Changing Perspectives in Australian Archaeology, Part VIII

Burins, Bones and Base Camps: A Re-analysis of Aire Shelter 2, Glenaire, Southern Victoria

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ABSTRACT. Archaeological studies often conclude that some sites are neatly identifiable as base camps, stopovers or tool-specific locales. Task reconstruction and interpretation of on-site activities affect our understanding of mobility patterns and subsistence and our ability to distinguish reconfigured land-use and population change. A re-analysis of Aire Shelter 2 is presented here to consider the potential of use-wear and residue studies for evaluating site function, in the context of coastal wetlands in southwestern Victoria. Traces of use were found on 242 stone artefacts. Identified tools include finely retouched flint scrapers and snapped flakes with burin edges associated with graving bone. The use-wear and faunal analyses indicate an atypical prehistoric assemblage that implies an alternative site function to that originally proposed. Rather than a base camp, the site is an infrequently used locale associated with hunting and the manufacture of bone points. Although theoretical reconstructions of land use suggest population contraction into winter base camps situated around coastal wetlands, there is no compelling evidence that such a site has been found at Aire Shelter 2, although nearby dune shell midden sites are likely candidates.