NOTICE OF GENERAL MEETING

The fourth General Meeting of the Society for 1982 will be held in the Museum Education Building, North Terrace, Adelaide at

8.00PM MONDAY, 28 JUNE, 1982

AGENDA

1. Apologies.

2. Minutes of Previous General Meeting.
   Minutes of the previous General Meeting, held Monday, 24 May, 1982 to be confirmed. A copy of these minutes is attached.

3. New Members.
   The following new members have been elected to the Society:
   Sylvia Gladys WHITEHEAD.

4. Papers and Journals.
   Papers and Journals from other Societies and Organizations will be tabled at the meeting.

5. Business.

6. Speaker.
   Ms. VAL POWER, Vice President Aboriginal Community Centre and President South Australian Aboriginal Cultural Committee, will give an address to the Society entitled:

   LAND RIGHTS - VAL POWER'S POINT OF VIEW

7. Supper.

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The widespread occurrence of significant Aboriginal sites in the Coorong have been recognized by visitors to the area for many decades. Commencing in 1979, the South Australian Department for the Environment and Planning commissioned the Coorong Archaeological Project to record and scientifically investigate the physical remains in the Park for inputs into Park management plans, as well as for information to be included in the interpretation of the cultural heritage of the Coorong. In May, Roger Luebbbers, Archaeological Consultant, presented a paper to the Society in which some conclusions of this study were summarized and the preliminary results from the 1982 excavation were presented.

The first practical task confronting the project has been the subdivision of areas to be surveyed so that representative samples of the estimated 6-8000 sites could be inventoried and researched in detail. The first phase of the work concentrated in the Southern Coorong along three primary sample transects, the most northerly traversing the Younghusband Peninsula at Salt Creek. Sites in these were recorded, relationships to the habitat were ascertained, and a select number were excavated and dated. From this exercise, a number of sites were classified according to major physical characteristics believed to be culturally significant, such as size, composition, internal organization of cultural residues, and position in the land form. Once the antiquity of these site types was established, an outline of the prehistoric land use pattern was reconstructed.

In order to interpret changes in these patterns and to identify the influence the environment has upon prehistoric settlement, information regarding the transformation of the coastal environment was compiled and cast against apparent trends in shifts in site morphology, content, and density. The following characteristics then emerge from this study which serve to both identify archaeologically significant Aboriginal sites and to suggest a comprehensive description of land use in the Coorong throughout the period of human settlement. The earliest evidence of occupation thus dated is 5500 years old and pertains to very small, discrete shell middens located near the estuary shoreline when the coast evolved as an island chain. Shellfish found in them typically inhabit only in tidal estuaries and are therefore locally extinct today. Access to these islands was gained either by boats, by swimming, or by short passage through shallow water. The second phase of occupation is characterized by larger middens of Plebidonax deltoides (cockles) located at least near the estuarine shores, and probably near the ocean beaches. This second phase has a tentative antiquity of 4500-2500BP and it represents the emergence of frequent seasonal use of the Peninsula by shellfish gatherers and fisherfolk using nets to catch Black Bream. The last prehistoric phase is characterized by huge shell mounds located overlooking the Lake shores and relict estuary in apparent clusters or groups, suggesting a persistent, intensive habitation and the development of a highly organized land tenure system consistent with the Tanganekald who owned the Coorong at the time of colonial settlement. Unlike similar sites in the Northern Coorong however, these in the south contain only meagre traces of historic occupation and some survive today beneath an old soil, suggesting an ancient final abandonment, or at best, a decrease in the intensity of site occupation. For this reason, this prehistoric phase is suggested to involve a population decline at some time in the late prehistoric past, possibly 1-2000 years ago when tidal closure in the Southern Coorong occurred.

The 1982 field season concentrated on a large number of associated Aboriginal and European sites located just south of Hells Gates (Parnka Point), on the Peninsula adjacent to Magrath Flats. There a huge shell
midden measuring 430m long and 35m wide was excavated to a depth of 1.5m. With a total volume of 4400 cubic metres, this deposit contains a rich mixture of cockle, fish (Bream, Malloway), crab, bird, snake, and some small marsupial rats, which together constitute 50% of the midden volume. Of significance is that while the base of the midden is clearly prehistoric in origin, the upper portion exhibits a house depression (wurlie) that contains historic artefacts of the 20th century. In conjunction with the midden frontline, a deep, peat filled depression was discovered to relate to either a 19th or early 20th century freshwater soak, which was maintained for domestic rather than farm use. Exactly who used the soak, or who inhabited the midden remains unresolved at the moment, but Aboriginal information gathered from interview promises to identify these residents and their activities. Whoever these people were, all evidence points to the fact that significant elements of traditional Aboriginal life survived well into this century and that the Coorong is still an area of great interest to all South Australians. This last phase, termed the Refugee Phase, related then to the colonial period of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal use of the Coorong.

A small stone house structure, measuring 10 x 6m and surviving only as a buried calcret wall, was also excavated at Hells Gates. Built in 1858 by J.B. Hack, the house and its associated discarded domestic ware represents the first substantial residence by pastoralists noted more for its tenacity than for its productivity. Although now in a state of almost complete ruin, the house in fact stands as a significant monument to the dedication and vision of early South Australian settlers. The brief archaeological investigation has demonstrated that a part of this early colonial period can still be reclaimed by further study and that these discoveries will provide valuable inputs into the current drafting of Park management plans.

R.A. LUEBBERS.