

Australian Archaeology



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BY THE SHORE

I walked today along that grassy shelf
Above the beach where once we made our camp
And lay together listening to the sea.

The shelf is now a narrowing ledge: the wind,
The rain, the surf and man with his vagrant wheels
Have broken down the bank that looked so firm.

Our tent-floor now would hang four feet in the air
Above, the sand, and where our camp-fire burned
There falls atumbled scree of shell and bone:

The kitchen litter of a thousand years--
Bleached abalone, turban-shell and triton
Slowly commingling with grey earth and sand.

The weekend rubbish of our dirty tribe
Lies on the grass - cans, plastic, shattered glass:
At least I bashed and burned and buried ours.

But still we left our black unlovely spoor
Beneath the soil - my mattock and my spade
Loosened the roots, our wheels helped gouge the ruts

That with each storm scour deeper. All life marks
The earth it moves on - but the mess we make
Seems filthier than most: we've fouled the nest.

And though the black man's midden stank, his dung
Bred flies, his fire-stick razed the bush - the grass
Where his bare feet passed sprang back green and fresh.

R.F. Brissenden

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