

UPPER SEPIK-CENTRAL NEW GUINEA PROJECT

PROGRESS REPORT October 2007

Barry Craig

As reported in April, the process of data collection and photographing of 12,000 objects from the study region presently held in museums and private collections in South Australia, ACT, NSW, Queensland, Papua New Guinea, United States, Canada, England, Austria, Switzerland, Germany, France, Holland, Norway and Iceland has been completed. Reading on method and theory, and of ethnographic sources, also has been completed. Andrew Fyfe has a good grasp of the anthropological and archaeological literature relevant to the project.

The coding of all 12,000 objects according to categories of material culture, language, geographical location, environment, and subsistence systems has been completed, revised where necessary, and checked. Barry Craig has been through all his field diaries from 1964 to 1983 and noted travel times between all collection points to develop a consistent measure of 'distance', given the extremely varied nature of the terrain in the study region and the importance of 'distance' as a variable in the analyses.

Andrew Fyfe has completed the identification of sixteen different types of binding on arrows and coded some 3000 arrows according to the presence of these characteristics; he has also revised the classification of arrows and refined it according to the materials and type of arrowhead, following to a great extent the indigenous taxonomy. This has already revealed some non-random distribution of categories consistent with other variables chosen for analysis. A similar process has identified ten different characteristics of string bag form and techniques and some 400 bags have been coded accordingly. A preliminary coding of the structure of the designs carved on arrows has been done according to the system developed by Washburn & Crowe (1988, *Symmetries of Culture*, p.83) and will be checked and revised, although it will not be utilised in the analyses for the PhD thesis.

Extensive reading in statistical method has suggested that an initial analysis using distribution maps, proportional data, and some cluster analyses will be sufficient to demonstrate the validity and reliability of the database, and to suggest significant relationships among the variables. Time and resources do not permit a more sophisticated approach for the purpose of the PhD thesis. Our application for an ARC-Linkage grant to develop and test a theory of the processes that shape material culture diversity using the USCNGP database has been successful and the two-year term of that grant (2008-2009) will enable an intensive program of analysis to take place using more sophisticated statistical methods.

Andrew Fyfe's paper on the background to the project, the history of the collections, and the processes and difficulties involved in collecting the data has at last been acknowledged by the editor of the journal *Oceania* after some unavoidable delays at their end. Some revision has been suggested before a formal acceptance is advised. The second paper by Fyfe, dealing with method and theory, and outlining the analyses that can be undertaken during the second stage of this project, will be sent to *Oceania* after the first has been formally accepted for publication. These materials form a substantial part of Andrew Fyfe's thesis, which will be completed in December.