

being a case of necessity due to distance from sources of wood. By highlighting rare stone structures and ignoring other sources, including Buckley, Pascoe is citing the exceptional as exemplification of the usual. This is not a scientific approach.

Still in Victoria: stone was used as a substitute for wood on treeless plains in western Victoria in another case provided by Kenyon:

The structures [on the Mount Elephant run, near Derrinallum] were shelter-circles, erected in situations *where neither ... brushwood nor bark could be obtained* for building mia-mias [huts] ... These circles are common on the plain or eastern part of this property (Purrumbete), *where branches of trees could not be procured for giving shelter ... The circles are generally formed of large stones set on their edges and bedded in the ground close together, without any other stones on the top*, thus forming good protection from the wind as they lay around the fire.²¹

Dawson made the same observation based on his experience in colonial Victoria, suggesting that stone was not the preferred dwelling material: 'In some parts of the country *where it is easier to get stones than wood and bark for dwellings*, the walls are built of flat stones and roofed with limbs and thatch.'²²

It seems clear that in *Dark Emu*, stone is proposed as the preferred, the more advanced, building material. It is crucial to Pascoe's task of proving the sophistication of the Old People. Those people evidently had the opposite view: organic materials, light and easily adjustable, were the preferred building mediums. Stones were used as a last resort.

Kenyon discussed the stone circles in the Lake Condah–Mount Eccles area of the Western District, and quoted Alexander Ingram as having been told in 1898 by elderly people at the Condah Mission that they had been roofed over with boughs and bark.²³ Keryn Walshe discusses this particular area in Chapter 13. Kenyon also referred briefly to explorers Flinders and King having found 'huts with stone walls, in both instances in the north'.²⁴ I will deal first with Matthew Flinders. The King example is dealt with further below.

The reference here to Flinders very likely comes from Thomas Worsnop.²⁵ However, the arranged stones Flinders saw, according to Worsnop, were not of Aboriginal origin: 'It was evident that these people were Asiatics ...'²⁶ This was not mere speculation by Worsnop.

Here is Flinders' original published record from the Sir Edward Pellew group of islands in the Gulf of Carpentaria:

Besides pieces of earthen jars and trees cut with axes, we found remnants of bamboo lattice work, palm leaves sewed with cotton thread into the form of such hats as are worn by the Chinese ... but what puzzled me most was a collection of stones piled together in a line, resembling a low wall, with short lines running perpendicularly at the back, dividing the space behind into compartments ... Mr Brown saw on another island a similar construction, with not less than thirty-six partitions, over which was laid a rude piece of framework ...²⁷

In his masterly survey of Aboriginal traditional dwellings, Paul Memmott presented only a few examples of stone used in buildings. His chapter 'The stone architecture of Aboriginal Australia'²⁸ opens with a two-page spread showing a photograph of a circular stone structure. Not until late in the chapter is it revealed that this is not a house but a hunting device, a bird hide. The Australian Alps also feature briefly, in a drawing of 'stone houses of Aboriginal Druids'.²⁹ It is possible that these 'stone houses' were representations of caves rather than houses, given that stone-house remains have not been discovered in the Australian Alps, and 'druids', in English folklore, are frequently typecast as cave-dwellers.

In support of this possibility is the report from William Thomas in Brough Smyth that an old man from the Australian Alps, Kul-ler-kul-lup, had spoken of:

a race living in the Alps who inhabited only the rocky parts, and had their homes in caves; that this people rarely left their haunts but when severely pressed by hunger, and mostly clung closely to their cave-dwellings; that corroborees were conveyed by dreams to Kul-ler-kul-lup's people and other Australians; and that men of the caves and rocks were altogether superior to the ordinary Aboriginal.³⁰

These details have all the hallmarks of religious mythology.

Be that as it may, Pascoe makes this very large claim: 'Early travellers in the Alps remark on the small villages of stone houses and the

large populations' (page 91). The source he gives is 'Peisley Papers, 2012'. The bibliography shows four sets of papers by 'A. Peisley', possibly Annette Peisley, dated 2010a, 2010b and 2011 and one undated. None of these sources are publicly available, so there is no way a reader can test Pascoe's sweeping assertion here. It has not been justified with evidence.

It is then highly problematic for Pascoe to go on to say: 'These structures [stone arrangements] have been found *all around the country*, as have stone houses similar to the Lake Condah buildings' (page 96). The evidence does not bear out the term 'stone houses' for Lake Condah (see details in Chapter 13).³¹ These had wooden wall structures and thatch on the walls and roofing, based on about two layers of stones used as footing for the upright posts. No mortar was used, and the naturally formed rocks were not trimmed. That is not a stone house. Without mortar, it is not possible to create house walls of up to 2 metres, from floor to roof, without using a massive pile of flat rocks, as in a corbelled vault, or arches or domes of close-fitting stones. In these senses, no stone houses have ever been reliably reported for Aboriginal Australia before conquest. The modern reconstruction in the photo is faithful to the sources for western Victoria (see page 4 of the picture section).³²

A footnote at the end of Pascoe's sentence on 'stone houses' being found 'all around the country' leads us to believe the statement is based on, or supported by, Memmott. But when we go to that page in Memmott's book to check, there is no such statement, and instead Memmott comments: 'There is extensive ethnographic and archaeological literature on stone structures, *but unfortunately little published on stone buildings per se.*'³³

Pascoe asserts that 'Foundations and walls are still visible despite the pilfering of their stone for European dwellings and dry walling, two hundred years of damage by cattle and sheep, and the sudden advent of uncontrolled fires' (page 91). But a paucity of record may well mean, simply, that there is a paucity in fact.

Memmott, evidently having difficulty locating evidence of any more than a dozen possibly pre-colonial stone-dwelling structures across Australia's 7.7 million square kilometres, cites Worsnop as a source on what he refers to as 'stone buildings'.³⁴ But if we go to Worsnop, we find there a quoted source from the explorer Phillip Parker King, who

visited Careening Bay in the Kimberley in 1820.³⁵ Here is the original passage in King to which Worsnop, and then Memmott, and then ultimately Pascoe, refer:

Besides the huts on the beach, which were merely strips of bark bent over to form a shelter from the sun, there were others on the top of the hill over the tents, of a larger and more substantial construction. One of them was thus erected:— Two walls of stones, piled one upon the other to the height of three feet [0.9 m], formed the two ends; and saplings were laid across to support a covering of bark or dried grass: the front, which faced the east, was not closed; but the back, which slanted from the roof to the ground, appeared to have been covered with bark like the roof.

The other huts were made somewhat of a similar construction, as they are represented in the woodcut [see below], but all differed in shape ...³⁶

These structures do not fit the usual meaning of the term 'stone buildings'. They are consistent with stones being used to support posts where the ground is too hard to sink the posts. Memmott, as an architectural anthropologist, refers to this as 'buttressing'.³⁷



Woodcut of shelters at Careening Bay, Kimberley, in 1820.