

THE GREEN GULLY BURIAL

An Introduction By D. J. MULVANEY

Australian National University

The Green Gully human remains were a chance discovery made during August, 1965. Bone collagen radiocarbon analysis later determined their age as 6460 ± 190 B.P., but evidence for possible human activities at the site extends back some 17,000 years.

The fact that the bones lay within two miles of the soil pit which, in 1940, produced the controversial Keilor cranium, that they were apparently embedded in the same terrace sediments, and that post-cranial bones survived, excited scientific interest. One of those rare opportunities in fossil human research was presented, with an *in situ* fossil which could be recovered under controlled circumstances, in conjunction with related archaeological and geomorphological studies. The Keilor Project Committee was established under the chairmanship of Mr J. McNally, the Director, National Museum of Victoria, to co-ordinate field and laboratory research.

It is an indication of the rapid progress in Australian prehistoric research, that human remains 6,000 years old are less significant in 1970 than at the time of their discovery. The antiquity of the human occupation of this continent has been pushed back far into the late Pleistocene, and research on other known human fossils, together with the discovery of further remains, is permitting new time perspectives. Even so, the Green Gully project resulted in the accumulation of data relevant to local prehistoric racial, cultural and environmental patterns, at a level of detail rarely achieved in Australia. It is only by such detailed concentration on selected sites or problems that a realistic appraisal of more general issues will become practicable—the climate, landscape and society of Aboriginal Australia.

This *Memoir* presents several facets of the Green Gully project. Work is continuing on the centrepiece, the human remains, under the direction of Professor N. W. G. Macintosh, who was overseas at the time of the discovery and excavations. The bones present many problems of identification, reconstruction and interpretation. These investigations will occupy some time, and it was decided to publish the present papers without further delay. As an interim measure, and with the concurrence of Professor Macintosh, an abbreviated account of some salient preliminary observations already published by Macintosh has been prepared by the writer (pp. 93-100).

To judge from the preliminary assessment of the human remains, the Green Gully burial verged on the bizarre. Delayed interment practices are indicated, but although no bones were duplicated, bones belonging to more than one individual were buried; evidently both sexes were represented. The anomalous circumstances of this composite burial make a full investigation of relevant Aboriginal ethnographic practices a desirable addendum to the published final report on the human remains.

Individual authors have acknowledged their debt to many collaborators and their names are not repeated here; others assisted who are not named, but the thanks of the Keilor Project Committee and of the chief participants are extended to them. It is necessary to single out the following persons, however, for specific services. Mr Donald Mahon, proprietor of the soil pit showed a sense of responsibility by reporting his discovery, as did the owner of the property, Mr H. Dodds, when both he and Mr Mahon assented to the work taking place. Professor E. S.

Hills, Chairman of Trustees of the Museum, took the initiative in arranging financial support for the project, while the Museum Director, Mr J. McNally, assisted in many ways. Mr McNally served also as Chairman of the Keilor Project Committee, and Mr E. D. Gill was its secretary. It merits record that over many years Mr Gill's visits to soil pits in the region alerted Mr Mahon to the potential significance of his discovery.

Costs of the project were supported partly by the Museum and by the Australian National University, Canberra. A contribution was made to the initial work by the Australia and New Zealand Bank Ltd. The major financial sponsor was the Sir Ian Potter Foundation. To all these sponsors, the Keilor Project Committee acknowledges its gratitude.

The writer was appointed by the Committee to co-ordinate the papers. He thanks the authors for their co-operation. This *Memoir* is published under the terms of the Ian Potter Foundation grant.