction.) At this stage, the number of occupation sites investigated was not sufficient to form any conclusions.

On completion of this section of the project at the end of 1967, the intention was to continue the survey downstream to Maitland and the Hunter estuary, in order to provide material for a comparison between Aboriginal exploitation of the freshwater and tidal zones of the river system. However, after extensive reconnaissance, it became clear that any occupation sites on the lower Hunter likely to contain *in situ* remains had been obliterated or destroyed by the intensive European use of the region.

As was described in the historical introduction to Part I of this report, the timber of the lower Hunter was progressively stripped from 1802 onwards and subsequently the fertile alluvial flats were extensively modified for agriculture and grazing. In addition, the valley periodically suffered devastating flooding. Around Newcastle itself vast areas of estuarine shell middens were removed and burnt for lime to make mortar. From the start of settlement in 1801 the progressive exploitation of coal seams also brought about substantial modification of the landscape. A particularly drastic change was the removal of cover upstream from the Hunter-Paterson junction by cedar-getters during the 1830s and 1840s. The early surveyors, such as Henry Dangar, reported impenetrable scrub and rainforest on both sides of the river for several miles (see Wood, 1972: 2-3) and this may well have formed an effective barrier to communication between the Aborigines of the lower and middle Hunter in prehistoric times. It is also possible that this was a survival of a

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