



Rock Art

OF THE KIMBERLEY



Proceedings of the
Kimberley Society Rock Art Seminar
Edited by Mike Donaldson and Kevin Kenneally



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The Kimberley region of Western Australia is one of the most prolific rock art centres of the world.

The ancient and enigmatic Gwion Gwion or Bradshaw paintings intrigue all who see them and the Wandjina galleries represent a wealth of stories from the Aboriginal Dreamtime.

Kimberley rock art was featured in a one-day seminar at The University of Western Australia in Perth in September 2005, organized by the Kimberley Society, a non-profit society interested in all things Kimberley. Eight presentations included hundreds of stunning images of rarely seen art sites from the wilds of the Kimberley, discussion of the origins and archaeological evidence for human habitation in the area, and the role of rock art as inspiration for contemporary Aboriginal painting in the Kimberley.

This book is a valuable record of the Kimberley Rock Art Seminar held in 2005 and provides access to the rich artistic traditions of the early inhabitants of Australia going back many thousands of years. It includes many photographs never before published, and represents a significant contribution to our knowledge of the Kimberley's fabulous rock art.

Dr Mike Donaldson is a past president of the Kimberley Society and a geologist with the Geological Survey of Western Australia. He is a keen photographer and for the last twenty years has spent several weeks each year walking the remote Kimberley rivers locating and documenting rock art.

Kevin Kenneally, AM is also a past president of the Kimberley Society and a research scientist with the Department of Environment and Conservation. For over thirty years he has conducted botanical and biological surveys throughout the Kimberley as well as documenting and photographing rock art sites. Kevin is an Honorary Research Fellow with the School of Earth and Geographic Sciences at The University of Western Australia and an Honorary Research Associate of the Western Australian Museum.

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held at
The University of Western Australia
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Kevin Kenneally AM



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INTRODUCTION

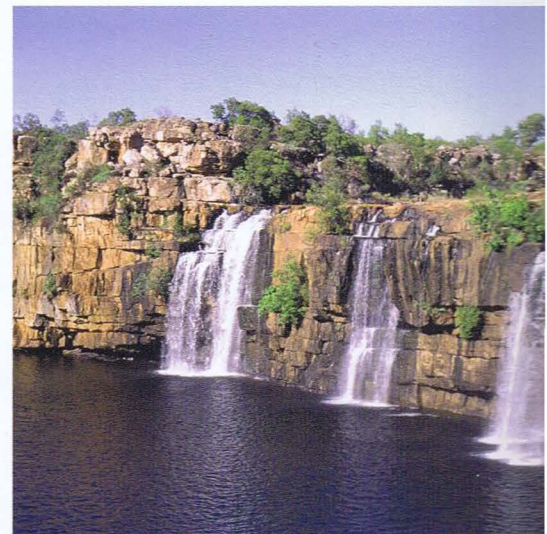
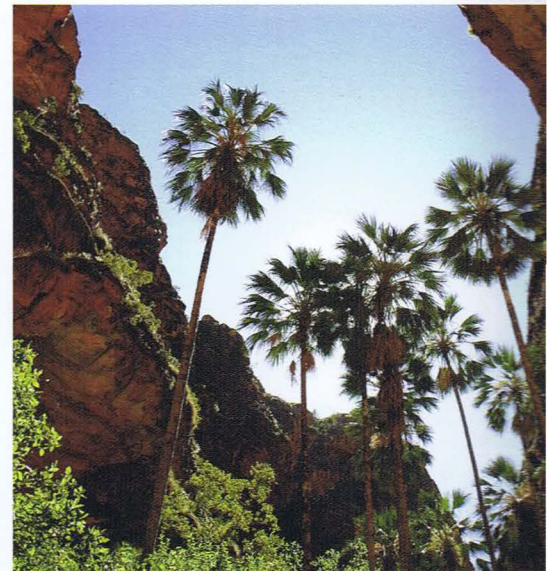
The Kimberley area is in the north of Western Australia, about 2,500 kilometres from Perth. There are many ways you can define the Kimberley: geologically it has one boundary, politically it has another, geographically it has another, and from the local government perspective it has another. What we know as the Kimberley is an area of rugged wilderness right in the north of Western Australia. The boundary to the south is the desert country, the boundary to the east is the border with the Northern Territory, and the coast forms the western and northern boundaries (map on page viii). It is about 700 kilometres east-west, and the same north-south, so it is a big patch of ground. I know not everyone in the audience will have been to the Kimberley so I thought it would be worthwhile showing some of the things that we think of as typical Kimberley: Boab trees, cliffs, water lilies, fantastic islands all the way along a very spectacular coastline, tremendous gorges on the coast and inland, as well as – and I guess this is what most people think of as classic Kimberley – palm trees, semi-tropical waterfalls, and rivers and water holes (Figs 1.1 to 1.3). Of course there are lots of rocks in the Kimberley as well, and there is a lot of art on those rocks and that is what we are going to talk about today. We are not focusing on many other aspects of the Kimberley apart from the rock art and the people who painted it or made it.

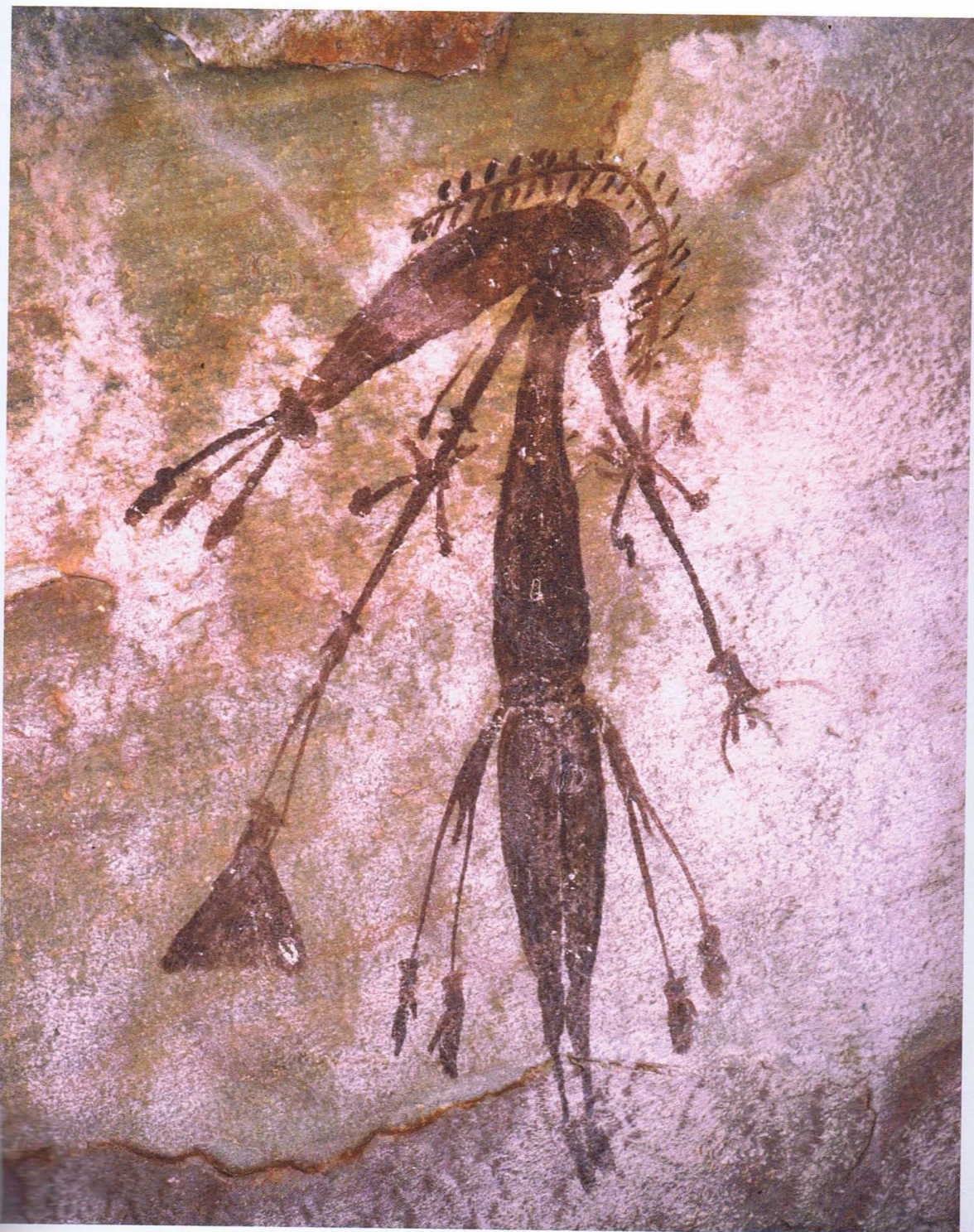
Most people who know anything about the rock art in the Kimberley would be aware of the several different styles of art. In fact, there are all sorts of art styles in the Kimberley, but perhaps the most visual is the Wandjina as shown on the title page. Wandjina art sites also typically include naturalistic animal paintings including kangaroos, snakes or fish. The other well known paintings are the Bradshaws or Gwion Gwion (page iii). Especially in the last ten years or so, these beautiful small figures have really captured people's imagination with their stylistic and rather enigmatic accoutrements, and the fact that nothing is known about the people who painted them, or how long ago they were done. So they are the two main types of Kimberley art, but there is a lot in the middle.

Top right: Fig. 1.1 Boab trees, Napier Range

Centre right: Fig. 1.2 *Livistona* palms, Bungle Bungle Range

Right: Fig. 1.3 Waterfall, King Edward River





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BRADSHAW ART OF THE KIMBERLEY

by
David Welch

Early Tasselled Figure with arm
bands and head-dress