

Archaeological Studies at Bomaderry Creek, New South Wales

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ABSTRACT. Aboriginal hunter-gatherers briefly occupied a large rockshelter on Bomaderry Creek at about 1900 years bp and about 1400 years bp. While in residence they subsisted on a variety of local plants and animals, but their life style was also linked closely to that of people who occupied sites nearer the coast farther south. Excavation revealed not only aspects of their economic life but also the manner in which the evidence they left behind had been modified later by such agencies as human disturbance, scavenging by dingoes and weathering.

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This joint paper describes two independent pieces of research at the Bomaderry Creek rockshelter. Both authors are indebted to the pioneering archaeological research by F.D. McCarthy in eastern New South Wales, much of which remains a keystone to present day studies in the region. If only because they occurred 17 years apart (in 1970 and 1987), with immense changes having taken place in Australian prehistory during those years, it will be appreciated that the two projects were undertaken for different reasons. The results they produced, however, are complementary.

The site was excavated in 1970 as part of a program of research into the prehistory of the south coast of New South Wales initiated by Lampert (1966, 1971a, 1971b). Reflecting the interests of those years, the aims of the program centred on building a basic knowledge of prehistory in a largely unknown region. A local cultural sequence was sought which might be compared with the eastern regional sequence proposed by McCarthy (1967)

from stratified sites at Lapstone Creek (McCarthy, 1948) and Capertee (McCarthy, 1964). At a time when economic prehistory was developing its research aims and a methodology, particular attention was paid to the economic uses of resources at coastal and near-coastal sites (Lampert, 1971a:1). In later years, data from this research was used to test different and often more sophisticated hypotheses (e.g., Lampert & Hughes, 1974; Hughes & Lampert, 1982; Steele, 1987; Sullivan, 1976).

Well-preserved organic remains in recent deposits – including artefacts of shell, bone, plant fibre and resin, and food remains of shell and bone – together with historical observations of Aboriginal economic activities, allowed a detailed picture of economic life to be reconstructed. This varied from site to site. While occupying the foreshore site of Durras North (Lampert, 1966) people subsisted almost entirely on such marine resources as fish, shellfish, mutton bird and seal, and had a specialised technology in which line and spear