Introduction

This volume contains written versions of papers presented at the International Wetlands Archaeology Conference held in Gainsville, Florida, December 1-5, 1999. Its theme was: The Significance of the Survival of Organic Materials from Archaeological Contexts. Delegates from seventeen countries participated and subjects ranged in time period from the Pleistocene to the recent past. Purdy's introduction provides a useful overview of the history of the history of wetland research although proxy environmental records such as pollen, seeds and beetles are not referred to. The papers are arranged into five sections: (1) Florida archaeology; (2) archaeology of the Americas other than Florida; (3) archaeology of the rest of the world; (4) wetland environments; and (5) conversation methods.

The text

Webb and Hemmings discuss the finds from the Aucilla River Prehistory Project, North Central Florida, which include an impressive range of megafaunal bones shaped into tools. There are two chapters that discuss the remarkable archaeology preserved in the Windover bog, Florida. One reviews the project (Doran) and the other considers the textiles and cordage recovered (Hyland et al.). The latter chapter is complemented by papers by Croes and Bernick on finds from the North West Coast of North America. Both the Hyland et al. and the Bernick papers have detailed discussions on manufacturing techniques. They use many technical terms and though these have been translated for the layman, I suspect the discussion will be of more interest to the specialist. Croes includes an interesting examination of social status as indicated by hat style.

A number of papers (including those by Marquardt and Walker, Purdy and Iriate et al.) discuss subsistence as indicated by the wealth of floral and faunal remains that are preserved in wetland environments. Iriate et al. use starch grain and phytolith analyses amongst other data to examine the interaction between human populations in mid-Holocene Uruguay and their environment.

Coggins describes perishable artifacts preserved in the Cenote at Chichén Itzá. These and many of the Maori artifacts found in New Zealand (Johns) are exquisite with intricate carvings and demonstrate the valuable role of waterlogged deposits in preserving ceremonial artifacts.

Many of the American papers discuss the additional complexity of excavating in the USA caused by the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). Doran expresses his concern that if a second Windover were found a similar investigation would be prevented by the fact that most claims to ownership by tribal people are honoured and reburial is expected. He highlights the fundamental change NAGPRA has brought to US archaeology, which places constraints on excavation, but has served to increase dialogue between tribal peoples and the archaeological/academic community. Ivy and Byram provide an example of this dialogue as they describe the fruitful collaboration between the Coquille Indian tribe and University of Oregon archaeologists in investigating, interpreting and managing cultural sites. Similar links have been operating in New Zealand for several decades and Johns stresses the long-
term benefits of co-operation between archaeologists and Maori communities.

Many of the European papers are more general than those concerning the Americas, for example, Larsson examines Mesolithic and Neolithic finds from south Scandinavia. Some focus on particular aspects of wetland archaeology; Marangou discusses Neolithic watercraft from the Greek Wetlands, Burov examines ancient wooden objects and structures from Russian oxbow peat bogs and Van der Sanden discusses ritual structures from wet contexts in the province of Drenthe, The Netherlands. Coles makes an interesting attempt to establish the relationship between European Bronze Age metal work, wetlands and rock carvings! Soffer et al. consider the Upper Palaeolithic evidence for cordage, netting, textiles and baskets from iconography and the impressions left in clay and bone; although I feel their fascinating interpretation of this data involves an oversimplification of arguments of gender division of labour.

Ellis highlights the potential of Scottish peatlands and illustrates this with a case study: the Carse of Stirling. The most microscale paper concerns the medieval graves of two children from France and demonstrates the wealth of analyses that can be carried out on well preserved remains to establish cause of death, burial practices and the surrounding environment.

Werker and Goren-Inbar use wood found during excavation of the waterlogged deposits from the Acheulian site of Gesher Benot Ya’aqov, Dead Sea Rift, Israel, to reconstruct the surrounding woody vegetation. Crisman et al. emphasise the need to link palaeoecology with archaeology in order to understand the ecological conditions of a site at the time of human occupation.

Lille and Chapman highlight the potential of wetland sites with organic remains for placing Mesolithic sites into their environmental context and for identifying subsistence strategies.

Papers by Nicolas, Van Heeringen and Theunissen and Van de Noortet al. discuss the problems of managing wetlands and preserving their archaeological/palaeo-ecological record. Many papers make the point that fluctuating water tables, especially as a result of land drainage and reclamation, are a continuing threat to these environments. The final paper (Hoffmann) discusses the problems of preserving large wooden constructions once excavated.

**Conclusion**

The eclectic mixture of papers in this volume serves to illustrate the diversity of wetland archaeology. As it covers such a wide range of topics, time periods, cultures and geographical areas, institutions will probably find it a more useful reference book than individuals. There are some useful case studies for students of archaeology and the background information included in many papers places sites and cultures into context for those who are not familiar with them. Most chapters are written in a very accessible style even when discussing quite complex issues and techniques. The editor is to be congratulated on publishing less than two years after the conference.

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