

Museums and Collections Projects Program 2021

University of Melbourne

Harry Brookes Allen Museum of Anatomy and Pathology

Project Description

Collection Management - Research project, fossil *Procoptodon* jaw bones

The Project

The focus of this project will be to conduct research on a pair of fossilised *Procoptodon* jawbones, which are part of the Frederic Wood Jones comparative anatomy collection in the HBA Museum. The completed research will provide context for the objects, increase our understanding and appreciation of the specimen and the collection, and has the potential to be developed into a published article.

Background

The [Harry Brookes Allen Museum of Anatomy and Pathology](#) has one of the largest collections of anatomical and pathological specimens and teaching models in Australia and serves as an educational facility for students studying medicine and related science disciplines. The majority of the 12,000 objects in the collection are dissected human remains (organs, systems or regions), some of which date back to the time of Sir Harry Brookes Allen (1854–1926). Most of the museum is arranged according to anatomical regions and systems of the human body, with corresponding pathologies. The Harry Brookes Allen Museum's collection also includes a significant collection of historical plaster, papier-mâché and wax anatomical models imported from Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries, historical death masks and a wax dermatological moulage collection.

The HBA museum's comparative anatomy collections comprise over 350 animal skulls and bones, early 20th century comparative anatomy models, and a small number of fossils. These include marsupial and primate specimens, plaster casts of early hominid fossils and skeletal preparations, which were used for teaching in the early 20th century. While some of the collection has been attributed to the anatomy professors, Richard Berry and Frederic Wood Jones, further research is necessary to determine the provenance of the remaining specimens and objects.

Details

This project involves, conducting in-depth research into a pair of fossilised jawbones identified as *Procoptodon*— an extinct type of giant short-faced kangaroos that lived in Australia during the Pleistocene Epoch. Using the accompanying historical documentation of these specimens as a starting point, and following up with published sources, the student will investigate the provenance of these specimens and undertake a basic anatomical analysis. The research findings will be added to the Museum's catalogue and ideally result in a published article. The student will need sound research skills and be competent in use of University Library resources and external online archives. Experience with osteological and/or fossil specimens would be highly desirable. Knowledge of the correct procedures for the safe handling of museum objects is needed as this project requires the close inspection of vulnerable collection items. Sound communication skills and the ability to independently pursue research leads.

Benefits

Opportunity to work at close hand with one of the University of Melbourne's extensive cultural collections and to gain professional development through the learning and application of collection management procedures and practice. Satisfaction from the creation of new knowledge about this unique item and contributing to its interpretation. In-depth research into the University's cultural collections is necessary to enhance our long-term understanding, management and appreciation of the collections.

Supervisor

Rohan Long, Curator, Harry Brookes Allen Museum of Anatomy and Pathology

