

Additional Evidence for pre-1788 Visits by Pacific Islanders to Norfolk Island, South-West Pacific

JIM SPECHT

Australian Museum,
PO Box A285, Sydney South, NSW 2000, Australia

ABSTRACT. One of F.D. McCarthy's earliest professional papers was a report of stone tools on Norfolk Island which he interpreted as evidence for pre-British visits by Pacific Islanders, probably from Polynesia. Since McCarthy's paper (1934), additional artefactual, biological and historical evidences have supported his original conclusions. The present paper describes further finds and concludes that the evidence is firmly in favour of Pacific Islanders visiting and using the Kingston area of Norfolk Island about 700 years ago and, probably, again at a later date. These visits originated in the East Polynesian area, possibly the Society or Cook Islands and New Zealand, though a landing from Melanesia cannot be ruled out. Why there was no population on Norfolk at the time of its discovery by Cook in 1774 remains unanswered, but the answer probably lies in a range of factors. Further progress on understanding the island's prehistory requires the location and excavation of *in situ* deposits.

SPECHT, J. 1993. Additional evidence for pre-1788 visits by Pacific Islanders to Norfolk Island, South-west Pacific. Records of the Australian Museum, Supplement 17: 145-157.

Norfolk Island was one of the few Pacific islands that was uninhabited at the time it was first visited by Europeans. Yet circumstantial evidence for earlier visits to and possibly occupation of the island by Pacific Islanders was reported from the first days of the British penal colony established there in 1788 (*cf.* Thorpe, 1929). In one of his first publications F.D. McCarthy (1934) described the discovery of flaked stone tools in the Emily Bay area of the island (Fig.1). Reviewing these finds in the light of archaeological and historical evidence, he concluded that these tools most likely indicated that Pacific Islanders, probably from East Polynesia, visited and perhaps settled the island some time before Cook's visit in 1774.

A review of historical evidence and finds reported

from the late 18th century onwards, combined with the results of a brief field survey in 1976, supported McCarthy's interpretation, suggesting that the island was visited at least once, possibly twice, by people from East Polynesia prior to 1774 (Specht, 1984). Stone tools of forms paralleled in Australia and Melanesia were discounted as evidence for landings from those areas, and their arrival on the island after 1788 was tentatively accepted. Subsequent work by biologists in the Kingston area (Rich *et al.*, 1983) revealed evidence at about 700-800 years ago for a major burning episode that might have been caused by human activity, and the appearance of the Polynesian rat (*Rattus exulans*), which is widely regarded as a commensal of humans in the Pacific (e.g., Williams, 1973; Roberts, 1991). The radiocarbon dates