

Reviews

Grace Karskens, *The Rocks: Life in Early Sydney*. Melbourne University Press, 1997; pp. xv + 304, illustrated, hardback, \$34.95. ISBN 0 522 84722 6.

In a handful of innovative research projects, undertaken in Australia, North America, and South Africa, historical archaeologists and historians are combining their skills in order to probe within the local horizons of nineteenth-century city neighbourhoods that have hitherto been obscured by distorting 'slum' stereotypes. Mary Beaudry and Stephen Mrozowski lead an on-going investigation of the Boott Mills at Lowell in Massachusetts, which has so far produced three volumes of 'Interdisciplinary Investigations' (1987, 1989), and Rebecca Yamin is directing archaeological investigation of New York City's 'Five Points' slum. Similar projects are under way in Melbourne's 'Little Lon' and Cape Town's District Six. Apart from Beaudry and Mrozowski's short *Living on the Boott* (1996), however, Grace Karskens' study of 'the Rocks' in Sydney is the first commercial publication to result from such research. It is an admirable trail blazer.

Innovation provokes. The findings to date from these synthesising studies of the urban past have provoked interest and lively debate. Some urban historians, however, are unsettled by suggestions that they should accommodate a materialist perspective upon the past in their history making (see my 1995 exchange with David Englander in *Urban History* 22:3, 380–389). Some archaeologists, too, are dismissive, as Karskens obliquely notes in her acknowledgements to this book. Notwithstanding such criticisms, however, *The Rocks* richly deserves recognition for signalling 'a new direction in the interpretation of urban historical archaeology' (xiv).

Karskens' approach, which she anticipated in 'The Dialogue of Townscape: the Rocks and Sydney, 1788–1820' (*Australian Historical Studies*, 108:88–112), combines documentary research which she undertook during the 1980s and early 1990s with artefact analysis derived from Godden Mackay's 'Big Dig' at Cumberland and Gloucester Streets. The material data is thus embedded in an expansive historical record base, which integrates these 'small things forgotten' with other gleanings from the minutiae of census records, constables' notebooks, inquests, petitions, court proceedings, and local family histories.

The Rocks explores the township fringe which developed along the craggy slopes above Sydney Cove during the early colonial period. The book comprises 19 parts, which are structured into three sections: locale, family life, and earning a living. Common to each is Karskens' teasing out of the borders which framed this community, and which — in public imagination — separated it from the regular town. She sets out to blur the lines of representation which have fashioned public understanding of the Rocks, in order better to access the local milieu which constituted the idiomatic basis for neighbourhood identity and interaction.

Karskens argues that our appreciation of the Rocks is clouded by the stereotypes about it which were constructed by the early-colonial elite as it sought to delineate and thereby better know itself. Their perception of the Rocks was grounded in 'what they expected to find in a convict colony: debased images rather than normal, acceptable behaviour' (72). For Karskens, this labelling process was highlighted by Commissioner John Thomas Bigge, whom she presents as being especially fixated by 'the part of Town they called the Rocks where every species of Debauchery and villainy is practised' (167).

These early-colonial elite stereotypes, and subsequent mid- and late-nineteenth century characterisations of the Rocks as a

notorious slum, have endured as a consequence of later history writing. Historians have perpetuated the Rocks' 'outcast' image by substituting the stereotype of 'bad' with that of 'victim': the people of the Rocks were hapless victims of vicious and unrelenting repression by officialdom and capitalism. Or they have sought to redefine 'bad' as 'good'. In both cases, Karskens suggests, historical interpretations have perpetuated the earlier process of stereotyping, obscuring 'the perspective of ordinary people' (202).

Karskens offers several pathways for penetrating beyond these stereotypes. One is via gender analysis. She probes the stratagems which resourceful women pursued in order to make ends meet, and sometimes accumulate considerable comforts, albeit always 'with the constant potential for the downward slide' (212). Another pathway is Karskens' analysis of master-servant relations, which she argues 'reveals a far more complex, far more human, and often humane, dimension' to life than has hitherto been generally recognised (171).

The central device which Karskens uses, however, is her presentation of the Rocks as a customary society. In Karskens' opinion, the 'most striking characteristic of early Sydney, as read through the close examination of everyday life, is that it was in many ways a *preindustrial society*' (7). She urges readers to set aside the later framework of mass class consciousness, in order to glimpse the face-to-face cultural world of a vanished community that was divided by rank rather than by class.

Karskens' earlier airing of this argument drew sharp criticism from some quarters. Her efforts to subvert elite stereotypes are occasionally crude (for example, her comment that convict society 'was not entirely chaotic, rootless or anarchic', 46). Neither is it entirely consistent. Her references to 'the culture of the lower orders' (132, 233) echo the perspectives of the elite rather than those of local inhabitants.

Any criticism of Karskens' approach must however be qualified by acknowledging the considerable complexity of her arguments. As she concedes, 'there was much distinction and diversity within the blanket descriptions "labouring people" or "the lower orders"' (153). Moreover, she is at pains to stress that the persistence of pre-industrial customs did not preclude the capacity for change. Thus, she contends that the canny entrepreneurialism of publicans and small-scale dealers 'encapsulates the ways and means of doing business in commercialised, yet preindustrial, Sydney' (215). She identifies important traits of modernity also, in the 'avid' consumerism of residents, whereby they 'could be agents in the new modes of self-identification through material possessions' (207).

Underpinning Karskens' arguments about continuity and change is the successful application to historical analysis of what anthropologist Victor Turner called a switch from 'a "being" to a "becoming" vocabulary' (*On the Edge of the Bush*, 1985, 152). In order to obtain 'glimpses' (73, 111, 145) of the unfolding lives of 'real' (210) rather than stereotypical people, she tells 'life stories' (145) about selected inhabitants. This is the kernel of the new integrating studies in urban history and archaeology (see Mayne and Lawrence, 'An Ethnography of Place: Imagining 'Little Lon'', forthcoming in *Journal of Australian Studies*, May 1998). Rebecca Yamin, interpreting 'Five Points', describes the approach as an hermeneutic process that draws upon the entire historical record — artefacts and documents — in order to weave 'narrative vignettes' around identifiable individuals, households, and workplaces (see Yamin, 'New York's Mythic Slum: Digging lower Manhattan's infamous Five Points', *Archaeology*, March/April 1997, 45–53).

Karskens' compelling life stories are an outstanding feature of this book, and highlight her meticulous and ever-searching scholarship. Arguably, she might more fully harness the archaeological evidence as she demonstrates this important approach. However it is perhaps a measure of her skill in so integrating these data, that they do not loom larger, but are instead seamlessly incorporated into a qualitatively-advanced interpretation of the past. It must be conceded that there are many instances in which the archaeological evidence is explicitly and effectively built into Karskens' narrative: for example, the piece of Chinese porcelain, its edges flaked to form a sharp-edged tool, which is cited as evidence of continuing Aboriginal occupation after European settlement. Because the book was completed before the over 750 000 artefacts from the Cumberland/Gloucester Streets site were fully catalogued, however, there are other instances where Karskens mentions such archaeological tracings only impressionistically. She does not always draw upon these data with the exactitude she does documentary sources (Note,

however, Karskens' important contributions to volumes 1 & 2 of Godden Mackay Heritage Consultants, Cumberland/Gloucester Street Site Archaeological Investigation, Sydney Cove Authority, 1996).

A decade ago Judy Birmingham and Tim Murray noted that a 'great deal of material data emerges during the excavation of most historic sites and by far the greater proportion of them are remarkably undistinguished... One challenge on such sites is to translate this assemblage of refuse and discarded material into a valid database for social and cultural interpretation' (*Historical Archaeology In Australia: A Handbook*, 1987, 91). Karskens' eloquent 'life profiles' upon the past clearly address that challenge, and signal a methodologically rigorous means of building the 'small things forgotten' into effective interpretation of their larger contexts.

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Graham Connah (ed.), *The Archaeology of Lake Innes House: Investigating the Visible Evidence 1993-1995*, New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service, Canberra, 1997; pp. 45, illustrations, soft cover. ISBN 0-646-34134-0.

Though Professor Connah describes himself as the editor of this publication, the consistently readable style suggests that he has painstakingly re-written it from the contributions of many students (44 in 1994) who worked on the site over three years. This project has been a tour-de-force of management, considering the size, complexity and ruinous state of the site, along with the range of skills of the people who worked on it.

The Lake Innes House and associated sites, lying 11 kilometres south of Port Macquarie, are extensive brick ruins of a large house and stables built in the 1830s and 1840s. Associated with it are less substantial ruins of workers' cottages, a blacksmith's workshop, a home farm and a brick making site.

This complex is an estate rather than a farmstead, since its creator, Alexander Clunes Innes, was a professional soldier, rather than a farmer, who took up land (more than 30 000 acres) as well as two stores and leased other runs as a business enterprise. His house at Lake Innes was the most impressive at the time outside of Sydney and was famous for its furnishings, paintings, silver, books and for the hospitality provided to visitors. Unfortunately, Innes does not seem to have had the capital and necessary business acumen to run such an estate once acquired. The economic downturn of the 1840s and the slow development of Port Macquarie also contributed to the failure of Innes's enterprises. Since the estate was not designed as a farmstead of a viable pastoral property, after Innes left it in 1852 it began to decline. It may have been lived in during the 1870s but it was a ruin by 1900.

The enquiring archaeologist is always anxious to know in detail how a building was used. Professor Connah's team was fortunate in having a plan of the house from the 1840s, indicating the uses of most of the rooms and giving some details about the stables. It is usually a simple matter, even from a ruin, to determine the front rooms, bedrooms and kitchens, but it is only from historic documentation that we would know that there was a bachelor's hall in this complex building. The placement of the latter behind the kitchen, close

to the stables and on the less-desirable sunny side of the house starts interesting speculations about the status of single men. The presence of a bathroom and privies attached to the main bedroom wing in the 1840s was also rather unexpected. This was a household with a notably large number of servants to carry water and dispose of chamber pots. It seems likely that this was a response to the hot climate. The house shows two other major adaptations to climate common to colonial houses — a large veranda and bedrooms on the cool south side of the house.

It would be interesting to compare the social context of Lake Innes House with that of Larnach Castle near Dunedin, New Zealand. The New Zealand building was also the grand house of an estate with numerous tenant farmers to supply its daily needs and the domestic focus of a business empire run by William Larnach. Dunedin prospered on the gold rushes of the mid-nineteenth century, and Larnach as Minister of Mines facilitated the mechanisation of mining in the late nineteenth century. After his death and the decline of his business, the Castle became dilapidated but was saved from ruin by its tourist potential. There is an implication in both cases that these great houses ceased to be functional because they were too large, but too large relative to what? An analysis of the size of large rural colonial houses, relative to their history and use within the local setting and economy, could be an interesting exercise. In Otago sometimes a farmstead around a large house has survived but the house has been demolished and a new homestead built. It is not necessarily the viability of the associated farm that determines the viability of a colonial mansion.

The survey of the visible evidence at Lake Innes House has produced a great deal of interesting material, and it is to be hoped that extensive excavations will be feasible. By linking the visible evidence to the archival material, it has been possible to make sense of a complex and badly damaged site. It would be useful to have more of the archival material published, particularly the early plan of the house. Professor Connah is to be commended for publishing an overview which is not just descriptive. At this stage, there are many mysteries and no doubt some conclusions will be overturned by excavation results, but the effort was worthwhile.

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B. McGowan, *Lost Mines: Historic Mining Sites in the Monaro Southern Tablelands Districts of New South Wales*, author, Canberra, 1994; pp. iii, 197.

B. McGowan, *Lost Mines Revisited: Historic Mining Communities of the Monaro, Southern Tablelands and South West Slopes Districts of New South Wales*, author, Canberra, 1996; pp. iv, 236.

B. McGowan, *Bungonia to Braidwood: an Historical and Archaeological Account of the Shoalhaven and Mongarlowe Goldfields*, author, Canberra, 1996; pp. iv, 293.

Between 1993 and 1996 Barry McGowan achieved a remarkable amount of fieldwork and historical research on mining sites in Monaro, the Southern Tablelands, the South West Slopes and the Upper Shoalhaven valley in New South Wales. He was funded by the National Estate grant program and the Heritage Commission got good value for money. In a most meritorious way McGowan decided to make his findings accessible to a wider public. He initially published the book *Lost Mines (LM)* at his own expense in 1994, covering an area centred on Canberra north to the Yass-Goulburn line, south to the Numeralla River and east to the upper Shoalhaven. This book sold well, as it deserved, and in 1996 McGowan published, again largely at his own expense, first *Bungonia to Braidwood (BB)*, which looked in similar style at the goldfields of the Shoalhaven and Mongarlowe (taking some of the material from *LM*) and then *Lost Mines Revisited (LMR)*. *LMR* was a substantially revised version of *LM* with the Shoalhaven chapter removed. Significant additions included new sites around Yass and Boorowa (including Dalton, Frogmore and Woolgarlo), an entirely new chapter on McMahons Reef and Cunninghams Reef (which are south of Murrumburrah-Harden) and a most welcome new section in the Cooma chapter on the early twentieth-century copper mine at Kyloe, tapped now by Lake Eucumbene.

The three books together constitute a major resource for the mining history and archaeology of an area where the majority of sites are difficult and sometimes dangerous of access. But the books themselves are also a shade difficult and occasionally dangerous of access. McGowan makes it plain that his objective is 'not a travel or guide book to the goldfields, but rather an historical and heritage study' and he adds, rather defensively, that 'inclusion of site descriptions simply underlines the point that history is not only found in books, and documents, but on the ground' (*LMR*, i-ii). Throughout all three books, however, he has chosen to divorce 'site descriptions' from 'history' and he puts site descriptions first. Particularly in *LM* and *LMR* the discussion of the physical remains is too short and the history too much a chronological narrative compiled from the local newspapers, the annual reports of the NSW Department of Mines and the two major illustrated monthlies, the *Australian Town and Country Journal* and the *Illustrated Sydney News*. Integration, which is of the essence for successful heritage evaluation and for the best historical archaeology, is largely left to the reader. The reader has to work extra hard in *LMR* because the excellent site photographs (taken by McGowan himself) are placed amidst the history, some distance from the site descriptions, and, while adequately captioned, are not referred to in the text or made to justify their existence. The detailed photographs require, moreover, good site plans to achieve their full potential. There are only nine such plans, with scales, in *LMR* though *BB* has more. It is unfortunate that there is no list of illustrations (photographs, maps, plans) in any of the three books. At its best, McGowan's system produces valuable results. The nine plans of the Bombay area on the Upper Shoalhaven (*BB*, pp. 41-80) and 26 photographs combine with the site descriptions and history to allow the reader a remarkable intimacy with unfamiliar places: if the orientation of photographs were supplied in the captions, the service to

scholarship would be even better. Yet the reader is still left to make an effort of consolidation.

There are a few curious discrepancies between *LM* and *LMR*. In *LM* there are interesting photographs of the stone powder magazine at Back Creek, the household oven at Fiery Creek and the dam at the Polar Star, all between the Numeralla and Bredbo Rivers (plates 21, 25, 15), but these are omitted in *LMR*. In the Shoalhaven area, the excellent general view of the large 1890s boiler at Crokers Mint (*LM* plate 110) is replaced by an end-on view in *BB* (fig. 8.25), while the impressive stone embankments from ground sluicing at Sewells Point and the stone hut nearby (*LM* plates 111, 112) are omitted from *BB*.

LM is accordingly not entirely superseded by *LMR* and *BB* and any one seeking the fullest information on an individual site should have all three at hand. *LM* lacks an index but this oversight was remedied in *LMR* and *BB*.

BB has one feature distinguishing it from the other two books. It has a chapter on 'typology and technology' and a separate chapter on dredging. Based on Neville Ritchie's very useful typology of alluvial gold-mining sites in New Zealand (published in *New Zealand Journal of Archaeology* 3, 1981, 51-69), McGowan gives a clear and concise description of the various technologies employed. It is a pity that it is wholly unillustrated save for drawings of the well-known cradle and long tom, but it is a necessary and useful introduction to a book on gold sites. The *AHA* reader now has access to the greatly expanded glossary by Ritchie and Hooker in this issue of the Journal.

The section on dredging techniques in the typology chapter would have been much better integrated with the substantial chapter on the history of dredging in the area from 1899 to 1914: the illustrations in that chapter of three 1901 dredges (Jembaicumbene, Colombo and Little River, fig. 3.2-3.4) are unfortunately ascribed only vaguely to 'old journals'. Dredging was a significant aspect of gold mining a century ago and it is good to have this discussion. Again, however, it is to be regretted that the inter-relationship between the general chapter and the specific dredging areas described later in *BB* is not explored. In particular the lack of cross-reference between history, technology and surviving machinery on site is a lost opportunity. At Jembaicumbene near Braidwood, for example, the description of material remains is cursory (*BB* pp. 109-13), the relevant photographs are scattered later in the chapter (pp. 117-38) and none of this machinery is referred to in the history (pp. 113-42) or specifically in the typology chapter (pp. 19-20).

The use of old photographs is very sporadic. Because of time and financial restraints, McGowan used Sydney resources very little. It is very much to be regretted, however, that he seems not to have consulted the superb collection of mining photographs held by the Department of Mineral Resources in St Leonards. His histories would also have benefited from use of the Department of Education School Files in the Archives Office of NSW at the Rocks: I noticed only one reference, to the McMahons Creek file (*LMR*, p. 137). Similarly the Australian Archive's holdings of Post Office files, occasionally consulted by McGowan, would have repaid systematic use.

Where an author has covered so many little known sites, it is perhaps churlish to ask for more. In *BB* only gold-mining sites are included. The author notes (*BB*, p. 286) that there are also three copper mining sites (Mulloon, Curra Creek and Tolwong) and a silver-mine (Boro) but mentions them only in passing in the context of toxic waste. It is curious that he does not mention that Mulloon copper-mine had been extensively described in *LM*, pp. 83-93, and would soon be republished in *LMR*, pp. 93-102. It is downright regrettable that he does not discuss Tolwong, a great and dramatic site on both sides of the Shoalhaven Gorge, with superb photographs available at the Department of Mineral Resources and the company's own

plans reproduced by J. E. Carne in his 1911 book on tin (not his book on copper).

McGowan's positive achievement is very substantial and everyone interested in ground sluicing and hydraulic mining generally should read these volumes with attention. It is a pity that they are not easier reading. Many of the sites are in wild and beautiful places and most of them will never be visited by most of us who read the books. The story of unquenchable optimism which prompted both local inhabitants and incomers to invest so heavily in time, effort and, sometimes, cash in the

hope of striking a payable deposit could be told with more dynamism and flair; while the rich store of abandoned machinery and archaeological remains could be presented with a broader awareness of the need for makers' names, for dimensions, for sketches and measured drawings. But the length of this review is a good index of how seriously historical archaeologists should regard McGowan's work.

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Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism, Colonial Expansion: Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600–1860*, Cambridge University Press, 1995; pp. 540, hardback, \$125. ISBN 0-521-40385-5.

Environmental history has become a popular topic for historians in the last few years, even in historical archaeology we have been urged to develop a 'Drysdale' model (to place on our coffee tables along with the Swiss Family model) that incorporates elements of human relations with the environment. Grove's book should therefore be of interest to the historical archaeologist seeking to understand the contexts in which the colonial interaction with the environment occurred.

Grove's point of departure is the modern environmentalism which is often portrayed as an entirely new phenomenon without a history. Grove's aim in *Green Imperialism* is to trace some of the intellectual history of environmental concerns in the context of interaction between European colonial expansion, non-western economic forces and the environment. He discusses this history in the context of the tropics and more particularly tropical islands because of their intellectual links with European notions of 'Eden' and 'paradise'.

All this is not entirely new and the first impression on reading Grove's work is that, unlike many of the new crop of environmental historians, Grove recognises that the historical geographers have been exploring this theme for many years. The usual familiar suspects are cited and acknowledged (Sauer being a notable exception). Added to the historical geographers is a post-modern concern for tracing ideas which Groves describes as the influence of historical anthropology, another intellectually productive field. It is not surprising that this book is rich and varied in content and has the rare distinction of being readable without access to a dictionary of post-modern jargon.

Grove begins with a discussion of the 'Eden' myth and other European conceptions of paradise which become the terms that the initial explorers and settlers use as a way of understanding the new lands and their unfortunate inhabitants that were being encountered. There was therefore a tension between this vision of paradise and the changes wrought by its commercial exploitation that rose to alarm when land degradation became apparent and short-term commercial interests were pitted against long term interests of maintaining the economic usefulness of the land. Grove argues this allowed pioneering conservation controls on land use to be introduced

on a scale not possible in Europe. Moreover the development of 'science' allowed the production of theories about why colonial development had such a bad impact on the environment and the cross fertilisation between nations and companies.

Grove develops these themes through studies on the islands of St Helena and Mauritius and of the Cape Colony and British India. My particular interest was in the work Grove presents on the development of state conservation of timber resources in India, partly because of the connection between Indian and Australian programs of forest conservation, and partly because of reading Brough-Smythe's report on Victorian forests (1859) where he argued that if the Government did not act firmly to put forest exploitation onto a sustainable level the forests would be gone and industry would be burdened with high prices for timber. Similar comments are made in the Indian context and it seems a pity that the issue was not firmly dealt with in 1859.

As an Australian with research interests in the area of human/environment interactions I was a little disappointed that Grove does not discuss the settlement of Australia and New Zealand. Admittedly the field is well covered by writers such as Cumberland, Hancock, Jeans and most important of all, Joe Powell but Grove could have at least pointed the reader in their direction. Interestingly Grove does not discuss the settlement theories of Wakefield which were so important for determining the way official policy towards the environment was formulated in Australia and New Zealand. Captain Cook and Joseph Banks are discussed but in the broader context of their scientific voyages. But there is nothing much on Australia. Perhaps Grove was unconsciously drawn into exploring his own Edens of history.

For the historian and archaeologist Grove provides good insight into the underlying intellectual underpinning of much of colonial policy relating to the environment and it is instructive to see this operating in places such as Mauritius and India and reflect on the Australian experience. I certainly learned a great deal from reading the text, putting my own musings about the environment into a broader context. I was left often wanting to see more depth in some issues but I guess Grove can only write one book at a time! Apart from the price, I have no hesitation in recommending the book.

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Paul Bahn & John Flenley, *Easter Island, Earth Island*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1992; pp. 240, 198 colour and b&w illustrations, hardback \$19.95. ISBN 050-005-0651

Although published six years ago this book grows daily more relevant to the present.

The text, which has Bahn's particular stamp of humour, is relaxed but well focused on the main aims. Flenley provides the expertise of a bio-ecologist and results from his pollen analysis form the crux of the disturbing argument in Part 11 of the book.

Three serious publications in the last decade about Easter Island (known indigenously as Rapa Nui) encapsulate the salient characteristics and paramount questions that are presented by this small island far from any other land in the south-west Pacific Ocean. Thor Heyerdahl's triumphant *Easter Island, The Mystery Solved*, Georgia Lee's scholarly, careful documentation of rock paintings and petroglyphs in *The Rock Art of Easter Island. Symbols of Power, Prayers to the Gods* and Paul Bahn and John Flenley's *Easter Island, Earth Island* are by their titles indicative of how the subject has been individually handled. Bahn enjoys an argument and Heyerdahl provides him with a good target. He has little trouble in dismissing point by point Heyerdahl's obsessive determination to prove the initial colonisation of the island was from South America with perhaps a second, later migration from Polynesia.

Heyerdahl's 'selective' evidence is countered by Bahn from the fields of archaeology, linguistics, botany, oral traditions, physical anthropology and marine navigational expertise. Heyerdahl's theories are sustained by his desire to prove his daring Kon Tiki expedition a conclusive success and his belief that a prehistoric native culture was incapable of achieving the incredible marine skills, artistic sophistication and ingenuity of the first settlers. Bahn describes in detail all these qualities and has no problem in attributing them to the Polynesians, with particular emphasis on their maritime and navigational abilities. He considers that in approximately AD 450 the original settlers together with their colonising baggage of rats, dogs, pigs, chickens and plants, probably came from the Marquesas, a journey navigated by the stars, winds and currents across some 4 000 kilometres of open Pacific Ocean.

Part 11 of the book deals with the climax and fall of a civilisation that Bahn compares to a microcosm of our own planet earth, hence the second part of the title. It discusses the enigma of the giant stone *moai* (statues), how they were made, moved and mounted on the massive stone *ahu* (platforms), and why, when finally Europeans came to the island in the late eighteenth century, they found a depleted and impoverished population, a denuded landscape, and a coast lined by mutilated giant figures toppled face down in rubble. Stress and

war had come to Rapa Nui. The chapter headings have Bahn's touch with such arresting titles as 'The Riddle of the Quarry', 'Rocking and Rolling: How were the Statues Moved?', 'Crash go the Ancestors' and finally 'The Island that Self-Destructed'.

The discussion around this central theme of ecological disaster is based on evidence provided by John Flenley's pollen analysis. Core samples taken from the edge of the swamp in the caldera of Rano Kau and from altitudinal zones on another crater show a dramatic decline in shrubs and trees from about AD 950 onwards. This marked a period of burning and clearing the natural vegetation for agriculture, of cutting down the native palms and shrubs to provide the mechanics for transporting statues, and the onset of soil degradation and erosion. The imported Polynesian rat ate the palm kernels and the eggs of ground nesting birds thereby hastening the extinction of both species. Exotic plants strangled the native flora. Food gathering became difficult as resources dwindled and an increase in human bone fragments found in deposits hints at cannibalism. This ecological chain reaction completed the breakdown of a system doomed by overpopulation, social one-upmanship and the naïve belief that the huge stone ancestral effigies would protect and provide. One last plea to the gods may have been the annual ritual of the birdman ceremony, a dangerous race to an off-shore island for the first egg of the sooty tern. The winner's sponsor lived in lazy seclusion for a year as the earthly representative of the god Makemake (God of the Warriors). There is every indication that sooty terns became very rare.

Bahn's analogy to the wider world is sobering. The feverish pursuit of mammon to the detriment of the environment and the over exploitation of natural resources, despite warnings, goes on unabated. He says that on Easter Island it was laid out for all to see — '*The person who felled the last tree could see that it was the last tree. But he (or she) still felled it*'. The lesson seems still unlearned.

This is a very enjoyable book, scientific but in 'plain English' and Bahn and Flenley have made a great team. Explanations are provided throughout the text of esoteric words such as 'boustrophedon' when referring to the Rongorongo tablets, and the translation of species' names. Polynesian words, abbreviations and acronyms saves the reader from groping for a glossary or a dictionary. As far as I know there has been no further publication that has superseded what is a very convincing book about the enigmas of this isolated Pacific island.

The format is clear, and the illustrations complementary to the text with some excellent sketches showing how the statues may have been moved. Last but not least the price is very modest for a hardback book of this calibre.

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