NOTICE OF GENERAL MEETING

The 1st General Meeting of the Society for 1986 will be held in

THE CONSERVATION CENTRE, 120 WAKEFIELD STREET, ADELAIDE

on

MONDAY 25TH MARCH 1986 AT 8.00 PM

AGENDA

1. Apologies :

2. Minutes of the previous General Meeting:
Minutes of the previous General Meeting, held in the Conservation Centre on Monday 28th October, 1985, to be confirmed. A copy of these minutes is attached.

3. New Members :
The following new members have been elected to the Society since the Annual General Meeting :-

Mrs Kay CLARKE
Mrs E. HANSMAN
Mrs M.V. JOHNSTON
Ms Francesca ZILIO

4. Papers and Journals:
Papers and Journals received from other societies and organisations since the last meeting will be tabled at this meeting.

5. Business :

6. Speaker :
Mr Phillip Jones - Curator of Australian Ethnology at the S.A. Museum, will address the Society. The subject of his address will be the exhibition of Tas, at present on view at the Museum. Old films will be shown.

7. Supper will be served.

R. Allison
Hon. Secretary
c/o Conservation Centre
120 Wakefield Street
ADELAIDE - SA 5000
PROJECTED WORK IN THE LAKE EYRE BASIN 1986-1990

Peter Sutton
South Australian Museum


INTRODUCTION

The new structures and expanded staff of the South Australian Museum, arising to a large extent from the government's decision to implement much of the Edwards Report on the future of the Museum, are now in place after their first year of development. Although physically dislocated by major refurbishment of the east wing of the Museum currently taking place, we are giving thought to what the Museum's Anthropology Division will be doing for the next five years. High priority has to go to filling the large spaces of our galleries with exhibitions of quality. Staff with scholarly commitments will also have their own research projects to keep on the boil. But as a Division we are about to take another joint step towards getting South Australia more firmly on the map in terms of archaeology, Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal social history, and cultural anthropology.

We have decided to concentrate a good proportion of our energies for the next five years in the southern sector of the Lake Eyre Basin, which basically means the South Australian part of the Basin. We hope this will be the first of a series of similar regional studies which gradually cover the whole of the State systematically, as the Royal Society's natural history series is doing, except that we will also have a major responsibility to create exhibitions in tandem with our publications. Some of the information we will be incorporating into publications and exhibitions is already available, but much of it will require original research. The Art and Land exhibition and associated book of the same title, both being launched in February 1986, and the exhibition on Aboriginal Trade in the Lake Eyre Basin which opened in 1984, may be seen as the first steps towards making the Lake Eyre region a focus for the Museum's educational and scholarly presentations.
This is not the first time the Museum has made moves to launch itself into a concentrated effort on Lake Eyre Basin. In the late 1970s Mr Pretty of the Museum and the volunteer archaeological group which included Mr Tolcher and others prepared the outline of a Lake Eyre Basin Project. This was to have a strong emphasis on archaeology. Limitations of finance and staff prevented these plans from reaching fruition.

OTHER INTERESTED GROUPS

A group of scholars, principally geographers and earth sciences people, have set up a Lake Eyre Basin Studies Group in Adelaide. Its membership is drawn from the two universities (Adelaide and Flinders), from State government departments (Environment and Planning, Mines and Energy, Engineering and Water Supply), from private enterprise (SANTOS, Kinhill Stearns), Bureau of Meteorology, the S.A. Museum Division of Natural Science, the Nature Conservation Society, and the CSIRO, with some interstate representation from the ANU, the University of Sydney, and Bureau of Mineral Resources.

This group is primarily interested in environmental fluctuations in the Lake Eyre Basin, and in their relationship with human occupancy and resource utilisation during the last 150 years. They also have an interest in the human archaeological past, especially as it reveals the nature of human adaptations in a region of environmental change. The key environmental changes in which they are interested appear to be fluctuations in rainfall and lake water levels.

It would be fair to say, I think, that the social aspects of that Study Group's project are weighted towards looking at human impact on the environment through Aboriginal firing of grasslands, pastoralism and farming, and mining and tourism, for example. The S.A. Museum's project clearly has some
substantive areas of overlap with those of this Group, and also with the interests of a parallel group of Royal Society members, and in the near future we hope to intensify contacts with both groups, hoping for cooperation in research where feasible.

REASONS FOR CHOOSING THE LAKE EYRE REGION

Our main reasons for choosing the Lake Eyre region as a focus have been as follows.

There is sufficient ethnographic and historical evidence to support the view that Aboriginal culture and society in the Lake Eyre region of South Australia have long formed a relative unity, the 'Lakes cultural complex' as it is sometimes called.

The area (as shown on the accompanying map) forms part of a drainage basin, which makes it a natural unit of study for an investigation of human interaction with the environment. Elsewhere in Australia, anthropologists have found that a knowledge of drainage patterns is vital to an understanding of the economic, political and even religious organisation of Aboriginal societies. The whole of the Lake Eyre Basin would be too large an area for study, and it is hoped that by selecting State borders as a rough limit to our field of interest we have contained the task in an appropriately arbitrary way.

The region is also one which is very poorly understood, both archaeologically and, in recent times at least, anthropologically. Although McBryde, Hughes, Lampert and others have carried out some archaeological work in the area in recent years (principally survey), no serious cultural anthropology has been done in the region for decades.

It is a region for which there is a large, detailed and complex body of basically unpublished information on
Aboriginal traditions. Certain aspects of those traditions have become known through the writings of Spencer and Gillen, Horne and Aiston, R.M. Berndt, Luise Hercus, Peter Austin and others, but the great studies of J.G. Reuther and Luise Hercus have yet to be published in the full form which will do justice to their quality and significance. Reuther’s manuscript, translated by Philipp Scherer and available in microfiche, is published but rarely used by scholars and hardly even sighted by anyone else. As did N.B. Tindale in the 1930s, we would like to see Reuther’s writings edited and illustrated and published in book form. The large and well-documented Reuther Collection of artefacts held at the Museum should be both re-exhibited and published (Art and Land is a first step in this process). Reuther concentrated on eastern Lake Eyre. Luise Hercus has worked in the whole region, but her records are perhaps richest for the western half.

Dr Hercus is a linguist (and Reader at the Australian National University) who has carried out annual field work among Aboriginal people of Lake Eyre for more than twenty years. This work has included grammatical studies of languages such as Arabana, Wangkangurru and Kuyani, but extends also to cover mythology, oral history, and site recording. In fact, a major component of her work has been visiting and mapping hundreds of sites of Aboriginal significance in the whole of the region. She has published parts of this work, for example on some of the mound springs, and she has recently completed, with some assistance by myself, a major study of 134 mound spring Aboriginal sites for the heritage survey of the Department of Environment and Planning. We look forward to continuing our fruitful relationship with Dr Hercus and other scholars working on the region.

Another major reason for selecting Lake Eyre as a region of focus is that, in spite of major inroads by non-Aborigines for well over a century, it is now facing a new intensification of outside impact, this time from the resource industry and tourism. We are interested in seeing that the cultural heritage of the region is not ignored or merely pushed to one side as these projected and incipient developments are debated and planned. In the case of archaeology, some evidence important to unravelling the prehistory of the region has already been destroyed and much more is in danger. Areas of living Aboriginal significance
are in a similar situation. While it is not our brief to police the protective legislation in these areas, we do have a mandate to carry out research on the State’s cultural heritage and present the results as best we can.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study will have a core component of archaeology, as well as major components of social history and cultural anthropology. When funding can be obtained, it is hoped that a full-time archaeologist can be appointed both to carry out archaeological research and act as coordinator of the project. The aim of the archaeological research, as presently conceived, would be to achieve an initial survey of the region’s archaeological character and potential, somewhat along the lines of McBryde’s New England work or that of Flood in the southeastern highlands of Australia.

The social history research would involve perhaps the greatest degree of joint work between the Museum and Aboriginal community members, although this collaboration will be sought for other aspects also. The areas of concentration here would include demographic change and movement, and interaction between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the areas of land use and the economy. A theme tying these concerns together, and one of great interest to Aboriginal people, is that of family histories.

The work in cultural anthropology would include a critical analysis of the existing ethnographic literature (e.g. that dealing with local and social organisation, decision-making, relative status, ceremonial life, ethnomobotany, languages, arts etc.), and a study of modern society in the region, especially in the domain of relations with the environment. This would cover the role of country in Aboriginal identification, use of the land and its resources, and Aboriginal involvement in current processes of political and socioeconomic change in the region, especially as far as they relate to the physical environment.
We hope to begin the concentrated part of the project with a one-year feasibility study. This should result in the establishment of joint Aboriginal community/South Australian Museum interests in the design and execution of the project, through intensive consultations. We want this to be more than tokenism, and even more than just consultations. The success of the project will in part depend on the extent of Aboriginal community interest in it. This has yet to be ascertained in detail.

The project itself will cover five years, perhaps a little longer, but will not be open-ended. It will have the advice of a panel of academic advisors from the relevant disciplines. It will set clear aims for results at an early stage, and appoint individuals as key curators of relevant exhibitions and authors of catalogues, papers and books. Its aims should be fairly modest, as all Museum permanent staff have duties and interests apart from research, and research interests beyond the Lake Eyre region. It is expected that the project will produce not only written and illustrated publications and public exhibitions, but we also hope to produce videos dealing with subjects of wide interest, such as the social historical and current people/environment themes already mentioned.