



KIMBERLEY
FOUNDATION
AUSTRALIA

Researching, preserving and promoting Kimberley rock art.

Newsletter

MAY 2015

Extraordinary momentum gathers around Australia's rock art heritage



“We have critical mass here and we should celebrate it. The Kimberley is one of the largest figurative bodies of art to survive anywhere on the planet.”

Prof Peter Veth



The lead article on the front page of *The Weekend Australian* April 18, 2015, by Victoria Laurie, tells the story of the Kimberley Foundation Australia's advocacy and research efforts over recent years. It is the story of the collaboration the Foundation has fostered amongst scientists, archaeologists and aboriginal communities that is now leading to the 'extraordinary momentum gathering around Australia's rock art heritage.'

The article features the rock art recording and dating work KFA has been driving over the last five years. It speaks specifically of 'the phalanx of experts, local, indigenous and international, being equipped with philanthropic funds, institutional backing and ultra-modern scientific tools to research and manage Kimberley rock art.'

KFA Chairman Maria Myers said the front page story was a wonderful boost for rock art.



“KFA is driving public appreciation of the art and its significance while ensuring the scientific research that will show us how to preserve the art is undertaken. Safeguarding the rock art and addressing conservation issues are long term goals of the Foundation.”

Maria Myers, KFA Chairman

The surge of intense interest in rock art is gratifying and is the result of a lot of people combining a lot of effort over a lot of years. “Everyone who has supported KFA's rock art research and the *Dating Project* can read it and feel proud that their support matters,” she added.



Images (clockwise):
Prof Peter Veth
Wyndham King River
Road rock art site.

Maria Myers in front
of rock art.

John Paul Karadada
and Ernie Boona
trainee field assistants
who will participate
in KFA's dating project
in Balangarra country
in July.

Gwion NW Kimberley.



Image: Robyn Mungulu at the Cyclone cave rock art site at Freshwater Cove camp. Image by Colin Murty courtesy of *The Weekend Australian*.



“The rock art is the only record of how people saw themselves, each other and the natural world and the social systems that they made. It is how they inscribed the land.”

Prof Peter Veth

Art in a distant cave catches the world’s eye

This headline in *The Weekend Australian* relates to art in a cave within the remote Buccaneer Archipelago, 360km northeast of Broome. It is just one of the sites where the Dambimangari Corporation is working with archaeologists to record and date their community’s art.

“We really want to know how old the art is, because tourists ask us,” says Mungulu, who tells visitors about the mother who went looking for her lost son, “poked the eye of the sea with a spear, and it sucked her in”. It helps the community too — an app is being prepared that will use the scientific findings to better inform visitors about the Kimberley’s most priceless resource.

A year ago KFA Chairman Maria Myers, Science Advisory Council Chairman Prof Andy Gleadow and CEO Cas Bennetto attended a meeting with the Dambimangari Aboriginal Corporation (DAC) to talk about projects relating to the heritage management, preservation, and recording of rock art – and how best to represent

both the traditional and scientific knowledge streams.

Since that meeting which was attended by a large number of Wunambal Gaambera and Dambimangari directors, TOs, and rangers, as well as UWA’s Peter Veth and Sven Ouzman, a ground-breaking research agreement has been put in place.

Peter Veth, Kimberley Foundation Ian Potter Chair in Rock Art at UWA received formal approval in March this year from DAC to work in the management of cultural sites on Dambimangari country. A massive Kimberley art province is also being researched much further east, north of Wyndham and bordering the Joseph Bonaparte Gulf. Collectively the project is known to KFA supporters as the **Rock Art Dating Project**.

This is precisely the kind of collaboration that KFA and colleagues have been describing in packed talks across the nation.

Prof Veth spoke at a lunch in Perth earlier this year arranged by KFA and sponsored by INPEX the Japanese oil and gas producer which helped to fund the Kimberley Foundation Ian Potter Chair in Rock Art at UWA.

‘...old money, new wealth, industry leaders and political figures heard Veth describe how — after decades of semi-neglect and self-funded expeditions by experts and amateurs — Western Australia’s largest rock art precincts in the Kimberley, Pilbara and Western Desert are coming under a global spotlight. Audience members included Andrew and Nicola Forrest, patrons of Kimberley Foundation Australia.’



Image: KFA Patrons Andrew and Nicola Forrest at a rock art site near Kalumburu in NW Kimberley.

Quotes in this article taken from *The Weekend Australian* 18 April, 2015.



Quotes in this article attributed to Peter Veth and Sven Ouzman were first published in *The Weekend Australian*.

Images (right, from the top): Ian Waina, who will work on the Rock Art Dating Project in Balanggara country, pictured here with KFA Directors Laurie Brereton and Sam Lovell.

John Paul Karada, trainee field assistant who will work on KFA's Dating Project.

Close up of a 'Sash Bradshaw' (Gwion) figure underneath fossil mud wasp nest.

“The rock art and cultural values of the Kimberley must be strategically managed. It will require government and industry to work together with indigenous Traditional Owners and researchers.”

Prof Peter Veth

Image: Group shot of KFA presentation at KLC Ranger Forum, One Arm Point, Dampier Peninsula.

Team of scientists collaborate with Traditional Owners to crack the dating code

This dry season the Armbangardi Traditional Owners will collaborate with KFA, UWA and partners to unravel the complexity of painting galleries, including the ancient Gwion Gwion rock art.

The **Rock Art Dating Project** involves a multidisciplinary team of scientists who hope to crack the dating code. University of Melbourne geochronologist Andy Gleadow is leading the team with input from the Australian Nuclear Science Technology Organisation and other universities.

The expert team includes a nuclear physicist, geochemists, geomicrobiologists, archaeologists, palaeoecologists and environmental scientists. ‘They combine nine separate but complementary scientific dating techniques to date, for example, mud wasps’ nests and mineralised crusts laying over the art surface. They may unravel the geological, chemical and biological processes that have preserved some paintings for thousands of years in harsh conditions.’ Other dating techniques are accelerator mass

spectrometry and radiocarbon dating, paleoclimate isotopic studies, cosmogenic exposure age dating, landscape geomorphology, and glacial climate change exploration.

Archaeologist Sven Ouzman, who has worked extensively on South African archaeology and rock art, is among those trying to work out the composition and age of markings on the rock.

“We expect this work fundamentally to alter our understanding of big and small issues,” says Ouzman, “of how people first came to and settled in Australia and how art and symbolism were present from the very beginning, integral to people managing social and environmental change.”

“In many cases, our work is not necessarily telling Kimberley people anything they don’t already know — it is also an exercise in translation to make all Australians more aware of this history and heritage,” said Ouzman.



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



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Image (right):
Prof Andy Gleadow.

Quotes from Prof Peter Veth, Kimberley Foundation Chair in Rock Art at University Western Australia first published in *The Weekend Australian* 18 April 2015.



Protecting and conserving heritage

"We have critical mass here and we should celebrate it," Peter Veth says.

For quality and quantity, stylistic variation and clear sequences over time, there is nothing in the world like Kimberley rock art. It is a window onto life as it was in previous times. We see the plants and animals and the tools and weapons used; we have

glimpses of rituals and practices, all of it reflecting man's adaptation to a changing environment: an environment that continues to shift. Its relevance for today is clear.

Conservation and preservation of the rock art, areas of keen interest to KFA, will benefit greatly from the **Rock Art Dating Project**. Once we understand the complex systems operating on rock faces, determine the characteristics and origins of rock crusts, varnish pigments, and other surface coating materials as well as the landscape geomorphology, we will know how to protect it.

"We are already seeing exciting results from samples taken last year," says Prof Andy Gleadow, Chief Investigator on the *Dating Project*. This month scientists at Melbourne University have demonstrated that Uranium Series dating can be applied to specific components in mineral crusts overlying the art. They have been examining the complex compositions of these crusts on a microscopic scale to identify which materials can be used for dating by various different methods.

"This is an important step forward, being the first time in the world that Uranium Series dating has been successfully applied to such materials and holding great promise for dating the rock art," says Gleadow.

KFA Chairman Maria Myers says Kimberley rock art is a hugely significant national and international resource. "Preserving and conserving it, while currently important to Traditional Owners and those who recognise its scientific significance, will become a matter of urgency for all Australians."

KFA welcomes APT partnership

APT shares KFA's commitment to researching and preserving the rock art and both organisations are collaborating with Aboriginal people in the Kimberley. The aim of this partnership is to work closely with Aboriginal people to create Aboriginal jobs as research field assistants, tour guides and wilderness lodge staff, and we are delighted to announce a partnership to this effect.



Images (below):
Prof Sue O'Conner and Jane Balme at KFA lecture in Canberra.

KFA supporters Laurence Freedman and Rob Woods at Kim Akerman's talk at Allens, Sydney.

KFA DIRECTORS

Maria Myers AO
(Chairman)

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(Deputy Chairman)

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Prof Andrew Gleadow
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Deidre Willmott

Cas Bennetto (CEO)

KFA gives talks at 'packed events across the nation'

This year the Foundation has already presented four free public talks and two lunch events across five cities to promote research findings and the significance of the rock art.

KFA's 2015 public lecture series *50,000 Years of Aboriginal People in the Southern Kimberley* kicked off in Perth with Prof Jane Balme delivering a talk about the resilience and adaptive ways of the Aboriginal people in the southern Kimberley up to 50,000 yrs ago. She gave the same lecture in Melbourne and Canberra in March. The series is sponsored by Voyager Estate, provider of premium wines from Western Australia.

Allens, who have generously supported KFA for 15 years, hosted a gathering in Sydney in April for a talk by Kim Akerman on Wanjinias – iconic Kimberley ancestral beings.

INPEX sponsored the Foundation's lunch in Perth in March at which KFA Patron Nicola Forrest and Prof Peter Veth were guest speakers.

Thank you to all our supporters.

Please consider KFA in your annual giving program before 30 June this year.

INPEX



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