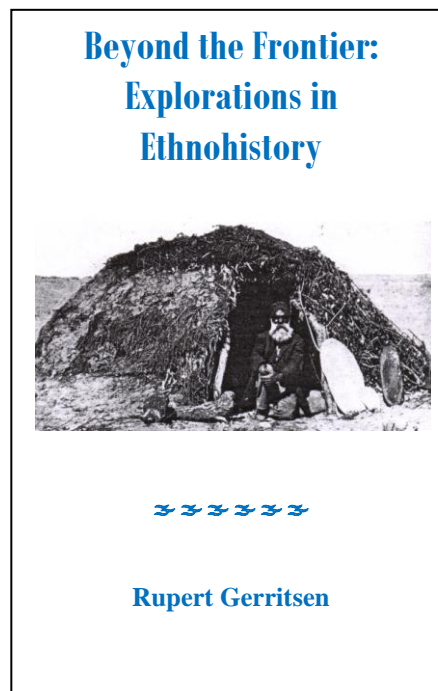


Preface

This book has evolved over nearly a decade as I have wrestled with approaches to ethnohistory and prehistory that draw upon historical records, oral traditions and archaeology, the validity and legitimacy of some of this material, and how it can be integrated in a way that may say something important and meaningful about the past and the people who lived there.

The first chapter is on the historiography of ethnohistory. Historiography can be a rather arcane discipline, but hopefully the reader will find the discussion interesting and enlightening. It looks at the broad history of ethnohistory, its origins, not just from an Australian but a global perspective. A more detailed history of Australian ethnohistory follows, and some of the recent issues, debates and controversies are then addressed. By necessity some philosophical issues are raised, and deconstruction of the concept of 'ethnohistory' considered in a limited way, before a classification, a typology, of ethnohistory, including points at which it informs archaeology, is proposed. From that certain types, such as historical ethnography and reconstructive ethnography, are highlighted, with the intention of specifically applying them in some of the later chapters.

Chapter 2 is a case study exemplifying the specific application of historical ethnography. This builds on previous research (e.g. Gerritsen 2008:32-34,46-51,77-81,99-106) that considered seemingly permanent Indigenous settlements of the central west coast of



Western Australia, western Victoria and the 'Corners Region'.¹ That research collated and summarised historical and archaeological information to ascertain the size, morphology and degree of permanence of dwellings, as well as the size and permanence of the settlements in the context of each particular area's settlement pattern. An analysis of the degree of sedentism of those settlements was also undertaken in these earlier publications. In this chapter a few simple historical observations are allied to comparative material from other parts of the world to suggest that the pattern of Aboriginal people living in villages and very large domiciles, in western Victoria and the 'Corners Region' at time of contact with Europeans, may have been in effect for 1000-1500 years.

¹ The 'Corners Region' is a broad area encompassing north east South Australia, western New South Wales, south west Queensland and south east Northern Territory.

The content of Chapter 3 revolves around the discovery of a cylindrical object, better known as a 'cylcon', during excavations at Cuddie Springs in northern New South Wales in 1991. It appears cylcons were still in use, predominantly in eastern Australia, at the time of European contact, and into the earlier part of the Contact Period. Many have turned up over the years, mostly ones that had been orphaned or discarded. While there is some literature on cylcons, their nature, role and purpose has never fully or coherently explained. This chapter attempts to do so, and concludes that cylcons were ceremonial objects and details their ceremonial functions. From this, and a global study of objects thought to potentially be involved in rituals in prehistory, it is concluded that the Cuddie Springs cylcon is the oldest ceremonial object in the world.

The debate over the extinction of Australia's megafauna has, at times, been acerbic and divisive. To some extent it has been a proxy for debates on the relationship between humans and the environment, as well as those on the nature of traditional Indigenous societies. Much of the evidence employed in research into the question of when and why the megafauna became extinct has relied on archaeological, palaeontological and climatological evidence. Chapter 4 takes a different approach in drawing on what I call ethnogenic evidence, in the form of deep time Aboriginal oral traditions, rock art and one particular petroglyph, known as the 'Panaramitee Crocodile'. The consistency of oral traditions and their congruence with the natural phenomena they describe are used to validate those traditions, and by relating them to the dating of the natural phenomena described, to date those traditions. The inferences

drawn from this suggest that some of the megafauna survived in temperate areas long after Australia was first colonised and were not rapidly exterminated, as argued by the proponents of the so-called 'blitzkrieg' hypothesis.

Finally, Chapter 5 considers how Sahulian Australia was first colonised, about 49,000 year ago, by the ancestors of its current Indigenous population. The origins of the first Australians, where they came from, and when and how they reached Australia's doorstep is summarised. The default explanation, that some form of watercraft must have been used, is examined and found wanting. The global prehistory of watercraft is considered in some depth, in terms of direct archaeological evidence and indirect evidence based on zoogeography and obsidian transportation. This suggests watercraft did not come into existence until 25,000-30,000 years ago. The prehistory of Indigenous watercraft also comes under scrutiny in this context. Issues around much earlier colonisation of islands by hominins, such as Flores by *Homo floresiensis* (the 'Hobbit'), and the technical capabilities of hominins and early modern humans are considered as well. A dataset of island colonisation in the last 70,000 years is presented graphically, and this also indicates that systematic island colonisation did not commence until 25,000-30,000 years ago. It is argued that earlier crossings of seaways arose from incidental circumstances. To explain the colonisation of Sahulian Australia a new hypothesis is presented.

Not surprisingly, in my view there are some potentially important findings contained here, which in some instances clearly challenge

conventional thinking. I expect that some may take exception to the methodologies employed in this book, as well as some of its arguments and conclusions. However, to advance our

knowledge and understanding, it may be necessary, from time to time, for some of us to go beyond the frontier.

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