Centre for Archaeological Science

Key Research Project

Modern human origins and early behavioural complexity in Australia and Southeast Asia

This 5-year (2011-2015) ARC Discovery Project was awarded to Chris Clarkson and Lynley Wallis (University of Queensland), Ben Marwick (University of Washington), Mike Smith (National Museum of Australia) and Richard Fullagar CAS, (University of Wollongong). The project targets a fundamental issue in world prehistory: how, when and why did humans first cross from Southeast Asia into Australia? New excavations using novel methods of analysis will be used to assess the nature of behavioural complexity and human evolution at the time when Australia was first colonised, more than 45,000 years ago.

Three sites planned for re-excavation have been chosen to represent likely entry points into Island Southeast Asia and Australia: Malakanunja II in Arnhem Land, dated to 61,000 ± 9000 years; Widgingarri in the Kimberley, dated to >48,000 years; and Jerimalai in East Timor, dated to >42,000 years. These sites are among the oldest and best-dated (for the time period in question) in the region, and have the greatest potential for artefact recovery from the period of likely first colonisation by modern humans.