

Hearing voices

Palaeolithic archaeology as a discipline offers a unique long-term perspective on behavioural change - this is hardly a controversial statement. Alongside this truism lies the usually unexpressed relief that we as archaeologists do not have to juggle the many voices (biases) inherent in collecting and interpreting ethnographic data. Our field has its own biases, taphonomic and otherwise, but we know what kinds of data and interpretive frameworks produce satisfying results. At the risk of over-generalising, most Palaeolithic archaeologists see contemporary hunter-gatherers as models for theory building, and issues to do with indigenous rights are the province of cultural anthropologists.

Before Farming was established to break down just such parochial attitudes, and a unifying theme runs through four contributions in this issue (Fullagar, Chennells & /Useb, Winterhalder, and Thomas) concerning the importance of contemporary indigenous knowledge systems for modelling the past, and the related issue of recognising the intellectual rights of those we study. The latter is the subject of Chennells & /Useb's article on San rights in relation to academic users of traditional knowledge and other forms of the collective San cultural heritage, including rock art. A formal contract is included in the article as a model for recognising the rights of and responsibilities owed to indigenous communities. The contract has potentially serious implications for what is perceived as our academic freedom to conduct anthropological and archaeological research across a large part of southern Africa. Given the importance of this issue, we have sought opinions from anthropologists who have been affected by the proposed contractual relationship with the San umbrella group WIMSA (Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa). The comments by Biesele, Wiessner and Hitchcock follow the Chennells & /Useb article. I would encourage readers to contribute to this debate, even if your area of research is not southern Africa. Please share your experiences of negotiating access to and of acknowledging traditional knowledge systems in your work. Is the WIMSA model of a formal contract something that you would like to see or do you feel it is an intolerable form of interference that serves an unrepresentative, vocal minority playing on collective academic guilt?

Rights of ownership are at the fore of Thomas's extended news item on the current legal status of Kennewick Man, the 9,000 year old skeleton from Washington State, USA, who has remained a contested figure since his discovery. From the long-running custody battles between indigenous communities and archaeologists, Thomas sees lessons for future cooperation between these two communities.

The articles by Yven and Guraieb are, by contrast, uncontroversial contributions to lithic-based archaeological interpretations, respectively, of landscape use in Mesolithic Brittany and demographic change in the Holocene of southern Patagonia. In another of our commissioned review articles Fullagar provides a sweeping and up-to-date overview of the current state of archaeological research on the continent of Australia, including the role of archaeology in supporting indigenous land rights. Those who know this database well will inevitably find some topics underrepresented or vice versa, but that is to be expected with such an immense topic.

In our Benefit of Foresight piece, Bruce Winterhalder reflects on the intellectual (eg, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*) and practical influences that fostered his pioneering work on foraging theory (once optimal, but no longer). This frank review should be required reading for all postgrads embarking on a research career - and maybe for all researchers who take for granted how lucky we are to be supported by the taxpayer.

The Editor
Bristol, June 2004