

where Sylvia made a contribution characteristic of her thorough scholarship particularly in addressing the historical record of observations about the behaviour of Aboriginal people at contact, and through her open-mindedness about the standard narratives that compare Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. White, with a mastery of the bibliography of regional and world literature on the theoretical and substantive issues, a mastery that might encourage all of us as we get older, returns to a theme he addressed more than forty years ago – the question of agriculture in Australia (White 1971). White concludes that the question of whether there was agriculture in New Guinea and not in Australia is a product of the way we have framed the question (rather as Lourandos [2008] also concluded) and that if we concentrate on the organisation of behaviour in relation to plants (as Hallam's original reading of the historical literature suggested) and the social and demographic consequences of that, then the whole problem disappears. I hope the paper stimulates more work in this direction, and I am sure Sylvia would too. That her careful work could inspire such a reassessment is a tribute to her perspicacity. I join the authors in celebrating this.

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#### Changing Perspectives in Australian Archaeology: Papers in Honour of Val Attenbrow

Edited by Jim Specht and Robin Torrence

Technical Reports of the Australian Museum,

Online 23:1-174 (2011). ISSN 1835-4211.

Free on line: <http://australianmuseum.net.au/journalfinder>

Unlike many edited festschrifts which tend to be eclectic affairs, the contributions to *Changing Perspectives in Australian Archaeology* coalesce around two major themes mirroring those that have underpinned Val Attenbrow's extraordinary contribution to Australian archaeology. First

is an attention to detail and careful scholarship to reveal new details about the past. Second is the use of multiple (and often novel) analyses and approaches to tease out the factors underpinning assemblage variability. Contributors pick up on many aspects of Val's work, including documenting variability in stone artefact assemblages, adopting landscape approaches and, of course, exploring the meaning of change itself.

Peter White opens the volume with an appreciation of Val's contribution to advancing real and meaningful 'regional' archaeology in Australia. As noted by many others, Val's Upper Mangrove Creek study stands as the most rigorous and detailed regional study seen through to completion, probably only rivalled by her subsequent Port Jackson Archaeological Project. As White notes, Val took advantage of her unique positioning as a consultant and public servant prior to joining the Australian Museum and her continuing close involvement with applied archaeology done by the Australian Museum Business Services and collaborations with academics (most notably at the University of Sydney and the Australian National University) to access the widest dataset possible. White concludes that emulation of Val's efforts in other major centres would lead to productive insights in other regions.

Several of the contributors explore Val's beloved Sydney Basin and nearby areas (Irish; Tacon *et al.*). Reading these contributions reminded me of comments a contemporary of Val's once made to me that at the time Val took up her appointment at the Australian Museum they could not see any potential in 'doing' an archaeology of Sydney and expressed genuine surprise that Val had made such a success of it! Paul Irish highlights the continuing lack of interest in protecting post-contact Indigenous sites, falling squarely between the cracks of legislative protection regimes and academic interests. Irish's preliminary results from the Sydney Aboriginal Historical Places Project echo those of Val's Port Jackson Archaeological Project, with an enormous database in evidence in highly urbanised areas, and also demonstrating previous blinkered approaches to the documentation and protection of historical Aboriginal cultural places.

Val's ongoing contributions to refining archaeological methods are clearly reflected in the papers by Sullivan, Hughes and Barham using geoarchaeological techniques to distinguish natural from cultural shell deposits near Port Hedland and Ross and Tomkins' contribution investigating the impact of sieve sizes on fish bone recovery in Moreton Bay. Ross and Tomkins show that the supposed late onset of fishing in the region is likely to be an artefact of inadequate recovery methods (with 12% of the fish bone by weight in their sample passing through the 3mm sieve). These findings are probably conservative given Ian Walters' unpublished 1979 honours research that 80% of fish remains pass through 3mm mesh.

Several of the papers focus on stone artefact analyses, another persistent theme in Val's research. Douglass and Holdaway's extensive study of cortex in western NSW lithic assemblages demonstrates an under-representation of cortex

on stone artefacts in areas of high local lithic source availability, which they interpret to result from artefact transport strategies to equip mobile populations. Frankel and Stern use a technological analysis of a small assemblage from Karremarter rockshelter in southeast South Australia as a basis for questioning the 'chain of interference linking tool categories to foraging risk' (p. 70), showing an apparent lack of correlation between backed artefact abundance and risk. Hiscock again elegantly shows how ineffectual typological approaches are in accounting for observed stone artefact variability at Jimede 2 in western Arnhem Land, demonstrating a single reduction process for both unifacial and bifacial point production.

Use-wear and residue analyses are represented in the contributions by Robertson and Fullagar. Robertson's analysis of the backed artefact assemblage at Lapstone Creek finds that, like in her other collaborative work with Val in the Sydney Basin, they are multifunctional in use. Richard Fullagar revisits his early postgraduate work on use-wear and residues on the Aire Shelter 2 in western Victoria, concluding that the site was not a base camp, but rather a hunting camp where bone point production took place.

The volume is rounded out with another excellent contribution by Asmussen in a series of articles on Cycad and Macrozamia use, this time using the historical record to tease apart the differences in processing and use of seeds between *Bowenia*, *Cycas*, *Lepidozamia* and *Macrozamia*.

In their preface, the editors comment that Attenbrow's work is distinguished by 'her willingness to undertake long-term projects that do not yield immediate results, but with meticulous attention to detail and resolution of methodological and theoretical issues, she has brought them all to fruition' (p. 2). One wonders in the competitive environment that many of us find ourselves in today with immediate turnaround expectations that future research will produce results as enduring in significance as those of Val and her peers.

The volume reminds us not only of the scholarly impact of Val's ongoing contributions in many fields of contemporary practice but, as warmly expressed in many acknowledgements throughout the volume, in her key enabling role in creating opportunities for others, her mentoring and collegiality; you are one of a kind, Val.

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### **The Statues that walked: Unraveling the mystery of Easter Island**

**By Terry Hunt and Carl Lipo**

Free Press, New York, 2011. ISBN 978-1-4391-5031-3.

Pp. 237. US \$26.00 (hb)

Without doubt, no single island among the many thousands that dot the vast Pacific has engendered more controversy and debate than remote Rapa Nui, or Easter Island. In part this has been driven by the supposed "mystery" of the

megalithic *moai* or statues, but other aspects of the island's culture and history – especially the dynamic relationship between the island's Polynesian population and its windswept, largely treeless island environment – have also attracted scholarly attention. Many Rapa Nui experts have argued that Polynesian land use practices led to the island's deforestation and, prior to European contact, ecological devastation, population collapse, social conflict, and war. This model was explicitly proposed by John Flenley and Paul Bahn in *Easter Island, Earth Island* (1992), whose title encapsulates their view that Rapa Nui offers a parable for the Earth today. The "ecocide" scenario was widely popularized in *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (2005), in which Jared Diamond argues that Easter Island provides "the clearest example of a society that destroyed itself by overexploiting its own resources" (p. 118).

In *The Statues That Walked*, a book intended for a broad lay audience, Terry Hunt and Carl Lipo challenge the model of pre-European ecocide on Rapa Nui. They aim to turn the received model on its head, presenting a vision of pre-European Rapa Nui as a marvel of human adaptability in which the island's population "crafted a life of ... delicate ecological balance" (p. 175) until this utopia was shattered by the arrival of Europeans bringing disease, slavery, and death. According to Hunt and Lipo, Rapa Nui's history is one of "near genocide, not self-inflicted 'ecocide'" (p. 168).

Hunt and Lipo do not dispute the palynological evidence for wholesale removal of the island's natural *Jubaea* palm dominated forests, but argue that the proximal cause of deforestation was predation on palm seeds and seedlings by the human-introduced Pacific rat (*Rattus exulans*). While the effect of rats on seedling recruitment and forest regeneration was doubtless significant, Hunt and Lipo gloss over the evidence for charcoal influxes into the lake sediment cores, and of burned palm boles in paleosols. Thus, they leave the reader dangling regarding "the relative impacts of rats, fires, and the felling of trees by the colonizers on Rapa Nui's deforestation" (p. 31).

In chapter 3 ("Resilience") the authors offer new evidence that the Rapa Nui were clever innovators who adapted their horticultural practices to the island's poor soils. Drawing largely on the work of Joan Wozniak and Chris Stevenson, Hunt and Lipo describe the practices of lithic mulching and use of walled gardens (*manawai*). This part of the Rapa Nui story was not fully appreciated by Diamond; the demonstrated effectiveness of Rapa Nui in converting much of their landscape into "an engineered series of massive fields fertilized by broken volcanic rocks" (p. 53) evokes quite a different picture from that of thoughtless slash-and-burn cultivators cutting down the last palm tree.

Chapters 4 and 5 take up the theme of the "mystery" of how the *moai* statues were transported to dispersed *ahu* sites around the island. Hunt and Lipo begin with the ancient roads, known since the time of Katherine Routledge (1914–15), but mapped recently using satellite imagery. Drawing on the ideas of Charles Love, the authors argue that