



## GETTING A DATE IN THE KIMBERLEY

On the eve of KFA's 20th anniversary the Foundation is closer than ever to understanding how and when the Gwion rock art was painted.

"The *Dating Project* partners include The University of Melbourne, the University of Wollongong, the University of WA and ANSTO. Partner investigators are Kimberley Foundation Australia, Dunkeld Pastoral Co Pty Ltd and Archae-aus Pty Ltd. The work is undertaken in collaboration with Balanggarra Aboriginal Corporation."

**The KFA-initiated *Rock Art Dating project* has been underway for three years, funded by KFA and the Australian Research Council (ARC). The 3-year \$1 million project is nearing completion (August 2017). But its gestation has been much longer. Professor Andy Gleadow, leader of the project, talked to Leigh Dayton about the journey.**

For over four decades Andy had nothing to do with rock art. "I'd seen a bit of rock art over the years, but had no particular interest in it."

Instead, The University of Melbourne geochronologist was busy pioneering techniques for dating ancient rocks, from Antarctica to Africa, and even the Moon.

He even had a lead role in one of archaeology's most heated debates – the age of a site in Kenya where prehistoric tools had been unearthed by a team led by celebrity paleo-anthropologist Richard Leakey.

Along with another Australian geologist, Ian McDougall, Andy helped end the controversy. They demonstrated the site was 1.8 million years old.

Today, it's a very different story. Not only is Andy a frequent visitor to the rugged Kimberley, The University of Melbourne scientist now heads the *Kimberley Rock Art Dating Project*, funded by the Kimberley Foundation Australia and the Australian Research Council. Other partner organisations include the Dunkeld Pastoral Company Pty Ltd and Archae-aus Pty Ltd.

And it all began with a phone call in early (March) 2007. Mike Lisle-Williams, the KFA's then CEO, was on the line.

"He wanted me to join the newly formed KFA Science Advisory Council," recalls Andy. "It seemed interesting, and different from my early work."

But what finally hooked Andy was a trip to the Kimberley to assess the potential of dating rock art. Accompanied by KFA Chairman Maria Myers, the

budding rock art enthusiast obtained an overview of the art, the geology, and the extraordinary cultural legacy of the Kimberley's first occupants.

"I realised there was potential to work out the ages of the different styles of rock art across the region," says Andy who promptly organised a second trip to the region, along with half-a-dozen Melbourne-based geoscientists and dating experts.

The plan was to examine closely what was happening to the rock surfaces around, under and over the art – to look for erosion, mud wasp nests, nearby rock falls, and other geological, microbial and chemical clues to when the early painters created their works.

With this knowledge in hand, the little team was confident they could pull together a range of methods for dating materials above and below the art. This 'bracketing' would produce the minimum and maximum age of the work, most of which is impossible to date directly.

Images:  
(L-R) Helen Green,  
and Sven Ouzman  
taking samples – *Rock  
Art Dating project*.  
Photo: Andy Gleadow

Jordy Grinpukel,  
Damien Finch and  
TO Ernie Boona taking  
samples – *Rock Art  
Dating project*.  
Photo: Paul Hartley

“Above all we have demonstrated that people have been producing important art works in the Kimberley for at least 20,000 years”

By building on the data, the team believed they could date the sequence of the Kimberley’s rock art styles, from the oldest rock markings and naturalistic art, through the Gwion (or Bradshaw) paintings, to the static polychrome and painted hand periods, ending with the evocative Wanjinna works.

Andy and his colleagues also knew they could use this dating tool kit to investigate the durability of the sandstone ‘canvasses’. That would help them estimate how long art in various sites can endure.

“We thought this is really worth doing, but it’s going to be very hard,” Andy says of that second pivotal trip.

“My conclusion was, if we can’t do this with the amazing scientific tools at our disposal and this group of people, it simply can’t be done. We all said, let’s give it our best shot.”

And they did – thanks to Andy’s grant writing expertise and the track record of an expanded, nationwide team of archaeologists and other dating experts. The *Kimberley Rock Art Dating Project* was funded in 2013 for three years and officially started in July 2014.

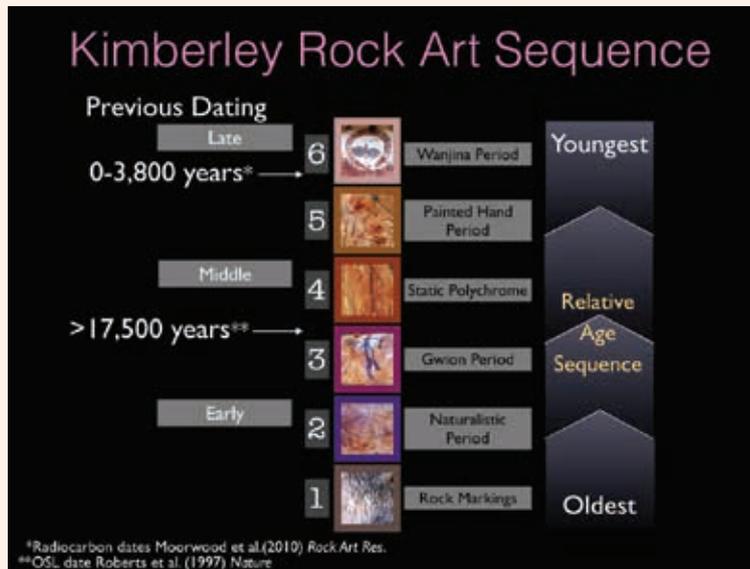
“We will run to the end of this year,” says Andy who recently completed a “new, bigger” application for five more years of support.

To date, progress has been substantial. Initially, the team identified four possible rock dating techniques which they believed they could adapt to the project. They knew each method had potential, each could fail.

“In my heart of hearts, I hoped one would work. Now they’re all working. It’s just fantastic,” Andy says enthusiastically.

Although all the numbers are not yet nailed down, results are coming in from the hundreds of samples the dating team collected in collaboration with traditional owners. They refined their geochronological tools and boosted knowledge of how the rocky landscape is evolving. They now know the rock shelters can protect the art for tens, even hundreds of thousands of years.

“Above all we have demonstrated that people have been producing important art works in the Kimberley for at least 20,000 years,” adds Andy who is about to take a well-earned break. He’s heading to Greenland to investigate continental rifting, a topic he studied in the 1970s. “I’m going back to where I started,” says the rock art expert.



Images: (L-R) Kimberley Rock Art Sequence. Source: Andy Gleadow.

Uraih Waina, Helen Green, and Cecilia Myers – *Rock Art Dating project*. Photo: Paul Hartley.

(Below): Damien Finch demonstrates radiocarbon sampling techniques to TOs Ernie Boona, Scottie Unghango and Mark Unghango.



## Radiocarbon – one of the four dating techniques being applied to rock art

Recording mud wasps in the act of building and provisioning their nests, with paralysed caterpillars, was a marvellous experience for PhD candidate Damien Finch.

Damien Finch from The University of Melbourne was in the Kimberley in March to observe ‘the wet’ with other members of the *Dating* team. Damien was observing and collecting samples to identify material suitable for radiocarbon dating associated with rock art in the Kimberley.

Image:  
KFA Director  
Rona Charles with  
Chairman Maria Myers  
at KFA Strategy Day.  
Photo: Gwen Allen.



*"The Rock Art Dating project gets our young ones onto their country and teaches them about their identity."*

RONA CHARLES  
KFA DIRECTOR

## Eyes and ears of the country

**One of the Kimberley Foundation's newest Board members is Rona Charles, an artist and conservation consultant based in the Yumurlan (Pandanus Park) community near Mowanjum. She is a member of the Wilinggin/Nyikina Clan and is a community leader; teaching young people traditional Junba (song and dance) and how these practices relate to country<sup>1</sup>.**

Rona was born in 1969 and spent her childhood days in Old Mowanjum, where she learnt the traditional Junba from the Wanjina Aboriginal Dancers (previously the Mowanjum Corroboree Dancers). During her teenage years she travelled with her mother, Molly Wenjarlin and anthropologist, Nick Green visiting the Wanjina sites in her country.

Today Rona works with the Mowanjum Art and Cultural Centre as an artist and with the Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation as a ranger and land care consultant. Rona is also a research assistant with The University of Melbourne on an Australian Research Council project *Strategies for Preserving and*

*Sustaining Aboriginal Song and Dance with the Modern World.*

The project started last year and runs for three years. Rona is thrilled that they have bought back the rights to old music recordings of a corroboree that was performed in the 1920s and remastered the tapes. They did this with the assistance of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS). The elders are mentoring and teaching the young people the dances and songs and bringing them back to life.

In recent times women's ranger programs have been introduced in the Kimberley to increase the engagement and involvement of younger and older women in the community.

Rona has been one of a small number of female rangers working on the Wunggurr Ranger Program on Wilinggin Country, land of the Wanjina-Wunggurr-Wilinggin native title claim. The land covers 60,150 square kilometres of remote and rugged country in central north Kimberley, with basalt ranges and sandstone cliffs, wooded grasslands and pockets of rainforest as well as rivers, creeks and billabongs. It is home to culturally significant sites including Wanjina and Gwion rock art sites. The Wunggurr rangers

are based at the Gibb River Road Station.

Rona participates in the aerial burning program started three years ago by Wilinggin Aboriginal Corporation. The Rangers work on projects to improve and enhance the biodiversity and cultural values of the region, using a combination of traditional cultural knowledge, local knowledge, western science and modern technologies to manage the country. As well as the burning and first aid programs Rona would like to see more women involved in the burning as well as plant mapping, propagation, a bush foods project and a rock art-related program. "We are looking at cultural mapping, stone arrangements, quarry sites, burial sites and rock art sites. There are a lot of sites," she says.

**Rona explains that caring for country and cultural practice cannot be separated: "When I go out to country to work; fire burning, monitoring water quality and biodiversity...I'm not there to paint, but when I get home that's when the stories start to come to me. Country opens itself to me and tells me what to paint, what songs we need to sing. Country can look after us if we look after it."<sup>2</sup>**

1. Rona identifies as both Ngarinyin and Nyikina. "Ngarinyin" refers to both the language and nation of Ngarinyin people. Ngarinyin Country (homelands) are located along the Gibb River Road region of the west Kimberley in Western Australia. Similarly, "Nyikina" refers to both the language and nation of Nyikina people. Nyikina Country (homelands) are located in the west Kimberley region, east of Derby, Western Australia.

2. Quote from Rona Charles and Rosita Holmes, 'Two laws protecting Kimberley Rock Art', Artlink, 1 June 2016.



*Kimberley Visions*  
Project Partners:  
Kimberley Foundation  
Australia, Balanggarra  
Aboriginal Corporation,  
Dept Parks & Wildlife,  
Monash University,  
The University of  
Melbourne, Université  
de Savoie and La Trobe  
University.

The 5-year research  
project is funded by  
the Kimberley  
Foundation Australia  
and the Australian  
Research Council.

Image:  
Detail of Wanjina  
Rock shelter,  
Drysdale River  
National Park,  
July 2016.  
Photo: Sven Ouzman.

*Kimberley Visions*  
is supported by a  
number of the  
Foundation's generous  
and visionary  
contributors. Visit  
**Support Research**  
page on the  
KFA website.

## Rock art dynamics of Northern Australia

The *Kimberley Visions* team will travel northwards into the Kimberley this month for four weeks. It is the start of their 3-month field season beginning in the Drysdale River National Park then heading further north east into the King George River and ending with a coastal survey.

Led by Professor Peter Veth, Kimberley Foundation Ian Potter Chair in Rock Art at the University of WA, the researchers are in the second year of a five-year journey examining art styles across northern Australia. The UWA team will be accompanied by French archaeologist Jean Michele Geneste from the Université de Savoie, France, Dr Bruno David from Monash University, Traditional Owners and Balanggarra Rangers, as well as the Dating research team from The University of Melbourne and the University of Wollongong.

The researchers are exploring whether similar styles occurred between the Kimberley and Arnhem Land. This research will shape our current understandings about shared traditions and why and if they have changed through time.

Last year the team established a number of recording systems including digital recording forms that work within a photographic and geographic information system database, gathering their data from three catchment areas – Drysdale River, King George River and Forrest River. Approximately 50 rock art sites were visited and recorded in the Drysdale River region with two selected for excavation. A further 195 rock art sites were visited and recorded in the King George region with two sites selected for excavation, including the first open site excavation undertaken in the Kimberley.

### In 2017 the *Kimberley Visions* team will:

- Start a new group of four PhD candidates to study aspects of art style and identity, distribution and connection, age and cultural context;
- Expand survey area, excavating and recording at sites along the Drysdale and King George River catchments; and
- Continue research at Wanjina rock shelter with laser imaging, excavation and geomorphology with French colleagues.

## Melbourne Uni laboratory and the MCG vie for top spot

Ian Waina, traditional land owner at Carson River on Balanggarra land and member of the KFA's *Rock Art Dating and Kimberley Visions* field teams, paid the Melbourne-based researchers a visit in March. He wanted to see what happens to the samples he helped to collect thousands of kilometres away in the Kimberley last year.

The Earth Sciences team – Helen Green, Damien Finch and Andy Gleadow – took Ian to the lab where they showed him how the foil-wrapped samples he collected in the field were prepared in the University's isotope clean laboratory. He was observing Uranium Thorium chemical procedure and analysis on the mass spectrometer and was mightily impressed!

Ian was able to put it into context once he was in the lab. "I think it will be more meaningful for him when we're in the field collecting samples this year," said Helen Green.

There was another thing Ian really wanted to see in Melbourne: a game of Aussie Rules at the MCG. The footy is closely followed in Kalumburu, Ian's home town, so a match at the G was a top priority. Although Ian is a Swans' man and the researchers are fans of the Bulldogs, the opening round game between the Western Bulldogs and Collingwood hit the mark. During his week in Melbourne Ian also caught up with *Kimberley Visions'* archaeologist Bruno David and his son Jasper for a visit to Melbourne Zoo.

Image:  
Ana Motta at  
archaeological  
excavation at La Grotte  
aux Points, France,  
June 2015.  
Photo: Dr Julien  
Monney.



## Forrest scholar to study the rock art legacy of the Kimberley

A rock art researcher, Ana Paula Motta, has been awarded the prestigious Forrest Research Foundation Scholarship. It is the first time this Scholarship has been awarded to a scholar of the Social Sciences. Ana will be based at the UWA's Centre for Rock Art Research and Management (CRAR+M) while she completes a Doctor of Philosophy in Archaeology.

Ana was drawn to the rock art of the Kimberley for its potential as a place to study identity (and the impact of social and environmental change on identity). A fortuitous and fleeting meeting with Professor Peter Veth, the CRAR+M's inaugural Kimberley Foundation Ian Potter Chair of Rock Art, at a conference in Oxford in 2015, cemented her interest in the Kimberley. Peter assisted with the co-supervision of her thesis and subsequently invited her to continue her research and apply for a place as a PhD student at

CRAR+M. He encouraged her to submit an application for a Forrest scholarship. It is the first Forrest Foundation Research Scholarship awarded to a South American.

After studying Anthropology and Archaeology at the University of Buenos Aires, where she obtained a Bachelor of Science and a teaching degree in Anthropology in 2014, Ana studied for a Master of Science in Paleoanthropology and Palaeolithic Archaeology at University College London. Her Master's dissertation "*Rock art and identity: the construction of personhood in northeastern Kimberley, Western Australia*" was awarded the UCL Institute of Archaeology's Masters Prize in November 2016 and included on the Social and Historical Sciences Dean's list.

Ana's PhD research will contribute to the KFA and ARC supported *Kimberley Visions: Rock Art Style Provinces in Northern Australia*

project. She is accompanying the *Visions* research team into the Kimberley this month.

Ana will focus on the artistic traditions of ancient rock art in the Kimberley and what this imagery reveals about the formation of identity of Australia's first peoples. She is particularly interested in the complex and detailed figurative rock art of the North East Kimberley such as the Gwion (Bradshaw figures), and what these figures might tell us about how people responded to their environment and the natural world. She will also record and explore the interactions and relationships between humans and animals in the artistic expression of the Kimberley.

Ana was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina and has been involved with archaeological and historical projects in Argentina, France and Australia, including studying the early Holocene and late Pleistocene hunter-gatherer occupations in north-western Argentina and Upper Palaeolithic hunter-gatherer occupations in Ardèche (southern France), where she collaborated with Upper Palaeolithic excavations and rock art recording at two sites.

The Forrest Scholarship is providing Ana with an extraordinary opportunity to study the unique rock art legacy of the Kimberley in the field, and work with the multi-disciplinary team of scholars and researchers at CRAR+M, with the expert guidance and supervision of Professors Peter Veth, Jo McDonald and Sven Ouzman. The three-year scholarship will also support Ana's attendance at international and domestic conferences and provide opportunities for specialist training to hone her research and writing skills.

"We need to know how long we've been here. The dating of the art and other research supported by KFA can tell us. It's great for the young ones to have this information."

SAM LOVELL AM,  
KFA DIRECTOR  
AND 'FATHER'  
OF INDIGENOUS  
TOURISM IN WA

**The Forrest Scholarship is awarded to scholars with outstanding academic ability. Andrew and Nicola Forrest established the scholarship program in 2014. The aim of the program is to encourage and assist outstanding scholars to study in Western Australia.**

Andrew and Nicola Forrest are patrons of the Kimberley Foundation Australia.



Image:  
Ian Waina using an  
Agilent 4300 handheld  
Fourier Transform  
Infrared Spectrometer  
in April 2017.  
Photo: Damien Finch.

## Big Wet presents unique opportunities

**This year's 'wet' was one of the biggest on record and presented a terrific opportunity for researchers to better understand the impact of the humidity and drenching rain on rock art. Visiting and observing the rock art sites in such contrasting conditions to the dry season is a vital component of research.**

Following Ian Waina's week-long visit to Melbourne in March (see story on page 4 of this newsletter), Ian and the Melbourne University Dating team travelled to the Kimberley for a week of 'wet season' fieldwork.

Standing in torrential rain, recording the pathways of the water flow and the interaction with the art pigment was a unique experience, says Helen Green.

Armed with a handheld *Fourier Transform-Infrared Spectrometer*, on trial from Agilent technology, the scientists were able to scan the mineral accretions forming in and around rock art in the shelters and identify the different minerals present without removing any material.

An important part of the *Dating project* is to get a better understanding about the chemistry of the weathering of the art; we want to know how to conserve and protect the paintings and the only way to do this is to understand the formation of the mineral accretions. Recording the pathways of the water flow and observing the interaction with the art pigment – and what happens to it – will provide vital information about how to preserve the art. It may also help identify accretions most suited to dating.

The Dating team, including a number of Balangarra Traditional Owners and Waina family members from Kalumburu will be reunited with the researchers in the field for the 2017 sampling season this June.

## Explorations in time draws a full house

Professor Andy Gleadow's lecture on the *Rock Art Dating Project* drew a full house at the Art Gallery of NSW on 18 March. The Art Gallery Society and the Foundation paired up to present the lecture which hit the right note with the Society's members and KFA supporters.

Ian Waina also found his voice following Andy's lecture. At his very first public speaking appearance he addressed the audience about the research work on his country sponsored by KFA. Ian told the audience about the importance of combining the science with traditional knowledge, adding "I like helping the scientists and showing them our sites and telling them our stories."

"The research work  
is important and will  
give us information we  
want to have."

IAN WAINA, TRADITIONAL OWNER

# OUR SUPPORTERS

It is through the support, interest and generosity of many collaborators, individuals, trusts and foundations that the Kimberley Foundation Australia can continue investing in meaningful research across the Kimberley region. Together, we are unlocking Australia's past to tell the story that lies behind the Kimberley's ancient rock art. We gratefully acknowledge and thank our contributors.



## **KFA Patrons:**

### **Andrew & Nicola Forrest**

Andrew and Nicola Forrest are philanthropic leaders and strong community and arts supporters. They believe a collaborative approach encompassing the arts, education and health is essential to build sustainable empowerment in individuals and communities. They are passionate about the Kimberley's rock art and support KFA's goals to research and protect it. Nicola is CEO of the Munderoo Foundation which she and Andrew established in 2001.

## **Founding Supporter:**

The Ian Potter Foundation

## **Current Support Partners:**

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## **Kimberley Foundation Ian Potter Chair in Rock Art:**

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## **Rock Art Dating Project:**

Australian Research Council, Kimberley Foundation Australia, The Freedman Foundation, Brenda Shanhan Charitable Foundation, John Calvert-Jones, Rob Woods, Michael Noonan, Lansdowne Foundation, Darryl Mack & Helen Taylor, Karen Barrymore, Pay It Forward Foundation, Helen Bunning, Erica Smyth, Saturday Squash Club

## **Kimberley Visions Project:**

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## **Special tribute is paid to:**

Janet & John Calvert-Jones, Laurence & Kathy Freedman, John Higgins, Christina & Trevor Kennedy, Munderoo Foundation, Allan & Maria Myers, Brenda Shanahan Foundation, Sunraysia Foundation, Alex Tseng

## **Contributions for the past 5 years are acknowledged:**

### **Rock Art Treasures >\$50k**

Helen Bunning, Colin Gageler, The Geoff & Helen Handbury Foundation, James McKenzie & Flavia Gobbo, Nicholas Moore, John & Jacqui Mullen, Scanlon Foundation

### **Rock Art Champions >\$15k**

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## YOUR SUPPORT

Your support allows us to fund scientific research in the Kimberley. We support a broad range of scientists from the fields of archaeology, geology, palynology and related areas who work with Aboriginal communities to uncover Australia's earliest settlement history. Support KFA and ensure the rock art is recognised for its world-wide significance and protected accordingly. All amounts over \$2 are tax deductible. **Donate today: [kimberleyfoundation.org.au](http://kimberleyfoundation.org.au)**

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KFA acknowledges the support of The Ian Potter Foundation

Image:  
Wanjina period  
crocodile.

"We need to protect the art for future generations. If we don't get this information from the scientists as well as the old people while we can, it will be gone forever."

SAM LOVELL AM,  
KFA DIRECTOR  
AND 'FATHER'  
OF INDIGENOUS  
TOURISM IN WA



## SUPPORT GROUND-BREAKING RESEARCH

A momentum is gathering around Australia's rock art heritage. With your support recognition of Kimberley rock art and its significance has grown and the Kimberley Foundation's reputation has also grown. The Foundation now undertakes a number of activities with significant PR/marketing opportunities. We run a lean office and do not have marketing staff. We invite you to review these opportunities and refer them to your corporate colleagues!

### **KFA is driving and funding ground-breaking science.**

#### **Sponsor KFA's Annual Science Conference**

Support global developments in science through KFA's annual science conference. In 2017 the conference will be held at the Woodward Centre, The University of Melbourne. More than 40 scientists come together at the multi-disciplinary conference to report on progress and present and share their research findings.

#### **Sponsor a Scientist**

Dr Helen Green is the lead PhD post-doc at The University of Melbourne on the *Rock Art Dating project*. Your gift will help support her research, 100% of which is dedicated to the Dating project (sampling and recording in the Kimberley at least twice a year in the field and testing hundreds of samples back at the lab at Melbourne Uni).

Helen is behind the ground-breaking research being undertaken at Melbourne University on Uranium Series dating of rock art. It is a world first. She is gifted and going places!

#### **Support Balanggarra Traditional Owners**

Support the Traditional Owners on whose country the research takes place and who participate in the research.

#### **Sponsor KFA'S Public Lecture Series**

Each year KFA presents a 5-city public lecture series partnering leading institutions and cultural organisations.

Leading scientists present lectures in Melbourne, Sydney, Perth, Brisbane, Canberra and Adelaide – always to a full house.

The Foundation collaborates with the National Gallery Victoria, The Art Gallery of NSW, The South Australian Museum and the National Museum of Australia to present the series.

**Sponsorship: \$10,000 per city; \$40,000 to sponsor 5-city series.**

#### **Invest in the development of educational resources to support Indigenous learning**

##### **Rock Art Education Project**

KFA is seeking partners who want to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for Kimberley communities, Indigenous schools in WA and throughout Australia.

We will bring Aboriginal histories and cultures and storytelling alive through the history, geography and science of the rock art dating journey.

**We invite you to contact our CEO today to explore opportunities on how you would like to get involved.**

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