

# australian ARCHAEOLOGY

The official journal of the Australian Archaeological Association Inc.

NUMBER 78 | JUNE 2014



# australian ARCHAEOLOGY

*Australian Archaeology*, the official publication of the Australian Archaeological Association Inc., is a refereed journal published since 1974. It accepts original articles in all fields of archaeology and other subjects relevant to archaeological research and practice in Australia and nearby areas. Contributions are accepted in eight sections: Articles (5000–8000 words), Short Reports (1000–3000), Obituaries (500–2000), Thesis Abstracts (200–500), Book Reviews (500–2000), Forum (5000), Comment (1000) and Backfill (which includes letters, conference details, announcements and other material of interest to members). *Australian Archaeology* is published twice a year, in June and December. Notes to Contributors are available at: <[www.australianarchaeologicalassociation.com.au](http://www.australianarchaeologicalassociation.com.au)>.

*Australian Archaeology* is indexed in the Arts and Humanities, Social and Behavioural Sciences, and Social Sciences Citation Indices of the Thomson Reuters Web of Knowledge, SCOPUS, Australian Public Affairs Information Service (APAIS), and Anthropological Literature and Anthropological Index Online.

*Australian Archaeology* is ranked as a tier A journal by the European Reference Index for the Humanities and French Agence d'Evaluation de la Recherche et de l'Enseignement Supérieur.

Subscriptions are available to individuals through membership of the Australian Archaeological Association Inc. or to organisations through institutional subscription. Subscription application/renewal forms are available at <[www.australianarchaeologicalassociation.com.au](http://www.australianarchaeologicalassociation.com.au)>. *Australian Archaeology* is available through Informat and JSTOR.

Design and Print: Openbook Howden

Front Cover: Excavation in progress, Boodie Cave, Barrow Island (Kane Ditchfield, entered in the AAA2013 Photography Competition).

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ISSN 0312-2417

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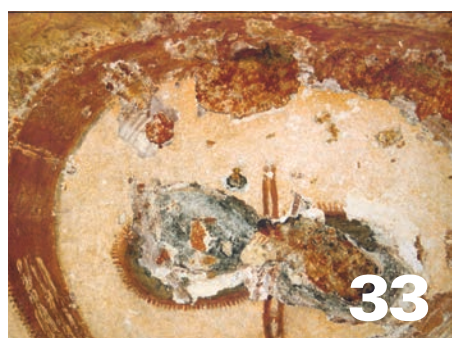
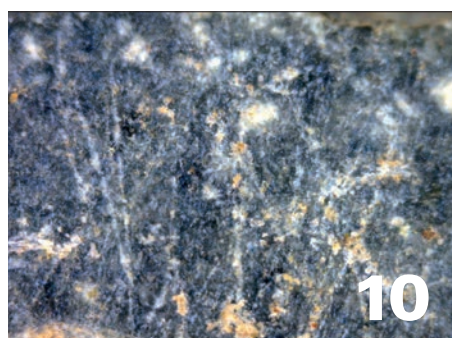
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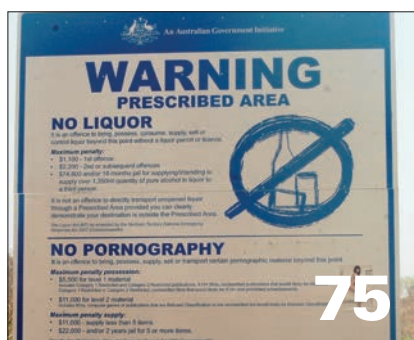
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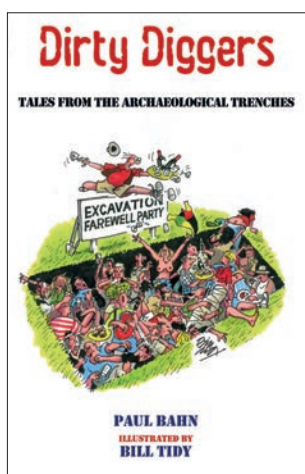


## ***Dirty Diggers: Tales from the Archaeological Trenches*** by Paul Bahn

2013. Left Coast Press, Walnut Creek, 120 pp.  
ISBN 978-1-61132-978-0 (pbk).

*Reviewed by Duncan Wright*

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In preparation for this review I browsed the web for similar publications which explored the lighter side of archaeology. Having heard so many humorous and bizarre stories at conferences and met some excellent archaeology raconteurs I expected to be bombarded with examples. Strangely not. Is it possible that archaeologists are reserved when it comes to publishing misdemeanours? Happily, Paul Bahn has rectified

this situation somewhat, while reminding us not to take ourselves too seriously!

So what is *Dirty Diggers*? In this 120 page romp across the archaeological world, Bahn amalgamates stories sent to him by colleagues from around the world. In the first chapters, 'Fieldwork Fun', 'Excavation Encounters' and 'Dig Dialogues' the reader is introduced to some of the more bizarre aspects of fieldwork. Standout examples include a camel shaved in the Sahara to remove a spill of latex (rock art specialists are to blame for this one; p.24); an attempt to explain why excavation was necessary to a local man in Nigeria ('Are you sure you haven't lost one of these?'; p.27); and a poignant story about a brown bear's exploration of a field camp (pp.34–39).

Bahn leaves the somewhat sensitive issue of archaeologists and alcohol until Chapter 4, presumably slowly fortifying the reader for the carnage that is to follow. We are introduced to the alcoholic underpinnings of the 'Hambledon Hill' excavations (p.78), the dangers of over-ripe camembert at Chegar, Syria (as recounted by Agatha Mallowan nee Christie) and Chuck Riggs' eloquent recount (pp.82–87)

of chipmunks in the Arizonan water supply. It would be excellent to resolve the identity of the 'posh [and hungover] British archaeologist' (p.74) who demanded the removal of the 'frightfully bright light' in a lecture, only to be told that this was his slide projector! Need I say more? The final chapter, 'Archaeology After Hours', dispels any lasting doubts the reader may retain about the sanity of archaeologists, recounting the bizarre, extracurricular activities (including marriage) of some of our more colourful colleagues. This section provides a window into the lives of some illustrious founding figures of archaeology (more on this to follow).

So where do Australian archaeologists figure in all of this? Bahn writes, 'to our great surprise we were let down by Australian sources despite their reputation for wildness' (p.9). I suppose we can take some comfort that we are known for some wildness; however, it is sad that the only reference to Australia I could find was a throwaway mention of the Jack Golson lecture at the very end of a story that takes place elsewhere. For the second edition, Paul, PLEASE contact us. We have plenty of crazy tales. For a start, the wonderfully eccentric Rhys Jones could surely figure in any one of these chapters. More recent forays could include Ian McNiven's excellent story about the floating Toyota 4WD or Sally May's tale of the beer can midden.

Having described the content let me briefly turn to the value of this book. As Bahn writes, there is a pressing need to dispel the myth that 'archaeologists are notoriously dull and unimaginative' (p.9); it is excellent that we now have this irreverent text to do so. In addition, there are some wonderful vignettes about past archaeologists (better known for their publications, theories and excavations) which can only benefit those of us who are interested in the history of archaeology. I can promise that you will never think the same way again about Mortimer Wheeler and his famous grid system after reading this book. The description of Abbé Henri Breuil and his, let's just say, 'rather personal' interaction with ancient art ('Merde! Une truite!'; p.87), is another image that sticks in the mind. It would be excellent, should another edition be forthcoming, to include stories about other key figures. Some real gems surround the early days of typology and relative chronology in Scandinavia, such as the disparaging attacks by J.J.A. Worsaae on a number of eminent Danish and English historians (Rowley-Conwy 2007:65–81). If Lewis Binford, Ian Hodder and Michael Shanks could also provide a few juicy stories I am sure it would be appreciated by lecturers and students alike.

### References

- Rowley-Conwy, P. 2007 *From Genesis to Prehistory: The Archaeological Three Age System and its Contested Reception in Denmark, Britain and Ireland*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.