

ARCHAEO NEWS

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Australian energy company to fund rock art scholarship

One of Australia's largest energy companies will fund a three-year postgraduate scholarship for research into a collection of Aboriginal rock art on WA's Burrup Peninsula. The carvings currently are at the centre of a heritage listing controversy, with Woodside Energy seeking to build an LNG processing plant in the area.

Dating back to the last Ice Age, the site is said to be several thousand years old, featuring hundreds of thousands of petroglyphs. The University of New England, in northern NSW, announced Woodside would fund a three-year postgraduate scholarship for study of the carvings. UNE Archaeology and Palaeoanthropology Professor Iain Davidson said the bursary would provide significant funding towards fees, analysis, and a living allowance for a PhD student to conduct research on the rock art. It would be named in memory of South African archaeologist Patricia Vinnicombe, who did pioneering work on the Burrup rock art, Prof Davidson said.

"The student could study the content of the art, or its spatial distribution and associations, or the chemistry of the rock surfaces - perhaps with a view to developing a dating method - or they could study the impact of heavy industry on the art" Prof Davidson said. "Woodside has guaranteed that the research will be as free and open as any other form of university research, and they do not want to influence the outcomes in any way." Woodside already had done extensive auditing and study of the art, and were keen to further research in the area, Prof Davidson said.

Sources: Perth Now, The Sunday Times (4 October 2006)