



ROCK ART AUSTRALIA

Uncovering our history



Uncovering our history through scientific research and Aboriginal knowledge



TO Uriah Waina and Prof Elizabeth Dinsdale taking samples to look for microbial activity on rock shelter surfaces.
Photo credit: Pauline Heaney, *Rock Art Dating* project 2022 field trip, Balanggarra Aboriginal Corporation.

Front cover: TO Ian Waina using the portable visible light spectroscopy on the ochre of painted snakes.
Photo credit: TO Augustine (Jnr) Unghangho, *Rock Art Dating* project 2022, Balanggarra Aboriginal Corporation.



Who we are and what we do

Rock Art Australia funds scientific research with archaeologists and multi-disciplinary scientists in partnership with Indigenous communities working on country.

Our current research projects centre on Kimberley rock art as well as uncovering the environmental history of the region.

Cultural sites are located and recorded with the traditional owners. These sites include rock art, historic campsites, ochre sources, stone arrangements, quarries and living sites.

The research includes scientifically dating the rock art as well as reconstructing past climates to provide new understanding of the causes of environmental change and impacts on Australia's Kimberley region.

Rock art reflects humankind's rich spiritual and cultural heritage and has great significance to its creators and their descendants.

“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, 'father' of Indigenous tourism in the Kimberley;
RAA Emeritus Director

Our research

Collecting microscopic samples from mud wasp nests, collecting mineral crusts from rock surfaces for analysis in the laboratories, recording digitally thousands of rock art sites, constructing an archaeological dig, surveying new areas, making comparisons with other rock art provinces, collecting sediment cores, reconstructing the environmental history of the Kimberley, and finding scientific ways to conserve the rock art is what rock art research is about.

The multi-disciplined scientists we fund work in partnership with the Australian Research Council (ARC), numerous university partners, and most importantly the traditional owners (TOs), elders and rangers on whose land they conduct research.

RAA is currently funding two major projects with ARC support: *Rock Art Dating* and *Unlocking Environmental Archives*.

A team of scientists is establishing a timeline for the Kimberley rock art sequence and styles, together with a timeline for the changing sea levels and climate, and getting some exciting results.

Another team focussed in the Kimberley is establishing a 60,000 year climate and environmental record identifying periods of climate change and the likely impacts on living conditions. An e-atlas will enable anyone to pinpoint what the weather was doing at any given time in the last 60,000 years.



Dr Louise Shewan with TO Scotty Unghangho using a drone to capture images.
Photo credit: David Barnes, Rock Art Dating project, Balanggarra Aboriginal Corporation.

On one pilot project, researchers collected over 500 gigabytes of photographs, drone imagery and audio data to produce an interactive augmented reality experience. Advanced 'augmented reality' technology using 3D Virtual and Mixed Reality headsets is breaking new ground in the Kimberley. The pilot will demonstrate the medium's potential for research, conservation, and education.

Research Chairs and Fellows

The backbone of Rock Art Australia is the establishment of two fully endowed Chairs – the Rock Art Australia Ian Potter Kimberley Chair at The University of Western Australia (UWA) and the Rock Art Australia Minderoo Chair in Archaeological Science at The University of Melbourne (UoM).

RAA funds Dr Helen Green's *Rock Art Dating Fellowship* at The University of Melbourne (UoM) with generous assistance from The Ian Potter Foundation. Also under the umbrella of the RAA Minderoo Chair is Senior Archaeological Fellow Dr Louise Shewan, co-funded by RAA and UoM.

Through many projects with multiple universities this research powerhouse is helping establish the importance of Australia's archaeology and transforming research and teaching in this area.



Collecting sediment cores
Photo: Hamish McGowan

Your impact

In 2023 Rock Art Australia celebrates its 25th anniversary with a continuing commitment to researching, preserving and promoting Australia's rock art and uncovering our country's history.

As well as celebrating a landmark 25th year, we are celebrating 10 years of the *Rock Art Dating* project and other research projects on Kwini and Balanggarra country.

Our achievements are made possible by the generosity and passion of our supporters and the many people who want to learn more about our history and Australia's rock art. We've witnessed a growing engagement from our Indigenous partners paving the way for community initiated research. Our success lies in our partnerships with Traditional Owner groups, our investment in support for shared objectives, and our commitment to investing in world class science.

Our vision to understand, through scientific research and Aboriginal knowledge the history of human habitation in Australia, is at present supported by a \$13 million research portfolio. It includes two permanently endowed research chairs, two scientific fellows, eight research projects including a study of damaged rock art sites, pigment analysis, and a scoping study of sites in Laos and Vietnam to look for similarities to Australian rock art.

To promote the rock art and share the findings with the public we present a 5-city public lecture series, foster an Indigenous cultural ambassador program and are partners in a documentary film in pre-production.

Thank you

We gratefully acknowledge the generosity of our leading donors

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We salute the generous, continuous support of our pro bono partners Allens Linklaters and KPMG.

We acknowledge the generous continuous support of Dunkeld Pastoral Company, the Freedman Foundation, INPEX, Minderoo Foundation, and Voyager Estate.

Special tribute is paid to Allan Myers AC KC & Maria Myers AC whom we acknowledge for a lifetime of extraordinary support for Rock Art Australia.

We have many other generous supporters whom we thank. Every donation counts and we are grateful to every one of you.

Photo: Sash Gwion figures,
Photo credit: TO Jeremy Unghangho,
Rock Art Dating project 2022,
Balanggarra Aboriginal Corporation.

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Help us uncover our history

We want all Australians to know about Australia's greatest Indigenous cultural asset – our rock art. And we want to ensure it is protected.

We're committed to understanding our history through scientific research and Aboriginal knowledge to protect this great national heritage. We hope you will join us.

Make a donation

Credit Card donations can be made easily and securely on our website: rockartaustralia.org.au/support-us

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BSB: 033-364 Account number: 985120 Bank: Westpac

Please advise us of your donation by email: accounts@rockartaustralia.org.au

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