



Balanggarra traditional owner William Maraltadj Jr. Picture: Kimberley Land Council

Researchers target rock art

■ Peter de Kruijff

Traditional owners from the Kimberley's north recently took university researchers on a survey tour north and east of Kalumburu in search of rock art sites.

Balanggarra traditional owners and archaeologists from the University of Western Australia were on country looking for sites as part of the Kimberley Visions project.

The surveys were held between the Drysdale River and Cape Talbot, first with a group of men and then with a group of women.

A range of styles and paintings were rediscovered including a small panel of a thylacine, also known as a Tasmanian tiger, being speared.

Some sites appeared to have been a common place to eat, with hundreds of shells from long ago eaten shellfish left behind.

Traditional owners and researchers also came across the painted figures known as gwion, which are thin human represen-

tations with complex headdresses, spears, tassels and sashes.

Several universities have been engaged in the Kimberley in the past few years in multiple projects looking into the different aspects of the region's rock art.

Kimberley Visions is just one of them and is funded for five years with three more field seasons to go with the current funding level.

Researchers from France, UWA, the University of Melbourne, La Trobe and Monash were all at the Drysdale River in June and July this year.

UWA professor Peter Veth said there had been significant advance in documenting about 600 sites with the Balanggarra people.

"We've done a number of excavations and dating exercises around some of the earlier and later art periods and this is all now in analysis," he said.

"We've got some new targets in the sandstone country to the east of where the boat work finished this year."