

15

Wider implications and conclusions

Introduction

This chapter briefly discusses the project's results in the context of key models for southeast Queensland and adjacent regions which emphasise recent intensification of settlement and subsistence strategies. The chapter concludes by considering directions for future research which will improve our understanding of the archaeology of southeast Queensland as well as coastal archaeology in Australia more generally.

Key Findings

The main findings of this study can be summarised as follows:

- significant estuary-specific radiocarbon reservoir offsets of up to $\Delta R = -305 \pm 61$;
- generally high integrity of open coastal deposits;
- first occupation of the region by 4,000 BP;
- presence of fish bone in deposits pre-dating 3,000 BP;
- a period of reduced regional occupation or abandonment between 2,000 and 1,000 BP;
- creation and occupation of more sites through time, especially after 1,000 BP;
- a general increase in the deposition of shell, fish bone, charcoal and stone artefacts through time;
- a change from small, focussed sites to large, diffuse sites;
- a change in raw material from high quality apparently imported stone to low quality local stone;
- a change in stone artefact technology from curated to expedient tool manufacture;
- the appearance of large stone tools associated with plant processing in the last 1,000 years; and
- continuity in site use from 1,500 BP into the early twentieth century.

A three-phase cultural chronology was developed for the region which proposed initial occupation before 4,000 years ago and significant changes in settlement and resource use after 1,500 BP. Phase

I (pre-4,000 BP–c.1,500 BP) saw ephemeral coastal occupation by groups which occasionally used coastal resources as part of highly-mobile settlement strategies covering a broad area. Phase II (c.1,500 BP–AD 1850s) is characterised by permanent occupation of the coastal zone with relatively low residential mobility systems. This phase is defined by a localisation in resource use and the establishment of large sites throughout the region on the lower margins of major estuaries. Phase III (c.AD 1850s–AD 1920s) saw the emergence of post-European mobility systems. Despite disappearing from the European historical record, Aboriginal people continued to use traditional camping places well into the period of European settlement.

Regional context and implications

As noted in Chapter 1, a number of large-scale archaeological projects have been undertaken along the coast to the north and south of the study area as well as in inland areas to the west (Fig. 15.1). All have yielded evidence broadly consistent with a model of ephemeral low density coastal occupation from before the mid-Holocene with patterns of dramatic change in the late Holocene towards increased rates of occupation. However, while the patterns described for all of these regions are broadly similar, interpretations vary widely and some basic sampling and analytical problems remain to be resolved. In the following sections, key results from the southern Curtis Coast are discussed in terms of major themes in the archaeology of southeast and central Queensland. As will be shown, the results of this study extend and amplify some previous findings while calling some others into question, pointing to issues requiring further research.

Regional occupation before the late Holocene

Findings in the wider region demonstrate the presence of people in inland areas by at least 21,800±400 BP (OxA-806) at Wallen Wallen Creek on the margin of what is now Moreton Bay (Gowlett et al. 1987), 18,800±480 BP (ANU-345) at Kenniff Cave in the Central Queensland Highlands (Callow et al. 1963) and 9,296±119 BP (Wk-9311) at Grinding Groove Cave at Cania Gorge (Tony Eales, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit, University of Queensland, pers. comm., 2004). On the coast, the earliest evidence for use of marine resources in Queensland comes from the Whitsunday Islands with dates of 8,150±80 BP (Beta-27835) at Nara Inlet 1 and 6,440±90 BP (Beta-56976) at Border Island 1 (Barker 1989). Unfortunately, few sites are known to span the transition from pre-coastal (terrestrial) to coastal (marine) resource suites. Wallen Wallen Creek on North Stradbroke Island provides one of the few Australian examples. Although the site dates from the late Pleistocene, faunal remains are restricted to the upper shell midden deposit, which is dated to the last c.4,000 years. Neal and Stock (1986:619) concluded that:

The inhabitants initially hunted terrestrial and aquatic vertebrate fauna, including dugong (*Dugong dugong*), pademelon (*Thylogale* sp.) and snake (*Python spilates*). This was later replaced by an exclusively coastal economy based on the littoral and marine resources of fish and shellfish, with limited dugong hunting.

From around 5,000 BP, and broadly coincident with the final stages of the last marine transgression, increasing numbers of open coastal sites are known, with dates of 4,830±110 BP (Beta-33342) at New Brisbane Airport and 4,350±220 BP (Beta-20799) at Hope Island in the Moreton Bay Region, 4,780±80 BP (Beta-25512) at Teewah Beach 26 in the Great Sandy Region and 4,274±94 BP (NZA-456) at Mazie Bay in the Keppel Islands (Ulm and Reid 2000). The first evidence for occupation on the southern Curtis Coast at the Seven Mile Creek Mound at 3,780±60 BP (Wk-8327) conforms well with these findings.

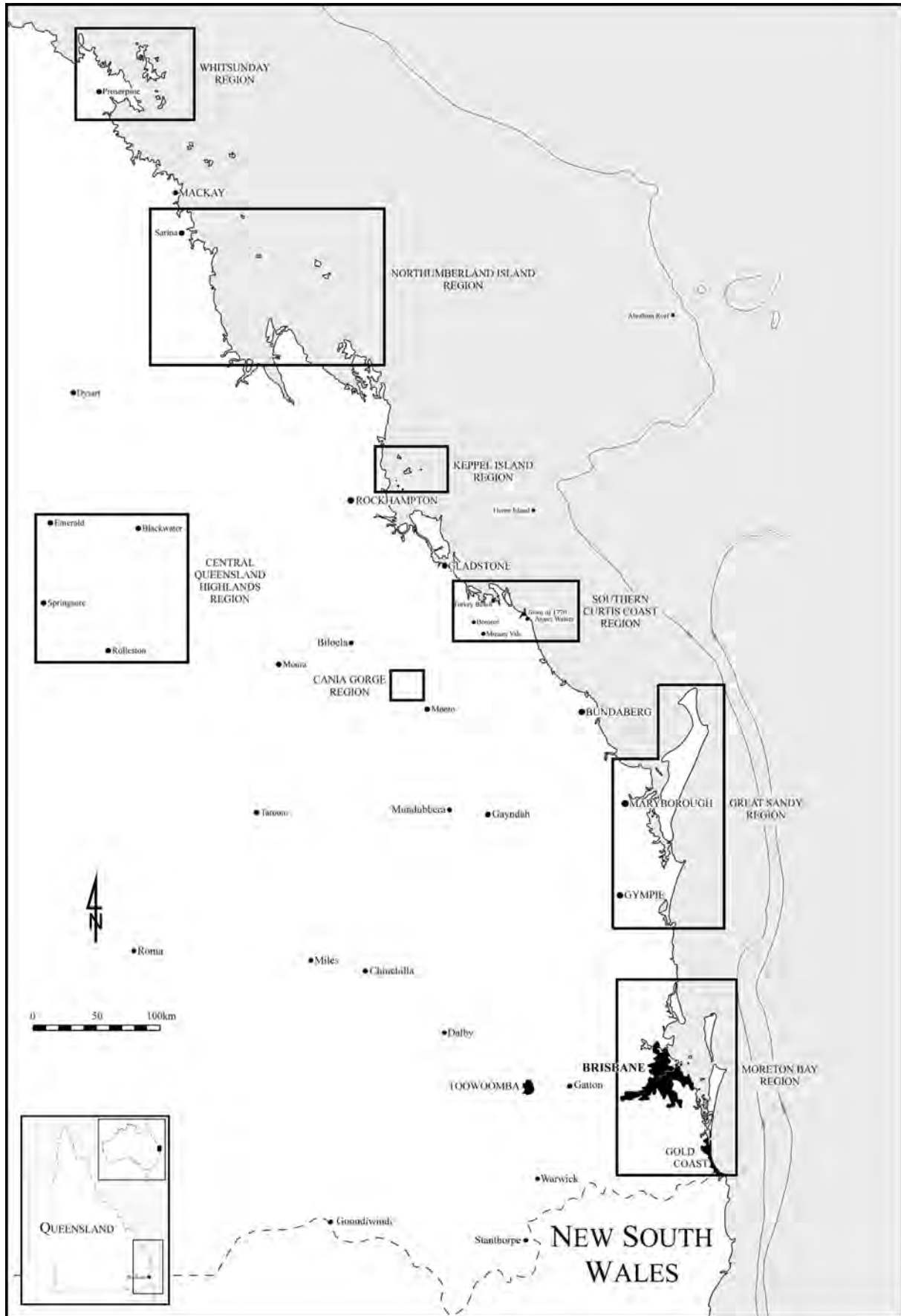


Figure 15.1 Southeast and central Queensland showing the location of major archaeological projects.

On the basis of these data, occupation before c.2,000 BP on the southern Queensland coast has been characterised as low density and ephemeral, and linked to low population densities and high levels of mobility (e.g. Barker 1995, 1996; McNiven 1999). Data from the southern Curtis Coast support these interpretations, with sites pre-dating 2,000 BP indicating geographically-focussed, short-term and discontinuous occupation. Evidence for the use of marine resources from the early Holocene in Whitsunday Island rockshelters located near palaeoshorelines and the coincidence of widespread coastal occupation with sea-level stabilisation provides strong support for continuous use of coastal resources throughout the marine transgression, with people following the transgressive coastline (see Hall and Hiscock 1988; McNiven 1991a). Occupation of the Seven Mile Creek Mound is synchronous with local sea-level stabilisation and its contents (50 taxa of shellfish, 2 taxa of crustaceans, 6 taxa of fish etc) indicate the presence of a well-established suite of estuarine resources at that time. Others have also shown that marine ecosystems are highly adaptable and resilient during periods of environmental change (e.g. Barker 1991; Hutchings and Saenger 1987; Quinn and Beumer 1984).

These data do not support models postulating time-lags between sea-level stabilisation and the availability of coastal resources associated with lags in the timing of coastal settlement (e.g. Beaton 1985; Walters 1986). There does not appear to be any link between the availability of coastal resources and the intensity of human settlement. Palaeoenvironmental and archaeological data indicate the presence of a mosaic of productive estuarine systems by at least 4,500 BP, some 2,500 years before the more recent phase of occupation, even if they were not identical in configuration to those of the present coast. A range of data presented above also suggests that this archaeological pattern cannot be explained in terms of differential preservation or selective sampling (see also Ulm and Hall 1996). As the sample of investigated coastal sites in southeast Queensland increases, the number of sites known to date from the mid-Holocene will increase. Geomorphological studies are now needed to create a regional model of landscape development within which to situate studies of sites pre-dating the late Holocene.

Reduced occupation or abandonment of the coastal zone in the late Holocene

Patterns of ephemeral low intensity occupation on the southern Curtis Coast appear to continue until about 2,000 BP. There is then a period of reduced regional occupation or abandonment between 2,000 and 1,000 BP, which closely matches findings from the Great Sandy Region to the south. McNiven (1992a:12) identified a gap of 1,400 years (2,300–900 BP) in the Cooloola sequence. This he linked to widespread climatically-induced decreases in the availability of rainforest resources across the Great Sandy Region, which prompted restructuring of existing settlement-subsistence arrangements by decreasing use of the coastal region and increasing use of hinterland areas (McNiven 1992a:12). Preliminary results from Cania Gorge complement these findings, with a period of reduced occupation identified between c.2,400 and 1,400 BP (Tony Eales, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit, University of Queensland, pers. comm., 2004). Results from Cania Gorge are significant in this context as they are derived from an inland region and from different site types (rockshelters) from those on the coast. This makes it unlikely that the pattern observed in the southern Curtis Coast and Cooloola sequences is related to differential representation of coastal archaeological deposits as has been suggested in other regions (e.g. Head 1983; Rowland 1989). There is no similar pattern discernable in the southeast Queensland data, with sustained increases in site occupation from the mid-Holocene (Ulm and Hall 1996). These observations indicate that the reduced regional occupation on the southern Curtis Coast may result from restructuring of land-use strategies since the mid-Holocene throughout the wider central Queensland region, but not in southeast Queensland, which may have involved at least temporary abandonment (Veth 2003). However, Early Phase occupation on the southern Curtis Coast is not associated with rainforest use, calling into question the significance of reductions in

rainforest cited by McNiven (1992a, 1999) as a major factor in the near-abandonment of the Great Sandy Region. Longmore (1997a) has suggested that reductions in rainforest occurred earlier than the late Holocene, further undermining the role of rainforest in the later changes.

These findings run counter to orthodox accounts of late Holocene culture change which emphasise undifferentiated cumulative trajectories towards increased occupation. The identification of major periods of reduced occupation or abandonment challenge us to re-evaluate conventional regional narratives of late Holocene Aboriginal lifeways and more explicitly focus research designs on the identification and definition of variation in trajectories of change.

The antiquity of marine fishing

In southeast Queensland, Walters (1986, 1989, 1992a, 1992b, 1992c, 2001) viewed the commencement of a marine fishery as a necessary precursor to permanent occupation of the southeast Queensland coastal lowlands which he modelled as a marginal terrestrial environment. In fact, he argued that there was no firm evidence for fishing in southeast Queensland before 2,000 years ago (Walters 1992a). Determining the antiquity and nature of marine fishing in the region has therefore been important in various regional studies (e.g. Bowen 1989; Frankland 1990; Hall and Bowen 1989; McNiven 1991a; Ross and Duffy 2000; Walters et al. 1987). However, variability in data recovery techniques and analytical methods combined with poorly developed site chronologies inhibit meaningful integration of these data (Ulm 2002a).

The southern Curtis Coast study not only deployed consistent data recovery and quantification protocols across the region, but is located in the same bioregion as Walters' sites. A major finding of the current study is the antiquity and abundance of fish remains in the region. Fish bone recovered from three sites pre-dates 2,000 BP. The Seven Mile Creek Mound provides the earliest unequivocal evidence for fishing in southeast Queensland at 4,000 BP. The only other site reported to have fish remains pre-dating 3,000 BP is the New Brisbane Airport site where 'fragmentary fish bone' (Hall 1999:174) dating to the mid-Holocene was found encased in the ironstone conglomerate matrix of the lower excavation units. Walters (1992a:35) noted that only a few fragments of fish bone were recovered from this site and argued that these remains have not been demonstrated to be cultural. Stratigraphic and other details published to date do not provide a clear cultural context for the fish remains.

Fish bone from the Mort Creek Site Complex and Eurimbula Site 1 unambiguously supports the antiquity of marine fishing in the southern Curtis Coast region, with assemblages at these sites pre-dating 3,000 and 2,000 BP respectively. These data suggest that fish were always a key resource along the southern Curtis Coast and were not recently incorporated into subsistence production systems to overcome the marginality of the coastal lowlands, as suggested by Walters.

Localisation of resource use

Recent models have highlighted an apparent localisation in the use of animal, plant and stone raw material sources across southeast Queensland in the late Holocene. Morwood (1986, 1987) observed that late Holocene faunal inventories from some rockshelter sites in southeast Queensland exhibited patterns towards representation of smaller-bodied animals, such as possums and koalas, and a more diverse array of species. He argued that this was part of a shift in subsistence strategies from individual encounter-based hunting to more cooperative forms using fire drives and nets with greater production potential.

McNiven (1999) elaborated these ideas in modelling regionalisation in the Great Sandy Region since the mid-Holocene (see David 1991; David and Cole 1990; Hall and Bowen 1989). He defined regionalisation as 'a process whereby social groups segment or fission into smaller social groups with separate and smaller territories. These smaller groups become more localised in their activities tending towards cultural exclusivity' (McNiven 1999:157–8). McNiven defined

archaeological correlates for fissioning in terms of increasing localisation of settlement and subsistence patterns and resource use, particularly stone procurement, and the emergence of identity-conscious place-marking strategies such as earthen circles (bora rings) and cemeteries in the last 1,000 years. He argued that access and control of rainforest resources was pivotal to restructuring of local group arrangements. McNiven (2003:339) recently argued that marine stone arrangements in central Queensland were also linked to this recent phase of regionalisation 'whereby newly established residential groups intensify use of local resources and inscribe their social identity into landscapes through place-marking strategies that include formal ritual sites'.

Archaeological investigations in other parts of southeast and central Queensland have revealed similar patterns, in what Lourandos (1997:161) described as 'a more specialised and broad-based coastal emphasis in the economy of the most recent phase' (see also Barker 1995; McNiven 1999; Morwood 1987; Rowland 1982; Ulm 1995; Ulm and Hall 1996; Walters 1989; Westcott et al. 1999a). Overall, these patterns point to a restructuring of land-use over the last 1,500 years towards more systematic and permanent coastal occupation with relatively low levels of residential mobility. Ulm and Hall (1996) dated these changes to around 1,200 BP in southern southeast Queensland and McNiven (1992a, 1999) has argued for a date of 900 BP for the Great Sandy Region. To the north, Barker (1989, 1991, 1995, 1996, 2004) associated increases in diet breadth in the Whitsunday Islands from 600 years ago with the emergence of specialised marine economies akin to those documented in the ethnohistoric record, while Rowland (1982) found that the Keppel Islands were only permanently occupied c.700 years ago.

On the southern Curtis Coast several lines of evidence point to increasingly localised resource use after 1,500 BP. In addition to obvious increases in coastal settlement and use of marine resources, stone raw material sourcing becomes almost exclusively local. The recent exchange of edge-ground hatchets manufactured on rhyolitic tuff also points to the active integration of people into wider networks of social geography in the recent past. In connection with McNiven's (2003) association of place-marking behaviours with recent processes of social fissioning, it appears that mound formation and stone fishtrap construction on the southern Curtis Coast pre-date the appearance of low mobility subsistence-settlement systems associated with localisation by more than 1,000 years, suggesting that caution needs to be exercised in arguments promoting a recent antiquity for place-marking behaviours.

The dramatic increases in the intensity of regional land-use identified on the southern Curtis Coast around 700 BP coincide with similar changes observed in the Whitsunday and Keppel Islands, but post-date changes in southeast Queensland by 500 years. Like the timing of reduced coastal occupation between around 2,000 and 1,000 BP, localisation in central Queensland and northern southeast Queensland are part of the same general system, implying the operation of different factors or at least different timing of these changes from those in southeast Queensland. Further investigation of these findings may shed light on the antiquity of social relationships recorded for the recent past. Intergroup relationships defined on the basis of linguistic and ethnographic data document a disjunction in alliance networks around Rockhampton, with the majority of social relations in the Curtis Coast region focussed to the southeast. The antiquity of these social arrangements is unknown and it could be that this pattern was preceded by an alignment of social affiliations which encompassed central Queensland and the northern half of southeast Queensland.

Wider implications

In the wider context, the recent trajectory towards localisation of resource use and permanent settlement of the coast in southeast and central Queensland can be related to long-term historical trajectories of change. The regional chronology indicates a time-lag between intermittent use of coastal resources, and widespread permanent occupation which occurred much later. People

appear to have always used coastal resources, and it is no accident that the first cultural shell deposits on the southern Queensland coast are coeval with the onset of relative local sea-level stability, resulting from people following the transgressive coastline westwards (Hall and Hiscock 1988; McNiven 1991a; Rowland 1999).

It is possible that reduced predictability of coastal resources linked to fluctuations in marine productivity induced by the final stages of marine transgression may have led to a reduction in the use of coastal areas in favour of increased use of subcoastal areas, with only occasional coastal foraging expeditions. Indeed, subcoastal occupation only becomes archaeologically visible in southeast Queensland around the terminal Pleistocene/early Holocene (Hall 1999). This would have resulted in significant depopulation of the coastal zone. Such population redistribution has been suggested as a mechanism to cope with dramatic environmental change elsewhere (e.g. Gamble 1993), necessitating reorganisation of access to land.

In some areas with low offshore gradients, coastal resources may have only been reincorporated as an extension of inland-focussed extractive economies in the late Holocene, after the end of major transgressive fluctuations increased the predictability of resource abundance and distribution. Smith and Sharp (1993:49) noted the 'presence of sites on or near the Pleistocene coast, wherever the continental shelf is steep enough to allow their preservation'. All known Pleistocene and early Holocene sites in Australia which exhibit use of coastal resources are located in rockshelters situated near rocky and/or precipitous palaeoshorelines (e.g. Barker 1991, 1995; Morse 1988, 1993; Veth 1993). These findings may not simply relate to preservation of sites, but also the relative stability of resource zones in areas where sea-level impacts are primarily vertical rather than horizontal (Beaton 1995). For the Whitsunday Islands, Barker (1995) has argued that the steep rocky coastline supported a similar resource structure throughout the Holocene. However, in southeast Queensland where the continental shelf is relatively wide, has a gentle slope and few near-coastal rock formations, it is perhaps not surprising that archaeological evidence is lacking for coastal occupation prior to mid-Holocene sea-level stabilisation. It might be expected that if early coastal use was related to inland-focussed groups, it might be characterised by high mobility and the establishment of activity-specific sites. Hiscock (1994) and Kelly and Todd (1988) have argued that initial incorporation of new territories or use of little-used territories would have focussed on hunting as the detailed knowledge required for successful gathering would not be available. Lithic technologies thought to be indicators of initial colonisation, with curated, reliable forms, are exactly the sorts of stone artefacts recovered from pre-1,500 BP deposits on the southern Curtis Coast.

After 1,500 BP the coast progressively assumed a more important role in regional mobility strategies, culminating in permanent occupation. After this time, excavations reveal rapid and widespread changes in site content, abundance of certain classes of cultural material in deposits and extent of sites. The magnitude and broad synchrony of these sites indicate a reorganisation of demographic structures linked to significant cultural transformation. Occupation in the region in the late Holocene took the form of progressively more nucleated communities. More specifically, these transitions include cessation in the use of non-local stone raw materials, an increasingly diversified subsistence resource base and patterns of increase in site establishment and use. Like McNiven (1990a, 1991a, 1999), I suggest that the pre-1,500 BP occupation phase was characterised by more territorially extensive and open social networks which included both coastal and hinterlands areas. After 1,500 BP regional populations appear more territorially bounded or closed as denoted by marked localisation of resource use and a dramatic increase in the scale of coastal occupation. A recent greater formalisation of social relations may also be evident in the production and exchange of edge-ground hatchets manufactured on rhyolitic tuff. The permanent structured occupation of coastal landscapes provided economic, social and political opportunities for the creation of new identity-conscious groups as part of a general restructuring of the social landscape.

The pattern of change and the emergence of regionalism is not the same everywhere and no single explanation can account for the changes seen in the archaeological record of the late Holocene.

Resolution of the causes of late Holocene modifications in Aboriginal land-use strategies on the southern Queensland coast will require ongoing work with particular attention paid to chronology-building, assessment of site integrity and consistent data recovery strategies.

Methodological implications

Two strands of this research have direct methodological implications for coastal archaeology in Australia as well as archaeology more generally. First is the concern with radiocarbon dating of coastal sites, in particular the dating of marine samples with poorly defined local marine and estuarine reservoir effects and establishing the comparability of these samples vis-à-vis those obtained on terrestrial materials. Second is the development of techniques to assess the stratigraphic integrity of sites. Together these approaches help quantify the temporal limits of the record of human occupation in the region and therefore amplify the interpretative potential of open coastal deposits.

Dating strategies and chronological control

Given the low number of dates available for Holocene open coastal sites in Queensland, a basic objective of this project was to construct a solid chronological framework through a large sample of radiometric determinations obtained on a range of sample materials from all major stratigraphic contexts. Dating of basal and termination deposits in this study contributed key data to defining regional continuities and discontinuities in occupation (David 2002:37). Conventional approaches which assume continuity of occupation from initial site establishment routinely overestimate the number of sites dating to more recent periods and tend to homogenise patterns of regional occupation and apply regionally undifferentiated trajectories of cultural change across vast areas of the continent.

This study revealed major problems in adopting generic open ocean marine reservoir correction estimates in calibrating radiocarbon dates obtained on estuarine shell samples in southeast Queensland. Results obtained from estuarine shell/charcoal pairs demonstrated marked variability in carbon reservoirs between estuaries, with offsets of up to several hundred years different from the recommended open ocean value, suggesting estuary-specific patterns of variation in terrestrial carbon input and exchange with the open ocean. Future studies will need to address this issue on a regional basis to increase confidence in site sequences and to facilitate their interpretation (Ulm 2002d). Large suites of dates including marine samples may be significantly biased by such factors.

Integrity of open sites

Australian archaeology has been dominated by studies of rockshelter deposits and open sites have often been cited as problematic owing to presumed uncertainties in site integrity. As Erlandson and Moss (1999:432) noted 'although many such investigations, especially those focused on large and deeply stratified sites, have helped elucidate general patterns of cultural development in many regions, the lack of comparative data from a broader range of sites in many regions obscures a tremendous amount of variability that helps us to transcend normative cultural reconstructions of the past'. Identification, description, sampling and absolute dating of a wide range of sites is therefore critical to the accurate characterisation of archaeological patterns as coherent over a region and not simply the result of site type and/or assemblage-specific accumulation and representation factors.

Issues of site integrity are basic to our understanding of cultural change. This study has shown that using appropriate data recovery tools at open sites can improve confidence in

assessments of site integrity. A novel approach using bivalve conjoin analysis of *Anadara trapezia* yielded data on post-depositional disturbance. These analyses demonstrated that relatively little movement of shell material occurred in most contexts, even in low density deposits without well-defined stratigraphy. The integrity of deposits is also supported by consistent age-depth relationships of dated shell and charcoal samples, as well as the clear disjunctions in the vertical concentration of cultural materials in deposits across the region. Shellfish remains at several sites also form continuous layers with interlocking valves effectively sealing lower deposits.

Bivalve conjoin analyses provide a useful adjunct to the battery of techniques conventionally used to assess post-depositional disturbance and have wide potential application in eastern Australian coastal shell deposits. Allen and O'Connell (2003) recently noted that stone artefact conjoin analyses are needed to help resolve questions about site integrity. Bivalve conjoin analyses provide a new method to apply to coastal sites, which often contain few stone artefacts.

Discussion

Despite the amount of research undertaken over the last three decades, it is still not possible to integrate our understandings of the Holocene on a continental scale, at any but the most abstract level. Few regions have sufficient data to attempt the construction of local archaeological (pre)histories. Major gaps remain in our understanding of the Holocene period owing to an uneven geographic spread of research, biases towards particular site types, and the limitations of conventional methodologies. Large areas of Australia remain virtually unknown archaeologically, especially beyond the southeast corner of the continent. The patchy distribution of studies has encouraged the identification of continuities between widely separated sites and regions, rather than at scales appropriate to the delineation of both continuities and discontinuities at the local level. Although there is a clear disjunction in the archaeological trajectories of many regions between 5,000 and 1,000 years ago, our ability to understand these changes remains hampered by limitations imposed by inadequate sampling and chronological control on the one hand, and the abstract explanatory framework adopted on the other. The continental narrative is important in providing a general heuristic framework but its validity is dependent on data accuracy and the strength of explanatory models. As it is, the continental narrative emerges as a conceptually inadequate framework that actually works to downplay temporal and spatial diversity, diverting attention from the particularity of regionally-specific historical trajectories and archaeological signatures. Obviously, at a continental scale, no historical trajectory is autonomous or exists in isolation, but rather is defined in part by external relationships. This interconnectedness should be the subject of study in its own right and not used to justify homogenising Indigenous Australian histories into a single historical trajectory. An alternative approach emphasising the diversity of regional archaeological and environmental records is much to be preferred. The major task ahead therefore remains a basic one: to construct and compare detailed individual site sequences from a range of site types, at the local and regional level, to establish the existence of trends independent of site-specific taphonomic and/or environmental factors.

Conclusion

Data and interpretations presented in this study form a baseline for future archaeological studies in the southern Curtis Coast region with methodological implications for the conduct of coastal archaeology in southeast Queensland and beyond. Conventional narratives of Australian prehistory emphasise patterns of synchronous change across many areas of the continent in the

late Holocene. Although these general patterns have often been presented as robust relationships in the literature, most are confounded by exceptions when subject to detailed scrutiny, underscoring the complexity of cultural diversity, site formation processes and taphonomic histories on both spatial and temporal axes. Techniques adopted in this study attempted to transcend the continental narrative by describing the archaeological record of a specific region and using tools sensitive to change in the archaeological record. Data revealed complex patterns of continuity and disjunction in the record of Aboriginal occupation of the southern Curtis Coast since the mid-Holocene.

Holocene period archaeology in Australia is on the cusp of a major shift in the appreciation of the complexity of temporal and spatial diversity. Accumulating regional archaeological and palaeoenvironmental datasets, coupled with refinements in technical methods, provides the potential for disentangling local and regional variability from amorphous 'long-term, continental narrative and description' (Frankel 1993:31). Although the continental narrative has value, its formative elements need to be rethought, particularly its failure to adequately contextualise sequences within local frameworks, historical trajectories and patterns of research. An exciting challenge in the coming decades will involve the construction of detailed regional archaeological and palaeoenvironmental sequences, and the re-examination of regional datasets, with a view to describing and explicating the complexity and diversity of the archaeological record. Not only will detailed regional studies provide more accurate accounts of the past and more strongly situate people in the context of landscape, but also they will contribute to a more informed, robust and useful continental narrative.