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NEW ZEALAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



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BOOK REVIEW

Pamela Swadling, Papua New Guinea's Prehistory: an Introduction.
Boroko, National Museum and Art Gallery, 1981. PNGK 3.70
(\$6.59 New Zealand).

This is a splendid publication (although I might rightly be accused of being biased), and one that anyone interested in Pacific prehistory or Papua New Guinea should own. Its modest price and its unique contents make it the Pacific archaeological buy-of-the-year.

It is a popular account aimed at the general public, and no doubt the tourist market as well, but has much of interest to archaeologists in it. Based on an exhibit opened at the museum in 1979, it is a feast of pictures and information gathered from many researchers and sources.

The person who 'prepared' the book is an M.A. graduate from Auckland who pioneered contract archaeology in Papua New Guinea (in a project related to the Ramu hydroelectric programme) who moved later into superintending the growing site record file (started by yours truly based on the New Zealand site records) and then to the National Museum. This book is the Museum's first major publication in the archaeological field.

Although basically a handbook of the exhibition the book goes far beyond the exhibit itself, bringing together a wealth of photos, including many of archaeological fieldwork and excavations that have never been seen in public before (and perhaps never will?). There are also many old historic photos, a liberal use of simple coloured maps and diagrams, making it a most attractive and informative contribution.

The three main themes of the book are the early settlers and changing landscape of Pleistocene New Guinea; how diet has changed through time, and the ever-fascinating pestles and mortars and stone carvings. The book is particularly notable for the way it integrates the ethnographic 'now' of the country with the archaeological 'then' and links it with early photographs of traditional activities and artefacts in use.

I have to admit I have long wished for such a publication, and can have nothing but compliments for the people who made it happen - there are many other hands than Pam Swadling's that have contributed. May the National Museum and Art Gallery prosper for being so enterprising and may they sell thousands and thousands of copies!

Susan Bulmer