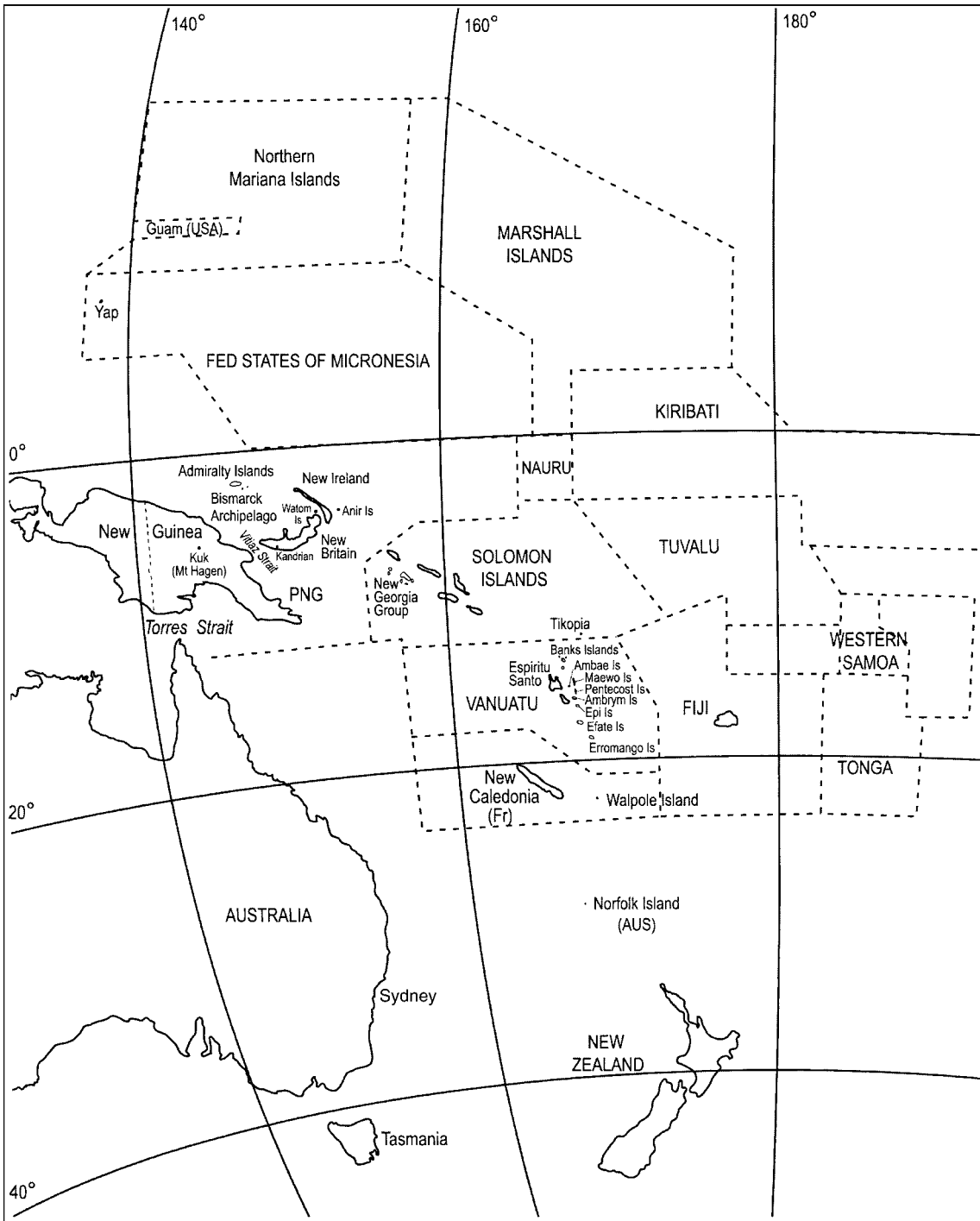


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Countries and key places referred to in this volume indicating the geographical extent of Jim's research and influence.

Preface

A core of papers in this volume was first presented at a one-day conference held at the Australian Museum on the 11th November 2000, titled “A Pacific Odyssey: Recent Archaeological Discoveries, on the occasion of Jim Specht’s retirement”. It was Robin Torrence’s idea that the conference present and discuss the results of important recent discoveries in Pacific archaeology with case studies from Micronesia, Polynesia and Melanesia. The idea was embraced by the Museum, and the program, introduced by the Australian Museum’s director Mike Archer, included presentations by scholars from around the world: Steve Athens (USA), Chris Gosden (UK), Christophe Sand (New Caledonia), Peter Sheppard and Richard Walter (NZ), and Australia: Tim Denham, Anita Smith, Matthew Spriggs, Glenn Summerhayes and Meredith Wilson.

Although the number of speakers was limited to ten, the audience numbered over one hundred. The day of stimulating papers was followed by a celebratory dinner at the Museum. Highlights of the evening included addresses by Phil Gordon (Head, AM Aboriginal Heritage Unit), Des Griffin (past AM Director), John Namuno from the West New Britain Cultural Centre, the late Mrs Grace Molissa from the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, and Kirk Huffman (past Director of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre), and many of Jim’s colleagues at the Museum and other institutions.

In addition to papers presented at the Symposium, contributions to this volume come from others working in Jim’s areas of interest. The volume includes 19 papers by 26 authors. All of the authors and the editors have in some way been influenced by Jim’s work, and this is brought out by many of the authors in their papers. His archaeological work also extended to eastern Australia where in 1975 he was involved in excavating a number of Aboriginal middens at Bantry Bay in Sydney Harbour—the current research area of one of the volume editors. The papers acknowledge Jim’s achievements and the contributions that he has made to the development of archaeology and anthropology of the western Pacific. Excluding the introductory tribute and bibliography, the papers are presented in alphabetical order by first author’s name. This is because there was no obvious grouping of themes according to geography, subject or object—from front to back the volume presents a wide-ranging set of papers addressing issues relating to environment, repatriation, agriculture, settlement history, historical collectors, trade, pottery, obsidian and rock art. This ordering, however, perhaps reinforces the breadth and diversity of Jim’s contributions to a variety of disciplines and organizations with which he worked.

Although the conference and this volume were organized to celebrate Jim’s retirement from the Australian Museum, he has maintained his interest in and still contributes to the discipline. He continues to work in West New Britain and to publish his research. He has also been chair of the Archaeology and Prehistory Committee at the Academy of the Humanities and an Expert Advisory Committee member with the Australian Research Council. Will he ever really retire?

There are many people to thank for bringing this volume to publication; these include not only the contributors, but also many anonymous referees, staff at the Australian Museum, and Fiona Roberts for producing the map opposite. Needless to say we are both indebted to Jim Specht for his wonderful generosity of spirit as much as his academic acuity and leadership.

Richard Fullagar, Senior Research Fellow, Department of Archaeology, University of Sydney.

Val Attenbrow, Senior Research Scientist, Anthropology, Australian Museum.