

terra australis 24

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Coastal Themes: An Archaeology of the Southern Curtis Coast, Queensland

Sean Ulm





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Foreword

THE RESEARCH DOCUMENTED here represents the first systematic archaeological work in this area of the southeast Queensland coast and was undertaken as a major part of a larger, multi-component project concerning archaeology and cultural heritage in the traditional country of Gooreng Gooreng speaking people. Sean's task was to build upon the results of exploratory site survey and excavation to address two key concerns. The first was the relationship of patterns of cultural change in his study area to those described elsewhere in southeast Queensland. The second was to ensure that any such comparisons were taphonomically well-founded, particularly with regard to the analytical integrity of the shell middens upon which he and other coastal researchers in Australia rely so heavily.

Sean took to this task with a vengeance, closely surveying a large area of landscape and excavating an array of site types to provide himself with a solid sample of the archaeological variation thus revealed. Though most were not archaeologically rich, these sites provided substantial grist for Sean's taphonomic mill, prompting him to adapt conjoining techniques to work on bivalve shellfish — a simple but clever innovation — as well as to undertake much more sophisticated work on local variation in correction factors for the radiocarbon dating of marine shell. In the end, he was able to distil the three-phase cultural sequence he describes in this volume, 'hygienically' dated on the basis of reliable correction coefficients and demonstrably high degrees of stratigraphic integrity in his middens. The patterns he identified accord with those from other parts of coastal southeast Queensland, suggesting widespread major restructuring of coastal occupation strategies in the archaeologically very-recent past, and particularly the last 1,000 years. Sean was also able to demonstrate that Aboriginal people were still using the area, and often the same sites that had been used for substantial periods in pre-European times, well after they disappeared from the documentary historical record, thus emphasising the importance of archaeology as an independent record of Aboriginal life in the historical period.

Ian Lilley

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