INTRODUCTION:

Archaeology all over the world has often been perceived to be in opposition with the aspirations and ideas of Indigenous communities. Today, as we speak, arguments continue between scientists and Indigenous people over ownership issues and rights to heritage, for example the Ancient One (Kommawick Man) in North America has long been under scrutiny to whether it should be repatriated or kept for the 'benefit of mankind' (Thomas, D. H. 2006). This has also been the case within Australia. Undeniably, we have our own cases that deliberate on the conflicting interpretations of heritage, for example the Hindmarsh Island Bridge case (Mead, 1995), or the debate over the Kow Swamp repatriated remains (Bowdler, 1992:103-66; Mulvaney, 1989:66-77) and other remains. It is clear that since its colonial beginnings in any country, archaeology's regard towards First Nations people's cultural heritage, lands and perspectives have been impertinent to say the least.

Within Australia, early attempts at 'archaeology' or 'anthropology' were characterized by accounts of grave robbing and the stealing of Indigenous cultural material (Langford, 1983:1-6). At times, even when a professional archaeological
practice was established in Australia, the discipline unknowingly played a role in divorcing Indigenous peoples from their heritage, conducting research without permission and creating theories and accounts of the past not supported by or damaging to Indigenous people (Langford, 1983:1-6). Thankfully, the methodologies that archaeologists often practiced in the past are now considered highly unethical by most archaeologists. While this does not necessarily mean that Indigenous peoples are ready to forgive and move on. Today, slowly, archaeologists and Indigenous peoples are beginning to work together and are pushing the boundaries on what should be considered as an ethical practice. Hopefully, this project will be another to assist in pushing those boundaries.

Such a dramatic change in archaeology is in part the manifestation of a much bigger movement within Australia since the 1970s. This is the empowerment and self-determination of Indigenous communities as they have risen up against Australia's past racial discrimination and intolerance. Part of the emergence of Indigenous rights have included the introduction of Native Title, a method for some Indigenous communities to claim back the land that their grandparents descended from. For the Ngadjuri people of the mid-north of South Australia, Native Title is just one of the ways that they are returning to their Grandfather's country. After being forced from the land in the nineteenth and early twentieth century due to pastoral expansion (Copley, 2002), the twenty-first century offers a chance for active reconciliation and the return of heritage and culture. However, the coming back process is more than just the retrieval of land. For Indigenous people removed from ancestral lands, one imagines that the process of returning would be a deeply powerful and poignant experience. For non-Indigenous communities in areas where
there has been little previous indigenous presence, the return of indigenous people to
their homelands may be just as deeply felt but in different ways. For my honours
project I plan to investigate this process and the way that archaeology can be useful
to such an event.

RESEARCH QUESTION:
What practical role can archaeology have assisting indigenous
communities returning to their ancestral lands and heritage?

This honours investigation aims to consider the ways that archaeology has
already been useful to Ngadjuri people of the mid-north coming back to their
country, and how it can continue to be useful into the future. The project aspires to
tell the story of how Ngadjuri people are coming back to their ancestor’s land, as
both a record for Ngadjuri people, and also as a prototype for the way that
archaeology fits into such a process. One of the major features of this investigation is
that it is to be totally guided by Ngadjuri Elders involved with my project, and
g geared towards positive outcomes for the Ngadjuri community. For this reason, any
of the proposed objectives affirmed to be carried out are subject to changes,
modifications or complete eradication from the project.

In conducting this project I am not only interested in the tangible aspects of
the ‘coming back to country’ process but also intangible elements focusing on the
inter-racial relations that spring from such an event. I am interested in how Ngadjuri
people feel about returning to their ancestor’s lands, and also how the non-
Indigenous community may feel about an indigenous presence where previously
there has been none in European times. Secondary questions to be addressed in this project include:

- How do Indigenous and non-Indigenous people feel about the process of "coming back to country"?
- How does general Australian society perceptions of Indigenous peoples and Native Title affect this particular communities (Burra and surrounding district) understanding of what is happening?
- Can Burra be used as a prototype for analyzing the way that rural areas may deal with inter-racial interactions?
- Are there any ways to create a better understanding for communities about Indigenous people coming back to country? How does archaeology aid in such a process?
- The "coming home process" is becoming well established in Australia ... Compare this to overseas? (Pitzer College research)
- What are the emotive issues archaeologists should be aware of during such a procedure and how can they assist in it?

These objectives, while coming from my own archaeological perspective, draw strongly on elements of anthropology, sociology and cultural studies. It is my belief that archaeology should not be limited by the definition of dealing with "material culture" only, and so consequently I am branching out into other areas in the hope of expanding the nature of my results.

While archaeologically, the outcomes of such an investigation will include the interpretations and analysis of people's inter-racial relationships and community social behavior in reaction to a particular ongoing event, I would also like the project to have positive public education outcomes, and outcomes for the Ngadjuri people.
This could include producing information for the community about the Ngadjuri people's return. It could also include working for Ngadjuri traditional owners and responding to any requests they may have of me, for example documenting knowledge, researching, or producing data for both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous community.

SIGNIFICANCE TO ARCHAEOLOGY:

As the aims and objectives of Indigenous archaeological practice become more and more geared towards Indigenous control of research, this investigation becomes increasingly significant to archaeology. Today any practice of Indigenous archaeology must be done with the full consent, support and involvement of Indigenous groups or communities and it is vital for both students and archaeologists to be aware of the ethical standards involved in dealing with people. This investigation plans to provide a documentary source of how processes of working together succeed. While it is clear that there have been many joint initiatives of archaeologists and Indigenous people working together, I have not discovered any archaeological studies into the way that the discipline may be actively used to ease tension and record the processes of retrieving culture and land.

Secondly, such a project pushes the boundaries to what constitutes archaeology. Traditionally, archaeology is looked upon as the study of material culture. However today in Australia, archaeologists are beginning to widen their horizons to include a more inter-disciplinary approach. This provides the researcher with a larger scope to consider the issues, and will often result in a more effective and extensive outcome for research.
METHODS:

My honours research methodologies will be split into three sections throughout the course of study. This will commence with a four-month period studying overseas at Pitzer College, LA. During this time the majority of background research will be undertaken into other disciplinary areas such as cultural studies and inter-racial relations. As a large part of my honours requires an interdisciplinary understanding that is disconnected from the discipline of archaeology, this will be an ideal time to build a strong foundation of knowledge on such matters. The research I conduct here will allow me to place my project more effectively within a wider global perspective, and will expand my understanding and cultural awareness on a worldwide scale.

The second term of research will include working for the Ngadjuri people and will involve the majority of fieldwork. This is likely to include archival research, recording oral histories, interviews, and may also include some field survey or similar, if requested by Ngadjuri people. It is during this time that relationships will be built with members of the Ngadjuri community, in which I hope strong friendships remain. In conducting this project, it is also my aspiration to be accepted by the Ngadjuri people to conduct further research for them if they desire in the future.

The third period of my honours will include the analysis and interpretation of data and writing up the results. As some of my research will often be personal, this will be done on the basis that all parties contributing information to my research will give full consent to the final contents.
TEXT REFERENCES:


Copley, V. 2002. Personal Correspondence.


BIBLIOGRAPHY OF PRELIMINARY READING:


