Introduction

When Professor Ann McGrath launched the Research Centre for Deep History in 2019, she spoke of her frustration that historians generally use European discovery narratives to mark the beginning of Australian history. Europeans could not logically ‘discover’ Australia when sovereign people were already living in it. Nor could today’s researchers ‘discover’ deep Indigenous pasts, for it will always be a rediscovery of a lived and ongoing experience. Since its inception, the Research Centre has expanded the practice of history into deep history. By attending to the specificities of Indigenous knowledges, as well as to the knowledge produced by historians, archaeologists, and anthropologists, the Centre has demonstrated the importance of deep history while also considering its methodological challenges.

Join us as we reflect upon the outcomes of Professor McGrath’s ARC Laureate program Rediscovering the Deep Human Past: Global Networks, Future Opportunities, and the innovative histories it created in partnership with Indigenous communities across Australia and collaborating scholars across the globe. What useful purpose can deep history play in truth telling? How might Indigenous perspectives shed light the chronology and temporality of history? And what aspects of the deep history approach might productively expand the history discipline in general?

This symposium accompanies the launch of the Centre’s collaborative deep history mapping project Marking Country.

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### Wednesday 23 November, 2022

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**RSSS Auditorium**

**Australian National University**

**146 Ellery Crescent, Acton, ACT, 2601**
9:30-10:30am Roundtable

‘Marking Country’: deep history and truth-telling in Australia

Chair: Professor Peter Yu AM

As part of the Rediscovering the Deep Human Past Laureate program, on 22 November the Research Centre for Deep History will launch Marking Country, a collaborative digital mapping project that visualises some elements of Australia’s deep history, gathered from across the continent. It presents a series of interactive digital stories, histories, and maps, shared by Indigenous communities whose ways of knowing Country have been practiced for countless generations. For millennia, living stories of deep time have been told, sung, danced, performed in ritual, and marked in the landscape. Marking Country offers a way of thinking about and sharing these stories with a broader public, while speaking back to dominant traditions of mapping and mapmaking. In this roundtable, we reflect on the development of Marking Country, on the importance of collaborative approaches to deep history, and the role of deep history in truth-telling.

Speakers: Dr Mike Jones, Tabassum Fakier, Professor Jackie Huggins, Dr Mary Anne Jebb, Leah Umbagai and Sherika Duckhole

11:00am-12-30pm Panel session

Knowing deep pasts: Time, landscape biography, and Indigenous critique

Chair: Dr Laura Rademaker

Professor Daniel Lord Smail, Harvard University
Deep History in the Light of Indigenous Thought

In proposing the idea of “deep history” in 2008, the author’s intention was to invite a conversation about the temporal boundaries that govern scholarship in the humanities and many of the social sciences. Scholars in these fields typically operate in a Eurocentric time frame extending back no further than the rise of civilization in the ancient Near East. One of the author’s principal claims is that the shallowness of the time frame arises from the hidden legacy of the sacred history of Judeo-Christian thought, according to which the world itself was created 6,000 years ago. Given the dizzying advances in our understanding of humanity’s deeper past that have been achieved by archaeologists and geneticists over the past generation, it seemed that the time was ripe to break the grip of sacred history and reconceptualise our understanding of humanity’s chronology.
The invitation to think with deep history was not motivated by academic and curricular concerns alone, since the framing of chronology has political and moral implications as well. In several early talks and thought pieces, the author considered the manner in which the shallow chronology and its abiding Eurocentrism renders Indigenous peoples invisible to history, and suggested that a deep historical framework would help bring Indigeneity back into view. But several occasions to engage systematically with Indigenous scholarship over the past decade have encouraged the author to revise much of his thinking, out of the realization that deep history, as originally framed, relies on epistemologies that are themselves Euroamerican in nature. In this paper, the author will offer a set of reflections on these important issues and use the occasion to revisit the concept of deep history in the light of Indigenous thought.

Neil Brougham, Australian National University

Counting time without number

In 1781, Immanuel Kant described space and time as "a priori" human forms of sensible intuition, not empirical objects. Every person, regardless of culture or creed, experiences time and space as the “formal condition” for any experience whatsoever: space permits intuitions of external objects and time confers on our sense experience perceptions of succession and simultaneity. For space and time to become empirical (a posteriori) objects consciousness must apply concepts. For Kant, the empirical "time-series" is generated via the "schema of magnitude (quantitates)", or “number”, by “the successive addition of one homogeneous unit to another”. This presentation discusses the generation of empirical historical time as the successive addition of homogenous units in three cultural forms, myth, religion, and science. It places emphasis on indigenous Australian time which does not contain number and the challenges and opportunities this presents for historians of Australia's deep past.

Joshua Newham, Australian National University

From the Mountains to the Sea: Landscape Biography as Deep History in South Eastern NSW and the ACT.

Deep History is a relatively new term, yet historiographically speaking, it is not without its antecedents. The Annales School, Big History and Landscape History, for example, have all sought to expand our conception of what academic history is and what it is capable of doing by engaging with the tools, methods and insights of other disciplines. Initially, Josh's research sought to explore the possibility of intercultural trade and exchange across the boundaries of four language groups in South Eastern NSW and the ACT prior to European arrival: the Gundungurra, Ngun(n)awal-Ngambri, Dharawal and Yuin. In dealing with such a large area, so much history and so many different kinds of data, it quickly became necessary to craft and then apply a research methodology.
This in turn raised many questions around what exactly “deep” historical research is, and what it might be able to do that other approaches and disciplines cannot. This was initially conceived as an example for a hypothetical future historical researcher intent on writing a “deep history”, a kind of guide to the process of deep historical research. Eventually, through this research, however, Josh uncovered the concept of Landscape Biography, a fascinating historiography that allows for interesting avenues of rapprochement between history and the sciences, as well as with Aboriginal worldviews that see Country as a living and agentive force. Josh’s talk will show how a landscape biography of Southeastern NSW and the ACT would employ his methodology in writing a deep history of Aboriginal connection to Country and of the intercultural connections between people, places and resources across the region.

1:30-3:00pm: Roundtable

Postdoctoral Reflections: Challenging methods and temporalities in deep history

Chair: Dr Julie Rickwood

Over the five years of the Rediscovering the Deep Human Past Laureate program, the Research Centre for Deep History has been a home for postdoctoral researchers to think through the innovations and advances of deep history. By beginning with community-based collaborations with First Nations peoples, many of whom know and live with deep time in the everyday, we have been pushed to reconsider many of the premises that underpin the rapidly developing interdisciplinary field. The Laureate program has provided the space to work through these concerns, both by working with First Nations communities to represent their histories in shared terms, and by engaging critically with the history and philosophy of deep time. In this roundtable, we will discuss our shifting senses of deep time, how it is experienced and lived, and share some of the lessons we have learnt through our collaborations with First Nations communities in the challenging circumstances of the past few years.

Speakers: Dr Mike Jones, Dr Laura Rademaker, Dr Ben Silverstein and Dr Amy Way

3:30-5:00pm: Panel session

Broadening horizons: Laureate research and the future of deep history

Chair: Dr Lorina Barker
Professor Ann McGrath AM, Australian National University
Reflecting on Rediscovering the Deep Human Past

That thorny question ‘what is history?’ is particularly relevant for deep history. Not only because of its timescale and evidence base, but because it requires cross-cultural temporal understandings. Additionally, the contemporary practice of writing/presenting local and national histories will inform the process of national truth telling. We need to ask not only what is history, but what is a nation? Of equal urgency, global crises call for global perspectives. This presentation considers what our team learnt and didn’t learn over the past five years. It includes brief reflections on the historiography of periodization and temporality, the politics of history, and on the need to attempt comparative, global and interdisciplinary perspectives.

Professor Lynette Russell AM FAHA, Monash University
Global Encounters Monash, a GEM of a project.

The Global Encounters ARC Laureate Program aims to rewrite our understanding of Australian encounter history. We are deliberately looking beyond the British and towards the Dutch, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Indonesian early contact and coastal exploration. Using multilingual and transdisciplinary research methods and research tools, we aim to produce a new paradigm for Australian pre-colonial history. In this talk, I will reflect on some of our findings, and the challenges of working across vast geographic and temporal zones, not to mention juggling all the pieces during a global pandemic.

Professor Alison Bashford, UNSW
Gondwanaland: Modern Histories of an Ancient Supercontinent

The Gondwana/Land Project is researching and writing the modern history of an ancient megacontinent. It brings together historians across the former Gondwanaland, now India, Australia, Southern Africa, South America, and Antarctica. Our international team aims to think through the connections between modern earth and human sciences across southern lands that were once connected and began to break up 200 m years ago. Gondwanaland's history is strange and little understood. We address Gondwanaland’s national and continental fragments within modern environmental, cultural, political, colonial, and postcolonial histories.