

Marginal Archaeology: Cultural Resource Management and the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service

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This paper presents the views of the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service Historical Archaeologist on the research potential of the Services estate. World Systems Theory and the Frontier Model are explored as possible approaches to places which in many instances reflect failed and abandoned enterprises, thus presenting unique and reasonably intact archaeological sites.

This paper is about the archaeology of a part of New South Wales which usually receives little consideration: the marginal lands that are regarded as being too rough, too distant or too economically difficult for permanent settlement. Much of this land is under the control of the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service. This paper has been prompted by a need to understand the archaeological significance of this resource, both for immediate management concerns and to direct management and research in the future. It will form part of a continuing effort to develop appropriate research strategies for the investigation of the archaeology of land settlement in New South Wales.

In this paper I will briefly discuss the historic resources that the National Parks and Wildlife Service manages, their significance, and how they can be used as evidence to understand the settlement of New South Wales. A broad archaeological research strategy will be proposed to take advantage of the unique opportunities presented by the sites within the marginal lands of New South Wales. Organisations such as the National Parks and Wildlife Service are in a critical position to be able to contribute to an understanding of the past through archaeology but are hampered by a variety of organisational constraints. Adopting standing research designs is recommended in this paper as one way of overcoming some of these difficulties.

This research strategy is relevant to all land conservation bodies in Australia and New Zealand. The pattern of site distribution to be described here is likely to occur elsewhere, inviting comparison. This paper emphasises the importance of comparative assessment of the process of settlement in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, not just between Australia's colonies and states, but as part of the phenomenon of the creation of industrial empires with large dependent colonies.

A research design based on World Systems Theory is proposed, as this offers a powerful explanatory tool for the process of nineteenth and twentieth century colonisation and settlement. The potential of the historic places owned by the National Parks and Wildlife Service for the investigation of broad questions of settlement and occupation is addressed, with particular emphasis upon short-duration, ultimately unsuccessful and intermittent land uses.

THE RESOURCE

The Service is currently completing a survey of what is known about the historic resources that it owns. The study is relying on a mixture of previous survey work, historical research and limited new investigation. From the preliminary results of the survey about two thousand historic places which retain some physical evidence of former land use have been identified. This includes at least one thousand buildings, huts and structures, the earliest being an artillery battery built in 1802 and Cadmans Cottage, built in 1815-1816. In addition there are abundant remains of many hundreds of other structures and land uses, which survive as archaeological sites. Industrial relics and the remains of pastoral activities also survive in large numbers.

The Service directly controls about 5% of New South Wales, which is over four million hectares. Its estate consists of 68 national parks and more than 230 nature reserves, historic sites, Aboriginal areas and recreation areas. The distribution of these reserves is uneven throughout the state, and they do not equally represent the full range of environments. The great majority of land owned by the Service has little value for farmers and graziers, because it is comparatively rugged, inaccessible or unprofitable.

Most of this land has been reserved to preserve its natural values, such as the presence of rare species or attractive scenery, despite the fact that historic places occur throughout these areas. Although these areas may never have been settled, many so-called 'natural' or 'wilderness' areas show extensive exploitation of natural resources by grazing, mining, quarrying and timber-getting. It is only because these activities allowed rehabilitation back to a 'natural' state that they are reserved.¹

The historic places found on Service estate generally reflect the process of settlement and occupation in response to local conditions, a process described by Carl Sauer as involving 'the physical character of the country,...the civilisation that was brought in and...the moment of history involved'.²

The identified historic places on Service estate represent a number of themes which relate to the expansion of settlement westwards, the development of infrastructure to allow occupation, such as transport and communications, the relationship with Aboriginal

populations and the identification and extraction of resources from the environment, such as the already mentioned mining and forestry. This interaction of culture and environment results in regional and temporal variants of general forms of settlement.

One example is that of standing vernacular structures including huts, homesteads and village houses. Geoff Ashley has demonstrated the effect of local conditions on vernacular building styles.³ This results in a range of distinct forms which exhibit continuity within a particular region despite the introduction of new materials and technologies. This is as true for recreational buildings, such as the huts in Royal National Park and elsewhere along the coast, as it is for more recognised regions such as the Riverina homestead. In the case of huts, one of the main drives was to achieve at least some isolation from the city, as a response to urban industrial society.⁴ The form of the buildings and the small settlements they developed into was determined by the availability of materials, access and topography, and the opportunities available to a class of people to have leisure and holidays from work.

Pastoral properties were similarly influenced by topography and economic conditions. Yathong Nature Reserve, in the centre of the State, contains a former pastoral property settled in the mid 1860s. It was well removed from the major rivers in the Riverina, whose frontages had been settled since at least the 1820s. Exploiting the backblocks was only possible with new water management and bore-digging technology, but the success of the properties depended upon the investment of capital into such works, and this was almost entirely determined by investors based in Sydney and Melbourne. The pattern of rural investment and land reform legislation from the 1860s strongly favoured urban interests over rural ones.⁵

Other pastoral properties owned by the Service also indicate the same pattern of dominance by urban interests and accommodation to local environmental conditions. Initial settlement relied on exploration and appropriate technology, but it was the pattern of investment and economic control which provided the dominant influence in the history of each property. A good example is that of Willandra Homestead. It operated as one of a chain of pastoral properties under one owner stretching from the Darling Downs to Victoria, providing a network of runs and stock routes which allowed for the flexible movement of stock to different markets.

RESEARCH POTENTIAL

One of the consistent characteristics of the historic places owned by the Service in the marginal lands, and even in areas close to Sydney, is that many of them were failed enterprises, never achieving the purpose for which they were built. Examples include the Old Great North Road⁶ which was made redundant by better transport routes elsewhere, the Gara River hydro-electric scheme,⁷ which failed twice for environmental and economic reasons, and the defences around Sydney.⁸

The importance of the failed enterprises as an archaeological resource is particularly high. Usually these were abandoned without substantial modification or later re-use and therefore have an integrity which is valuable for research and interpretation. In other cases, e.g. Sydney's defences and the Gara River hydro-electric scheme, the way that the schemes were modified reveals much about contemporary perceptions of economic and environmental conditions, which may be completely wrong.⁹ The study of failure can reveal much about the operation of capitalism at different times and the pressures it put on particular types of industries or regions. The

study of failed enterprises requires the development of appropriate models of land settlement and occupation which can take advantage of this sort of evidence.

MODELS OF SETTLEMENT

Archaeologists have begun to examine the process of colonisation under the general philosophical guidance of World Systems Theory and under more detailed models dealing with the mechanics of occupation, but which rely upon the same premises.¹⁰ World Systems Theory is the most important and powerful explanatory tool for studying the nineteenth century, especially when allied with social theories of industrial societies, such as Marxism. World Systems Theory basically describes the unequal movement of capital from the periphery of an economy to a core area. These geographically derived terms describe a spatial patterning of an area with high resource consumption supported by a larger area whose resources, such as capital, labour or agricultural produce, are never fully returned to it.

The core area seeks to maintain and perpetuate its advantage by a variety of social, economic and ideological mechanisms which legitimise this unequal access to resources. The modern world system began with the rise of Britain as a world power during the Industrial Revolution, creating a core-periphery network which spanned the globe. Typical of the exploitation of peripheries for the benefit of the core are such actions as 'farming' colonies to produce and export raw materials, processed in the core and sold back to the colony.

The theory provides an explanatory model which can be tested by direct archaeological investigation. Some studies, have already established research projects within the context of World Systems Theory.¹¹ Archaeological investigation can operate at a number of scales from the global to the individual. Particular issues which can be investigated include examining the different technologies used to settle and occupy lands, and using them to understand patterns of capital investment, looking at common patterns of resource exploitation in different colonies, and examining how individuals constructed their lifestyles in the core and periphery and how much control they had over their own lives and the mismatch between their perceptions and reality.

One particular model which has been developed for the westward expansion of American society in the nineteenth century by Kenneth Lewis is the Frontier Model.¹² This is based, in name at least, on Frederick Jackson Turner's hypothesis that the expanding frontier produced unique conditions which influenced Americans' self-perception and relationship with the environment. The Frontier Model takes this as a starting point to examine the economic, social and cultural adaptations which are made by societies that are expanding their boundaries and have a frontier where they are in contact with other, generally indigenous, cultures.

Lewis explicitly tied the Frontier Model to a more general model of core-periphery relationships, which are the basis of World Systems Theory. All core-periphery models operate on the presumption that the unequal distribution of resources between core and periphery can be manipulated and maintained by a variety of social, ideological and economic mechanisms. Testing whether this is in fact the case is difficult and requires a sample region of much broader dimensions than that usually adopted in archaeological research.¹³

Lewis studied one particular town, Camden, in South Carolina, and posited a series of hypotheses of what should happen if the adaptive changes predicted by the Frontier Model were, in fact, occurring. Although testing

some of these hypotheses produced equivocal results, there were clear demonstrations that Camden's spatial patterning, economic and social structures were consistent with the Frontier Model's expectations. These included changes in the distribution of land as the density of settlement increased, a dendritic settlement pattern based on a major *entrepôt* and adoption, with modification, of forms of material culture and behaviour from the settlers' homelands.

The parallels between America's westward expansion and that of Australia are clear, although these differed greatly in detail. Taken alone, Turner's hypothesis applies only to the American West as a unique phenomenon, but recast as a model by Lewis it becomes suitable for comparative analysis. Lewis's Frontier Model is still explicitly concerned with North America, but the process of creating and expanding the frontier has been shown to exhibit considerable variation. A frontier model should be able to be developed and tested in an Australian context. It should, further, be able to show what are the unique factors which affected the Australian experience, and what are the underlying common factors in European colonial expansion.

The strength of the National Parks and Wildlife Service sample of historic places rests in its temporal and geographic spread and variety. The range of different historic themes represented by these sites covers many of the critical aspects of exploration, settlement and occupation of the land.¹⁴ The emphasis on marginal lands and the high proportion of failed enterprises also makes the places in the park and reserve system much more likely to retain archaeological integrity, with little subsequent redevelopment.

A model taking advantage of these characteristics of the sample would be based upon Lewis's Frontier Model, but would need much more to emphasise rural land. Lewis's model, while dealing with the settlement of a large area, was tested in a township. The key to understanding how settlement took place and what the influences of the environment were is much more likely to be reflected in isolated rural sites. As shown earlier, there are clear indications in vernacular architecture of the influence of local environmental conditions on building style which remain despite changes in material and technology. Also the pattern of failures (and by definition the pattern of successful enterprises) will provide a detailed resource for understanding the influence of broad economic patterns, dictated from the capital cities or overseas, on how particular areas were settled and how well they fitted into core-periphery systems.

CONCLUSIONS

The obligations of a heritage conservation body go beyond the acquisition and protection of historic resources. Resources have to be understood for their various values and the contribution they can make to an understanding of the past and present.¹⁵

The role of the Service in conducting historical archaeological research has never been properly defined, and to date has consisted of equal parts crisis management and pursuit of personal research interests. It is recognised that this will not let us come to grips with the archaeological resource and its potential. Therefore adopting a World Systems Theory perspective, as it applies to Australian history as an explicit research area for future archaeological projects to be carried out by the Service would produce benefits. It would stop the usual obsession with seeing historic places as unique. It would provide a perspective on the relationships between different types of sites and areas. Most archaeology in the

Service is done as part of conservation work. This is usually driven by immediate management concerns. Acceptance of a research design would allow particularistic studies to contribute to a broader perspective, something that is totally lacking under the current situation and which undervalues sites and their potential archaeological and historic significance.

One example, typical of the sort of conservation work regularly undertaken by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, would be with pastoral homesteads. The patterns of additions and changes to the fabric of buildings should reflect the ups and downs of the rural economy, and also the various levels of investment made by city bankers and financiers, rural development groups and families of landed gentry. The investigation of these issues is realistic within the scope of a brief conservation plan and creates a benchmark to evaluate archaeological significance, by assessing whether a particular historic place has potential to address particular research questions.

None of this is likely to happen in the short-term, but it is necessary to look at this as an organisational responsibility. The ability of one individual to dictate and coordinate an organisation's research over any length of time is not high, but this sort of scope is needed when both the resource and investigations which produce data are so dispersed.

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NOTES

1. Gojak 1988a.
2. Sauer 1930; Wynn 1983.
3. Ashley 1990.
4. King 1980.
5. Gammage 1990.
6. Karskens 1984.
7. Gojak 1988b.
8. Gojak 1985; Wilson 1985.
9. Gojak 1988b.
10. Wallerstein 1979; Jeans 1988.
11. e.g. Murray 1988.
12. Lewis 1984.
13. Paynter 1985 and 1989.
14. Pearson 1981.
15. Murray & Allen 1986.

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