

EDITORIAL

Dear fellow Quaternarists,

“Neither Alan nor myself were prepared for what was to come. Not only were we in the presence of Australia’s oldest human burial, but the mourners of that ancient occasion had left their indelible mark.” (Jim Bowler, 2017)

Occasionally, we strike moments in our professional and personal lives that are turning points; not just in our own personal odyssey, but within the wider context of our nation and indeed, human civilisation. Jim Bowler and Alan Thorne experienced just such an epiphany, while excavating in the Willandra Lakes Region on February 25, 1974. Careful excavation of some lunettes at Lake Mungo revealed remains of an adult male, sprinkled with red ochre. Now dated at 40,000 yr (40 ± 20), this is probably one of the earliest known examples of a sophisticated burial ritual in Australia. Mungo Man’s discovery followed that of Mungo Lady in 1969 (by Jim Bowler) which also indicated ritualistic burial rights and mourning rituals.

These and subsequent archaeological findings in this area are significant, as they indicate that human occupation of the Willandra Lakes area dates back to around 50,000 years, and contributed to our greater understanding of the diaspora of modern humans out of Africa. So, November 17, 2017 marked a significant moment as Mungo Man was repatriated back to Lake Mungo, to remain with Mungo Lady, with the agreement of the traditional owners. In his report in this issue of *Quaternary Australasia*, Jim Bowler outlines the background to these discoveries, and also the significance of the cultural, natural and scientific heritage value of the Willandra Lakes area. This is the interdisciplinary space between archaeology, geosciences and geography that is embodied by AQUA – as noted by Scott Mooney in his President’s Pen in this issue.

We also report on other research initiatives: the SHAPE special issue of *Journal of Quaternary Research* has been published; and SHeMax has run a recent productive workshop in Wellington, to be followed by another in Wollongong in February 2018. Helen Bostock reports from the 12th International Conference on Paleoceanography in Utrecht, Netherlands. Kat Fitzsimmons reports from close to the Continental Pole of Inaccessibility – during a 6 week field expedition to the Tian Shan piedmont area of southern Kazakhstan to examine paleoenvironmental change in this arid part of central Asia.

Encouraging ECR’s in their developing their skills is an important part of the professional development for scientists. Georgina Falster reports from 2 week workshop (Advanced Climate Dynamics) in Rondane National Park, Norway; while Haidee Cadd reports back from a quantitative vegetation modelling workshop in Greifswald, Germany. Our Editor, Sanja van Huet also reports from the recent CAVEPS conference in Queenstown, NZ.

We continue our exploration of science communication in this issue; Bob Wasson offers some personal reflections on his experiences of the place of science communication and how it can influence decision making.

Our next AQUA conference will be in Canberra in December 2018. Planning is well underway and we look forward to this biennial mustering of Australasian researchers and an opportunity to explore the Quaternary landscapes of the Canberra “environs”.



WARNING: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are warned that this issue contains images of deceased persons.

Yours Quaternarily,

Carol Smith and Sanja van Huet

Editors