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## A Brief History of Australian Archaeology

The professional practice of archaeology in Australia is a relatively recent endeavor, only crystallising into a distinct discipline in the 1960s and 1970s. It was during this period that Australian archaeology was first taught at Australian universities, that professional organizations dedicated to Australian archaeology were formed, that Federal and State legislation was enacted to protect archaeological sites and artifacts, and that employment opportunities opened up, either in government departments and other institutions or in cultural heritage management. Since then, there has been an enormous increase in the number of recorded sites, as well as increasing evidence for their environmental and cultural diversity, a growing understanding of the antiquity of Aboriginal occupation within Australia and an increasing interest in colonial (historical) and maritime archaeology. However, there is still much work to be done in all areas of the country. Australian archaeology today covers a variety of interests: from Indigenous archaeology focusing on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander occupation of Australia over the last 50,000 years, to historical archaeology which deals with the last few hundred years since colonial contact.

Prior to the professionalization of the discipline, most archaeological observations were made by amateurs, explorers and professionals from other disciplines, such as geology and anthropology. It could even be argued that the first disciplinary observations of Australia's past were made, not by scientists or professionals of any kind, but by its Indigenous occupants, who have lived here for around 50,000 years and who routinely interpret the world around them in terms of its material remains (see Chapter 2). In the 17th and 18th centuries, however, this long Indigenous tradition was paralleled by the observations and activities of explorers and early colonists. The first of these was English officer, William Dampier, who made astute observations about how to read the lifestyle of Indigenous Australians from food remains when he visited the shores of Western Australia in 1688 and 1699 (Dampier, 1699 [1906], cited in Horton, 1991:7). English explorers, such as James Cook and George Bass, were also interested in understanding the lifestyles of the exotic inhabitants of this new land, and made similar observations on their voyages some seventy to one hundred years later. The strangeness of these new encounters and a desire to understand "man" in the "pure state" of nature fired the colonial

TABLE 1.1. Changing dates for the occupation of Australia

Date	Site	Dating method	Reference
>400	Meredith, Victoria	Visual analysis of excavated materials	MacPherson, 1884
1,770	Ballina, New South Wales	Visual analysis of geomorphology and stratigraphy	Statham, 1892
>5,000	Devon Downs, South Australia	Visual analysis of stratigraphy, C <sup>14</sup> on charcoal	Hale & Tindale, 1930; Smith, 1982
9,000	Cape Martin, South Australia	C <sup>14</sup> on charcoal	Mulvaney, 1961
16,000	Kenniff Cave, Queensland	C <sup>14</sup> on charcoal	Mulvaney & Joyce, 1965
31,100	Lake Mungo, New South Wales	C <sup>14</sup> on shell	Barbetti & Allen, 1972
35,000	Devil's Lair, Western Australia	C <sup>14</sup> on charcoal	Balme et al., 1978
39,500	Upper Swan, Western Australia	C <sup>14</sup> on charcoal	Pearce & Barbetti, 1981
50,000	Malakununja II, Northern Territory	Thermoluminescence	Roberts et al., 1990
46–50,000	Lake Mungo, New South Wales	C <sup>14</sup> on bone, thermoluminescence	Bowler et al., 2003
60,000	Lake Mungo, New South Wales	Electron spin resonance (ESR), optically stimulated luminescence (OSL) and uranium series	Adcock et al., 2001 (still under debate)

imagination, and the recording of observations of an archaeological or anthropological nature, and the collection of artifacts became integral to the acquisition of these new lands. Building on this, the early governors of the Colony of New South Wales carried out the first archaeological excavations (Horton, 1991:3–5). Human burials were a focus of these early excavations, as researchers sought to determine whether the treatment of the dead by Indigenous Australians showed evidence of conviction in an afterlife, and thus of religious belief (Horton, 1991:5).

The first serious attempt to estimate the antiquity of Indigenous occupation was made in 1884 by Reverend Peter MacPherson, who tentatively suggested 400 years on the basis of his excavations of oven-mounds and associated stone circles in Meredith, Victoria (see Horton, 1991:34–43). A few years later, Statham's examination of the geomorphology and stratigraphy of shell mounds excavated for road works in New South Wales suggested an occupation date of 1,770 years (Horton, 1991:50). Since this time, estimates of the age of occupation of Australia have doubled on a regular basis (see Table 1.1).

Today, it is generally accepted that Indigenous people occupied the Australian continent by 50,000 years before present (BP), although dates much older than this are sometimes advocated (e.g. Adcock et al., 2001; Fullagar et al., 1996). There are many sites dated to between 30,000 BP and 40,000 BP (e.g. Balme, 1995; Balme