NOTICE OF GENERAL MEETING

The 7th General Meeting of the Society for 1986 will be held in:

THE CONSERVATION CENTRE, 120 WAKEFIELD STREET ADELAIDE

on

MONDAY 22ND SEPTEMBER 1986 AT 8.00 PM.

AGENDA

1. Apologies:

2. Minutes of the previous General Meeting:
   Notes of the previous general meeting held in the Conservation Centre on Monday 25th August 1986 are attached.

3. New Member:
   The following new member was elected to the Society:

   J.R. Michell

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

5. Business.

6. Speaker:

   Margaret Nobbs will show slides of Aboriginal Rock Art, taken during the field excursion which followed the "Conservation of Rock Art" conference held in Perth, at the WA Museum in 1977. The field excursion visited art sites north of Meekatharra, at Woodstock, in the Pilbara, at Port Hedland and Dampier Island.

7. Supper will be served at the close of the meeting.

R. Allison
Hon. Secretary
120 Wakefield St.
ADELAIDE. SA 5000
Our Oldest Dingo?

In the scattering remains of midden heaps and campsites along the coast south of Adelaide, the prehistory of our metropolitan area is slowly being erased. In the process the secrets of those silent times are revealed fleetingly. Regular surveillance over the past ten years has spelt out many riddles to me and just occasionally has thrown in an answer!

Yet the most exciting and significant find has been made only recently. During a quick visit late in 1985 to the Moana Sandhills, a fragment of mandible and three teeth were collected. Early in January a few more fragments of skull material were collected from the surface of the hearths. This site had been partially excavated by Society members in 1979. The material was interesting in several ways:

a) It looked extremely canine.

b) It was much less fragmentary than the usual food remains found in the hearth debris.

c) It had a slight orangestaining that was not typical of other bone excavated at the site.

An application was made to the Heritage Branch for a permit to carry out further investigations.

Meanwhile, Mr Neville Pledge, curator of palaeontology at the South Australian Museum, examined the bone collected and felt confident the it was Canis familiaris, the Australian dingo. Suddenly a mildly interesting food remain became much more interesting: if this was dingo bone eroding from the hearths, and not an errant Kelpie buried by a mourning owner, it dated to the vicinity of six thousand years old. The oldest dingoes with undisputed dates are around three and a half thousand years old. Indeed, as the following Table indicates there is a cluster of dates around 3,000 B.P.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3450 ± 95 BP</td>
<td>MAV 857</td>
<td>Hadura Cave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3320 ± 100 BP</td>
<td>Gok 558</td>
<td>Wetolah Hidden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3170 ± 94 BP</td>
<td>MPH 29</td>
<td>Freew's Landing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2840 ± 57 BP</td>
<td>V 33</td>
<td>Cigarette 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2200 ± 96 BP</td>
<td>NSW 30</td>
<td>Thylacine Hole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2160 ± 90 BP</td>
<td>Gok 1021</td>
<td>Devon Sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1680 ± 100 BP</td>
<td>MAV 139</td>
<td>Barrill Lake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1020 ± 40 BP</td>
<td>Gok 426</td>
<td>Mt Burr</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Dates for early finds of the Australian Dingo.

It was essential to establish the source of the mandible and fix it stratigraphically, if that was possible. In May the permit for further investigation arrived.

Detailed examination of surfaces around the eroding hearths showed no signs of additional material in exposed profiles, but other fragments of bone were found scattered about the surface of the site at the north-east end of the collapsing site. In this sheltered area windblown sand had accumulated. This sand was sieved and more fragments of bone were collected: like the original find showing a light orange staining.

Slowly the level of the loose sand was lowered until work was proceeding a few centimetres below the surface of the lowest level of hearths, but still slightly to the north-west of them. Numerous teeth had been collected, scattered skull fragments, including more of the original mandible; and various small bones from the fore paws. All this sand was very friable and appeared to have been disturbed. The fragmented and scattered nature of the finds confirmed this impression. It was as though the sand had all been overturned, perhaps by a dog in pursuit of a lizard.

Gentle brushing of the sand continued. Three vertebrae emerged in a natural alignment, with broken ribs in close association. The stray jaw bone finally had a stratified body. Slowly a line of vertebrae was revealed, obviously articulated and curling around to slightly underlie the hearth area. Indeed
the lower vertebrae, hip and rear femur were directly below the hearth. Although the line of vertebrae was incomplete and some of the material very fragile it was easy to discern the position in which the dingo had been lying when it was covered.

The original mandible discovered in two phases of the investigation.

It was evident that to be quite certain of the stratification removal of the overlying hearth was essential. This stage of the excavation revealed a small hearth, typical of those described in the original excavation report as Type I A. Its saucer-like profile curved down to within centimetres of the underlying hind section of the skeleton.

The stratigraphy was now certain: an almost complete skeleton partially underlay a small hearth in the lowest level of the site.

1. Campbell, V.M. *Excavation of a Small Hearth Site at Moana Beach, South of Adelaide.* 1980, Table 1.
Teeth and skull fragments found in loose surface sand.
Clearly the dingo was not part of the diet of the Aboriginal group who had lit that fire, and almost certainly not their pet. Rather it would seem that the carcase had been buried by a thin layer of sand before it decomposed and became dis-articulated. Sometime after its death and covering an Aboriginal camp-fire was built over it.

And the date? That remains to be corroborated, and grants are awaited so that carbon-14 dating can be undertaken. However, two carbon-dates were obtained from the hearths excavated in 1979.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{GaK -9121} & \quad 6340 \pm 180 \\
\text{GaK -9122} & \quad 6040 \pm 150
\end{align*}
\]

The site is a very concentrated one and appears similar throughout, so that chronological variations over a wide time spectrum are unlikely. Circumstantial evidence is very strong that once again Moana has produced a quite outstanding find: Australia's oldest dingo. Now we must await scientific description and dating.

© V.M. Campbell, Sept, 1986.

References:


13.