

Prehistoric Settlement on Norfolk Island and its Oceanic Context

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ABSTRACT. The likelihood of Polynesian settlement of Norfolk Island was recognized in the eighteenth century, but archaeological remains of a settlement site were only discovered in 1995. The excavation history of the Emily Bay site is summarized, its date put at about the thirteenth to fourteenth century A.D. and its East Polynesian nature, especially its contacts with the Kermadecs and New Zealand, recognized through its artefacts. The faunal remains show a dominance of fish and birds, and low diversity within each. The reasons for ending the settlement are unknown but speculated upon and several future research priorities noted.

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There are two small archipelagos in the northern Tasman Sea. One of them, consisting of Lord Howe Island and Ball's Pyramid, has never produced any evidence of prehistoric human settlement, even by extensive test-pitting, coring and drilling (Anderson, 1996a, Macphail, 1996). In the other, consisting of Norfolk Island, Nepean Island and Phillip Island—the Norfolk Island archipelago—indications of earlier habitation were observed from the beginnings of European settlement. These were, and remained, enigmatic, namely, clusters of bananas growing in Arthur's Vale, the existence of small rats, pieces of wrecked canoes and other wooden artefacts which were ascribed variously to origins in Tonga or New Zealand, and from the interior of the island some stone adzes and chisels. By A.D. 1793 Commandant King, clearly influenced by the fact that two Maori taken to Norfolk Island had recognized the newly-discovered stone tools as Maori "toki" (adzes) from the North Island (New

Zealand), concluded that the various pieces of evidence constituted "a feasible proof" of Norfolk Island having once been settled from New Zealand (King, 1793, cited in McCarthy, 1934: 267).

If this seems a prescient observation now, it was not one that the history of archaeological discovery subsequent to 1793 and prior to the current project would have easily allowed. Many stone adzes and flakes, recovered particularly from Emily Bay and adjacent areas, were of forms regarded as generically East Polynesian, but some Norfolk Island collections were found by Specht (1984) to contain many stone implements, and some of shell, in non-Polynesian forms and materials, Melanesian types especially. Further examples of non-Polynesian implements, not recorded by Specht, occur in the Norfolk Island Museum collection, where they were catalogued by Anderson (n.d.). Since New Caledonia is relatively close to the north and