



A rock carving at Karratha Station.

Intriguing rock art at station

By Ben Cranston

COULD this rock carving depict Pilbara pioneer Peter Hedland's vessel the *Mystery*?

An amateur historian, who brought the carving to the attention of *Pilbara News* believes the single mast and curved tail are telltale signs suggesting Aboriginal people made record of Hedland's vessel visiting the region.

A man who would come to have a great impact on the North West.

Peter Hedland discovered an entrance into the mangrove inlet at Port Hedland in 1863, opening up the region to colonisation, and distant relative Bruce Hedland-Thomas says the coastal skipper may have chosen the site for the settlement of Cossack based on his knowledge of the North West.

Is this simple carving a record of his being here?

WA Maritime Museum expert Mike McCarthy says there is no way of telling for sure if the carving is in fact of Hedland's famed *Mystery*.

"The only positive identification we've made is of the *Xantho*," he said.

"There were so many three, two and one-masted cutters, schooners and brigs at the time because it was an extremely busy place."

The *Xantho* was the only two-masted steam ship in the region in the 1800s.

Mr McCarthy said Aboriginal people rarely carved something they had not seen.

Because the vessel's mast continued through the deck and down to the keel, it was logical to deduce whoever made the carving had been onboard.

University of WA maritime expert Alastair Patterson said the carving could have depicted a composite steam and sail vessel.

He said historical art depicting early contact with Europeans was common.

"It was usually of something really important about life," he said.

"Evidently, they quite often depicted something new and something they became involved in."