

## **ABORIGINAL LAND USE IN THE ARMIDALE AREA**

SUZANNE HUDSON, BA (HONS), Dip AF&CC, JP Archaeologist

### **INTRODUCTION**

During 2003 a study of pre-European land use by Aboriginal people – the *Anaiwan* group of the Armidale area was undertaken. This study involved the movement of Aboriginal people across the environment using stone tools to mark the routes they used to forage, hunt, camp and manufacture both stone and wooden tools.

Places of human habitation, tool procurement sites, scarred and marked trees and places of significance to the inhabitants were used to 'map' the area to give an idea of how these people lived in the local environment.

### **LOCATION**

This focuses on the Country of the *Anaiwan* people, who lived in the area before European arrival. The area forms part of the New England Ranges encompassing eastern and western river systems. Walker (1977:11) describes the region as being dominated by undulating uplands, extending as a tableland belt of varying width, with gently rolling country with shallow valleys terminating in the eastern escarpment east of Walcha.

Photo: Stone tool manufacturing site



### **GEOLOGY**

The geology of the area consists of granites and associated volcanics (greywacke, rhyolite, basalt, diorite). Harrington (1977:31) describes the region as being a difficult communication area as the Peel Fault at Tamworth provides a barrier to easy travel into the area from the south and the escarpment and gorges from the east.

## **CLIMATE**

Climate is the basic element of ecology that affects the study area. Hobbs & Jackson (1977:77) state that the climatic features of the New England area are the result of the effects of distance from the coast and eastern scarp, relief, altitude and latitude which create greater temperature ranges (maximum and minimum), rainfall amounts, and wind patterns.

Some previous researchers (McBryde 1974, Belshaw 1977) state that Aboriginal populations on the Tablelands moved to warmer climates (eastern coastal and western slopes) during the cold winter months, but local research has indicated that there is adequate plant food available during the winter months – for example rusty fig trees (*Ficus rubignosa*) are in fruit during winter. Experience from living in the study area indicates that cold is relative and if you are accustomed to living in a cold climate, the body adjusts to it.

## **VEGETATION**

Vegetation of the Armidale area falls into three categories:

1. Open woodlands or parkland (as described by the early settlers)
2. Marsh and/or swamplands
3. Grasslands, devoid of tree cover

The survey area can be described as all three categories that of open woodlands or parkland, marshy areas and grasslands. Grasses are predominately native species however introduced species are now covering much of the area, especially since the application of superphosphate fertiliser in the 1960's. Trees are predominately native species with some new plantings of native species planned for the future.

Sutton (1989:7-8) writes that Aboriginal people of the area used the trees to trap macropods using nets strung between the trees, used the swamps to catch crayfish and dig for yams, roots and hunt water birds and grasslands were maintained by burning to attract large game into the area for hunting.

Photo: Aboriginal stone axe



## **ABORIGINAL SETTLEMENT**

The last 25 years have seen spectacular changes in our knowledge of the area Aboriginal past. White (1976:71) states that changes in dating methods have come about because of regionally oriented research programs and the most durable methods of dating the past, come flakes of stone and stone tools types as they change over time.

By distinguishing certain features of stone tools that are common to all sites, dating can be achieved within a rough estimate.

The heavy core and flake scrapers (50,000-10,000 years ago) of the "Australian Core Tool and Scraper Tradition" have been associated with making wooden tools such as boomerangs, spears, clubs and throwing sticks. Tools of the newer industries (10,000-5,000 years ago) are relatively small in size and are defined by shape as points, adzes and backed (blunted) blades and are known as the "Small Tool and Scraper Tradition". These smaller tools are found in conjunction with chisels and axes. The oldest examples of these stone tools come from the New England region (Binns & McBryde 1969, 1972, McBryde 1974 and McCarthy 1979). There was a further change in technology (1,000-400 years ago) with a loss of some items from the range (backed blades and finely retouched [resharpened] blades) were replaced with simple flakes, bipolar pieces and ground edge axes and a greater use of shell, bone and glass for toolmaking (White 1976:76).

## **ANAIWAN COUNTRY**

Tindale (1974:115) gives a definition of the Australian Aboriginal tribes, which have five markers:

1. they inhabit and claim a definite area of country
2. use a dialect or language peculiar to themselves
3. possess a distinctive name
4. have customs and laws differing in some measure from those practiced

by their neighbours

5. possess beliefs and ceremonies differing from those held or performed by others.

Hoddinott (1977:52-55) classifies the language as *Nganyaywana*. He states that this language is now extinct but was formerly spoken in an area from Moonbi in the south to Guyra in the north. The language is unique to the area and has little or no relationship to other Australian Aboriginal languages. From some of the words that have been recorded by researchers, the language has roots that relate to neighbouring areas populated by *Daingatti* people but that the language diverged many thousands of years ago. Hudson 1996:39, Godwin 1990:381 state that the *Anaiwan* group living in the Tablelands had ancestors in common with the eastern *Daingatti* people, but at some stage they broke with the *Daingatti* and all other neighbouring groups so totally that their language diverged. At some later time they re-established a close social interrelationship with their western neighbours, the *Gamilaroi* sharing aspects of social organisation and during this contact, the language changed to reflect aspects of the *Gamilaroi* dialect.

Compared to the surrounding tribal groups:

*Gamilaroi* – 75,400 sq km – one of the largest in the state

*Daingatti* - 9,100 sq km

*Anaiwan* - 8,300 sq km

*Weraerai* - 4,100 sq km

*Bundjalung* - 2,300 sq km

*Banbai* - 2,300 sq km

*Ngarabal* - 1,000 sq km

Average size in the Tablelands – 5,420 sq km, which relates to climatic and environmental restraints and isolation/altitude for sustainable living areas.

Photo: Burial site



## EUROPEAN ARRIVAL

The New England area was investigated in 1818 when Surveyor-General John Oxley explored the area. Alan Cunningham passed through the area in 1825, Charles Sturt in 1828 and Thomas Mitchell in 1831. The first of the settlers who arrived in the Armidale area of New England was Henry Dangar in 1833, whilst working for The Australian Agricultural Company to develop the wool and coal industries (Hudson 2004:4).

In 1832, Hamilton Sempill settled on the Apsley River and named his holding "Wolka" (now Walcha) and Edward Cory settled east of Uralla in 1833 on Salisbury Waters calling his run "Gostwyck". In 1835 Henry Dangar bought him out, when word of the New England's productivity for wool growing had spread, and the area was then settled by Henry Dumaresq in 1834, William Dumaresq in 1835 and other settlers who selected land across the New England. These settlers included McDougall, Campbell, Macintyre, Clerk, King, the Everett brothers, Duval, Innes and others who are remembered by present-day places such as Mt Duval, "Clerkness", Macintyre River, Glen Innes, Land of the Beardies (from Duval and Everett), Beardy Street and River (Hudson 2004:4).

In 1845 Commissioner George Macdonald reported that numbers of Aboriginal people in the New England numbered about 600 men, women and children but stated that because of their "wandering, disunited and unsettled habits, it is impossible to estimate their numbers with any truth".

He also reported that there was a decrease in numbers since 1840 due to disease, their means of subsistence had diminished to a considerable extent because of the arrival of 500,000 sheep onto the Tablelands which had reduced the numbers of macropods – their staple food.

The Aboriginal people were seen as unwanted nuisances standing in the way of European development and economic progress (Macdonald 1845).

In 1851, Commissioner Massie reported that "... a reserve for use by Aborigines of 350 acres had been put aside, which contained good cultivation ground, good water and every essential requisite for the permanent location of the Aborigines, should they feel disposed to forget their migratory habits" (Massie 1851).

Campbell (1978:6) states that in 1842 there was a cessation of the violence between Aborigines and settlers in the New England. He states that this was due to the change in white population numbers due to the termination of transportation and the assignment system of convicts working for the bushman-managers of the pastoral runs. The usual bushman-manager was being replaced by the wealthier educated squatter, and the census figures confirm this, with a total white

population of 2,231 and about 1/3 were convicts and by 1851, this group had dropped to 1/6 of the population.

Walker (1963:141) states that in 1839 Commissioner Macdonald set up his camp on an extensive open plain, well watered and sheltered and situated contiguously to the squatters on Salisbury Court (Uralla), Gostwyck (Uralla), Saumarez (Armidale) and Tilbuster (Armidale). Macdonald named his campsite "Armidale" after his English estate.

Armidale had always been the largest settlement in the Tablelands, which received the first post office in 1843, court of petty session in 1846 and chief constable in 1847 and was the first town to be incorporated as a municipality in 1863 (Walker 1963:141).

Gardner (1852:78) describes country unfit for sheep farming. These places are referred to as the hilly country where box trees are found growing on the slopes and tops of hills. The riverine flats were chosen by settlers to build their homes and sheds. Hudson *et al* (2003:23) states that the remains of buildings from the first European settlement of the area may reflect British layout and style. Housing began with pitching a tent, followed by wattle and daub, pisé, and simple slab, bark and shingle dwellings or log cabins. With the arrival of sheets of iron and glass, more elaborate structures using brick or stone were constructed. Fittings and fixtures give indications of sophistication of plumbing (baths, indoor toilets, laundries [chip heaters, coppers], early hand operated washing machines, light fittings [carbide gas, generators, 32v electricity]).

## **CHINESE ARRIVAL**

After people of European extraction had settled the area, the white population jealously guarded the area from other ethnic groups. The Armidale Express of 29th August 1857 reported on the mass migration of Chinese people (called Chinamen) during the gold rush period. Claiming that between 40,000 and 50,000 Chinese people were present in Victoria alone and reported again (16th September 1857) that about 60 Chinese people had arrived at the Rocky River goldfields from Victoria. The reporter stated:

"Squatters may not be able to do without pig-tailed cooks and shepherds, or storekeepers without the custom of a legion of Celestials, without dwelling upon the vices they introduce to the colony – leprosy. I would protest against their race, having low mental and bodily powers and half-savage habits, utterly unfit for assimilating with a nation of such a boasted degree of civilisation as our own".

Smailes and Molyneux (1963:206) report on the state of settlement by 1900 having been broken up from the early pastoral runs by the Robertson Land Act of 1861. This Act brought about a confused pattern of

free selection, rapid sales, land dumying and quick turnover of land blocks allowed a new crop of larger holdings owned by wealthier men than the average selector.

Land once deemed to be unfit for pastoral use was now taken up by selectors and areas within town boundaries that had once been designated Aboriginal reserve had been reclaimed for urban development and the incumbent Indigenous inhabitants were again relocated onto less usable or remote areas.

Photo: Stone Axes, knife and flakes



## **ETHNOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

McBryde (1978:1) states that the only ethnographic source material available for this area are the records, diaries and letters of the early settlers. The information on Aboriginal life and culture is often fragmentary and contradictory and requires much critical sifting, often revealing more about the thoughts of nineteenth century Europeans than of Aboriginal culture.

McBryde refers to literature describing the use of stone axes to catch possums and Wyndham (1889:37) recalls a ceremonial gathering on the western fall of the Tablelands where four tribes were present.

Mathews (1896:135) states that ceremonies were of great importance, providing a connection between groups – *Daingatti* Keeparra (sic) and *Gamilaroi* Bora (sic) ceremonies. Wyndham (1889:37) states that the last Boora (sic), an initiation of young men, was held on the western fall of New England. Both men and women attended the ceremony but each had their own special areas after the initial meeting of the groups.

Hudson's (1976) research of this area has located an initiation site near Uralla. This site consists of a stone structure (one side has collapsed), a single stone tool grinding (sharpening) groove and a rock enclosure where the start of the initiation ceremony took place. This site indicates that it was used by both men and women, but as the ceremony progressed, the

men left the site and walked approximately 7 km to the bora ground she located west of the initiation site.

Photo: Stone Axe Grinding site



## STONE RESOURCES

The surviving relics associated with Aboriginal campsites include seed grinding and axes sharpening grooves in rock slabs, cooking areas, and scatters containing various stone artefacts. Stone artefacts may be found as grave goods, especially axes, knives, seed grinders and other specialised tools. Stones were sometimes used to cover graves and traces of ochre may be found on the stones, which served as grave markers. In the New England area, stones may be found as stone arrangements. They vary in form ranging from simple cairns to complex groupings of stone circles, single lines, corridors or other designs. They are sometimes found close to water or ochre sources. There is not a lot known about stone arrangements, possibly because Aboriginal people are reluctant to reveal their meaning. Tree falls can cause groups of rocks to resemble circles and stone arrangements made by non-Aboriginal people as survey or boundary markers can be confused with Aboriginal arrangements (James & Conyers 1995:53).

Stone is very durable and stone tools have the capacity to remain in sites long after wood, charcoal, bone and plant remains have disappeared (Wilson 1995). Modified stone is identified as an artefact if it has at least three of the following attributes:

1. positive or negative ringcrack
2. positive or negative bulb of applied force
3. erillure scar in position beneath the platform
4. definite remnants of flake scars (dorsal scars and ridges)
5. fracture marks such as lines, concentric undulations and point of force (PFA) scarring

Artefacts found in sites are usually flakes, cores, retouched (resharpened) tools, flaked pieces (amorphous pieces that do not have the attributes of



a flakes but are found in conjunction with them) and debitage (pieces that break off during the reduction process).

Flaked tools are made from *isotropic* raw materials, that is they have the same breaking properties in all directions. These materials include chert (flint and jasper), chalcedony (agate and opal), quartz, quartzite, petrified wood, silcrete, mudstone, tuff, argillite and hornfels. These materials are all high in silica. Stone tools made of *anisotropic* materials, those that do not flake well but fracture along bedding planes, were used for making axes, chisels, wedges and grindstones. These materials include tuff, shale, andesite, slate, granite, adamellite, amphibolite, sandstone, greywacke and some basalts (Wilson 1994).

Photo: Art site in rock Overhang



<http://ochresearchives.blogspot.com/2006/08/aboriginal-land-use-in-armidale-nsw.html>