

PLASTIC PIPES IN FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY

Peter White and the 1988 Hawker team

*to think of all the marvellous ways
they're using plastics nowadays*

(T. Lehrer)

Stemming, no doubt, from the 'fix it with fencing wire' school of Australian bushcraft, Australian archaeologists have not been slow to employ various appliances in ways doubtless unconsidered by their makers. We report here on a lightweight set of materials which can make the field archaeologist's burdens considerably lighter.

1. Electrical conduit is made of PVC tubing, 20 mm (0.75 in.) in diameter and is, at least in shorter lengths, quite rigid. It comes in two 'weights', that is, thicknesses, the lighter being grey and the other orange. For most uses the heavier one is not necessary.

It is also possible to purchase 'corners', right angles of moulded plastic which clip onto the tubing. With careful measurements, it is possible to make an exact metre square (internal measurement) which loses only a few millimetres right at the bend in each corner. There are, however, several brands of corners, some of them less acutely angled than others.

This metre square is invaluable for surveying, being accurate and light. It is also good for laying out sample squares for excavation. Disassembled, it is compact and unobtrusive. Should it be in heavy or long-term use, we have found that binding the corners with plastic packaging tape stops any slippage. It is also possible to increase the rigidity of the sides (and give some extra stability in high winds) by inserting a length of wooden dowel in each side before assembly. Finally, should any part be lost it can be replaced at almost any hardware store.

2. Larger diameter PVC tubing, such as 50 mm or 100 mm, is also readily available in many hardware stores, even in Papua New Guinea. JPW has found that 200 mm lengths of this provide excellent samplers of pollen and soils. Lengths of new clean tube can be sharpened at one ends with a file and then be simply hammered into section walls and removed with their contents. The tubes may

themselves be directly labelled, the ends sealed with plastic bags taped on, and are easily transported. This equipment is simpler and cheaper than that suggested by Beaton (1985), but no less efficacious.

We expect other researchers will have further suggestions for this versatile material.

Acknowledgement

We now know Judy Birmingham thought of the survey squares first. The 1988 Hawker team consisted of (in no particular order): Ron Lampert, Stan Florek, Angela Kenny, Daniel Tangri, Pat Leo, Dave Cameron, Greg Wyncoll, Lisa Hill, Kathy Sale, Samantha Edwards and Jacqueline Carless, but imagine writing all those names into a bibliographic reference.

Reference

- Beaton, J.M. 1985 A method for estimating organic matter content in archaeological sediments. **Australian Archaeology** 20:28-31.



Stan Florek using a plastic metre square to sample the surface site at Hawker