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All correspondence and submissions should be addressed to:

Australian Archaeology

PO Box 10, Flinders University LPO

Flinders University SA 5048

Email: journal@australianarchaeology.com

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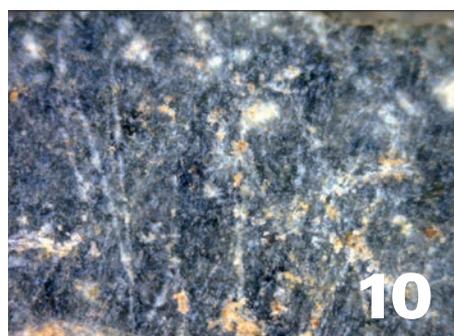
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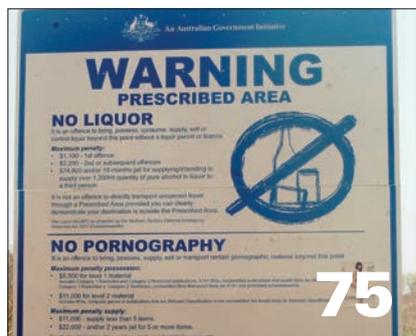
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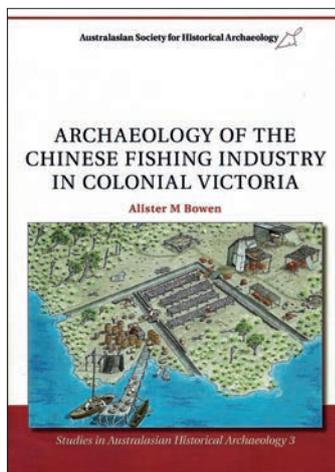
Book Reviews

***Archaeology of the Chinese Fishing Industry in Colonial Victoria* by Alister M. Bowen**

2012. Studies in Australian Historical Archaeology 3. Australasian Society for Historical Archaeology, Sydney, xiv, 177 pp. ISBN 781920899813 (pbk).

Reviewed by Neville Ritchie

Department of Conservation, Private Bag 3072, Hamilton 3240, New Zealand <nritchie@doc.govt.nz>



Every so often a graduate student identifies a research topic and finds a great representative site from which considerable knowledge can be gained by the application of historical archaeology. This book, based on PhD research and now published in the Australasian Society for Historical Archaeology (ASHA) series, encapsulates the results of the all-but-

forgotten contribution of the Chinese fishing industry in eastern Victoria during the second half of the nineteenth century. The book is much more than just a story about catching and preserving fish; it is a revealing insight into many facets of traditional Chinese social and business structure and the way these developed in colonial Australia.

Prior to the 1860s, the development of the fishing industry in Australia was hampered by the problems posed by the transportation of fish to markets: during the 1850–1860s it was common for whole catches to putrefy before getting to market. The influx of Chinese gold miners, who regarded fish as a dietary staple, increased its demand and prompted the creation of many Chinese fish-curing establishments. As they were purchasing large quantities of fish, the Chinese created a new and reliable market for European fishermen. The fish-curers supplied their compatriots in Melbourne and on the goldfields with both fresh and cured fish. They made sums of money far greater than any contemporary European fishing operation and for many years created hundreds of jobs for both Chinese and Europeans in the fishing industry.

Archaeology of the Chinese Fishing Industry in Colonial Victoria is a fascinating story through which Bowen ably demonstrates the major role that Chinese migrants played in the southeast Australia fishing industry for nearly three decades (late 1850s–1870s). Fundamental to their dominance was the use of long established

traditional methodologies (such as salting and pickling) to overcome the problems of preservation and transportation prior to the availability of ice-cooling and refrigeration. The story also highlights how the Chinese fish-curers lived, worked and interacted in colonial society and why they seemingly disappeared from Australian history, both literally and figuratively. They did not disappear without trace, however, as Bowen cogently demonstrates through his research based on sparse documentary evidence, archaeological surveys and his detailed investigation of the Chinaman's Point site (the best preserved of the remaining Chinese fish-curing sites).

The monograph begins with a succinct review of theoretical perspectives and an outline of previous relevant archaeological and historical research in Australia. Chapter 2 traces the history of commercial fishing in Australia and gradually focuses in on Victoria and coastal Gippsland in particular. Chapter 3 examines China's nineteenth century fishing industry and the importance of fish in the Chinese diet. The following chapter is a thorough examination of the documentary evidence about Chinese fish-curing in colonial Australia and the Chinese involvement in commercial fishing. This reveals a far greater level of participation than previously realised and puts to bed the notion that Chinese fish-curers were 'down on their luck' ex-gold miners. On the contrary, Chinese fish-curing was an established practise in Australia nearly a decade before the Victoria gold-rush era, and involved a complex inter-relationship between entrepreneurial Chinese merchants and those working for them.

Chapters 5 and 6 outline the field methodology and results of the survey and excavation of the Chinaman's Point site. Comparative analysis (including extensive recourse to American and New Zealand literature and assemblages) indicates that the Chinaman's Point site assemblage represents a fairly typical colonial period Chinese site. The industrial artefacts and structural remains confirm that it was a fish-curing establishment and the site's occupants caught the fish themselves. The author has made special effort to verify hypotheses about the use or role of artefacts found in overseas Chinese sites which are often taken for granted, on occasion offering alternative explanations. The detailed analysis and interpretation of the recovered materials and remains of structures is particularly informative about the means and operations of the Chinese fish-curers at Chinaman's Point and their wider interactions with both Chinese communities and Europeans.

Chapter 7 continues to focus on the site by dating as accurately as possible the occupation period at Chinaman's Point, while the second half of this chapter discusses the more significant information gleaned from the artefact analysis. The final chapter brings together the evidence from all avenues of the inquiry. The conclusions confirm the significant contribution this published volume makes to developing an informed viewpoint about the Chinese experience in colonial Australia, especially regarding their massive contribution to Victoria's fishing industry during the mid- to late nineteenth century.

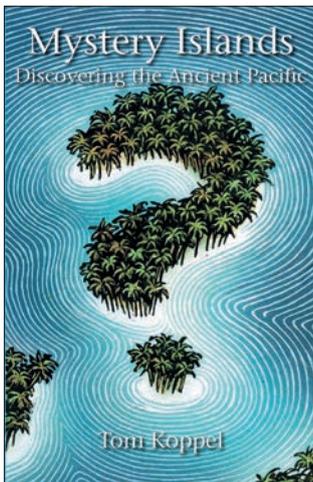
This highly readable, well-illustrated monograph provides access to the knowledge gained from a very good PhD project. It elucidates a forgotten or missing chapter in the overall history of Chinese settlement in Australia (there are other missing chapters too), and highlights the significant role a small specialised sector of the nineteenth century Chinese migrants (the fish curers) played in the development of the Victorian fishing industry.

***Mystery Islands: Discovering the Ancient Pacific* by Tom Koppel**

2012. University of the South Pacific Press, Suva, Fiji, xv + 339 pp. ISBN 978-982-01-0888-2 (pbk).

Reviewed by Matthew Spriggs

School of Archaeology and Anthropology, College of Arts and Social Sciences, The Australian National University, Canberra ACT 0200, Australia <Matthew.Spriggs@anu.edu.au>



This is not a book for Pacific specialists and so it is quite a challenge for one of them to review it. Indeed, the audience is a bit unclear, particularly given its publication by a university press in Fiji. I can imagine it being placed on reading lists for interested first year geography or history students, say, at the University of the South Pacific—it is certainly more up-to-date than much of their current class

materials on archaeology in the region. But it doesn't seem to be addressed to Pacific Islanders per se. The author is a travel and science writer and the book mixes both—I would have thought distinct—genres. Given Koppel's own travel experiences, I would plump for an intended audience of interested Canadian and American 'yachties'.

That said, the interest of such general or 'popular' works to Pacific archaeologists is perhaps twofold. Firstly, it is always interesting to see what the wider public out there understand about our findings, and what we have so far failed to convey about them. Secondly, we should be producing more works aimed at various audiences in the region, including Indigenous, visitor and non-Indigenous residents; and we don't do enough of this. Could a specialist have written such a book as this? Probably not. We are hopefully more conscious of the limits of our knowledge than to take on the overly-ambitious range of issues covered in this book, and our continual cautious hedging of bets on issues would tend to bore the reader.

I was impressed by a generally very knowledgeable coverage of sometimes arcane archaeological issues in the text, including long and short chronologies for Polynesia, recent

debates on contacts with the Americas, arguments about how useful modern canoe replicas are in judging prehistoric voyaging capabilities and navigation techniques, as a few examples. These debates are covered in a readable and informed manner that any archaeologist attempting to reach a general audience can learn from. Of course, coverage of issues we would see as key is uneven. Koppel misses almost entirely the significance of the Kuk Swamp data for New Guinea as an early and independent centre of agriculture, implicated in the movement of major crops west into Island Southeast Asia at an early date, as well as the source for those carried eastwards out into the Pacific. His knowledge of what is happening in Melanesian archaeology in general, as opposed to Fiji, Polynesia and parts of Micronesia, is minimal, despite Lapita being a focus. Much could have been made of the extinction of large vertebrates in Vanuatu, New Caledonia and Fiji with the arrival of humans into the region, to flesh out the picture of bird extinctions in places that do get some coverage, such as Hawaii and New Zealand. But also much could have been made of the adjustments the early settlers in the entire region made after an initial phase of massive environmental impact following initial colonisation. Seeing what they had done, people of necessity developed methods of soil conservation, reef protection, and intensive but sustainable agriculture on many of the islands.

The style is uneven, slipping as I noted between travel and science writing. This is not helped by a series of colour photographs which are largely just holiday snaps of little or no relevance to the main topics being discussed. A single, truncated map on the inside does not even include New Zealand, and doesn't do justice to the text. On occasion the author, clearly here in travel writer mode, gives way too much credence to the 'traditional' knowledge purveyed by small-business tourist operators as representing something deep and meaningful about the pre-contact era in the Pacific; the science writer's necessary scepticism should have been alerted on such occasions.

Much of the final 100 pages, apart from the discussion of possible contacts between Polynesia and the Americas, could have been omitted. Attempts to prove that the average Pacific Islander would have had a truly miserable existence under their brutal chiefs, completely omit any useful comparisons, except a vague reference to medieval serfs in Europe. While the chapter can only help modern Westerners feel superior, this bubble could very usefully have been pricked by noting that life in many places that the complacent readers may have come from was undemocratic, dangerous, brutish, nasty and short until not very long ago. If we look at many of the trouble spots of the world it remains so today. Can one describe European history until well into the twentieth century without suggesting endemic warfare was a major cause of grief almost everywhere? It is presented here as entirely a Pacific problem.

The sections on European contact, where archaeological evidence is suddenly jettisoned as having no interest or contribution, are particularly weak. There is a massive underplaying of the facts of military conquest and savagely repressed revolt on island after island; the overthrow of Hawaii's independence by American business interests aided by US Marines doesn't even merit a mention. Indeed, one has to be slightly irked by how easy the Americans get off in general in relation to their colonial adventures compared to some other colonial powers, notably the Japanese and