



Museums & Art Galleries  
of the Northern Territory  
Foundation Limited

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## Media Release

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30 June 2010

### Breathtaking rock art reveals secret stories

International collaboration and cutting edge technology have helped reveal fascinating details of some of the Northern Territory's most significant rock art galleries in Arnhem Land, according to archaeologist Robert "Ben" Gunn.

Robert is the recipient of the 2009 George Chaloupka Research Fellowship, an initiative of the Museums and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory (MAGNT) Board and the MAGNT Foundation.

The fellowship promotes and supports published research and conservation of Aboriginal rock art located in Arnhem Land, Northern Territory. Energy Resources of Australia (ERA) provided \$75,000 to support the first three years of the fellowship.

MAGNT Foundation President Emeritus Professor Helen Garnett said the Foundation was excited about the results achieved from the first year of the fellowship. "It is very important to continue the pioneering work of George Chaloupka and expand our knowledge about the rich galleries of rock art found across Arnhem Land," Emeritus Professor Garnett said.

With fellowship support Robert studied the extraordinary Nawarla Gabarnmung Aboriginal art site in the centre of the Arnhem Land plateau, and will be presenting a summary of his research at a lecture at the MAGNT Theatre on at 6pm on Wednesday, 30 June.

Robert said Nawarla Gabarnmung was a spectacular natural stone cathedral used by Indigenous groups for thousands of years.

"The site features an incredible collection of ochre paintings which swirl across the rock ceiling, depicting Dreaming figures, sorcerers, dancing spirits, people and animals," Robert said.

"You look up, and you just go 'wow' - it's like the Sistine Chapel only painted by many artists over many decades rather than a single Michelangelo."

During his research at the site Robert collaborated with the Jawoyn Traditional Owners, an archaeological team from Monash University in Victoria, and international cave painting expert Jean-Michelle Geneste, curator of the world famous Lascaux Caves in France.

Robert's work involved the use of sophisticated computer programs designed to unravel complex layers of separate images painted over many centuries.

Carbon dating techniques determined the age of beeswax motifs used in some of the images, pinpointing the age of paintings beneath the wax at more than 400 years.

Robert said archaeological excavations of the floor carried out by the Monash researchers indicated the site has been used by humans for more than 12,000 years.

The 2010 fellowship opened to applicants in March and the recipient will be announced in August.

ERA Chief Executive Rob Atkinson said working with local communities to protect and preserve cultural heritage sites was an important part of ERA's day to day work.

"We are proud to support the George Chaloupka fellowship, and we appreciate the great contribution that Robert has made to the identification, documentation, and interpretation of Aboriginal rock art in the Northern Territory."

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**About the George Chaloupka Fellowship**

The George Chaloupka Research Fellowship is sponsored by ERA and was established in 2009 by the Museums and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory (MAGNT) Board and the MAGNT Foundation.

The annual fellowship is valued at \$25,000 and recognises the outstanding work of rock art historian Dr George Chaloupka OAM FAHA, a renowned rock art historian and MAGNT Curator Emeritus who has documented and recorded more than 3,000 rock art sites in the Northern Territory over the last 50 years.

The fellowship is granted to an individual to promote and support published research and conservation of Aboriginal rock art located in Arnhem Land.

**About Robert “Ben” Gunn**

Robert Gunn has worked as an archaeologist for the past 30 years, has recorded rock art in many areas of Australia and has published his findings extensively. He is a founding member of the Australian Rock Art Research Association.

**About ERA**

ERA operates the Ranger uranium mine in Jabiru. The Ranger mine is Australia’s major uranium producer, producing approximately 10 per cent of the world's mined uranium supplies.

ERA works with local Indigenous communities to identify, protect and preserve sites of cultural heritage on its mining leases.

ERA provides \$75,000 over three years to support the George Chaloupka Research Fellowship.

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For more information on ERA activities go to  
<http://www.energyres.com.au>