

# Rock art vandals

VANDALS have defaced rock art at Kangaroo Paw Valley on the Burrup Peninsula.

Friends of Australian Rock Art last week released photos of the latest vandalism in the Dampier National Heritage listed area.

Friends' spokesman Robin Chapple has called on Federal Minister Peter Garrett to intervene to ensure the national and world heritage value of the area is protected.

"As industrialisation of the Burrup has grown, increased vandalism has mirrored the expansion," Mr Chapple said.

"Neither the State Government nor industry has done anything to curtail the vandalism by recreational users in the area."

Mr Chapple said the Friends' group could see no other way to protect the Burrup than to only allow controlled access to the heritage site.

"The area is now listed as a National Heritage place, and deserves the same level of protection as given to Kakadu (Australia), the Lascaux Cave (France), Stonehenge (England) or the pyramids (Egypt) – all sites which are many thousands of years younger," he said.

"We call on those people who have witnessed their friends or associates committing this wanton vandalism to come forward to provide evidence to the police or federal authorities to enable prosecution.

"We urge all employees in the area to induct all their staff in the protocols of recreational use of this national heritage site and put in place instant dismissal and reporting provisions of any member of staff found conducting vandalism."

Mr Chapple said the latest damage was discovered last week – but could have occurred at any time in the past two months, as the art is rarely patrolled.

"We can't have this happening – it is the world's pre-eminent rock art site," he said.

A spokesman for Mr Garrett said that "an act of vandalism that has a significant impact on a National Heritage value within the Dampier Archipelago National Heritage Place would also be punishable under Commonwealth law, through the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999".

"This can include civil penalties up to \$5.5

million, or criminal penalties up to seven years' imprisonment can apply for undertaking an action that has, will have or is likely to have a significant impact on a National Heritage value of a National Heritage place.

"We're working closely and collaboratively with the WA Government on a bi-lateral agreement to ensure that these important pieces of Australia's cultural heritage are protected, while at the same time facilitating efficient processes for ongoing development in this important economic region."

Mr Chapple said it was clear from parliamentary questions that while the State Department of Indigenous Affairs was the body responsible for the site, it did not monitor any of the area.

"(It) merely records acts of vandalism to Aboriginal sites on the Burrup if reported," he said.

It said the department had identified various ways to protect the Burrup site in 2007 including; fencing, signage, education and track rationalisation.

"None of these have been implemented," Mr Chapple said.

"We call on the Federal Government to seek World Heritage listing for this, the world's pre-eminent prehistoric art site and the site of the horrific 'Flying Foam Massacre' in 1868."

He disputed reports to the State Parliament that the level of damage was not increasing.

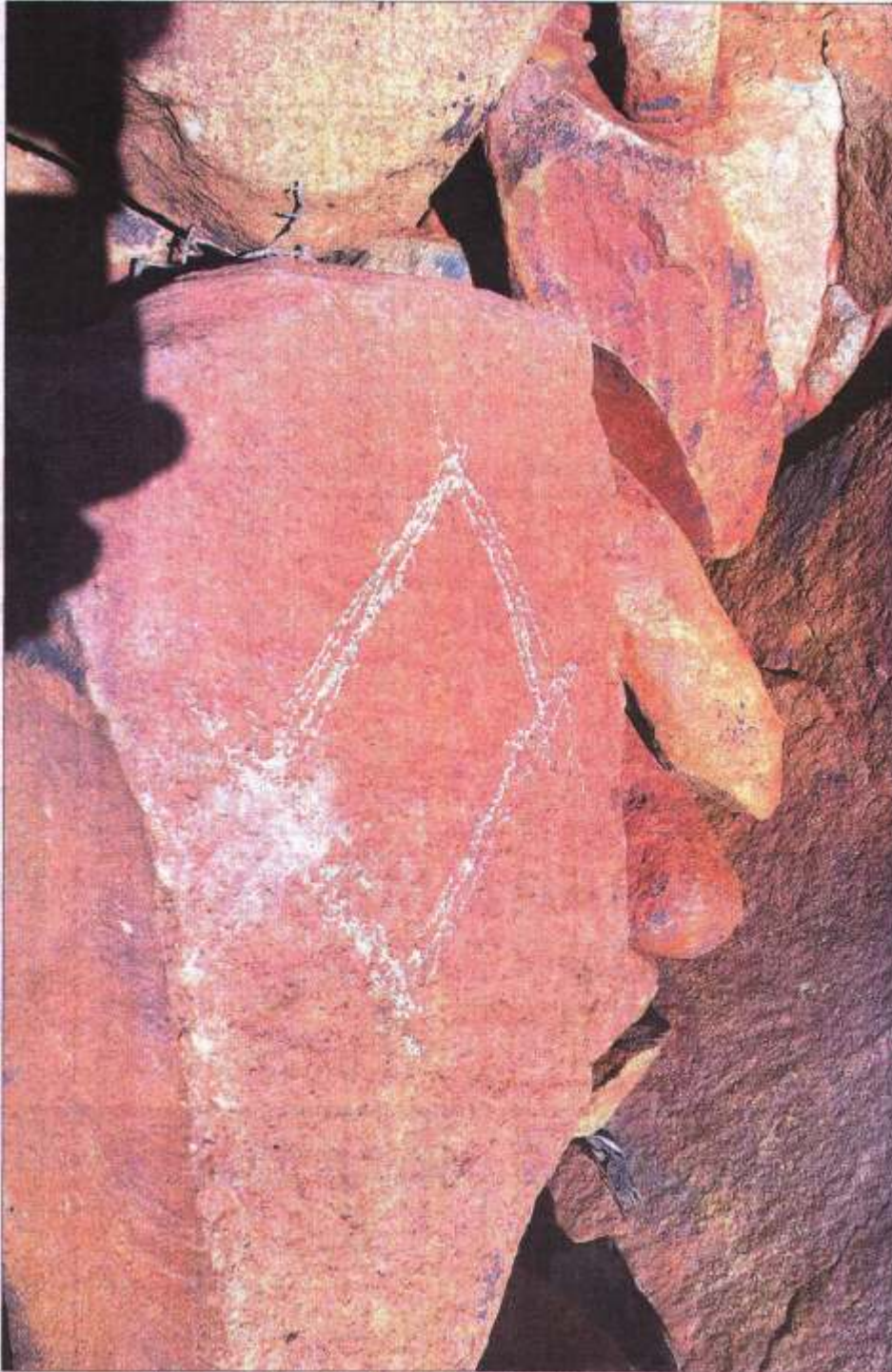
"They can't say that it is not getting any worse because they haven't any monitoring," Mr Chappel said.

He said controlled access was the only option for the site – as was done with rock art near Port Hedland.

"The real importance of the site is globally as it is the only site in the world that categorically records the evolution of humankind, from before the last ice age through to the current day," he said.

Between five and eight periods of distinctive styles are included in the Burrup art – dating back to 17,000 years ago when the area was a mountain range and including a time 27,000-30,000 years ago when Australia was joined to other continents.

"It is the only place in the world which has chronicled history to such an extent."



Damage to the rock art on the Burrup Peninsula