KIMBERLEY FOUNDATION AUSTRALIA
Researching, preserving and promoting Kimberley rock art.

Newsletter

AUTUMN 2014

Driving the future of Kimberley Research

In October 2013 KFA revisited the research themes originally conceived in 2007 in a high level collaborative workshop involving Australia's top Kimberley researchers.

This workshop was hosted by KFA in conjunction with University of Western Australia's Centre for Rock Art Research + Management (CRAR+M). It gave researchers the opportunity to come together from across institutions and identify key research themes and priorities that will drive Kimberley research over the next decade.

Our priority research themes:

1. *Reconstructing past climate and environments*
2. *The production, composition and conservation of Kimberley art*
3. *The antiquity of engraved and pigment art in the Kimberley and how we understand its variability across space and time.*
4. *The chronology of human occupation of the Kimberley in the context of archaeological and genetic data from Sunda (southeast extension of the continental shelf of Southeast Asia) and Sahul (part of the continental shelf of the Australian continent)*

These themes reflect leading questions in Kimberley rock art research and will guide the KFA in identifying and funding research projects.

Our approach in pursuing these themes, referred to scientifically as a 'catchment type' approach, focuses on locating research sites that are relevant across key disciplines. These include archaeological and paleontological sites and cultural landscapes, and will build on research already done to expand the depth and scope of our understanding.

All research would be undertaken in concert with the relevant Indigenous Protected Area Ranger programs and industry stakeholders to ensure engagement, cultural relevance and compliance.

KFA responsible for initiating a new era of archaeological research in the Kimberley

It was noted by the SAC and researchers at the workshop that the Foundation has been responsible for initiating a new era of archaeological research in the Kimberley.

KFA's funding and leadership has resulted in 12 new research projects since 2007 that have been completed or are still in progress. Three of these have been awarded Australia Research Council grants. To date, KFA-sponsored projects have involved more than 20 researchers, 10 Australian universities and research organisations and 14 post-graduate students including five new PhD students.

Images:

Top: Smoking ceremony to welcome Rock Art Recording program participants Carson River, Drysdale National Park: Elder, Mary Taylor and Nick Evans. *(Image: Nick Sundblom)*

Left: Assoc. Prof Sven Ouzman and Prof Andy Gleadow at SAC Workshop.

Image:
Left: Sue O'Connor at SAC Workshop.

Right: Jane Balme at SAC Workshop.

Kimberley lifeways

Thousands of years ago people were leading culturally rich lives in the demanding environment of the Kimberley, writes Leigh Dayton.

"Previous dates suggest people were living in the region for over 45,000 years."

"...laboratory scientists are using a suite of high-tech procedures to determine climate shifts, as well as dates of occupation through time."

A few years ago archaeologists Sue O'Connor and Jane Balme caught up in Perth at a seminar sponsored by the Kimberley Foundation Australia. O'Connor, with the Australian National University in Canberra, had worked on ancient Aboriginal sites in West Australia's western Kimberley. And the University of Western Australia's Balme was doing the same in the eastern Kimberley.

"We decided to fill in the gap," recalls Balme of their decision to team-up. They wanted to explore the lives of the first Australians to inhabit the region, from the monsoon-soaked northwest to the very edge of the desert in the southeast.

As Balme notes, those pioneering people came from tropical Indonesian islands to a "large and variable" continent, yet they adapted well to the vagaries of the rugged, rust-coloured Kimberley. "They must have been very flexible to be able to inhabit so many environments, including inland desert regions," she says. "What was it about their society, including their technology, social organisation and symbolic behaviours that allowed them to do that?"

The result is a project called *Lifeways of the First Australians – Ancient cave dwellings & rock art of the southern Kimberley*. The 3-year project blends archaeology and rock art analysis to discover how people lived, beginning with the earliest human occupation. O'Connor, Balme and their academic and Aboriginal colleagues hope to have a picture by 2014 when the project finishes.

With O'Connor and Balme at the helm, the diverse team includes researchers from three universities, graduate students and Indigenous liaison officers, representing the local Bunuba and Goonyandi people. The project was approved by the traditional owners. *Lifeways* is supported by the Australian Research Council, KFA, the Western Australian Museum and the Commonwealth Department of the Environment.

The fundamental obstacle facing the colleagues is that while there are numerous occupation sites scattered across the Kimberley, few artefacts have been unearthed and lifestyle details are sketchy. That is why collaborations such as *Lifeways* are so important. And not just to archaeologists keen to reconstruct the past, but to traditional owners and national heritage managers. Even climate scientists will benefit. After all, the Kimberley climate changed many times over the millennia. Details of prehistoric climate variability will help predict future regional patterns.

Clearly, creating what Balme and O'Connor call a "grand narrative" of the lives and times of the Kimberley's pre-historic people is an enormous task. But by the end of the 2013 field season last July, the team had excavated and documented precious cultural evidence and sediment samples from about four cave dwellings in the south-central Kimberley.

Key sites are located at Carpenter's Gap east of Derby near Winjana Gorge and the Lennard River, and Riwi Cave, situated about 90 kilometres east of Fitzroy Crossing.

Right now, analysis of the archaeological trove is underway using a variety of approaches. For instance, laboratory scientists are using a suite of high-tech procedures to determine climate shifts, as well as dates of occupation through time.

"We haven't done all the analysis, but we just got some very old dates and will be getting more throughout 2014," Balme says, coyly avoiding specifics until they confirm the findings. "But previous dates from both Carpenter's Gap and Riwi suggest people were living in the region for over 45,000 years." That fits neatly with the growing body of evidence that people first arrived Down Under about 50,000 years ago.

And the rock art? It's "extremely difficult" to date, notes Balme. But generally, much is from the last few thousand years. There are dingos and eels and ancestral beings. Intriguingly, they found only one image showing a motif from the time of European contact, unlike the nearby Pilbara where rocks often depict scenes of horses

and people wearing hats. Why? According to Balme, it may reflect the violence of first contact with Europeans. "They want to emphasise their own group identity," she suggests, adding that people continued to paint ancestral beings and important ceremonies, defiantly rejecting European culture.

To help tease out answers to many such questions, doctoral student Jane Fyfe is creating a 'relative' sequence of the rock art. This will combine with the results of more direct dating techniques, as well as adding to existing knowledge of rock art styles. Critically, the work will add to knowledge of the activities at the heart of the resilient cultures.

Fellow student Tim Maloney is studying the stone artefacts, while Josue Gomez is collecting geographical information systems data to identify geographic links between archaeological sites and changes in landscape and resource features. Student Dorcas Vannieuwenhuyse is analysing sediments from the sites to understand what geochemical processes were, and are, at work.

Meanwhile, broad elements of the "grand narrative" have already emerged. Analysis of artefacts such as twisted string and knotted fibres, shell beads, and bone and stone tools reveal clues about how the versatile people organised themselves and "earned a living". The fibre, for example, suggests widespread use of light-weight nets, carry bags, baskets and hafting hand tools.

And as early as 30,000 years ago people had sophisticated social networks, Kimberley-wide. Case in point: shell beads made from a species found only along the coastline were found in small quantities hundreds of kilometres distant. "We think they were made on the coast, then transported inland where they were precious and treated with care," explains Balme.

Further evidence of early inventiveness comes from numerous "edge ground axes", found in northern Australia and nowhere else in the world until about 10,000 years ago. Add objects used to make wooden tools – spears, spear carriers, boomerangs and digging sticks and probably even musical instruments – to their accomplishments and, for Balme, the conclusion is clear.

"These were adaptable people living rich cultural lives in a demanding environment thousands and thousands of years ago".

KFA lecture series: Corporate support & full houses

Interest in Kimberley rock art continues to grow through the expansion and delivery of our annual public lecture series. The annual lecture, which began in Perth in 2009, has since expanded to a 3-city series attracting corporate sponsorship and large crowds. Our most recent 2013-14 series *Dating Kimberley rock art: the long and short of it*, presented by Kimberley Foundation Ian Potter Chair Prof Peter Veth, showcased rock art dating techniques and the ages of key sites around the world. Prof Veth delivered the lecture to sold-out events in Perth, Sydney and Melbourne.

We would like to thank our business partners Azure Capital, Indigenous Construction Resource Group and the Macquarie Group Foundation for their commitment to KFA's mission to research, preserve and promote Kimberley rock art.

ICRG

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Matched giving: Twice the amount of research for one donation

Many firms match donations given by employees to charities. KFA is thrilled to be on Allens Linklaters' list of charities with deductible gift status. A small monthly donation can go double the distance with matched giving! If you think KFA might be eligible for matched giving at your organisation, let us know.

Allens and KPMG have become firm friends over the many years they have supported us through their pro bono work.

Last month KPMG's WA Chairman Gary Smith invited KFA to give a rock art presentation to staff. CEO Cas Bennetto linked the presentation to KPMG's Reconciliation Action Plan which, among other things, helps to develop Indigenous cultural awareness amongst staff. Prof Veth presented a brief narrative on the history of rock art to more than 50 enthusiastic staff and partners.

Image: From Left: Graeme Sheard, KPMG Partner, Prof Peter Veth and KPMG Chairman Gary Smith at the KFA presentation.

The Rock Art Research multiplier effect

KFA has played an integral part in the growth of the largest global centre for rock art research and management.

The appointment of Peter Veth as Winthrop Professor, **Kimberley Foundation Ian Potter Chair in Rock Art** at the Centre for Rock Art Research + Management (CRAR+M) at the University of Western Australia has been much greater than the appointment of just one person. It has had a significant multiplier effect.

At the International Federation of Rock Art Organizations (IFRAO) last year there was recognition from the 50 rock art bodies that met in Albuquerque New Mexico that CRAR+M Perth, Australia is now a global leader and has their support.

There is now six Faculty members in CRAR+M led by Winthrop Professor **Jo McDonald** (Director), Kimberley Foundation Chair **Peter Veth** and **Ben Smith** (Winthrop Chair in Global Rock Art and working in China, Arnhem Land & South Africa).

Assoc. Prof **Sven Ouzman** (South Africa) who joined the team in July is working with Peter Veth on the Kimberley research program for the next three years. Sven participated on KFA's rock recording program in Drysdale River National Park in August, held in collaboration with the Kalumburu community.

CRAR+M will be a global leader. It is the largest in terms of having a domestic and global mandate. It has strong alliance networks and goodwill from the French rock art community and from the different archaeological surveys in South America and particularly in USA.

Peter Veth and Jo McDonald have been approached to head the Presidency/Vice-Presidency of the International Scientific Committee for Rock Art for *UNESCO* World Heritage Centre – International Council of Museums.

This means Australian researchers will have a lot of influence on directed research, focus on world heritage and national heritage listings and ensuring Australian rock art is dealt with at the same level as other rock art provinces around the world.

It's an honour

KFA congratulates two of its long term supporters whose philanthropic work, amongst other deeds, has been recognised by the Australian Government.

Mr Tim FAIRFAX AC has been appointed a Companion to the Order of Australia for eminent service to business and to the community, as an advocate for philanthropy and as a major supporter of the visual arts, to the promotion of higher education opportunities, and to rural and regional development programs.

Mr Samuel CHISHOLM AO who already has an honorary doctorate from the University of Queensland, has been honoured for service to medical research and health organisations in Australia as a corporate leader and through fundraising. Sam was honoured in November 2013.

KFA DIRECTORS

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Images from KFA Public Lecture, Perth sponsored by Azure Capital and ICRG:

Left: KFA Chairman Maria Myers, Prof Peter Veth and Deputy Chairman Laurie Brereton.

Top right: KFA Patrons Andrew and Nicola Forrest with CEO Cas Bennetto.

Bottom right: KFA Director Susan Bradley and author Di Morrissey.

"Australian researchers have a global influence."

"KFA has played a seminal part in the development of rock art research with the establishment of the Kimberley Chair at UWA."

How a geologist **paved the way for rock art research**

It may not have started as the most obvious scientific collaboration, but there is no doubting the immense influence Dr Jim Ross AM has had over the last seven years as Chairman of KFA's Science Advisory Council (SAC). When first approached about the role of Chair, Jim, like many of those who joined the growing Council, had never worked with such a wide range of people on an archaeological issue as seemingly narrow as rock art archaeology.

Jim however, quickly recognised Kimberley rock art research as a 'fine exemplar of the need for a multidisciplinary approach'. "We deliberately gathered together a diverse group in the formation of the Council," says Jim, who guided the SAC through its establishment and development before his retirement in November 2013.

Jim looks back on an exciting time as Chair of the SAC. He was entering a completely new arrangement in the world of funding scientific research; a world where private citizens go to the scientific community with questions to which it wants answers and says 'please help'.

Since its establishment in early 2007 he has steered the SAC on key research questions and advised the Board on the strategic direction of KFA research. The SAC evaluates proposals submitted for funding; a sustainable research program has now been established with twelve projects either completed or in progress.

Jim notes that 'modern archaeology' requires a range of skills and is not just traditional archaeological excavation. He acknowledges that each member of the SAC brings a unique perspective to KFA's research strategy. "Understanding the complexities of what the rock art can tell us about settlement and life in Australia's past is dependent on being able to put rock art in the context of other disciplines," he says.

Jim's impact on the Foundation went beyond the establishment and running of the SAC. KFA's most significant achievement has been the establishment of the Kimberley Chair in Rock Art. Jim guided and shepherded the negotiations with the University of Western Australia, his alma mater, with whom he had close connections.

KFA Chair, Maria Myers paid tribute to Jim at a dinner given in his honour in November last year. "Jim's contribution stemmed from his competence, experience and learning in many different areas including international mining, corporate management, science, and academia. And to those he brings his personal qualities of generosity and integrity", she said. "Jim is a renaissance man of our times."

The accolades kept coming as directors recalled Jim's contribution to KFA's research and achievements.

Jim is succeeded by Andrew Gleadow, Professor of Geology and former Head of the School of Earth Sciences at the University of Melbourne. Andy is a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Sciences and a former President of the Geological Society of Australia. He is currently leading KFA's major project to date the rock art in the Kimberley.

Image: Dr Jim Ross at the SAC Dinner in Jim's honour in Perth, Nov 2013.

> "Understanding the complexities of what the rock art can tell us about settlement and life in Australia's past is dependent on being able to put rock art in the context of other disciplines"
>
> Jim Ross

Images:
Top: Dr Jim Ross presenting at the SAC Workshop in November.

Bottom: KFA Chairman Maria Myers honours Jim Ross at his Board Retirement Dinner in Perth in November 2013.

Your support

The Kimberley Foundation Australia raises funds to support scientific research in the Kimberley. We support teams of archaeologists and scientists to work in partnership with aboriginal communities to uncover Australia's earliest untold settlement history through rock art. You can support the research program and ensure the rock art is recognised for its world-wide significance and protected accordingly. All amounts over $2 are tax deductible.

www.kimberleyfoundation.org.au/make-a-donation

THE IAN POTTER FOUNDATION

KFA acknowledges the support of The Ian Potter Foundation

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The multiple strands of **Australia's settlement story**

The KFA-sponsored *Change & Continuity* project is now entering its publication phase after three years of research in the field.

Dr June Ross of the University of New England, who leads the project with Dr Kira Westaway of Macquarie University, describes their team's research as "pulling together multiple strands to understand the way people lived in the past." The recent Professor Mike Morwood, archaeologist, rock art specialist, and lecturer, was co-chief investigator with June.

The project has been a collaboration with the Wunambal Gaambera people and focuses on rock art as well as excavations, rock art dating techniques, shell and environmental issues. It was also among the first in the world to systematically use the non-destructive Portable X-ray Fluorescence Spectroscopy (PXRF) on remote rock art sites for sampling. These multiple strands have allowed the team to answer questions that range from broad topics such as settlement patterns in the area, to narrower questions such as what the pigments are made of.

The research has also focused on training the next generation of archaeologists as well as the local aboriginal people. Two Honours projects and one PhD have been directly supported by KFA, and three PhD and two MA projects have been supported through an ARC Linkage partnership with KFA, Department of Environment & Conservation, Kandiwal Aboriginal Corporation, Slingair and Heliwork.

"We want to know specific things such as when people first occupied the northwest Kimberley; how old the rock art is; when did people begin painting and why did those painting styles change through time?" explains June. They also want answers for the little questions. "Were they men or women? What were the gender roles in the past?"

Look forward to some exciting insights when the team's findings are released later this year. You can hear June speak about their project at www.kimberleyfoundation.org.au/change-and-continuity

> "The research has also focused on training the next generation of archaeologists as well as the local aboriginal people."

Image: Karl-Heinz Wyrwoll

The changing climate of the Kimberley

20,000 Years of Climate & Weather

Roughly 50,000 years ago people arrived in the Kimberley region of north-western Australia, bringing with them cultures developed in a wetter climate.

To understand how the first Australians adapted to the new landscape it's critical to know how the climate changed over the millennia. The *Climate & Weather* project seeks to establish the long-term climate record of the Kimberley through field investigations and laboratory analysis of river, dune and cave deposits, as well as samples collected from "speleothems" like stalactites and stalagmites.

The project is led by Karl-Heinz Wyrwoll of the University of Western Australia and the University of Melbourne's Andy Gleadow. They have confirmed that the climate changed, often abruptly, many times over the last 10,000 to 20,000 years, requiring versatile responses from Aboriginal people. The team also discovered the "signature" of a severe drought, between 1000 to 2000 years ago, which would have had a profound impact on inhabitants.

Other evidence suggests abrupt interruptions of northern Kimberley monsoon. These were driven primarily by collapse of sea ice into the Atlantic Ocean which, in turn, affected weather in East Asia, itself linked to the life-giving rains. Data also supports the notion that people likely made early summers hotter and drier by firing the landscape at the end of winter to facilitate hunting and promote specific plants and animals.

While the project wound-up in the middle of 2013, further computer analysis and climate modelling is being done by Karl-Heinz Wyrwoll in 2014.

> "...the climate changed, often abruptly, many times over the last 10,000 to 20,000 years, requiring versatile responses from Aboriginal people."