

Pre-European coastal settlement and use of the sea: A view from Queensland

Sean Ulm¹, Bryce Barker², Andrew Border³, Jay Hall², Ian Lilley¹, Ian McNiven⁴, Robert Neal⁵ and Mike Rowland⁶

We draw attention to important omissions in the chronology of Australian coastal occupation presented by Nicholson and Cane (1994) in their recent review of the subject. In the Queensland section of their review, Nicholson and Cane (1994:110-11) state that coastal settlement is confined to the last 2000 years in the Moreton Bay area, and to the last 1500 years for the remainder of the Queensland coast, with the exception of Princess Charlotte Bay, where occupation is dated to 4700 BP.

For the Moreton Bay area, Nicholson and Cane (1994:111) make the erroneous claim that 'no sites older than 2000 BP have been recorded.' In fact, there are five reported coastal sites in this region (Hope Island, New Brisbane Airport, Sandstone Point, Toulkerrie and Wallen Wallen Creek) and two more immediately to the north (King's Bore Sandblow, Teewah Beach 26) which pre-date 2000 BP (Fig. 1, Table 1). These results have been published for some time and have been discussed extensively in the general literature (e.g. Lourandos 1993; McNiven 1992a, 1992b; Walters 1989, 1992a, 1992b).

Wallen Wallen Creek dates to at least 20,560±250 (SUA-2341), but it is not considered to have been a coastal site until about 7500 BP (Neal and Stock 1986). Four other coastal sites in the area are dated to earlier than 2000 BP, although results are not yet published.

Evidence from southeast Queensland comprises the largest regional coastal archaeological data set available in the state (and indeed one of the most extensively documented in Australia), with some 48 dated coastal sites. Although occupation in the region is evident around the time of sea level stabilisation, most sites are first occupied after 1500 BP. The implications of this chronology for models of cultural change in the region are discussed elsewhere (Hall and Hiscock 1988).

We also note that excavations on a number of offshore islands on the central Queensland coast are omitted from the Nicholson and Cane synthesis. Excavations at Mazie Bay on North Keppel Island (Rowland 1981, 1982a, 1983, 1985) and Nara Inlet 1 on Hook Island (Barker 1989, 1991) have revealed coastal occupation dating from the early to

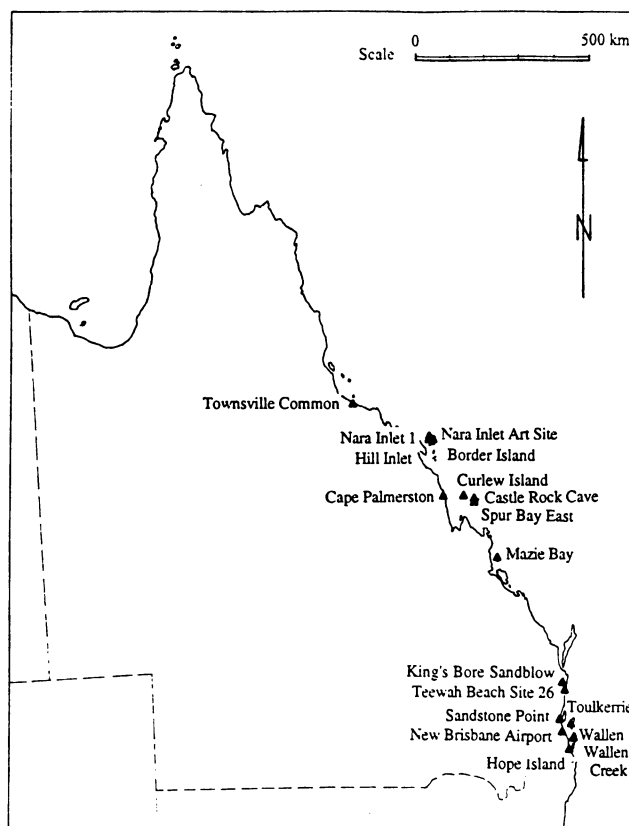


Figure 1 Queensland, showing sites referred to in the text.

mid-Holocene. Indeed, Barker's (1989, 1991, 1993) research in the Whitsunday Islands has provided the oldest evidence of human occupation within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park with sites on Hook Island and Border Island dating to around 8000 BP and 6500 BP respectively. Barker's (1989, 1991) investigations at Hill Inlet on Whitsunday Island and Border's (1994) excavations on Curlew Island demonstrate occupation by about 3000 BP. Two other sites on Middle Percy Island (Castle Rock Cave and Spur Bay East), some 60 km from the present coast, were occupied prior to 2000 BP, indicating that marine-oriented cultural systems were well developed by this time (Border 1994). More recently, Barker and Schon (1994) have published a date for the Nara Inlet Art Site on Hook Island, also indicating occupation before 2000 BP.

Although few dated sites have been reported on the mainland coast between Fraser Island and Princess Charlotte Bay (cf. Campbell 1982a, 1982b; Rowland 1982b, 1989), sites at Townsville Common (Kelly 1982) and Cape Palmerston (Border 1994) have demonstrated coastal occupation dating before 2000 BP, in the first case by a substantial margin.

- 1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit, University of Queensland, Brisbane, QLD 4072, Australia.
- 2 Department of Anthropology and Sociology, University of Queensland, Brisbane, QLD 4072, Australia.
- 3 Cultural Heritage Section, Department of Environment and Heritage, PO Box 5391, Townsville Mail Centre, Townsville, QLD 4810, Australia.
- 4 Department of Classics and Archaeology, University of Melbourne, Parkville, VIC 3052, Australia.
- 5 Cultural Heritage Section, Department of Environment and Heritage, Jetset House, 288 Edward Street, Brisbane, QLD 4000, Australia.
- 6 Cultural Heritage Branch, Department of Environment and Heritage, PO Box 155, Brisbane, Albert Street, QLD 4002, Australia.

Site	¹⁴ C Age	Laboratory No.	Reference
Border Island	6440±90	Beta-56976	Barker 1993
Cape Palmerston	2350±70	Beta-64372	Border 1994
Castle Rock Cave	2300±90	Beta-64373	Border 1994
Curlew Island	2930±120	Beta-54204	Border 1994
Hill Inlet	2720±120	Beta-34060	Barker 1991
Hope Island	4350±220	Beta-20799	Walters et al. 1987
King's Bore Sandblow	3560±100	Beta-25510	McNiven 1992c
Mazie Bay	4140±70	SUA-2183	Rowland 1985
Nara Inlet 1	8150±80	Beta-27835	Barker 1991
Nara Inlet Art Site	2410±80	Beta-45186	Barker and Schon 1994
New Brisbane Airport	3910±80	Beta-23345	Hall and Lilley 1987
Sandstone Point	2290±100	Beta-15810/B	Walters 1989
Spur Bay East	2510±130	Beta-64374	Border 1994
Teewah Beach Site 26	4780±80	Beta-25512	McNiven 1991
Toulkerrie	2290±80	Beta-32047	Hall and Bowen 1989
Townsville Common	3760±130	GaK-7225	Kelly 1982
Wallen Wallen Creek	6950±80	SUA-2343	Neal and Stock 1986

Table 1 Published pre-2000 BP dates for coastal sites in Queensland. All dates are on charcoal, except for Beta-56976 and SUA-2183 which are on marine shell.

We draw attention to this issue because we feel that Nicholson and Cane have omitted crucial data concerning Aboriginal use of the Queensland coast. We appreciate the difficulty of providing an overview of what is now an extensive coastal literature. Nevertheless, Nicholson and Cane have failed to refer to some basic and easily available literature on the Queensland coast.

Occupation of the Queensland coast south of Cape York Peninsula is clearly not confined to the late Holocene as Nicholson and Cane suggest. We argue that both the Pleistocene and Holocene coasts of Queensland were extensively used by Aboriginal people and that further research is required to define the archaeological expression of these activities. Investigations at several sites (e.g. Nara Inlet 1 and Wallen Wallen Creek) have demonstrated the potential to locate long sequences on both the mainland and offshore islands (e.g. Barker 1991; Neal and Stock 1986), while the possibility of locating submerged sites on the continental shelf has been little explored. These views are consistent with the emerging pattern of coastal occupation for Australasia in general (e.g. Allen et al. 1989; Morse 1988, 1993; O'Connor 1989; Veth 1993; cf. Beaton 1985).

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WJ

Still flawed: A reply to Pardoe (1994) and Sim and Thorne (1994)

Peter Brown

For different reasons I would like to thank the three authors (Pardoe 1994; Sim and Thorne 1994) who responded to my criticism of Sim and Thorne's (1990) research on King Island. Colin Pardoe agrees with my criticisms of Sim and Thorne's (1990) research methodology and the conclusions that they draw from it. However, he disagrees with my assertion that data of the type offered by Sim and Thorne should not be published. This is an important issue and I would like to discuss an example which I think may persuade him, as well as others with similar views, to change their minds. I must admit some surprise at the nature and content of the second reply to my article (Sim and Thorne 1994). While I think that they have scored a number of own goals some of their remarks do require discussion.

I have argued (Brown 1994) that data like those recorded by Sim and Thorne (1990) for the King Island skeleton should not be published as they cannot be corroborated or challenged by others. As a teaching academic I believe that the most important talent to develop in a student is a

capacity for critical thinking. I would be appalled if one of my Honours students accepted an article I had published, or an article published by anyone else, at face value. It is essential to the future of our subject that students be encouraged to critically compare published data. This is only possible where observations have been recorded and discussed by a variety of people. Ideally this should be over an extended time period to account for changing research emphasis and methods of analysis. The alternative is a complete inability to distinguish fact from fiction and may as well be written as 'Mills and Boon' to begin with.

Pardoe (1994:7) argues that 'in a sense, there is nothing wrong with using data from skeletal remains that have been reburied' because the actual measurements may be corroborated by future discoveries. Although I agree that in an evolutionary sense it is the population that is important, rather than the individual, the history of our subject emphasises the importance of reassessment of individual fossils. I suspect that the books we read today may have had a very different emphasis if Piltdown had been lost in 1927 (Spencer 1990) and Taung had not been discovered (Dart 1925). After all we are members of a sexually dimorphic

Department of Archaeology and Palaeoanthropology, University of New England, Armidale, NSW 2351 Australia.