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Fieldwork in the Namadgi Ranges

Archaeological work in the Namadgi Ranges around Canberra is continuing as part of Fenja Theden-Ringl's PhD project into the archaeological and palaeoenvironmental histories of the region. Seven rock shelters have been excavated since last October, distributed from Wee Jasper in the north to the southern tip of the ACT. The excavations have involved dozens of postgraduate and undergraduate students from the Archaeology and Natural History and the Archaeology and Anthropology departments of the ANU as well as interested researchers and locals. With work likely to continue into May, volunteers are always most welcome! Email: fenja.theden-ringl@anu.edu.au
ANH & ANSTO rock-art dating collaboration

During September last year Dr. Vladimir Levchenko from the Institute for Environmental Research at ANSTO, joined PhD Candidate Tristen Jones in the field at Red Lily Lagoon, western Arnhem Land. The collaborative project aims to investigate the radiocarbon dating potential of mineral accretion layers that encase rock-art, utilising the carbon compound found in calcium oxalate, the main mineral in the accretion layer. Dr. Levchenko and Tristen sampled 22 mineral accretion layers associated with rock art. Samples have since been analysed in RSES laboratories by Tristen and RSES researchers Dr. Penny King and Dr. Ulrike Troitzsch using FTIR, XRD and SEM-EDS technologies. These techniques have generated interesting data on the content and development of mineral accretions. Samples that contained calcium oxalate have been AMS radiocarbon dated at ANSTO facilities by Dr. Levchenko and his team. Results of the age determinations are currently being prepared for publication. These dates will be the first radiocarbon age determinations for an art style, known as Northern Running Figures, assumed to be of mid Holocene antiquity. The research is an ongoing project, headed up by Dr. Christian Reepmeyer and is supported by an AINSE Research Grant, ALNGRA12047P.

Recent Publications


Dr. Hsiao-chun Hung returns to the Mariana Islands

In February–March 2013, Hsiao-chun Hung and Mike Carson returned to the Mariana Islands in far western Micronesia, searching for more evidence of the oldest human habitation at the House of Taga Site, ca. 3500-3400 BP.

Following on their 2011 field-work, they uncovered more than 90 sq m of a very well preserved habitation layer, very dense with artefacts and midden, as well as arrangements of post-holes and other structural features. This work confirms that the very first inhabitants in the Marianas made red-slipped pottery of various forms with or without carination, including hundreds of decorated pieces that appeared from the earliest deposit of this site.

This excavation produced the largest so far known collection of decorated red-slipped pottery in the Marianas, with beautifully dentate-stamped designs highlighted by white lime in-fill. Some early pottery with painting was noticed, too! Certainly, the large amount of decorated pottery can help us to understand more about cross-regional relations.

Thanks are due to the funding sources, including both Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation and Australian Research Council. Strong support from local scholars and authorities graciously made this project gain fruitful results. The preliminary results have been invited for presentation at several locations, such as at Archaeology Center of Stanford University (USA) and Northern Marianas Humanities Council (Saipan), as well as featured in media such as Radio Australia News and Archaeology Magazine’s top news story on 14 March 2013.

In Other News

It is a pleasure to announce that Dr. Julien Louys who is currently a post doc at the University of Queensland and Stuart Hawkins who is a PhD candidate in ANH will be joining the Department as Post-doctoral Fellows in July 2013 on the ARC Laureate project ‘From Sunda to Sahul: Understanding Modern Human Dispersal, Adaptation and Behaviour en Route to Australia’. These appointments are for 5 years and involve field research throughout Island Southeast Asia.

The ANU library is interested in digitizing old Terra Australis and other ANH (and predecessor organizations) publications. Publications will be put online, and accessible in the DSpace. The department has donated a copy of each TA we have available but there are a number missing. If you have any ANH publications that you are willing to donate for digitisation please contact Dr. Jack Fenner, jack.fenner@anu.edu.au

Congratulations also to ANH’s Dr. Matthew Prebble who from February 1st was appointed acting Convener, for the Masters of Archaeological Science Program, CASS, ANU. Dr Prebble has been involved in the Program in the past, teaching of the Vanuatu Field School for the program in 2012. Well done Matt!
At the invitation of Professor Santamaria, Chief Scientist at the Vatican, Judith Cameron presented a paper on prehistoric textiles in Southeast Asia to archaeologists and conservators at the Vatican Museum on January 28th 2013. Excavations of burial beneath the Necropolis had produced large fragments of woven asbestos cloth and such finds are exceptionally rare. Prof. Santamaria had read Judith’s paper ‘Asbestos Cloth and Elites in Southeast Asia’ published in 2000 in the Bulletin of the Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association 2000 19: 47-51 and was interested in archaeological parallels. Judith is currently investigating asbestos fibres from Kamrej in India with Sunil Gupta and tiny fragments from Batujaya, a 2nd century temple site in West Java as part of The Archaeology of Batujaya Project by Prof. Pierre-Yves Manguin (EFEO) and the Urasan Arkeologi Nasional (Indonesia). Her new collaboration with the Vatican Museum dovetails well into Judith’s Future Fellowship which is concerned with long-distance interaction in Southeast Asia.

The Romans, legend has it, would often throw asbestos napkins and tablecloths into the fire to clean them (e.g.: mesothelioma-help-network.com)

Dr Xaiyun Xiao returns to China

Dr Xaiyun Xiao (Nanjing Institute of Geography and Limnology, Chinese Academy of Sciences) has been a visiting fellow at ANH for the last 3 months, working with Simon Haberle to develop a collaborative research program between ANH and the Chinese Academy of Sciences in Nanjing. During her stay she was able to take part in fieldwork in southern NSW (Bega Swamp) and has prepared two significant manuscripts on the last 20,000 years of environmental change in Yunnan Province for publication. We look forward to ongoing collaboration in the future.
ANH contributes to human health study

Pollen are routinely used to understand palaeoecological change yet there remains knowledge gaps regarding how modern pollen rain relates to different landscape settings and to different climatic regions. A new study funded through ACEAS (Australian Centre for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis) will provide important information on the relationship of land cover changes associated with urbanization and rural land management. We know that pollen assemblages can provide a very cost-effective measure perspective of landscape phenological patterns, including identification of invasive allergic species. We can also gain insights into how these are driven by current climate patterns and potentially map the influence of future climates on pollen production. Expanding urbanization and climate change are likely influences of aerobiological distribution of allergic pollens. It is likely that the relative distribution of pollen from clinically important species, will be affected by changes in temperature, precipitation and CO2 concentrations associated with climate change.

Simon Haberle attended the first workshop of the working group for “Australian aerobiology to monitor environmental change” met on Stradbroke Island on 11-15 March 2013 to develop a framework for the establishment of a national pollen count monitoring program with the potential to assist with management of patients with allergic respiratory diseases such as hay fever and asthma that can be triggered by airborne pollens, particularly but not exclusively from grasses. The group included leaders in the measurement and analysis of pollens in Australia. This exciting multi-disciplinary team includes scientists and clinicians with expertise ecology, botany, archaeology, climate change science, allergy, immunology, public health and biostatistics. ANH has been involved in a number of aerobiology studies over the last decade in locations such as Darwin, Canberra, Hobart, Brisbane and even the Daintree Rainforest.
From 3rd to the 7th April, ANH Department staff members Prof. Sue O’Connor, Assoc. Prof. Geoff Clarke, Dr. Sally Brockwell, Dr. Ambra Calo, Dr. Christian Reepmeyer and Dr. David Bulbeck, along with PhD candidates Mirani Lister, Ella Usher, Katherine Seikel, Alexa Benson and Tony Barham travelled to Honolulu, Hawaii to attend the 78th Annual Meeting for the Society for American Archaeology. Many of the Departmental participants presented papers (while some co-authors also remained at home in the office!), congratulations to all for an outstanding effort!

Jane Balme (University of Western Australia) and Sue O’Connor (Australian National University) “Traditions and Change in Scaphopod Shell Beads in the Southern Kimberley, Australia from the Pleistocene to the Recent Past”

Sue O’Connor (The Australian National University) “Pleistocene Maritime Societies in Island Southeast Asia”

David Bulbeck (Australian National University), Ben Marwick (University of Washington), Sue O’Connor (Australian National University), Ambra Calo (Australian National University) and Jack Fenner (Australian National University) “The Prehistoric Archaeology of the Rota Region of Central Sulawesi”

Anthony Barham (Australian National University), Philip Hughes (HEH Pty Ltd, Australian National University), Marjorie Sullivan (HEH Pty Ltd, Australian National University), Sue O’Connor (Archaeology and Natural History) and Patrick Faulkner (University of Queensland) “Geoarchaeological Advances in Identifying Shell ‘Scatters’ As Middens Located on Tropical Shorelines Influenced by Catastrophic Marine Inundation Events (Cyclones and Tsunamis)”

Upcoming Conferences

A Centenary of Celebrating Heritage
Accessing, presenting and interpreting heritage places and their collections that have contributed to 100 years and more in Canberra and the region.
Hosted by Canberra Archaeological Society, National Trust of Australia (ACT) and Significance International with sponsors: Australia ICOMOS; Donald Horne Institute for Cultural Heritage University of Canberra; and the Institute of Professional Practice in Heritage and the Arts ANU.

When: Saturday 20th July 2013; time: 8.30am to 5pm.
Where: Sir Roland Wilson Building Theatre, Bldg 120, ANU campus.
Cost: $70 full, $50 members of the host organizations, $30 concession & full-time students - registration details will be available by the end of April 2013.
Call for presentations to be submitted by Friday 3 May 2013 to Helen.cooke@anu.edu.au.

The 2nd International Contact Rock Art Symposium
Contributors have been invited based on their experience researching and writing about contact rock art in their respective countries and also for their interest in moving contact rock art research away from purely description-based studies towards a more theoretically-grounded area of specialisation within rock art studies.
Our aims are:
1: To share international perspectives on rock art depicting/representing contact between different cultural groups.
2: To explore different approaches to the interpretation of contact rock art.
3: To highlight similarities, differences and themes in the nature of representing ‘contact’ in different parts of the world and at different times.
4: To discuss options for promoting the study and protection of contact rock art globally.
This symposium will include a field trip for presenters to meet local Aboriginal Traditional Owners and visit important contact rock art sites in Kakadu National Park and western Arnhem Land.
For more information, contact Sally May (sally.may@anu.edu.au) or Ben Smith (benjamin.smith@uwa.edu.au)

When: 13-15 September 2013
Where: North Australia Research Unit (NARU), 23 Ellengowan Drive, Brinkin (Darwin) NT 0810
Canberra Archaeological Society & ANU Students Archaeological Association: Recording Significant sites in the Tuggeranong Valley

Daryl Wesley, Peter Dowling, Helen Cooke and Tristen Jones offer all ANU undergraduate students, CAS and CAR members the opportunity to participate in a day fieldtrip to record significant sites in the Tuggeranong Valley. The group will revisit known sites of culturally modified trees and artefact grinding grooves.

Lab session outlining recording techniques and fieldwork safety briefing will take place on Friday 17 May, 2-3.30pm at Coombs (Building 9) Teaching Lab: 6002. Field survey will take place on Sunday 19 May, at 2 pm. For more information, or to RSVP please contact Helen Cooke on 0408 443 243 or email Helen.cooke@anu.edu.au

Lunchtime talks

The Department is still looking for presenters for ANH’s monthly “Lunch Time Talks”. If you are happy to informally present on any recent fieldwork or research activities please contact Dr. Janelle Stevenson, Janelle.stevenson@anu.edu.au

Morning Tea

Also for all department members who haven’t yet signed up to host a morning tea this year, please sign up on the noticeboard in the tea room. We have still have free spots from September through to December!