

**SOME WOODEN ARTEFACTS FROM
THE NORTH COAST OF NSW:
NEW ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND ETHNOGRAPHIC DATA**

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SUMMARY

This paper describes some wooden artefacts recovered from sites on the North Coast of New South Wales, and discusses their radio carbon age and significance. The specimens were recently donated to the Museum's Collection.

INTRODUCTION

This paper records and discusses the cultural context of three dated items from the North Coast of New South Wales. All were recovered by chance from waterlogged deposits during dredging or farming activities not found during systematic archaeological investigations. They include one boomerang from the Clarence River at Grafton, and a boomerang and one point from a multi-pronged fishing spear found in swamp deposits at Collombatti on the Lower Macleay north of Kempsey.

Aboriginal technologies as recorded in the immediate contact period depended to a considerable extent on organic raw materials. Many major items in the 'extractive tool kit' of hunting weapons as well as basic tools and utensils were made of wood and bark fibres, and so are unlikely to survive in archaeological deposits, even of relatively recent age. Unfortunately, the material culture of east coast Aborigines was not fully described at the period of European settlement, while it is only recently that anthropologists and prehistorians have revived interest in Aboriginal technology. Their attempts to reconstruct the material culture have been based on the evidence of ethnohistorical sources and museum collections, often themselves neither comprehensive nor even adequately documented. A great opportunity to record the material adaptation to the rich environments of the temperate and the sub-tropical east coast regions was lost in the late nineteenth century; we are now forced to attempt piecemeal reconstruction from fragmentary literary and artefactual evidence.

Many of our museum collections represent items made decades after settlement, when traditional methods of artefact preparation and the use of traditional materials were being modified by culture contact. Pre-settlement artefacts, or those collected early in the contact period, are therefore of considerable interest for studies of material culture. Dated wooden artefacts from geological or archaeological contexts, of course, have particular significance, especially as they give further evidence on the antiquity of certain items in the total assemblage, and on the tool kit as a whole.

1. BOOMERANG FROM THE CLARENCE RIVER (E66715)

DISCOVERY: This artefact was recovered by Grafton geologist Reginald Oxenford during dredging operations in the Clarence River between Seelands and Grafton, at a location half a mile downstream of the Southampton Ferry. It lay below twelve feet of

Records of the Australian Museum, 1977, Vol. 31 No. 16, 660-671 Figures 1-5.

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