

# THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE CAPERTEE VALLEY, NEW SOUTH WALES

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Australian Museum

Plates 11-24 Text Figs. 1-6

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In 1951 Mr. J. Norcross reported to the Australian Museum several rock shelters containing stencils that he had inspected in the Capertee Valley, near Glen Davis. His attention was drawn to them by local residents, particularly W. Ferguson (store-keeper), to whom they had been known for some 50 years. At my request, Mr. Norcross dug a test hole in the floor of two sites, 1 and 3 in this paper, which produced *Bondi* points and waste flakes. In 1954 Mr. J. Bland, of Sunny Corner, further examined the sites at my request, and test holes dug by him yielded Bondaian culture implements and patinated yellow flakes not known elsewhere. Excavations of the sites were undertaken in 1958.

The following were members of the excavating parties during university vacations for periods of from 7 to 10 days:—

December, 1958: Professor N. W. G. Macintosh, Department of Anatomy, University of Sydney; Mr. D. Currie, of Imperial Chemical Industries, Sydney; Mr. J. Bland, farmer, Sunny Corner; Mr. V. Rose, Fruit Inspector, Bathurst; Mr. P. Gresser, retired, Bathurst; and Mr. W. Coombes, medical student, University of Sydney.

December, 1959: Messrs. J. Bland and D. Currie and the following members of the Sydney University Rover Scout Crew: Messrs. G. Ford, R. Jamieson and P. Sinclair.

May, 1960: Messrs. J. Bland and D. Currie and the following members of the Sydney University Rover Scout Crew: Messrs. R. J. Baker, G. Ford, R. Higgins, R. Jamieson, A. McHugh, P. Sinclair, R. Sutton and W. Warne; Messrs. B. Shanahan and A. P. Walker, Arts Students at the University of Sydney, and E. D. McKenzie, Ph.D., student in Chemistry at the University of New South Wales.

May, 1961: Messrs. J. Bland, D. Currie, R. French and J. Paterson (the latter two of the C.S.I.R.O.) and the following members of the Sydney University Rover Scout Crew: Messrs. A. McHugh, R. Lucas and R. Jamieson.

Mr. P. H. Walker, Research Officer, Soils Division, C.S.I.R.O., was present during several of these periods and participated in the excavation during one of them.

The author organized and led each of the four parties. He is extremely grateful to all of the above, and particularly the Sydney University Rover Scout Crew, for their generous assistance in this arduous series of excavations.

The Capertee River rises in the Triassic sandstone plateau which forms the main topographical feature of the countryside. In the Glen Davis area the river is joined by many creeks, among which Running Stream or Coorongooaba, Cook's or Coco, and Umbrella are the most important. The main valley is up to 10 miles wide, and is a mixture of alluvial flats and low hills now used mainly as cattle pastures. The Capertee flows eastward through a deep and narrow gorge, in which sites 1 to 4 are situated, which it has cut through the Hawkesbury and Narrabeen sandstones. The gorge is over 1,000 feet high, and at the base of it Permian Lithgow coal measures, in which cherts are present, are occasionally exposed.

The environment is fertile, with an average rainfall of 20 in., but is subject to periodic dry spells varying in length from one summer to several years, when bushfires are common in this type of country. The summer temperatures rise to over the century and the winter temperature falls to the low 30's. The countryside is covered by open woodland eucalyptus forest, with comparatively dense epiphytic undergrowth. It could be described as an ideal environment for a hunting and gathering people of semi-nomadic habit. Game in the area includes all of the major kinds of Australian mammals—grey kangaroos, swamp and rock wallabies, ring-tailed and brush-tailed possums, wombats, echidnas, koalas, platypuses, bandicoots, phalangers, and various small rodents; emus (in the more open country), ducks, scrub turkeys, pigeons, herons and many other species of birds; goannas and a variety of lizards and snakes; eels, perch, crayfish and mussels in the river; bees, moths and other insects. Several species of yams, the seeds of the kurrajong, *macrozamia*, *acacias*, *pinus* and other plants, and various leaves, berries and fruits added the vegetable element to a well-balanced diet. The methods of hunting included the use of the spear, club, boomerang, burning-off and group ambushes to kill the bigger animals; others were dug and burnt out of trees and holes in the ground, and bird nets were in use. The game would no doubt become very wary and difficult to kill after a few weeks of hunting by the Aborigines in these confined gorges and valleys, and for this reason the families and local groups either used a number of shelters during the year, or spread their hunting over a wide area in the valley.

No major geological or physiographical changes took place during the occupation of the area by the Aborigines. It is obvious that in a period of thousands of years the river would make deeper inroads into its bed, and many falls of rock would take place along the cliffs, otherwise the building up and consolidation of the soil mantle, and the growth of vegetation after forest fires, are the only features worth noting. There is no evidence, as Mr. Walker's report on the soil and landscape history of the area makes clear, to indicate that there has been any marked change in climate during the period of occupation of the sites.

All of the shelters examined, of a size and kind suitable for habitation, in the Capertee Valley have been inhabited by man, but the distribution and size of the local groups and their territories are unknown. The area is in the north-eastern corner of the territory of the Wiradjuri tribe, near its border with the Darkinung tribe. The Wiradjuri belong to the No (Wira) group of tribes, with sections and matrilineal moieties, and with totemic clans each of which seems to have consisted of quick and slow blooded divisions; personal and sex totems existed (Brown, 1931, 59-61).