

KIMBERLEY FOUNDATION AUSTRALIA: HELPING TO UNDERSTAND THE KIMBERLEY'S PREHISTORY

On 5 December 2007, the Kimberley Society heard from Mike Lisle-Williams, the CEO of the Kimberley Foundation (and a Kimberley Society member) and Jim Ross (Kimberley Society member and author of a chapter in our *Rock Art of the Kimberley* book).

Mike started by explaining the origins of the organisation, which originated when Susan Bradley set up the not-for-profit Bush University in 1995, with friends who had met and supported the late Grahame Walsh and were fascinated by the rock art of the Kimberley. This subsequently led to Maria and Allan Myers' decision to purchase the Theda and Doongan pastoral leases to support Walsh's research. In 2002, the organisation's present board structure was in place and its name was changed to the Kimberley Foundation Australia (KFA). Justice Henric Nicholas of the NSW Supreme Court was appointed Chairman.

Although the board supported Walsh's quest, it was a turbulent relationship. There was much support from the Myers family. The board sought to establish a Kimberley Research Centre but funding proved difficult. The Kimberley Foundation Australia developed a new plan for a research program and accepted that the road to a Kimberley research institute would take longer than originally thought. After consulting to the board, Mike was asked to become CEO and has worked in that capacity with KFA since January 2007. Sadly, Grahame Walsh died in August 2007.

Vision and mission

- Rock art has been the initial catalyst for inter-disciplinary research into history of human interaction with environment in Kimberley
- Scientific credibility and contemporary relevance
- Global context of Kimberley story and art treasures
- Contribute – knowledge, education and engagement
- Respectful approach – science and indigenous beliefs

Longer term aims

- Well funded ongoing research program e.g. via Kimberley Research Institute
- Open communication of findings
 - Peer-reviewed scholarly publications
 - Popular media
- Protection of rock art and research resources

Mike also outlined funding initiatives, links with the WA Museum, the web site, the Qantas Kimberley Archive media and communication plans.

Jim Ross then took over, for a detailed look at future activities. The Scientific Advisory Council has as members our own Past President Mike Donaldson, Prof Sue O'Connor, also a participant and author of our Rock Art Seminar, and other eminent names in the sphere. This committee will advise, monitor, evaluate, engage specialists and encourage best practice in the area.

The Six Key Research Questions

- The antiquity and continuity of habitation: during the Pleistocene, last glacial maximum, and the Holocene.
- Analysis of rock art: particularly its physical features and age; its patterns and content; and also its preservation and protection.
- The palaeo-climatological framework during habitation, and projection of climate change into the future.
- The palaeoecological framework during habitation at the local and regional scale.
- The broader regional significance of the timing of habitation (including the timing and locations of migratory routes across, and from, the Indonesian archipelago).
- The distribution, chronology and significance of Macassan and historic sites in the Kimberley Region.

Jim then explained the significance of monsoonal rainfall changes in the evolution of alluvial deposits and the importance of palaeo-hydrological reconstruction using flood deposits. He outlined the six research projects that KFA's board had just agreed to support and their importance in starting the research program. He expected that 2008 and 2009 would see a lot of progress.

The Future

- A robust research program
 - Scholarly credibility
 - Refereed publications
 - Wide communication through digital media
- Education and training
 - Indigenous communities
 - Working with/ through educational institutions
 - A chair of Kimberley Human and Environmental History?

- Kimberley Research Institute
- Global alliances

Challenges

- Protection of Kimberley rock art and research resources
 - High stakes
 - Cooperation with other environmental groups
 - A balanced, managed approach
- Continuity of funding
- Effective relationships with indigenous communities and organisations
- Global visibility

There followed a lively question time, particularly concerning Aboriginal participation in both the organisation and the research program.

Hamish McGlashan & Daphne Choules Edinger