This thesis contains no material which has previously been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution and, to the best of my knowledge, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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Abstract

This thesis explores ideas about the deep past in Australia in the context of contemporary notions of geological heritage, cultural property, cultural identity and antiquity. Moving between disciplines, localities, stories and timescales it examines the complexities of changing intellectual agenda. But it does not pretend to present a complete history of the earth sciences in Australia. Rather it brings together an array of related themes, places, and stories, that knit into a narrative about the construction and interpretation of signs of age in Australian landscapes. Taking as its starting point the discovery by European settlers in 1830 of the Wellington Caves megafaunal fossils, which first suggested a long chronology for Australian vertebrate fauna, this work considers 'ordinary time' and 'deep time', geological heritage, the appropriation and celebration of deep time by settler Australians, and the naturalisation of narrative and sequence in geological writing.

The body of the thesis involves discussion of three landscapes which have been celebrated for the deep pasts revealed in their sediments, landforms and material remains: Hallett Cove and Lake Callabonna in South Australia and the Willandra Lakes in New South Wales. Each of these is regarded as more or less canonical in the respective histories of Australian geology, vertebrate palaeontology and archaeology, but each is also a living historical and geological site where people have lived, interacted with and interpreted the shape of the country for upwards of forty thousand years.
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