

Old News

The Canberra Archaeological Society Newsletter
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**CHANGE OF
VENUE!!!**

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2005 Public Lecture Series

Wednesday 20 April 2005

7.30 pm, **Hayden Allen Building HAG053**, ANU

ENVIRONMENTAL CATASTROPHES: NEW LESSONS FROM HISTORY?

Through the use of ice cores, radiocarbon dating, tree-ring analysis and other techniques the environmental and biological sciences are providing increasing knowledge of environmental catastrophes in the past. Some examples are briefly described: the volcanic winter due to the Mount Toba eruption, Noahs' floods, the A.D. 535 event, drought and the Mayan collapse and the post- Columbus depopulation of the New World. There is much controversy about these events and popular interest in them. Two appropriate questions about these catastrophes are what has been their relative importance in determining historical development and are there any lessons for our society?

Mike Austin had a professional career with the CSIRO as a plant ecologist. Now, semi-retired, he is developing an interest in the interaction of environment with human history through the Independent Scholars Association of Australia (ISAA)

All welcome, entry is by gold coin donation at the door.

Please join us afterwards for light supper and a chat – find out how ‘down to earth’ archaeologists really are.

The Travelling Archaeologist

Episode 1.

By Fenja Theden

That is the frustrating thing about visiting an archaeological site as a tourist: you are likely to come across a deserted place that reveals perhaps a few stone walls or contours. At most a handful of signs explaining the site's 'significance' to the world. If you are incredibly lucky you may arrive at a site that has been granted an interesting interpretative centre. Hundreds of kilometres driven, and the most information available to be absorbed on a casual visit (unless you have done a good deal of research beforehand) is that which every city tourist can read and understand in passing. None of the juicy archaeological stuff you were after: drama during the excavation, details on how excavations or studies were actually undertaken, conflicts in interpretation of the evidence, or new material that just does not seem to fit in with the old theory.

In the upcoming issues of the Old News, I would like to share some impressions of a few of the archaeological sites visited in recent times as an amateur archaeologist. Perhaps for each of these sites, one little bit of interesting information can be found that is not commonly mentioned in the guidebooks?

Let me begin on the Isle of Lewis, in Scotland, where the area around Calanais is home to over 20 stone monuments erected around 3000 years ago. The most famous of these is Calanais I, a complex arrangement of around 50 stones.

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The Travelling Archaeologist

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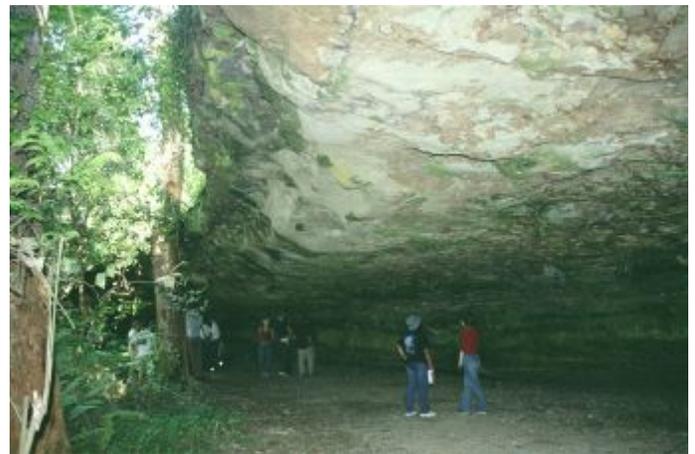
My encounter with this site was during one of those trendy backpacker tours that show you every part of Scotland within 5 or 6 days. It was a cold and rainy September day, the last tour of the season, and we were herded through someone's backyard into this arrangement of stones, trailed by a local dog. Impressive, but limited in its breathtaking ability by a rickety wire fence surrounding the perimeter. I had run out of camera film and thus resorted to buying a postcard in the next village. Half an hour standing in the sleet and not knowing what exactly to marvel at, and we were back in the minibus, heading to Loch Ness or some other famous place next on our list.

A visitor centre actually does exist close by, unfortunately not included in the itinerary of backpacker tours. It portrays the usual explanation of why stone circles were constructed – as ritual and ceremonial centres, used to mark significant points in the lunar cycle. However, a new study by the University of Manchester questions what we actually know about the role and purpose of prehistoric monuments in Britain. The project began in 2002, hypothesising that the particular importance of these circles was their construction, particularly the quarrying and dragging of the massive monoliths, rather than the finished product. The project identifies monolith quarries and 'destroyed stone circles' around Calanais, and implies that the actual rock and the place it came from are its important aspects, more so than the erection of the features themselves. The project is ongoing, to my knowledge no conclusions have been reached.

This is the type of controversy that stimulates interest and should be far more publicised. Although, I must admit that I remain unconvinced by this particular theory. Personally, I have watched far too many ABC documentaries highlighting the mystical qualities of stone circles, and see the survival of stone circles to this day as evidence enough that they were built for duration, not just for the exploitation of poor workers and a quick project to impress the neighbours. But then again, who knows what actually did happen 3000 years ago at these cold and windy sites across Britain?

CAS GOES TO THE SOUTH COAST

A big thanks has to go out to our field trip organiser, Lad Nezman, for a fantastic couple of days gallivanting about the coast looking at archaeological sites. Everyone had fun learning about our largest rock shelter, shell middens, axe grinding groves, and industrial sites...a couple of days on the coast were fun too!



Burrell Lake Rock Shelter





Inspecting an exposed shell midden



The remains of an old port



The group in front of a controversial scarred tree

2005 Lecture Series

7.30pm in Manning Clark Theatre 6 (unless specified)

Date	Speaker	Title
16 March	Mal Booth	One Night In May: Uncovering the real story behind the capture of an outpost in Vietnam.
20 April	Mike Austin	Environmental catastrophes: new lessons from history?
18 May	Andrew Fairbairn	Çatalhöyük and Pýnarbaþý: Windows on the origins of agriculture in Turkey
15 June	Ralph Sutherland	TBA
20 July	Peter White	Axes and Ares: stone tools of the Duna and their implications
17 August	Kim Owens	Farmers, Fishers and Whalers: The settlement landscape of Lord Howe Island
21 September	Kath Szabo	The Ebb and flow of tradition in an island world: Shell beads in island Southeast Asia
19 October	Richard Hekimian	The Duntroon Dairy
16 November	Peter Dowling	Archaeology and the ANZACs

Call for contributions

We've had a few articles written by CAS members for Old News...have you got something archaeologically interesting to say? An anecdote? A joke?...contact the editor at the details below....seriously, this is your newsletter, and it can only be as interesting as you make it!

Ad Space

Got anything archaeological to advertise? If you know of, or are running fieldwork this year and you need volunteers, or you want to volunteer for work, then drop us a line, and we'll advertise it for you in Old News. Websites and archaeological events are also welcome!

2005 CAS COMMITTEE CONTACT DETAILS

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Apologies for any quality issues in this edition, but I am putting it together while doing fieldwork and don't have access to the usual computers/software to make any necessary changes- Richard Hekimian