



**KIMBERLEY  
FOUNDATION  
AUSTRALIA**

Researching, preserving and promoting Kimberley rock art.

# Newsletter

June 2012



## New Chair in Kimberley Rock Art

**KFA gives \$1.5m to establish the first Chair in Kimberley Rock Art at UWA.**

The Kimberley Foundation Ian Potter Chair in Rock Art will support longterm research into the nature and context of the Kimberley's ancient rock art. Researchers, working in partnership with traditional custodians, will study and record rock art and will educate students and the broader community about the value of the Kimberley's rich cultural heritage.

"We have priceless Indigenous rock art in Western Australia and leading researchers in the field at UWA," said Vice-Chancellor Professor Paul Johnson. "The research to be conducted with this funding will

enhance our knowledge of Kimberley Rock Art and provide a legacy that will be appreciated around the world."

The Ian Potter Foundation, a longterm supporter of KFA's research has contributed to the Chair project.

"The Kimberley Foundation wants to see the rock art known for its national and international significance and the establishment of a Chair in Kimberley Rock Art is a remarkable achievement," said KFA Chairman Maria Myers.

"Even more exciting, will be the knowledge that will come of the settlement of Australia, the changing environment and how it affected the people who were living here. It's a tremendous opportunity to expand studies in a number of disciplines," she said.

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Maria Myers,  
KFA Chairman

## Chair in Kimberley Rock Art 'Perpetual'

**INPEX gives \$500K to the Kimberley Foundation Ian Potter Chair in Rock Art ensuring the Chair is perpetual.**

The INPEX contribution to KFA, which will be passed in full to the University, means that the Chair in Kimberley Rock Art is perpetually endowed.

KFA entered talks with INPEX when the international oil and gas company indicated an interest in the Foundation's scientific research, particularly the rock art dating and rock art recording with remote Kimberley communities.

"This represents an important strategic investment for INPEX and reinforces one of our key principles to contribute to the development of host countries and communities, based on the understanding of cultural diversity. We are particularly proud to contribute to Aboriginal communities in the Kimberley," said Seiya Ito, President Director, Australia.

UWA has matched the \$2million gift (total including Potter Foundation) from KFA enabling \$4million to be established in an endowment fund.



Image (top):  
VC Prof Paul Johnson,  
KFA Chairman  
Maria Myers,  
Prof Krishna Sen

Image (bottom):  
Prof Alistar Robertson,  
Dr Jim Ross & VC Prof  
Paul Johnson at the  
announcement of the  
new Chair at the  
University of WA

## Surge of interest in rock art studies

Students wanting to study rock art have increased by a factor of 7 since UWA launched its Centre for Rock Art Research Management (CRARM) two years ago. CRARM's rock art studies course is one of the Units making up the Archaeology degree. Students can do it in either their 2nd or 3rd year of study.

Once undergraduates have fulfilled the course requirements at a grade D or HD they can pursue more detailed rock art research as a 4th year Honours Project. If students are keen to pursue a rock art research career they can enrol in a Masters or a PhD.

"It is KFA's goal to encourage new young scientists into these fields of research so it is enormously pleasing to see these figures", said Jim Ross, Chairman of the Foundation's Science Advisory Council.

The 2011 field season for KFA's *Change & Continuity* project (Mitchell Plateau archaeology dig) included 4 PhD students, 3 MA students, 3 undergraduates and 3 Traditional Owners.

Leading Australian rock art specialist Professor Jo McDonald, the new Director of CRARM, has filled the Rio Tinto Chair. The Kimberley Foundation Ian Potter Chair position is currently seeking candidates.

Visit [www.uwa.edu.au/rock-art](http://www.uwa.edu.au/rock-art)



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Dr Jim Ross,  
KFA Director

Image:  
Students on Rock Art  
Recording project,  
Majaddin camp.

(Image - Nick  
Sundblom).

## KFA funds four projects in first quarter of 2012

KFA has approved extension funding for two existing projects with the capacity to attract Australia Research Council grants:

- \$25,000 to the **Palaeolinguistic** project led by Patrick McConvell with an increased emphasis on the flora and fauna representation in the rock art. The extension provides opportunities for Patrick's work to be closely integrated into rock art recording in both the *Change and Continuity* project and *Lifeways of the first Australians* project.

- \$25,000 to the **Palaeoecology** project let by Simon Haberle to enable deeper coring from the Mitchell Plateau site. Simon is planning to use the Itrax high resolution analytical system at ANSTO

on the new core to provide detailed geochemical information on the sediments.

- An Honours scholarship has been awarded to Dean Fleming, a talented student who will investigate the morphology of excavated ochre pieces. His dataset will comprise the ochres recovered from the ten excavations already completed on the *Change and Continuity* archaeological dig.

- Funding has also been awarded to Jane Fyfe, a researcher on the *Lifeways* project, to enable widespread recording and documentation of rock art in the Oscar and Napier ranges during the forthcoming two month field season.

- KFA has also awarded a travel grant to scientist Jillian Huntley (*Messages in Paint*) to attend the International Rock Art conference in Bolivia, 2012.

Information on all these projects at [www.kimberleyfoundation.org.au/research-projects/](http://www.kimberleyfoundation.org.au/research-projects/)

## KFA partners remote communities to record rock art

**KFA's Recording information about country, maintaining cultural places, and observing and reporting on plants and animals program enters its second year.**

Following the success of last year's pilot, KFA is again working with Kimberly Training Institute, Kalumburu Aboriginal Corporation and Wilinggin and Mowanjum Aboriginal Corporations to take local Aboriginals onto country and re-connect them with the rock art of their elders. The rock art recording training is an accredited module within TAFE's Conservation and Land Management Certificate II.

KFA is training the younger generation to be well versed in both the scientific and traditional knowledge of the remarkable rock art of their ancestors. These are small steps in a big project to

map and record the rock art of the Kimberley.

"The local aboriginal people are the future custodians of the rock art. So we are taking them to remote sites, reconnecting them to their culture, capturing their stories, their words, and the traditional knowledge from the elders, and passing it on. We are the only organisation doing this kind of work. It's complex work but incredibly rewarding," said KFA CEO, Cas Bennetto.

### DONATE NOW TO KFA'S ROCK ART RECORDING PROGRAM

Working alongside the Traditional Owners KFA is equipping locals with the skills to document their rock art and to talk about it with knowledge and understanding.

## THE KFA RESEARCH STORY SO FAR:

Images (clockwise): Prof Jim Bowler, Prof Peter Veth and researchers at excavations, Lake Gregory Mulan project.

Archaeological excavation exposing upper levels of coarse stream gravels, the location of the flaked core.

Profile of excavation, Lake Gregory Mulan project.

Flaked core recovered from 23cm below the gravel surface, dated by OSL analyses to between 40-50,000 years.

(Images Peter Veth)

## KFA DIRECTORS

Maria Myers AO (Chairman)  
 Laurie Brereton (Deputy Chairman)  
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 John Calvert-Jones AM  
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 Dr Jim Ross AM  
 Brenda Shanahan  
 Deidre Willmott

**The history of Australia before European contact is still waiting to be deciphered from the unique record left on the rocks and the surrounding areas where the remains of human occupation can be found.**

Contributors to KFA and readers of our newsletter know that the information the rock art and associated research can yield is the earliest story able to be told about Australia.

Dating the age of Kimberley rock art has transfixed many researchers over many years. The Kimberley Foundation, established to encourage and support this line of investigation, has supported a dozen research projects whose findings are now being revealed.

The first of these was 'Mulan'.

## The journey started here – and it's only just begun

Following the establishment at Lake Mungo of a long record of climatic change spanning the period of human occupation, a continental wide survey sought to identify the possibility of 'other Mungos' in the arid and semi-arid region of Australia. After extensive examination the most likely contenders were identified in the interconnected pattern of lakes within the Gregory Salt Lake system of northwestern Western Australia on the southern edge of the Kimberley.

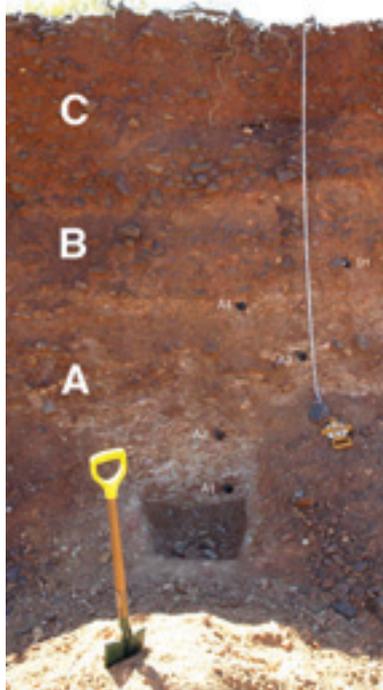
### **The Gregory-Mulan Lake Project**

In 2008 KFA supported a research proposal led by Professor Jim Bowler to carry out archaeological investigations of human occupancy of Mulan Lakes. This project (excavations at Parnkupirti, Lake Gregory) was the first project KFA funded.

The discovery of an in-situ stone core lying 23cm below the top of the gravels was undoubted **evidence of people of great antiquity** associated with the desert environment during times much wetter than today. **OSL dates effectively bracket the core age in the 40-50,000 year range**, the first such evidence from this arid region of northern Australia.

The unearthing of the 8cm core, although a single object of antiquity, is the oldest published evidence of OSL ages for occupation before the Last Glacial Maximum (Peter Veth & Jim Bowler). To date it remains the only project to have thrown up such thrilling evidence.

**While this may sound sobering in terms of the scientific research being undertaken in the Kimberley, and the scale, complexity and skills needed, it is encouraging and exciting. Systematic archaeological, geomorphological and dating work has only just started in a strategic and problem-oriented sense. And KFA is at the forefront of this research.**



## Your support

Your support allows us to fund our research program in which leading scientists and academics across Australia are working towards ensuring that the rock art of the Kimberley is recognised and promoted for its world-wide significance and is protected and preserved accordingly. All amounts of \$2 and over are tax deductible.



KFA acknowledges the support of The Ian Potter Foundation

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Image: Christina Kennedy, long-serving KFA Director.

## Dating the Rock Art

**Unpacking the complex nature of rock art is KFA's No 1 research priority.**

It is impossible to understand the age of Kimberley rock art without a firm handle on the very complex environmental and human signals, which are present in the active monsoonal area of the Kimberley and the critical need to understand the nature and composition of the rock art.

Unpacking this intricate web

## More dating research required

**Bradshaw/Gwions could in reality be much older than the classical cave paintings in France.**

One of the most crucial and largely unanswered questions about the remarkable rock art record of the Kimberley region is the age at which the various styles of art were produced. Present estimates based on very limited dates are tantalising, but scattered, and for the most part not entirely convincing. Notwithstanding the importance of these studies, therefore, the problem remains largely unresolved.

The Australian science community has not yet convinced the international community the definitive age of Bradshaw/Gwion art. In France, five sites have yielded

## KFA honours Christina Kennedy

Christina Kennedy's contribution to the KFA Board over a 13-year period was celebrated at a dinner held in her honour in Sydney last month.

The very first meeting of the Wandjina Foundation (now KFA) was held in Angus and Cooté's office on Macquarie Street, Sydney

requires a multi-year and staged approach. KFA's research strategy over the last five years has done just that: KFA has funded a variety of projects spanning key scientific disciplines.

KFA's research projects cross numerous disciplines and include examining the culture and social organisation of the first inhabitants; the dating of selected archaeological sites; the pigmentation of the ochres; the discovery of pollen bearing sediment deposits; the effects of climatic fluctuations on the flora, fauna, landscape and peoples;

a total of forty Pleistocene (12,000 year BP) dates.

In Australia, we have one only published date and thousands of sites. The only published date is a partly fossilised wasp nest attached to one of the paintings dated at 17,000 years old. It is clear it is not sufficient to assert the art is Pleistocene and that considerable more research needs to be undertaken.

OSL dating of wasp's nests fossilised above Bradshaw / Gwion art panels has indicated ages of **more than 25,000-35,000 years before the present** [BP]. These results are unpublished but they suggest the extreme age of some of the rock art while generating a host of questions about the origins, social organisation and culture of the painters.

The OSL date coincides with the

and Tony Cooté became the inaugural Chairman and Christina the Treasurer. She held this role for nearly all of her 13 years remaining steadfast in her commitment and devotion to the Foundation's objectives. Christina retired from the Board at the recent AGM.

Christina's official involvement may have ended but she remains a valued member of KFA Alumni just like the rock art she treasures.

the impact of humans, including their fire burning practices; the early occupants' adaptation to environmental challenges, and linguistic diversity...

All of these are active ingredients determining the history of human settlement of the Kimberley region, and the cultural, climatic and ecological context in which migrations and occupation occurred.

**Scientists working on KFA projects share their knowledge with each other. All of these integrated projects are helping us to better understand the nature and characterisation of the rock art.**

Last Glacial Maximum (the period in earth's history when the glaciers were at their thickest and the sea levels at their lowest, 20,000-26,000 years ago). This was a very dry period on the Australian continent, as the frequency of tropical cyclones and rain depressions were reduced. Inland aridity was so intense that lakes as far south as Tasmania dried up, and the desert expanded, replacing forested areas (Mulvaney and Kamminga, 1999). We constantly hear about the Lascaux caves in France. Alors! Let's change the story!

**KFA is putting together a multi-disciplinary team to date the rock art of the Kimberley. This needs your help.**

**Please support this critically important research.**

**www.kimberleyfoundation.org.au**

## BECOME A 'ROCK ART CHAMPION'!

Donate \$1000 before 30 June and become a KFA Rock Art Champion.

Rock Art Champions will be listed on KFA's website and marketing materials.

[www.kimberleyfoundation.org.au](http://www.kimberleyfoundation.org.au)