

Fishbone from the Emily Bay Settlement Site, Norfolk Island

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ABSTRACT. Fishbone from the settlement site at Emily Bay and excavations in West Emily Bay was identified on the basis of five mouth parts, checked against eight paired bones and some multiple and unique bones. The number of specimens (NISP) was counted and the Minimum Number of Individuals (MNI) calculated to display relative abundance of families. Lethrinidae dominate all assemblages, with Carangidae, Labridae and Serranidae as significant secondaries. Many specimens are large examples of the species. The domination of benthic feeders implies baited hooks, used over submerged reefs close to shore, were probably the most common technology. There are no deep water species present. Norfolk Island fishing appears to be very like that of prehistoric New Zealand.

WALTER, RICHARD, AND ATHOLL ANDERSON, 2001. Fishbone from the Emily Bay settlement site, Norfolk Island. In *The Prehistoric Archaeology of Norfolk Island, Southwest Pacific*, ed. Atholl Anderson and Peter White, pp. 101–108. *Records of the Australian Museum, Supplement 27*. Sydney: Australian Museum.

Norfolk Island is one of a band of widely dispersed subtropical Pacific islands stretching from Australia to South America (Francis, 1993: 136). The three easternmost of these islands, Lord Howe, Norfolk Island and the Kermadecs, lie on the fringes of southwest Polynesia (SWP) near the southern limit of the tropical convergence zone. These SWP islands exhibit features of both temperate and tropical Pacific ecologies and share a number of common features of archaeology and biogeography.

In archaeological terms, the Kermadecs and Norfolk are both “mystery islands” (Kirch, 1988; Irwin, 1992; Weisler, 1996) and Lord Howe might well fall into the same category if archaeological remains exist there. The first two of these small, isolated islands were settled during the Polynesian expansion in East Polynesia, but were abandoned some time before European arrival. The reasons for abandonment appear to have been partly ecological and partly to do with

the social and economic problems of isolation. The SWP islands all lie in proximity to larger, continental landmasses and this fact also may have affected the course of their prehistories.

In terms of marine biogeography, it is difficult to define a separate province for the SWP islands but they do share general features in common, and are unique from other Polynesian islands. The most characteristic of these is the mixing of tropical and temperate fish faunas and the maintenance of biogeographic links with their continental neighbours: Norfolk and Lord Howe Islands with Australia, and the Kermadecs with New Zealand (Francis, 1993: 148). They also maintain biogeographic links with one another and all three display low rates of marine vertebrate endemism. In several features of fish diversity, Norfolk Island falls into a position mid-way between Lord Howe and the Kermadecs (Table 1).