

Abstract.

Anthropological studies of modern hunter-gatherers have revealed that this mode of human existence involved many complex forms of behaviour. These complexities operated on many levels, and in many accounts were quite regionalised. The archaeological study of hunter-gatherers however has at times struggled to reproduce the complexity of anthropological studies due to the relatively uncomplicated form of what is preserved of hunter-gatherer behaviour in the archaeological record. As has become apparent with the growth of cultural resource management in Australia, the majority of this evidence consists of scatters of stone artefacts, with just the odd rock-art site. The primary focus of this study was to examine how such evidence can contribute to our understanding of regional hunter-gatherer behaviour.

This thesis examined this issue through a spatial analysis of the archaeological evidence recovered from a region in northwest central Queensland Australia. Using spatial modelling techniques, it was found that several levels of archaeological variation could be identified in the region. These levels of archaeological variation provided insights into the complexity of behaviour that occurred in the region before it was severely disrupted by European colonisation. Such knowledge about the spatial dynamics of regional hunter-gatherer behaviour is not only informative about Aboriginal behaviour in the recent past, but also about the processes involved in the behavioural changes evident in Australia's 50,000 year history.

The results of this study demonstrated that much more could be gained from the archaeological evidence of hunter-gatherers if a regional spatial perspective is taken. Such a perspective cannot reproduce the kinds of complexities that have been observed through anthropological studies of hunter-gatherers, but provides complementary evidence about other levels of behavioural complexity that may not be attainable through anthropological research. The result is a more holistic understanding of hunter-gatherer behaviour. Such understanding has the potential to improve the way archaeologists understand the archaeological record of regions, and has the potential to enable more effective of management cultural resources.