

Archaeologist finds oldest rock art in Australia

June 18 2012, by ROD McGUIRK



In this May 2012 photo provided by Bryce Barker, a fragment of Aboriginal rock art on granite found in Australian Outback is seen on a plastic bag. University of Southern Queensland archaeologist Bryce Barker said Monday, June 18, 2012 that tests show the Aboriginal rock art in the cave was made 28,000 years ago, making it the oldest in Australia and among the oldest in the world. The rock art was made with charcoal, so radiocarbon dating could be used to determine its age. (AP Photo/Bryce Barker) EDITORIAL USE ONLY

An archaeologist says he found the oldest piece of rock art in Australia and one of the oldest in the world: an Aboriginal work created 28,000 years ago in an Outback cave.

The dating of one of the thousands of images in the Northern Territory rock shelter known as Nawarla Gabarnmang will be published in the next edition of the [*Journal of Archaeological Science*](#).

University of Southern Queensland archaeologist Bryce Barker said Monday that he found the rock in June last year but only recently had it dated at New Zealand's University of Waikato radiocarbon laboratory.

He said the [rock art](#) was made with [charcoal](#), so [radiocarbon dating](#) could be used to determine its age. Most rock art is made with mineral paint, so its age cannot be accurately measured.

"It's the oldest unequivocally dated rock art in Australia" and among the oldest in the world, Barker said.



In this May 2012 photo provided by Bryce Barker, University of Southern Queensland archaeologist Bryce Barker investigates Aboriginal rock art in a cave in the Australian Outback. Prof. Barker said Monday, June 18, 2012 that tests show the Aboriginal rock art in the cave was made 28,000 years ago, making it the oldest in Australia and among the oldest in the world. (AP Photo/Bryce Barker) EDITORIAL USE ONLY

The oldest known rock art is in Spain, where hand stencils and red disks made by blowing paint on to the wall in El Castillo cave are at least 40,800 years old, according to scientists using a technique known as uranium-thorium dating.

Australian National University archaeologist Sally May, who is not involved with Barker's research, described his find as "incredibly significant."

"I don't think it will surprise anyone that rock art is that old in Australia because we know people have been here a lot longer than that and there's no reason to believe they weren't producing art," she added.

Barker said he found evidence that the cave where he found the rock art had been occupied for 45,000 years.

Copyright 2012 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Citation: Archaeologist finds oldest rock art in Australia (2012, June 18) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-06-archaeologist-oldest-art-australia.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--