3

Aboriginal Occupation

It seems to follow that one cannot make full sense of the development of European life in Australia without reference to the structure of racial relations and the persistent indifference to the fate of the Aborigines; in short, without an analysis of the Australian conscience. Part of such a study would be the apologetic element in the writing of Australian history, an element that sticks out like a foot from a shallow grave. (Stanner 1977:22)

This chapter outlines a broad archaeological, anthropological and historical framework of Aboriginal occupation of the region. A review of archaeological research conducted in the Sydney Basin, and the adjoining south coast, is presented. General temporal and archaeological trends are identified, which are relevant because they are comparable with those that were likely to have occurred in the Upper Nepean catchment. Models developed to explore the nature of Aboriginal occupation, land use and subsistence strategies in south-east Australia, and the manner in which people occupied and exploited the resources of the coast and its hinterland, are considered. In the absence of detailed archaeological research, and in particular the lack of excavation in the Upper Nepean, this review aims to establish, as much as is reasonable, a model of temporal change and Aboriginal occupation in the study area.

The occupation and settlement of New South Wales by the British in 1788, and during the colonial period, was predicated on 'two quite opposite and irreconcilable requirements ... one the need to assure settlers their legal rights to possess land (and dispossess the Aborigines); and the other the moral requirement that the Aborigines should be treated well and their rights as human beings protected' (Plomley 1990–1991:1).

The broad demographic and social context in which Aboriginal people encountered Europeans in the region is discussed in this chapter. It is well established that rock art was produced in the Sydney region in the early period of European occupation (McDonald 2008b). Given that the Upper Nepean catchment was largely unoccupied by European settlers, it can be considered to have been located actually beyond, or on the *far side* of the frontier (cf. McNiven and Russell 2002). Historical records are scanty in regard to Aboriginal use of this land during the colonial period; however, there is evidence that indicates people did retreat to the Woronora Plateau to recover from introduced disease. It is possible, if not probable, that some rock art present in the Upper Nepean was produced at this time. The review of the colonial period takes into consideration contemporary conceptual issues relevant to the exploration of Aboriginal intellectual and cultural responses to the frontier.

Knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal social life and organisation in south-eastern New South Wales at the time of European occupation is minimal. Fundamental details relating to kinship, clan, territorial and religious organisation are, by and large, unknown (cf. Attenbrow 2002). The main sources of information relating to Aboriginal social life in the south-east derive from the work of Howitt (1904) and Mathews (1898), which was compiled during the late nineteenth century, well after Aboriginal people had adjusted to the new settler economy. Their work was framed by assumptions and ethnographic models 'which laid emphasis on a rather

limited view of social and cultural life' (Rose 1990:8). The work of Mathews is considered 'slight and unreliable' by some (Flood 1982:29), and by others as sober and thorough (Rose et al. 2003:17). Howitt is often found to be contradictory and must be approached with caution (Swain 1993:118; Rose et al. 2003:16). A consideration of Aboriginal social life and organisation is set out in this chapter with reference to contemporary anthropological concerns and understandings.

3.1 The Archaeological Context

South-eastern New South Wales has been occupied since the late Pleistocene (Attenbrow 2004:72; Boot 1996:288; Lampert 1971:9). The dated occupational sequence in the Sydney region extends back 30,000 years (JMcD CHM 2005:3; and see Stockton & Holland 1974). Further to the south, Lampert (1971:9) and Boot (1996:288) report Pleistocene dates for occupation of the south coast and its hinterland, which extend back to c. 20,000 years BP. Several occupation dates have been obtained from the northern Woronora Plateau (cf. Attenbrow 2002:18,19) and, at this time, the oldest date of occupation is 7,450±180 BP, obtained from Curracurrang 1 rock shelter (Megaw 1974:35). While no dates of cultural deposits have yet been obtained in the Upper Nepean catchment, it is probable that the study area would have been utilised by Aboriginal people in a similar time frame as in the broader south-eastern region.

A basic chronological sequence of human occupation in south-east Australia is the Eastern Regional Sequence, proposed by McCarthy (1964) and more recently refined by Lampert (1971:68), Stockton and Holland (1974:53), Attenbrow (2004:72) and McDonald (1994; 2008a). McCarthy's (1964) three-phased sequence extends from the Pleistocene through to the late Holocene, and is based on observed changes over time in stone artefact assemblages. The phases identified by McCarthy were the Capertian, the Bondaian and Eloueran (the latter being the most recent). Later researchers, such as Lampert (1971:64) at Burrill Lake, found a general agreement with McCarthy's sequence. However, the sequence has undergone revision (Lampert 1971:68). At Upper Mangrove Creek Catchment (UMCC), Attenbrow (2004:72) identified four cultural phases based on changes in artefact typology and raw material in the stone artefact assemblages from four radiocarbon-dated sites. These changes were considered with reference to other studies conducted in the south-east in defining the phases and assigning dates to them.

Attenbrow (2004:72–75) identified the following broad sequence of change in the UMCC catchment:

- Phase 1 (Capertian): c. 11,200 – c. 5,000 years BP: Assemblages consist primarily of flakes, cores and flaked pieces. Implements include amorphous flakes with retouch/usewear, dentated saws and small numbers of backed artefacts. Fine grained siliceous stone and quartz dominate assemblages.

- Phase 2 (Early Bondaian): c. 5,000 – c. 2,800 years BP: Backed artefacts become more archaeologically visible and ground-edge implements appear at c. 4,000 years BP. Fine-grained siliceous stone and quartz dominate assemblages.

- Phase 3 (Middle Bondaian): c. 2,800 – c. 1,600 years BP: Backed artefacts reach a peak in abundance. During this time quartz dominates assemblages.

- Phase 4 (Late Bondaian): c. 1,600 years BP through to just after European occupation: Backed artefacts are rare, bipolar artefacts and ground-edge implements continue to increase in abundance; quartz continues to dominate raw material categories.

Regional, and sometimes local, variations in the assemblages of each phase of the sequence have been identified and, furthermore, each phase has been found to begin at slightly different times in different regions (Attenbrow 2004:219). Attenbrow argues that these differences are

possibly due to local environmental conditions and local responses to climatic change, as well as to regional variations in social organisation, territoriality and subsistence patterns. As discussed below, considerable regional variation exists in the archaeological record. In consideration of the absence of detailed archaeological investigation of the study area, extrapolating the evidence from elsewhere for use in this research necessarily requires caution.

While supporting the general sequence of change, archaeological enquiry undertaken since McCarthy proposed his regional sequence now considers the behavioural and demographic implications of observed change. Much attention has also been given to explaining phenomena such as the timing of initial site occupation and other indicators, such as changes in artefact numbers in sites. A picture of apparent intensity of site occupation during the mid to late Holocene has been explained in terms of a corresponding population increase (Hughes & Lampert 1982), and this notion has gained currency in the literature (see, however, Hiscock 1981, 1986; Attenbrow 1987, 2004; Boot 1996, 2002). Attenbrow (2002:21; 2004) devotes considerable attention to this issue, and concludes that distinguishing between behavioural (such as changes in technology or mobility patterns), geomorphological and demographic change to account for observed changes in the archaeological record is not straightforward. She argues that answers to these questions are still unresolved, and that at this time it is not known how populations may have grown or changed from the time of initial occupation.

This problem of unresolved issues relating to population change is an important consideration in any study dealing with rock art because notions of population increase reside at the explanatory heart of many previous studies (e.g. Morwood 1980; David & Cole 1990; David 1991; McDonald 1994, 2008a). McDonald (1994:67, 80) argues that the archaeological evidence indicates that the region was most intensively occupied during the last 3,000 years, and that occupation patterns became more complex during that time. McDonald (1994:348) considers that a dramatic increase in population density occurred at c. 3,000 years BP, and that this and associated social pressures provided the impetus for the development of 'social mechanisms to control interaction and to make such interaction less stressful'. However, others note that population growth at this time is not easily demonstrated using quantitative evidence (e.g. Attenbrow 2002:17, 2004; Hiscock 2008:158).

The nature of Pleistocene occupation in south-east Australia is generally thought to have been sporadic and of low intensity, reflecting low population levels (McDonald 1994:67). For sites located immediately to the south and south-east of the Upper Nepean catchment, such as Sassafras, Burrill Lake, Bass Point and Currarong, it has been argued that they possess evidence of increasing intensity of site occupation and population during the mid to late Holocene (Hughes & Lampert 1982). Based on observed increases in sedimentation rates and implement discard in rock shelters in the southern part of the Sydney Basin, Hughes (1977; Hughes & Lampert 1982:26) proposes that a region-wide intensification in site use and population increase occurred between 5,000 and 2,000 years BP. This argument has been critiqued by a number of researchers. As Boot (2002:19) summarises:

> The archaeological evidence is still not understood well enough to support definitive statements about Aboriginal occupation in the different ecological zones of the hinterland, let alone any alleged changes in subsistence strategies and population levels in the region.

As more work has been undertaken in more sites, and in sites with long periods of occupation, both the substantive and theoretical foundations of this model have required review.

Boot's (2002:220) research identified that the south coastal hinterland and adjacent coast were first occupied before 19,000 years BP, and that early occupation of the hinterland 'appears not to have been intensive'. Throughout the Holocene, occupation levels fluctuated with sites being

temporarily or permanently abandoned at different times, and the intensity of occupation varied between sites (Boot 2002:220). Boot (2002:225, 244) argues, that since the late Pleistocene, the archaeological evidence indicates that a generalised subsistence economy was practised in the south coast region, and that there is no evidence of a region-wide increase in artefact discard rates and intensity of site use during the mid to late Holocene. Instead, it was found that not only was there evidence of considerable inter- and intra-site variability in rates of artefact discard and intensity of site use, the notable pattern was one of a series of peaks and troughs indicating significant variations in the intensity of site use, both from the late Pleistocene through to the early Holocene, and during the mid to late Holocene (Boot 2002). Boot (2002:245) argues that the evidence reveals numerous fluctuations in intensity of site occupation over time and, furthermore, he argues that these variations could not be correlated directly with long-term variation in environmental changes.

As already noted above, Attenbrow's (2004) research has been specifically directed towards an examination of the causes of quantitative changes over time in the region's archaeological record. The UMCC data displays a lack of correlation in the 'timing and direction of dramatic late Holocene changes in number of sites and artefacts', and Attenbrow (2004:1) suggests that this seriously questions notions that chronological changes in numbers of sites and artefacts correspond to population changes. The UMCC data indicates that there is also a lack of correspondence in timing of changes in sites and artefact numbers, and changes in stone artefact assemblages, and that dramatic changes in different indicators occur at different times (Attenbrow 2004:1, 217). This result questions the epistemological premise that broad suites of archaeological materials may be precisely contemporaneous, and that changes in all indices occur at the same time (cf. Pinney 2005).

While Attenbrow (2004:217) does not discount the fact that broad-scale demographic change may be invoked for explaining quantitative change in habitation and artefact indices, she focuses on addressing behavioural explanations and processes, which may have contributed to observable patterns. Attenbrow's (2004) investigation was, therefore, geared towards examining habitation indices in terms of habitation patterns and subsistence organisation, and artefact accumulation rates in relation to subsistence methods and equipment. In investigating habitation patterns and subsistence organisation, Attenbrow (2004:219) assumes the possibility that habitation sites are not all equivalent in function. That is, they may not all have been used for the same types of activities and, furthermore, she recognises that a single site's function may have shifted over time. This is important because, as discussed later in this chapter, one of the characteristics relating to Aboriginal settlement and mobility is that they conform to a 'collector' model (after Binford 1980), whereby people form home bases and make logistical forays from these home bases (Keen 2004:104). Employing the Binford (1980) model, Attenbrow (2004:220, 223) distinguishes between *base camps* and *activity locations*, and she identifies a number of salient points. These are listed below because the potential for shelter function to vary across space and time is considered to be potentially relevant in this research:

- Of seven long-term habitations, only one appears to have been used as a base camp throughout its history (first established in the fourth millennium BP). The function of the remainder changed over time from activity location to base camp. The majority of these sites became base camps at, or after, 3,000 years BP.

- Twenty-two habitations were used solely as activity locations, and most of these were first used in the last 2,000 years.

In the UMCC, the commencement of use of base camps was limited in the early Holocene, and it was not until after 4,000 years BP that base camp occupations became established. This coincides with the appearance of ground-edge technology (Attenbrow 2004:243). Attenbrow

(2004:223) argues that in the third millennium BP there was significant change, including a substantial increase in base camps, and this timing was earlier than the dramatic increase in habitation indices, which subsequently occurred during the second millennium BP. In the second and first millennium BP, activity locations increased, corresponding also to a more diverse use of the landscape, including topographic zones previously not used (Attenbrow 2004:223). It is also notable that Attenbrow (2004:223) argues for a correspondence during the last 4,000 years, and 'perhaps more commonly in the last 2,000 years', between the activities that occur within 'habitations' and the addition of ground-edge implements, which were manufactured and maintained on sandstone where water was available such as in creek beds (represented by open context grinding groove sites). Attenbrow (2004:243) argues that changing habitation and land use patterns involving shifts in subsistence and mobility patterns may explain the dramatic late Holocene increases in habitation indices. Attenbrow (2004:223) summarises these patterns as '[v]ariations in the number of base camps and activity locations in different millennia … support the proposition that habitation patterns and subsistence organisation in the catchment changed over the last 11,000 years, and that change of an unprecedented scale and nature began in the third millennium BP'.

Detailed use-wear analysis and residue studies on backed artefacts from three UMCC shelters shed further light on functional variability in shelters located within a single catchment (Robertson et al. 2009:296). While the primary focus of the Robertson et al. (2009:302, 305) study was to emphasise the general purpose and multiple use of backed artefacts, it was also found that various characteristics of use of these artefacts differed between shelters. It was concluded that '[t]he pattern is one of a distinctive combination and emphasis of backed artefact tasks at each location in the landscape, perhaps reflecting dissimilar resources in the immediate neighbourhood of each site and/or different activities habitually undertaken at each site' (Robertson et al. 2009:303). This latter point is of particular interest in this study, because it indicates that shelters in the region do possess evidence of functional variability and that, hence, in the Upper Nepean catchment, there is the potential that inter-site variability may occur, which is due to differences in site use and social context.

A new adaptive model, based on analyses of backed artefacts, has also been proposed, which has implications for behavioural change during the late Holocene. Backed artefacts have been made and deposited in south-east Australia since 9,500 years ago (Hiscock & Attenbrow 1998). They dramatically peaked in abundance c. 3,500 years ago, and sustained until 2,000 years ago when their number began to decline. Hiscock (2008:156, 158) hypothesises that the backed artefact proliferation was a response to economic risk associated with the onset of drier and more variable climatic conditions in southern Australia related to the intensification of the El Niño system. Additional factors that may have triggered higher foraging risk have been posited, including landscape colonisation, redefinition of social space, landscape change, reduction of resources and greater foraging mobility (Hiscock 2008:158). It is noted also that ground-edge hatchets were adopted as a new technology in south-east Australia at c. 3,500 years ago at the same time as the backed artefact proliferation. This technology is also likely to have helped deal with foraging risk.

While the above discussion has focused on chronological change in the archaeological record, researchers have also examined the subsistence strategies employed in coastal areas, and how people organised themselves in respect to coastal and hinterland resources. For the south coast, several models of Aboriginal occupation have been proposed (cf. Boot 2002:7). Bowdler (1970:5, 111) argues that, during summer, Aboriginal occupation of the coastal zone was intensive and dense, and that some inland exploitation occurred during seasons when coastal resources were limited. Lampert (1971:63) proposes a model based on a mixed coastal economy involving the exploitation of littoral, estuarine and terrestrial resources. Similar to Bowdler, however, Lampert

argues that littoral resources contributed a much higher component to the Aboriginal diet than that which may have been obtained from the forest. Lampert's model includes a differentiation of coastal sites based on different forms of resource exploitation, including main sites (base camps), specialised sites and a third category of overnight camps (Lampert 1971:62–64). Poiner (1976) proposes a model of seasonal differentiation in which semi-nomadic occupation of the coast occurred during summer, with nomadic winter occupation of both hinterland and coastal areas. This model assumes that hinterland sites are small, widespread and few in number (Boot 2002:7).

These early models have been subject to various reviews. Attenbrow's (1976:66, 121–3) model of resource exploitation and movement posits that the hinterland and coastline were occupied on a year-round basis, and that movement occurred only at the family or small group level, rather than as seasonal movement of entire populations. While arguing that coastal occupation was greater during summer when the resources of the sea were more abundant, Attenbrow suggests that people living on the coast would also have harvested terrestrial resources. Attenbrow also considers in greater detail the nature of hinterland occupation and argues that, in summer, large groups would have occupied valleys, while small family groups exploited resources in the mountains. Conversely, family groups would have been more widely dispersed throughout the hinterland and along the coast during winter. Each of these groups, and particularly those on the coast, had a higher proportion of animal foods in their diet during the colder months. Vallance (1983:27–8) also moves beyond a strictly seasonal model and argues the economy was likely to have been based on a range of subsistence strategies that varied within and between seasons, and from year to year. Vallance (1983:62–64) argues that short-term climatic variation would have affected subsistence strategies rather than longer term seasonal variation. Hiscock (1982:43) argues that considerable movement between the south coast and its hinterland occurred. He found associations of stone from hinterland sources with stone derived from the coast, and argues that this indicates that occupants of hinterland sites had an intimate knowledge of resources in both areas and that they were therefore not just 'short-term refugees' escaping winter coastal food scarcity.

3.2 The European Encounter

The British settlement and occupation of New South Wales commenced in 1788 with the arrival of the First Fleet and was premised upon an assumption that Australia was *terra nullius* or unowned land (Troy 1990:13). Governor Arthur Phillip was under instruction to open friendly intercourse with the Aboriginal inhabitants and to protect them from convicts and settlers. It was effectively a policy of protection and segregation (Bell 1959:345). It was not until 1825 that an official policy was introduced, which aimed to 'civilise and convert them to Christianity', although this policy was largely ignored (Bell 1959:345). By 1838, spurred by humanitarian concerns in England, Aboriginal Protectors were appointed. Once again, the civilising policies that were their charter were never, or were ineffectually, implemented (Bell 1959:345; Shaw 1992:265, 269).

The injustices of the colonial period were the result of failed government policies and the antipathy of settlers and pastoralists, the latter having considerable bearing on the inability of contemporary governments to enforce any policy of which the settlers or squatters did not approve (Shaw 1992:265). The colonial encounter resulted in Aboriginal people systematically and inexorably losing their land. As Shaw (1992:266) expresses, '[t]he tragedy which ensued was the almost inevitable result of a conflict between the settlers and the Aborigines', and this conflict was one fought over land with both parties wanting the same land.

> The Aborigines, for their part, wanted to continue to occupy their land. They literally lived off it. They used its flora and fauna for food, clothing and shelter. … [T]hey had strong emotional and spiritual ties with the land which they had lived on for so long. Here were their sacred sites – the homes of their Dreamtime ancestors, whose spirits still dwelt among their rocks and rivers and caves and where natural features had been settings for the great deeds of those ancestral heroes who had given life and shape to the various clans (Shaw 1992:267).

That Aborigines believed that particular tracts of country belonged to each group was recognised by some, in particular Archdeacon Broughton, who presented such evidence to the 1834 Select Committee Inquiry into the state of Indigenous people in British settlements (Shaw 1992:269). This fact, and its corollary, that settlement was effectively shutting Aboriginal people out from what they regarded as their property, was recognised by others also, but there remained the position that the government of the late 1830s would not protect the Aborigines' land, denied that they owned any, and, in fact, encouraged encroachment of it by the introduction of the Squatting Acts of 1836 and 1839 (Shaw 1992:275).

While the obvious impacts of the colonial encounter include the loss of life from disease and massacre, loss of land and access to resources and special places and so on, it has only recently been recognised that an understanding of Indigenous responses entail considerations of agency and resistance, and that the forms by which responses can be expressed are sometimes startling (Comaroff & Comaroff 1989, 1991; Lattas 1993:103; McNiven & Russell 2002:27). In the wider Sydney region, it is clear that death, dispossession and 'titanic population declines' followed colonisation (Swain 1993:115). The Aboriginal response was to regroup, fight, in some instances to attempt to accommodate the invaders within pre-existing social structures, and, significantly, instigate a new sky hero into their cosmology to mediate the encounter and wrest back control of life and land (Swain 1993). It is very clear that, during the colonial period, Aboriginal people had very little interest generally in adopting the culture and practices of the British (Shaw 1992:276). This is important because, while there is no fundamental reason for rock art produced during the colonial encounter to refer exclusively to introduced objects (cf. Taçon 2008b:220), there is a significant reason why it may not.

The most obvious and immediate impact following the arrival of the First Fleet was the introduction of disease, the most lethal of which was smallpox (Butlin 1983). Three major smallpox epidemics were recorded in Australia: in 1789, one year after European settlement, in 1829 and in 1866 (Curson 1985). The 1789 epidemic had a devastating effect on the local Aboriginal people living close to the British settlement at Port Jackson, and it was reported that the region was evacuated until the disease had disappeared (Bell 1959:345). At the end of the 1789 epidemic, when Aboriginal people began returning to the shores of Port Jackson, it was estimated by Governor Phillip that smallpox had claimed at least 50 per cent of the population (Butlin 1983). In the years immediately after the epidemic, its effects were observed in locations well outside the 1789 European frontier. The second smallpox epidemic, beginning in 1829, coincided with the commencement of the dramatic expansion of the pastoral frontier across the south-eastern interior of New South Wales (Carey & Roberts 2002:822).

Flow-on effects of disease included difficulties for people to obtain food and carry out socio-religious obligations. It affected demography and the social structures of Aboriginal populations. After the 1789 epidemic, individual groups were so reduced in number that individuals were required to forge new groups (Collins 1798:496; Attenbrow 2002:60). It has been estimated that by the 1830s, approximately only 500 people remained within a 200 kilometre radius of Sydney (Swain 1993:115). In short, smallpox 'initiated cultural disorientation for the … people of NSW during which the direct impact of the disease was compounded by the effects of European colonization, military action, and losses from other introduced diseases' (Carey & Roberts 2002:822). It has been argued by Carey and Roberts (2002:822) that, in addition

to the demographic impact of smallpox and other introduced diseases, 'the deeper intellectual and cultural responses of Aboriginal people' precipitated the development of a new cult, 'that reflected deep hostility to both the presence of Europeans and the diseases associated with them'. This will be discussed further below.

Until c. 1813, European settlement of the Sydney region was confined, at least officially, to Sydney Harbour and that area of the Cumberland Plain, situated east of the Nepean River (Troy 1990:1). As settlement expanded, conflict between the British and Aborigines escalated, and two methods of segregating the Aborigines were adopted. One was by punitive expeditions, and the other by the issue of Government Proclamations and General Orders to control their contact with whites (Bell 1959:345).

A permit system began in 1821, which allowed for the movement of cattle beyond the Cumberland Plain. Many exploratory journeys proceeding south from Sydney took place prior to this time, some of which traversed the study area, while others skirted around it. In addition to official or 'respectable' journeys of exploration, Europeans made their way out of the arena of European settlement to live with Aboriginal people (Andrews 1998). This phenomenon would have added to the already dynamic social and economic changes taking place within Aboriginal society at this time. Cattle had already penetrated the interior, west of the Nepean, growing to immense herds, and significantly impacting local environments. Caley visited an area, which later became Appin, in July 1807, when he travelled to the Appin Falls on the Cataract River (c. 1 kilometre west of the now Cataract Dam wall). Caley recorded the Aboriginal name of the falls as Carrung-gurrung. In 1811, a series of land grants were made and from this time settlers began to occupy, clear and farm the Appin district. This occupation resulted in a period of conflict during 1814 after Aboriginal people apparently raided crops. A report from 1814 indicates that Aboriginal people from Jervis Bay had banded with mountain people from the west for the purpose of 'kill(ing) all the whites before them' (Sydney Gazette 1814:Jun 4, cited in Officer 1984:12). This was not an isolated event. At this time the early white settlers were required to defend themselves and their property. In a number of recorded events, both Europeans and Aboriginals were killed (Whittaker 2005). Other attacks occurred within the broader area, including Bringelly and Camden, which provoked Governor Macquarie to order the military to round up all Aborigines in the Hawkesbury and Southern Districts. A regiment, accompanied by two Aboriginal guides, spent one month in the area around Glenfield and Appin in a largely unsuccessful campaign, which was thwarted by the settlers of Appin who were sheltering the Aboriginal people. It is also possible that Aboriginal people were themselves finding refuge within the gorges of the plateau further to the south (in the study area). However, 14 Aboriginal people were killed in a single event at the Cataract River when they were shot or driven over the cliffs on 17 April 1816 (Whittaker 2005).

An article in the 1820 *Sydney Gazette* (1820:Dec 16, in Officer 1984), which is of specific interest, refers to Aboriginal people who, after sustaining significant loss from influenza in the winter of that year, went to the coast and into the 'bushy and broken country, where there were quantities of honey', and where it was expected that they would remain until the summer. The area referred to is almost certainly the Woronora Plateau. At Wollongong a decade or so later, a deputy surveyor reported to Tyerman and Bennett (1840:193) that Aboriginal people were numerous, and that they had come from the interior (likely to be the Woronora Plateau) to 'obtain fish, oysters, water fowl, grubs'. While references regarding people continuing to use the Upper Nepean catchment after the beginning of colonial period are scanty, there is every reason to consider that they did so, although the intensity and nature of that use is less certain.

3.3 Social Geography and Worldview

Historical records relating to Aboriginal social geography and worldview in the early years of European occupation are very few; they are significantly incomplete and superficial (Swain 1993:115). Stanner (1969:32) reviewed the early record of Aboriginal and European relations in Sydney and concludes that the enquiry relating to Aboriginal people has resulted in a picture that is 'sketchy, ill-proportioned and often malevolently drawn'. Everything we know of Aboriginal social life in the region comes from records made after the huge population decline resulting from the death and dispossession that ensued following the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788 (Swain 1993:115). The social geography and an understanding of the relationship between land and the people who inhabited the study area is, therefore, limited and difficult to overview. It was not until the 1880s that Europeans began to look intently at aspects of Aboriginal social organisation and worldview, by which time (i.e. after 100 years of European occupation) Aboriginal people had forged a new life within the settler economy.

3.3.1 Social Geography

Close scrutiny of the early records offer some observations of relevance in consideration of Aboriginal social geography and relations to land in the Sydney region. In the eighteenth century, David Collins noted that in Port Jackson, Bennelong considered Goat Island to belong to him and he advised that, similarly, other people 'possessed this kind of hereditary property' (cited and quoted in Williams 1986:143). Threlkeld, later in 1828, was able to define the boundaries of the country of the Awabakal people, near Lake Macquarie, and understood that this group considered it to be their own land (Gunson 1974:30). Threlkeld understood that '… every tribe has its district the boundary of which must not be passed without permission from the tribe to which it belongs' (Gunson 1974:186). Williams (1986:144) notes that early nineteenth-century explorers also recorded that Aboriginal people knew with great accuracy, the boundaries and limits of their own land.

The early records also reveal that the land was named and ordered at an extremely fine level of resolution. Lang, in 1847 (cited in Williams 1986:147), remarked that Aborigines named all features and areas of land, 'every rock, river, creek, mountain, hill, or plain' so exactly, that meeting places could be specified with great accuracy. Many early commentators indicate that natural land features clearly defined the boundaries of tracts of country to which people identified and occupied. It is also notable that places clearly also possessed specific significances, given that during particular parts of initiation ceremonies, which took place in the region, 'the men shout the names of *remarkable* places in the novice's country' (Mathews & Everitt 1900:279, my emphasis).

In the late nineteenth century, Mathews identified three broad cultural areas in south-eastern New South Wales, extending from Port Macquarie to the New South Wales–Victorian border, across which people had similar cultural practices and beliefs (Mathew 1898; cf. Attenbrow 2002:126–127). The central cultural area, which includes the area in which Sydney is located, extended from the Hunter River–Newcastle area south to the Georges River–Botany Bay area. The southern cultural area, which includes the study area, extended from the Georges River south to the New South Wales–Victorian border (Mathews 1898).

By the early twentieth century, it was becoming clearer to commentators that Aborigines' division of groups, which were associated with particular tracts of land, was an important aspect of their social organisation, and Baldwin Spencer, for example, reported at length about land-owning groups, which he called 'tribes' (cf. Williams 1986:150). It was also recognised that while a 'tribe' could be regarded as owning definitive tracts of country, the boundaries of these areas were known

to that group, and also were *recognised* by others (Williams 1986:150). In this sense, knowing the location of boundaries probably did not require the aid of non-verbal communication such as style and so on (cf. Wobst 1977).

Tindale (1974) formalised the notion of tribal boundaries and identified those in the study area. Tindale (1974:191, 195) identified the Tharawal as having occupied land that included the coast from the southern shores of Botany Bay to Bulli, and westward to include that part of the Woronora Plateau drained by the Georges and Port Hacking rivers, and the area to Camden and Picton. The Wodi Wodi land was identified as that which extended along the coast from Bulli south to the north shore of Jervis Bay, with a westerly margin that extended from the headwaters of the Nepean River and its tributaries, south to the northern drainage system of the Shoalhaven River. On the basis of Eades's (1976) linguistic work, it is understood that a common language, Dharawal, was spoken across both the Tharawal and Wodi Wodi tribal boundaries. Early researchers equate language group areas with tribal boundaries (e.g. Capell 1970:22). According to Tindale's analysis, the study area can be considered to be located within the boundaries of the Wodi Wodi country.

The notion of the boundedness of social groupings, and concept that tribes functioned as politically cohesive, corporate groups, does not retain its anthropological currency (Rumsey 1989:76). Tindale's tribal groups were conceptualised in accordance with a model of social organisation, in which the tribal group equates to a linguistic group, which is seen as a defining structural feature in Aboriginal social organisation, with the implication that tribes or language groups were territorial groups. These concepts are no longer regarded as valid. It is now recognised that conceptualising language groups as bounded social groupings is not appropriate because Aboriginal people were multilingual, that linguistic groups were not necessarily spatially contiguous, and that social affiliations are/were at any time, highly fluid (Sutton & Rigsby 1979). Furthermore, language groups and social networks are not necessarily spatially isomorphic (Sutton & Rigsby 1979:717).

Aboriginal cultures in Australia share comparable underlying features. In the secular sphere, these hunter-gatherer communities foraged in highly flexible bands, in which membership was fluid and ephemeral (Layton 1992:31). Social groups, therefore, are likely to have been multidimensional and fluid (spatially and generationally), and at any one time comprised of people with different clan, gender and age identities. Individuals are likely to have resided in different places, at different times, as they fulfilled various familial, social and individual responsibilities. The flexibility in band composition is, however, 'counterpoised against a relatively stable structure in the spiritual sphere' (Layton 1992:31). Across Australia, Aboriginal men and women belong/ed to small descent groups, each of which possesses 'a distinct body of religious property', which includes a suite of sites, waterholes, caves, rocks and other environmental features imbued with the spiritual power of Ancestral Beings who created the landscape during the heroic period. These sites form clusters that correspond to what is known as a clan's estate (Layton 1992:31). Clans are not, however, autonomous and, instead, are linked by shared religious traditions, the exchange of marriage partners and overlapping foraging rights (Layton 1992:31). Clan membership is attained by descent, usually through the father and, in the Sydney region, it is generally believed that clan groupings were based on patrilineal descent, and that local clan membership appears to have been the significant manner by which social organisation was structured (Attenbrow 2002:58).

A person's identity in Aboriginal society is multifaceted. Layton (1989:5) argues that in order to assess artistic systems—for example, in the archaeological record it is useful to distinguish between the egocentric and sociocentric status of individuals. The former is exemplified by kinship. This status is fluid and varies in accordance with those with whom a person interacts. Sociocentric status, on the other hand, is exemplified by clan, age and gender groupings, and this

is less fluid. A person's sociocentric status, as defined according to membership of one of these groupings, means that s/he has that status towards everyone, at all times (Layton 1989:5). These groupings, however, are not mutually exclusive, nor are they always in existence everywhere and at the same time. Social groupings, as groupings, are contextually relative and do not endure in all social contexts (Rumsey 1989:76). That is, social grouping is context specific and is mobilised according to specific contexts, at specific times and for specific purposes (Smith 1994:5). Smith (1994:5) argues that cultural constructions of groups are activated according to contexts of interpretation, which are informed by the broader social and historical context in which an individual lives.

The general underlying features of Aboriginal social organisation and identity, as set out above, are invoked in this research in the absence of an ethnographic context for the Upper Nepean catchment.

3.3.2 Worldview

Religion is a dominant feature of Australian Aboriginal society. Every aspect of life can be considered to be intertwined with religion (e.g. cf. Berndt 1969; Myers 1986; Swain 1993). Aboriginal beliefs and practices are, however, complex and varied. The motives behind them, their purposes and significance are heterogeneous (Keen 1986:46). Beliefs are the products of complex histories. Keen (1986:46) states that although beliefs may vary in detail, the forms taken by Aboriginal religions in general 'have a lot to do with governance and politics'. He argues that religious beliefs and practices are key aspects of governance and provide the basis of authority. Social practices are thus arbitrated via religious law and the rules and categories that were 'established by ancestral Spirit Beings' (Keen 1986:46). In south-east Australia, aspects of social organisation such as marriage were regulated, at least in part, by totemic affiliations. Totemic affiliation to an animal, plant or other object was inherited by sons and daughters patrilineally and formed one basis for the choice of marriage partners. Marriage between individuals of the same totem was forbidden (Mathews & Everitt 1900). It is probable that similar to elsewhere, land tenure in the south-east may also have been governed by the politics of religion.

From the late nineteenth-century accounts, the dominant belief at that time in the south-east was in an All-Father being known by various names, including Baiame and Daramulan (Attenbrow 2002:128). These two beings are in some places the one, but with different names, while in others, Daramulan is the son or half-brother of Baiame (Knight 2001:59; Attenbrow 2002:128). In the late nineteenth century, Howitt emphasises the heaven-dominated cosmology that is central to the Baiame/Daramulan belief, and which is described by Swain (1993:203) as a utopian tradition, whereby humans and ancestral spirits are removed to a sky realm. Swain (1993) contrasts the cosmological orientation emphasised in south-east Australia with what he calls the locative tradition found elsewhere in Australia, which 'emphasises the association between creative powers and sites, and the affiliation of human spiritual essences with these places …[and] stresses ubiety and earth-based powers'.

Given this significant contrast between a heaven-dominated cosmology of south-east Australia with an earth-based religious cosmogony, anthropologists have for some time suggested that the belief in the All-Father arose following contact with missionary teaching (cf. Swain 1993:117; Carey & Roberts 2002:823). Swain (1993:117) provides the most controversial account of the emergence of the All-Father belief, which is based strongly on the notion that Aboriginal conceptions of existence within the colonial frontier could have adapted to accommodate the devastating effects of European occupation upon social and territorial organisation. Swain (1993) offers well-documented and compelling evidence (Rose et al. 2003:21–22) that charts the historical trajectory of the emergence of the utopian tradition in south-east Australia. Swain describes major

changes that occurred in the relationship between people and place as a result of depopulation and dislocation, describing this as a revolution in the Aboriginal understanding of space. Aboriginal people sought to accommodate the invaders in their 'pre-existing structures of space', yet this failed and, based on their understanding via experience, they began to subsume key elements of Western ontology, notably 'that the earth was impoverished and that power now resided in the sky'. Swain also contends that people's predicament became one regarding time, specifically a concern with the end of the world.

Swain (1993) focuses his attention on the Aboriginal response, and the dynamic restructuring of Aboriginal world views, which occurred during the period of early European occupation. He argues that the coexistence of dual cosmologies in post-colonial Australia is well documented and widespread, and that there is ample evidence that this was also the case in south-east Australia. Recognising that significant limitations apply in any attempt to reconstruct pre-colonial religious life in the south-east, Swain (1993:119) nevertheless strongly claims that a locative tradition did exist prior to and in the very early years of the colonial encounter. He refers to the existence in south-east Australia of increase ceremonies and abundant references in the literature to Ancestral Beings transforming into identifiable places in the landscape. Swain (1993:121) thus argues that the association between creative powers and sites, and the affiliation of human spiritual essences with these places, existed prior to the emergence of Baiame. Swain (1993:121–122) maintains that, within the early colonial period, a twofold cosmological orientation therefore existed. He argues that, while the dual cosmological orientation is unremarkable in colonial Australia, what is peculiar to the south-east is that the belief in the sky realm view became dominant. However, Swain (1993:204) indicates that in the south-east the utopian vision achieved a dominant position in Aboriginal cosmology; he attributes this to the specific context of the colonial period here where, for Aboriginal people, 'invasion was for them a reality so devastating as to render impossible the maintenance of a locative religious life'.

Swain's (1993:122) argument is essentially that the Aboriginal response to invasion was an intellectual one, which was to locate conquest in a moral order. As described earlier in this chapter, the settlement of south-east Australia resulted in widespread death, which devastated traditional social networks and resulted in dispossession and the alienation of people from their lands—in this context the ability to maintain 'the cosmos through a locative tradition' became impossible. The challenge for Aboriginal people, in response to this, was to establish a means of accommodating those who were seen as a fundamentally immoral and brutal people (Swain 1993:124). Swain (1993:124, 229) argues that this entailed subsuming some of the ontological principles of the invaders' own cosmology, not in the manner of a synchretic or mythic borrowing, but rather via a major reformulation of their understanding of the nature of existence, and that '[i]n a single move the All-Father created a new, potentially pan-Aboriginal, social base and removed the cosmological centre of gravity beyond known places to an unspecified realm in the sky'.

There is no mention of the All-Father Baiame in the accounts of the earliest commentators in the Sydney region. Swain (1993:145) argues that the earliest mention of Baiame dates to the 1830s, in the Wellington Valley mission, in central western New South Wales, and that Baiame was introduced to that area from closer to the Sydney frontier. Carey and Roberts (2002:822–823) examine in detail the records (many of which have previously been overlooked) from the Wellington Valley mission, and argue that Baiame, and an associated dance ritual, *waganna*, was a phenomenon linked to the aftermath of smallpox. Their research is also concerned with exploring the intellectual and cultural response to the impacts of disease and death. At Wellington, Baiame was associated with an adversary, Tharrawiirgal, who was believed responsible for the bringing of smallpox because of his wrath due to his loss of a tomahawk (Carey & Roberts 2002:830–831).

Smallpox reached the Wellington Valley in 1830, and was particularly severe. It has been estimated that a third of the population died (Carey & Roberts 2002:827, 829). The Wiradjuri, via a range of Indigenous and/or borrowed natural and/or magical explanatory frameworks, began to search for an explanation and possibly control of 'so virulent a misfortune' (Carey & Roberts 2002:831). They argue that, from 1830, there is evidence that suggests that one cultural response was the creation of new dance rituals and mourning ceremonies, and that, by c. 1833, these responses had been elaborated into a *waganna*, or dance ritual.

Missionaries recorded that some dance rituals were held at this time specifically in regard to smallpox (Carey & Roberts 2002:832). Over a period of time they were performed on a regular basis and with increasing intensity and ritual elaboration. By 1835, there was also a shift in focus from smallpox to the issue of sexual access by white men to Aboriginal women and children, and an insistence on the traditional practice of nose piercing (Carey & Roberts 2002:833, 837–838). Between 1833 and 1935 it was also strongly believed, as Swain (1993) similarly documents, that the end of the world was a possibility, and specifically that the world was to be destroyed by flood.

The Baiame *waganna* cult at Wellington lasted for two years only, and during this time missionaries recorded what Carey and Roberts (2002:843) describe as the formation and transformation of the Baiame travelling cult. They observed major changes in the prophecies. The concern with smallpox shifted to the issue of the sexual abuse of women and children by white men and a focus on the instigation of traditional practices. The cosmology saw a decline in the acknowledgement of Tharrawiirgal, who was regularly replaced by Daramulan, and to a 'magnification of the authority of Baiame' (Carey & Roberts 2002:843). The evidence from Wellington is testament of dramatic and swift change in Aboriginal people's beliefs and concerns, which could take place in a very brief period to time.

It is inconceivable that the Aboriginal people from the Upper Nepean catchment and environs did not also adapt their world view and conceptions of existence to meet the demands of life within the colonial milieu.

3.4 Summary

Given that the broader region was occupied from the Pleistocene, it is probable that the Upper Nepean catchment has been used by Aboriginal people since that time. Certainly, it is likely that Aboriginal occupation of the study area occurred throughout the Holocene and until the 1840s (at least), as documented in written texts. Whether or not imagery of Pleistocene or even early Holocene antiquity (and, indeed, occupation deposit) is present in the study area is unknown given the lack of research into this question in the Upper Nepean.

The archaeological evidence described in this chapter charts a mosaic of change in a variety of indices relating to technology, subsistence and occupation in the south-east, although explanations that account for the impetus of change are contested. Nevertheless, on a fundamental level, changes in technology, subsistence strategies and land use, which are evident in the archaeological record, are likely to have been accompanied by reformulations in legitimating ideologies and world views (cf. Rosenfeld 2002:61; Hiscock 2008:159). The discussion above forms the basis for conceptualising in very general terms, change and transformation in the Upper Nepean catchment that may have been expressed and indeed brokered, at least in part via the production of rock art.

A general model of temporal variability in the regional archaeological record is evident. In respect of technological innovations during the late Holocene, Hiscock (2008:159) argues that 'it is likely that these technological reconfigurations were accompanied by ideological reconfiguration,

as the new life ways involved in using altered toolkits found expression in socially defined views of the ancient world'. He suggests that new ideologies were likely to be a component of, rather a reason for, technological shifts. An ideological reconfiguration in the late Holocene may well leave an archaeological signature in the rock art sequence of the Upper Nepean catchment. This proposition will be discussed further in subsequent chapters. Here, however, it is noted that while referring to Central Australia, the archaeological record indicates that in the recent past Aboriginal culture underwent significant transformations in technology, subsistence strategies and the demographics of mobility and territoriality. Rosenfeld (2002: 61) remarked as follows: 'It is improbable that such transformations did not also require reformulations of the legitimating ideologies that underly [*sic*] social praxis'.

In contrast to many other places in Australia, a deeply informed knowledge and understanding of the social geography and worldviews of Aboriginal people of the south-east that prevailed at the time of European occupation are not available, and this has been acknowledged in this chapter. In the south-east, throughout the early colonial period and beyond, commentators did report on Aboriginal people's deep attachment to land, and this is in keeping with what is known more broadly in Australia. With British occupation, and the pastoral expansion in the south-east, Aboriginal people lost not only sovereignty over their land but possibly also their ability to maintain conceptions of existence, which may have been founded in an ontology of place (cf. Swain 1993).

That such an ontology of being existed has generally been denied to the Aboriginal people of south-east Australia and, instead, the sky-based All-Father being has been widely considered to have been the basis of religious life. In this chapter, a review has been conducted of two religious histories that, contrary to this view, argue that the All-Father being arose during the colonial period as a ritual response within the context of cross-cultural exchange. Swain (1993:121) refers to many examples hidden in the literature, which strongly suggest the existence of a totemic geography in the south-east that is comparable with cosmologies found elsewhere, and which emphasises the association between creative powers and places, and the affiliation of people with these places.

David (2002:205) argues that the ethnographically known Dreaming has a history, and his work has sought to reveal that social history via archaeological analysis. The Dreaming of south-east Australia is clearly not well understood, and it is almost misleading to consider that there is an ethnography relating to it. However, the signatures of a totemic geography are potentially recognisable in rock art (Layton 2000a:179). This research seeks to explore the social geography of the Aboriginal people of the south-east, and questions whether or not there is evidence of a totemic ontology, which Swain (1993) argues prevailed at the time of European occupation, prior to the ascendance of Baiame.

The European occupation of the region was an agricultural enterprise. Accordingly, shale and volcanic landforms, which previously existed as open woodlands, were the focus of this endeavour. The forested sandstone country, especially that which is dissected with gorge and escarpment systems such as the Upper Nepean catchment, was not occupied by European settlers (see Chapter 2). While it is recognised that there is variation in responses to colonialism at local levels, in this study it is assumed that within the colonial and post-colonial period, a ritual response to accommodate change, as is documented elsewhere in the country, may also have occurred in the Sydney Basin. McNiven and Russell (2002:27) argue that Aboriginal people's activities and responses to the colonial encounter were often conducted on the far side of the frontier, and that, therefore, historical sources alone are inadequate for the task of exploring this phenomenon. In this chapter, various references to Aboriginal people's continued use of the Woronora Plateau during the colonial period have been discussed, and in Chapter 2 it was noted

that this country was largely unoccupied by colonists. It can, therefore, seriously be considered that the plateau may have continued to have been used by Aboriginal people during the period of the colonial encounter.

However, it cannot be assumed that an Aboriginal response to European occupation necessarily entailed marking the land with imagery. At any time people may enjoy 'different kinds of engagement with the material world' (Thomas 2004:219). While people may have used the plateau country during the colonial period, this may not have been accompanied by the production of rock art. Indeed, McDonald (2008b:109) expresses the view that, given the paucity of contact motifs in the Sydney Basin rock art, the arrival of Europeans resulted in the 'termination of the Sydney region's symbolical and artistic culture'. She argues that there is no evidence that rock art production continued after European occupation. The question of whether or not rock art was produced within the context of cross-cultural exchange in the south-east has not yet been the focus of a systematic analysis, so the view in this research is that it cannot be discounted that some rock art in the Upper Nepean catchment may have been produced at this time.

Frederick's (1997, 1999) research has in many ways legitimised the study of contact rock art in Australia. Prior to her work in Central Australia, discussions regarding contact rock art were largely descriptive and incidental to the concerns of 'prehistoric art' (and see also, Smith & Rosenfeld 1992). Contact rock art was defined solely by introduced subject matter and this 'implicitly asserts a model of acculturation' (Frederick 1999:133). One reason for seriously entertaining the notion that some rock art in the Upper Nepean catchment may have been produced within the context of the colonial encounter is that the historical records, as discussed above, clearly chart the emergence of and change in novel ritual practices that, in their motivation, were also startlingly dynamic and contingent upon the immediate and changing concerns of people (i.e. at Wellington mission, the Baiame *waganna* was originally concerned with smallpox, but within two years its focus had shifted to a concern about the sexual appropriation of women and children by white men). Cultural construction is achieved through action, not merely through conceptualisation (Meskell 2005a), and it is potentially via rock art as praxis that Aboriginal people may also have sought to mediate the colonial landscape and their place within it.