

crusts, seems to be based on arbitrary assumptions and circular arguments about climatic change. No wonder the authors think that rock art sites provide more information than archaeological deposits, which, they admit, do not provide a great deal of evidence for the issues in question.

Edwards and O'Connell ('Broad spectrum diets in arid Australia') appear to be alone in addressing explicitly the global significance of aspects of change in Australia. They argue that while 'human diets in most parts of the world changed dramatically' after the Last Glacial Maximum to a new diversity of foods, termed the 'broad spectrum revolution', Australia presents a challenge in that the changes are later than elsewhere. While this has the makings of a fascinating discussion, it is unfortunately undermined by their failure to define what they mean by 'broad spectrum'. I would have understood this to refer to the 'new diversity' mentioned above, in which a wider range of foods were exploited than had previously been the case. However, they appear to refer simply to a small number of new resources evident (mostly indirectly) in the archaeological record, referred to as 'definitive broad spectrum resources'. How are these identified? It is generally agreed that some foods were incorporated in the Aboriginal diet for the first time during the Holocene. The authors have not, however (nor has anyone else, as far as I know), shown that an overall wider range of resources came to be exploited at any given time in the Australian archaeological record.

This collection addresses some interesting topics, but fails to provide any unifying conclusions to the problems initially posed. Nor, on the other hand, does it contribute much in the way of debatable new argument. Most of the data and many of the views expressed have been aired elsewhere, but it is no doubt useful for *Antiquity's* wider audience to have this collated for them here.

**CONTEMPORARY ARCHAEOLOGY IN THEORY: A READER** edited by R.W. Preucel and I. Hodder. Blackwell Publishers Ltd. (1996) xiv+678 pages. ISBN 0 631 19561 0 (paperback). Price US\$24.95.

#### Bryce Barker

*Contemporary Archaeology in Theory* is divided into nine parts, beginning with a Prologue in which the editors discuss, in a general sense, various approaches to archaeological theory within a post-processual critique. Each of the other sections is preceded by a short discussion or critique of the approach presented, followed by papers exemplifying the various frameworks. The main sections deal with ecological theory, political economy, evolutionary theory, meaning and practice (material symbols), feminist and gender theory, theory relating to the past as power and finally a section dealing with archaeology and indigenous peoples' responses to it. The authors conclude with a theoretical archaeological discourse, between and with archaeologists and indigenous peoples. The papers selected range from well-known published work, from journals such as *American Antiquity*, to material from occasional papers or regional journals, not readily available in Australia.

Preucel and Hodder state that the impetus for the book was to provide a degree of clarity to the often bewildering diversity of theoretical approaches in contemporary archaeology, and to encourage students to think about the relationship between

theory and practice. Indeed, one of the strengths of this book is that it is not just a text on pure theory in archaeology (an approach which often leaves students confused as to practical applications), but one that utilises case studies of applied theory in each section. Thus, the brief overviews of various theoretical approaches which precede the papers of each section, provide constructive critiques and highlight possible shortcomings of the approaches, providing a good spring-board for student discussion. For example, under 'Ecological Approaches', the editors use Binford's (1980) 'Willow smoke and dogs tails: Hunter-gatherer settlement systems and archaeological site formation' as an example of an ecosystems approach, and Mithen's (1989) 'Ecological interpretations of Palaeolithic art' as an example of an evolutionary ecological approach. The third paper in this section, by Hastorf and Johannessen (1991), looks at palaeoeconomics as it relates to prehispanic Andean fuel use. It incorporates an ecological approach (in this case economic resources) with social, symbolic and political dimensions. These sections are not only of value in providing examples of theory in action, but also in relation to further reading, as many of the major proponents of various theories are referenced. For Australian archaeologists, I feel the sections dealing with representations of the past as an inherent part of the power relations of the present are particularly relevant theoretical issues, especially 'Responses of "the Other"', in which it is seen that dominant western cultures construct the past and cultures of non-western countries as inverse images of themselves. These sections are neatly framed in the final part, a dialogue between archaeologists and a Native American which serves as a summing up and conclusion to the book. I believe all archaeology students in Australia need to be familiar with these theoretical issues, relating as they do to the archaeology of living cultures and European colonial history.

An important feature of *Contemporary Archaeology in Theory: A Reader* is that it does not eschew existing theories for a new dogma. Rather, it views archaeological theory as in many ways fluid and overlapping. This is neatly set out in the excellent first part, in which the editors state:

We regard archaeology as an increasingly diverse and changing discipline, with a growing multitude of perspectives espoused. Any attempt to congeal this proliferation, to categorize the moving diversity must ultimately be an attempt to impose a particular perspective from within a particular set of interests. Our aim, therefore, is to acknowledge this condition in constructing this Reader. We seek not to close down debate by asserting a stability, or declaring a new dogma. Rather we want to use this Reader as an opportunity to foreground some of the tensions which exist both within the discipline and across its boundaries. We view this Reader as a context for exploring these tensions as potential sites for future theoretical differentiation and development (p.4).

Similarly, it is stated that archaeological theory should not be seen as a set of historical oppositions representing distinct evolutionary stages in the history of archaeological theoretical development (such as processual archaeology evolving as a response to culture history or post-processual as a reaction to processual), but rather that connections and interactions as

well as the contemporaneity of different approaches should be emphasised. This inclusive approach is of particular importance in a text, as a range of theoretical views are to some extent accommodated.

Archaeological theory is somewhat neglected in Australia as an essential part of students' archaeological training. In this context I believe *Contemporary Archaeology in Theory* makes a valuable contribution to contemporary archaeological theory by making it accessible to students and archaeologists generally, in a structured and comprehensive way. This book would provide a good basis for an advanced level archaeological theory course.

#### References

- Binford, L.R. 1980 Willow smoke and dogs' tails: Hunter-gatherer settlement systems and archaeological site formation. *American Antiquity* 45:4-20.
- Harstorf, C.A. and Johannessen, S. 1991 Understanding changing people/plant relationships in the prehispanic Andes. In R.W. Preucel (ed.) *Processual and Post-Processual Archaeologies: Multiple Ways of Knowing the Past*, pp.140-55. Carbondale, Illinois: Center for Archaeological Investigations, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. *Occasional Paper* No. 10
- Mithen, S.J. 1989 Ecological interpretations of Palaeolithic art. *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* 57:103-14.

**BUSHFIRES AND BUSHTUCKER: ABORIGINAL PLANT USE IN CENTRAL AUSTRALIA** by Peter Latz. Illustrated by Jenny Green. Alice Springs: IAD Press (1995) xv+400 pages. ISBN 0 949659 835 (hardcover). Price \$49.95.

#### Wendy Beck

This book is about the economic botany of Central Australia. It is very carefully researched and well-presented, and it consists of two parts: Part I is a relatively short (72 pages) account of the characteristics of the central Australian desert and the Aboriginal uses of plant resources, together with a chapter on Aboriginal fire use; Part II is an extensive (225 pages) and well-illustrated list of plants and their uses. The last 90 pages of the book consist of a series of very valuable tables of primary and summary data and information sources, which I will discuss further below. Latz wrote the book because

the detailed knowledge of plant food knowledge and usage held by Aboriginal people has been lost forever in much of Australia. ... In some ways this book is my attempt to ensure that this knowledge is not lost in Central Australia. (p.xi)

In style and tone, this book seems to fall between the less scholarly 'bush tucker' books and the more-detailed, but relatively inaccessible journal articles, scholarly databases and theses. While there are other general books which deal with the economic botany of Australia, especially the non-arid areas, this is the most comprehensive work to deal with Central Australia, and is based on much first-hand observation and research (Latz 1982).

This is a well-presented book, with a particularly eye-catching cover. The line illustrations and photographs are useful and appropriate, but it should be noted that the book is not a field guide. There are some typographical errors, particularly in the citing of named authors (e.g. Griffen for Griffin,

p.22 and elsewhere). In my view, the strongest parts of the book are the plant lists in Part II, and especially the tables in the appendices. These add detail to the more general account of plant uses in Part II. The plant lists contain, for example: references for each plant; a list of species utilised in Australia, but not used in the area researched; a list of species given Aboriginal names, but not utilised, or utilised for minor purposes only; and an extensive list of plant names in seven central Australian languages. Another strength of the book is the use and acknowledgement of research in unwritten forms, which includes research undertaken by schoolteachers, government officials and other people living in Central Australia (p.390). Inevitably one could disagree with some of the statements based on the literature (e.g. that *Macrozamia* can be detoxified by heat alone), but these are minor quibbles. This book is obviously a product of careful and long-term research, both first-hand and literary. However, I would have liked to learn more about Latz's practical experiences living off the land, and more about how these showed up the deficiencies of current literature sources (p.xi).

I think the weakest part of the book is the first part, in particular the chapter on Aboriginal people and fire. Firstly, Latz makes no reference to arguments that oppose the view of substantial firestick farming, and secondly, no reference is made to recent work on the prehistory of Central Australia (e.g. Smith 1993; Veth 1993) and its colonisation, instead referring only to older and outmoded models. There are very few references to relevant literature of the 1980s and 1990s. However, I suspect that most readers of this book will be more interested in the uses of plants rather than their history, and so this book will be a useful and attractive reference and will have a long shelf life.

#### References

- Latz, P. 1982 Bushfires and bushtucker: Aboriginal plant use in Central Australia. Unpublished MA(Hons) thesis, Department of Archaeology and Palaeoanthropology, University of New England, Armidale.
- Smith, M.A. 1993 Biogeography, human ecology and prehistory in the sandridge deserts. *Australian Archaeology* 37:35-50.
- Veth, P. 1993 *Islands in the Interior: The Dynamics of Prehistoric Adaptations Within the Arid Zone of Australia*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. *International Monographs in Prehistory, Archaeological Series* 3.

**THE ILLUSION OF RICHES: SCALE, RESOLUTION AND EXPLANATION IN TASMANIAN PLEISTOCENE HUMAN BEHAVIOUR** by Richard Cosgrove. British Archaeological Reports International Series 608. Oxford: Tempus Reparatum (1995) x+234 pages. ISBN 0 86054 787.6 (paperback). Price £33.00 plus postage.

#### Judith Field

My introduction to archaeology was in 1983. Professor John Mulvaney was addressing a public meeting at the Kogarah Town Hall in Sydney, presenting the archaeological evidence for Pleistocene occupation of Tasmania and the need to protect these important archaeological sites, under threat from the proposed Franklin River dam. More recent archaeological excavations in southwest Tasmania have extended the chronology of human occupation to over 30,000 years, more than