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STONE TOOL LOCALITIES IN ARNHEM LAND

Our expedition crossing Arnhem Land from south to north found many prehistoric localities in different parts of this vast area. I selected five localities representing different regions and environments where reasonable number of stone artefacts was found. At Wilton II, IIa, VII and XXIV there were surface finds and in El Sherano and in Goomadeer trial excavations were realized. The Wilton II and IIa localities are situated on the right bank of the Wilton River, near Upper Wilton River Crossing, when approaching from the Mainoru cattle station. (Fig. 1.) The Wilton River in these places flows through a flood plain — the plain on the right bank of the river is 200–500 m wide. At this distance from the river the slope starts rising and localities Wilton II and IIa are situated exactly here at the foot of the slope, actually outside the flood plain. Wilton II is more down the slope, thus nearer to the flood plain, whereas Wilton IIa is 50–100 m further up on the slope. This can be so due to the stratigraphic situation — perhaps the finds were originally situated in two different horizontal layers, which were later eroded on the surface of the slope. The other possibility is that the horizontally different concentration of tools does not follow from stratigraphic, i.e. chronological differences, but it is due to the presence of raw igneous rock material in Wilton IIa, suitable for the production of special tools.

One site (Wilton IIa) was used as a quarry, and the other, not far aside (Wilton II) was a normal camping site. Although there are some boulders of igneous rock (dolerite) at Wilton IIa, and they were used for tool production, there are no tools made of this material at Wilton II, indicating that the two

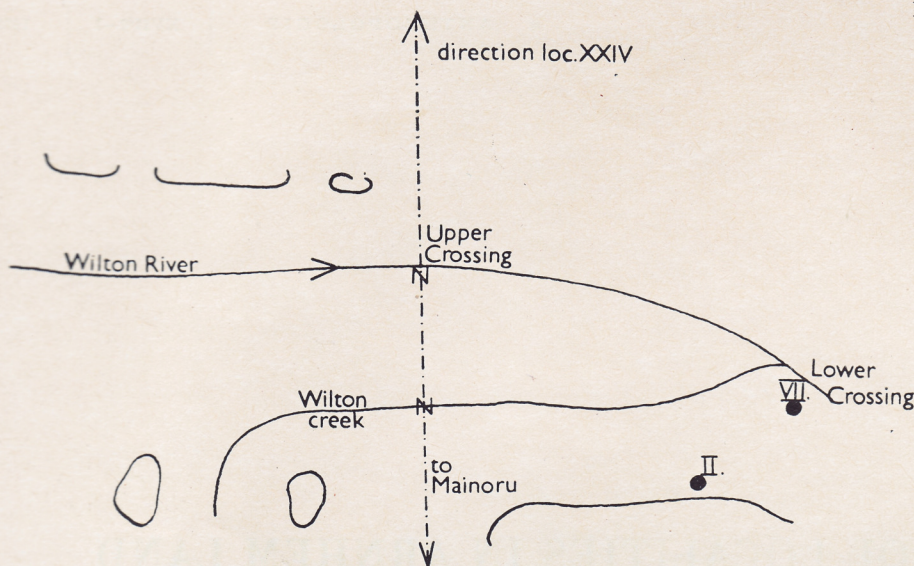
sites did not belong to the same time and to the same population. While most tools at Wilton IIa are made of dolerite, at Wilton II prevails tools made of a highly silicified fine grained sandstone. Both kinds of rock are reddish in colour, but this is only a superficial colouring caused by the local lateritic clay. The original colour of dolerite is dark-gray to black or greenblack and the sandstone is white.

The environment today is a dry bush not far from the river. A denser belt of trees is situated along the river bank. Nevertheless, the place is a good camping site even today. The North Australian bush deep in the interior is a relatively flat country with Wilton the river in the flat valley with plenty of water all the year round. The flood plain is flat with some 1–2 m high heaps of clay sand. The heaps are of various dimensions. In the south I found another locality, situated on and round such a heap namely Wilton VII, measuring approximately 20×20 m. The place is often flooded and therefore it cannot be used as camping site any more. The stone tools found here belong to a layer which sedimented when the valley was of different shape and the place did not form part of the flood plain. Today the floodplain contains not only recent fluvial sediments, but also remains of older layers. The stone tools assemblage is remarkable for the high frequency of bifacially and unifacially worked points of diverse raw materials.

The various colours and the distant origin of the material reveal that the Aborigines applied also aesthetic reason in their selection. Individual property can be a further reason for the selection of different colours and materials.

The locality Wilton XXIV is situated 6 miles

FIG. 1. Wilton-River-Crossing localities.



north of the Upper Wilton Crossing, following the foothills in the length of 500–600 m. It is far from water and there are scattered dolerite boulders of different sizes in the bush. This was not doubt a workshop. We found here stone axes in all stages of manufacture, broken pieces, as well as rejects. Anyway, many other types of unusually big stone tools, and the very advanced weathering in some pieces indicate that the existence of the workshop does not explain the presence of all finds.

According to their advanced weathering some pieces must be much older than anything we have found so far in the Wilton River area.

The Goomadeer locality is situated some 500 m from the right bank of the Goomadeer River. When driving from Maningrida state settlement to the west and after crossing the Liverpool and Man rivers we shall find the locality in the neighbourhood of 300 to 400 m high mountains in the traditional Gunwinggu tribal area. In the flat country under the mountains there are groups of big boulders, some of them with rock paintings. We found also human burials and animal bones at the locality. If we follow the foot of the mountain, some 1000 m further to the north-west we shall find a water spring.

One of the big boulders forms a deep overhang and surface finds reveal that the site was in the past, even in not too remote times, settled by Aborigines. Many stone tools of different type can be found on the surface around the boulder. Inside the rock shelter there are several flat rocks on the floor. Their horizontal surface is full of round, artificially ground cups. Two grinding pebbles were still lying on the boulder. On the floor there were some pieces of eucalyptus stringy bark, and three sticks, probably once forming part of a construction. The rock ceiling was black with sooth. Aside of some rock paintings in the frontal part of the rock shelter also some other X-ray paintings were found.

We dug a trial trench from the shelter out — the trench was 7 m long, 60 cm deep and 80 cm wide. Three different layers were distinguished. The 10 cm thick sandy surface layer contained flake and blade tools. The following 30 cm thick sandy layer contained typical bifacial and unifacial points. The third layer contained yellow sand, evidently the wheatered sandstone, which in some places was found still unweathered. While the Wilton River localities are situated on the southern fringes of Arnhem Land, this locality is ecologically an inland site situated not far from the northern border of the escarpment, but anyway it is not a typical rock country site. Situated at the foot of the mountains it faces the dry bush plains of the Goomadeer River. The rock face of the shelter is decorated with a number of paintings. The oldest of them have been strongly weathered, so that only some remains of the red pigment can be seen. In two places parts of a big snake body can be recognized (red colour). Without any doubt much younger are the white paintings with traces of the simple X-ray style. The very good state of preservation of these paintings points to a fairly recent origin. The latest are paintings in developed X-ray style. The chronological periods in the paintings — the early and the late one (with two styles) point to a similar archaeological situation, namely to the existence of an older layer (with small stone points) and a late one (with flake blade tools). The situation of the site and of the trial trench are indicated in Fig. 2.

The El Sherano assemblage of stone tools was excavated in 1968 by G. Chaloupka (The Darwin Museum). He gave the whole collection to our disposal for detailed archaeological study. The excavation site lies on the south-western fringes of Arnhem Land, on the upper reaches of the South Alligator River, not far (some 2 miles) from the old El Sherano mine, where we find two rock



FIG. 1.
Wilton River XXIV
Big boulder of igneous rock
with a flake.



FIG. 5.
Wilton River XXIV
A big core. Ventral side.



FIG. 2.
Wilton River XXIV
An irregular core with a flake



FIG. 6.
Goomadeer rock shelter
Archaeological trench and rock
paintings are well seen.



FIG. 3.
Wilton River XXIV
A stone tool workshop.

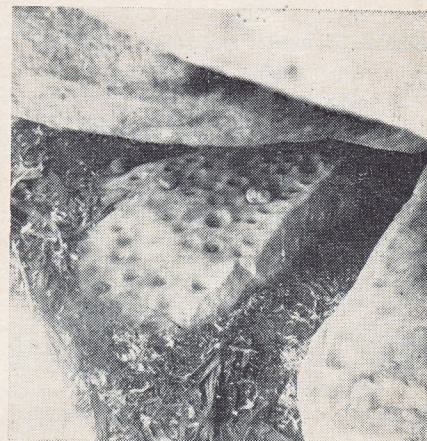


FIG. 7.
Goomadeer rock shelter.
Flat boulder with hollowed cups.

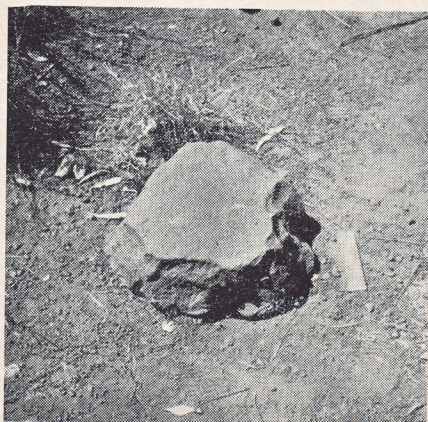


FIG. 4.
A big core of igneous rock. Dorsal
side. A paper measure aside
is 5 cm long.



FIG. 8.
Goomadeer rock shelter
Stone cups with crushing stones.

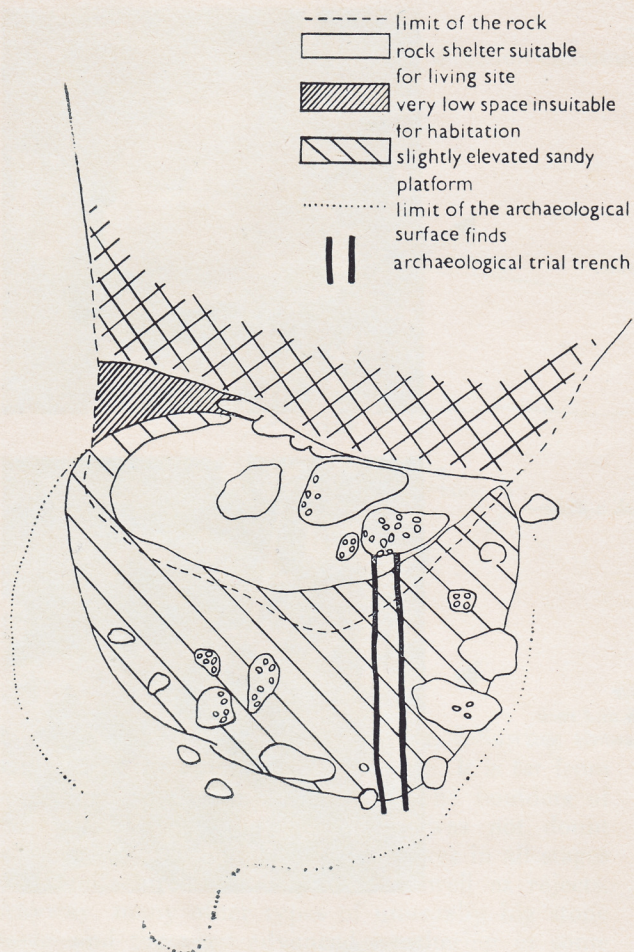


FIG. 2. Goomadeer rock shelter.

shelters with paintings on the walls. It is a typical far-inland situated locality south-west of the Arnhem Land escarpment. G. Chaloupka excavated the floor of the bigger of the two rock shelters. He found only one archaeological layer, reaching from the surface to some 30 cm deep. The paintings in both rock shelters belong to the local X-ray style or are contemporary with it. There is not a single typical archaic painting here (Jelínek, 1979). The archaeological evidence shows that the shelters were used as a living site by Aborigines for many generations.

The map (Fig. 3) shows the position of all the above-described localities.

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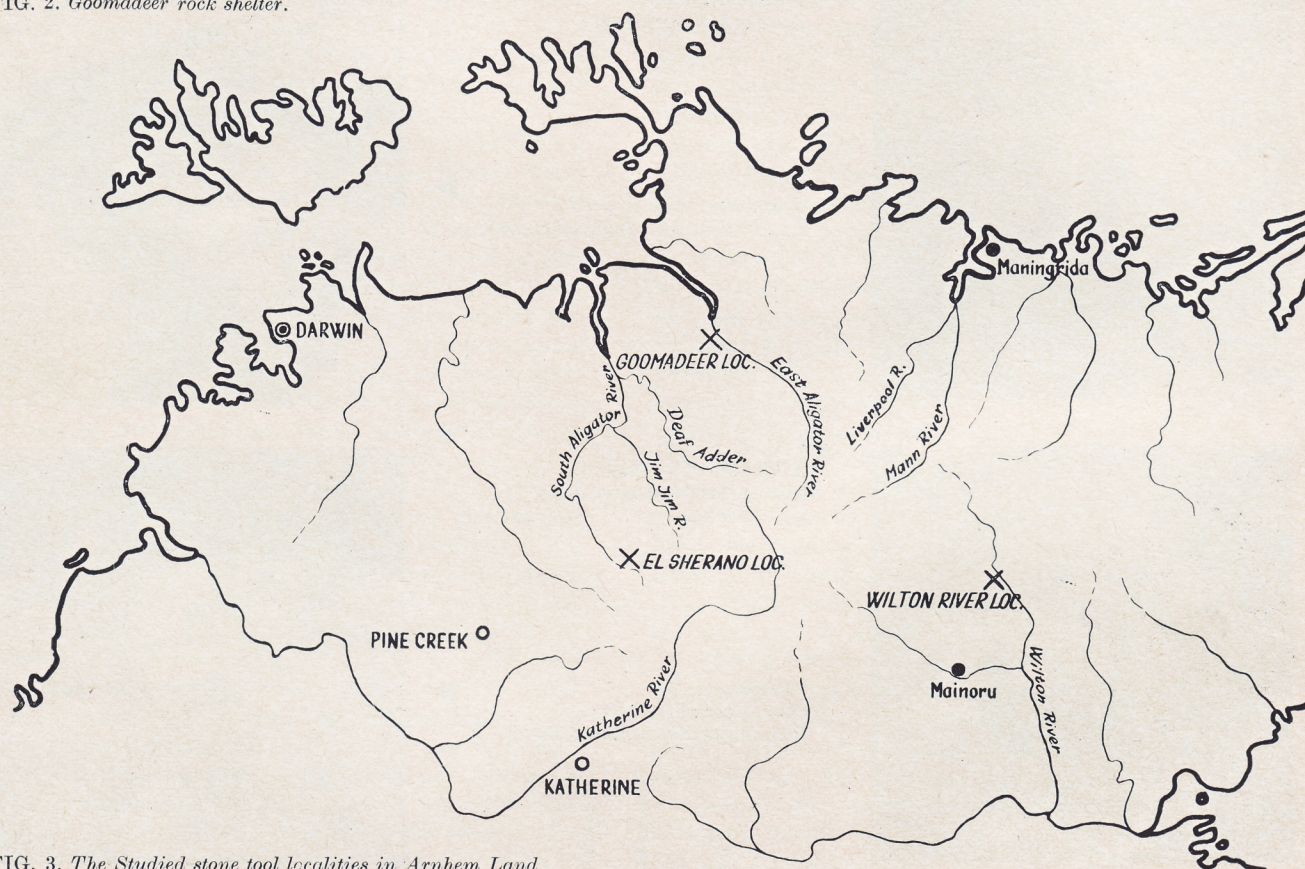


FIG. 3. The Studied stone tool localities in Arnhem Land.