Dialogue of Civilisations

New Centre tackles one of the most pressing needs in the world today

Who killed our giant marsupials?
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International survey
ranks La Trobe in State’s top three

LA TROBE UNIVERSITY has been ranked among Victoria’s elite three universities – after Melbourne and Monash – in the latest leading global academic rankings, the Shanghai Jiao Tong University index of the world’s top 500 universities.

The Jiao Tong study surveys more than two thousand universities world-wide on a variety of criteria including research prizes, publications and major citation indices.

In the table of the top 100 universities in the Asia-Pacific region, La Trobe was also placed third in Victoria – and at equal tenth place among Australia’s 38 universities.

Vice-Chancellor, Professor Brian Stoddart, said La Trobe University prides itself on being an internationally recognised leader in the provision of high quality education and training underpinned by a strong research profile.

‘It is very pleasing that independent surveys of this sort continue to bear this out,’ he said.

La Trobe also featured among the top universities in the world in the latest British Times Higher Education Supplement league table. It gained 23rd place in the Arts and Humanities, 68th in the Social Sciences, 86th in Biomedicine – and was ranked overall 98th among the world’s top universities.

In that survey, La Trobe University Arts and Humanities was ranked equal 3rd in Australia (with Monash University), after the University of Melbourne and the Australian National University.

Nursing bruises

THE WORKPLACE for nurses can be ‘distressing and dangerous’ with nurses reporting being ‘shouted at, punched, stabbed and bitten’ according to a recently published study led by La Trobe University Head of Nursing and Midwifery, Professor Gerald Farrell.

Almost a third of the nurses who took part in the largest study of its kind in Australia said they had been subjected to both physical and verbal abuse in the last four working weeks, and a quarter had considered resigning because of this.

The research was carried out by Professor Farrell and a team from the University of Tasmania before he joined La Trobe early this year. It was supported by the Australian Nursing Federation and published in the latest issue of the Journal of Advanced Nursing.

Two-thirds of the 2,407 nurses who took part in the survey reported some form of abuse during the four-week period covered.

This ranged from being sworn at, slapped and spat upon to being bitten, choked and stabbed. The abused nurses, who all worked in Tasmania, reported an average of four verbal incidents and between two to three physical incidents.

Sixty-nine per cent of nurses who had been physically abused had been struck with a hand, fist or elbow and 34 per cent had been bitten.

A further 49 per cent said they had been pushed or shoved, 48 per cent had been scratched and 38 per cent said that someone had spat at them.

‘We also discovered that six per cent had been choked and just under one per cent had been stabbed,’ Professor Farrell said.

Verbal abuse was most likely to take the form of rudeness, shouting, sarcasm and swearing. Two per cent said that their home or family had also been threatened.

While nursing is a rewarding and challenging career, Professor Farrell said policies and practices must minimise workplace aggression, regardless of who the perpetrators might be.
New Centre for Dialogue

‘Your undertaking comes at a period of sharply increasing intolerance, extremism and violence … That is why initiatives such as your Centre are so important. They can help us unlearn our collective prejudices, and promote contacts and dialogue among different societies.’

- Kofi Annan

‘I am pleased to offer my support for the launch … and congratulate the organisers and the University for what I am sure will be a highly successful institution’

- John Howard

THESE TWO MESSAGES of support, from the UN Secretary-General and the Prime Minister, were two of many received from leading local and world figures at the official launch of La Trobe University’s new Centre for Dialogue.

The Centre was launched in the Great Hall of the National Gallery of Victoria by Mr John Pandazopoulos, Minister Assisting the Premier with Multicultural Affairs, in front of an audience of 800 people.

The Centre is the initiative of its Director, Professor of Politics, Joseph Camilleri. He said: ‘The violence that is raging in different parts of the world is a salutary reminder that dialogue is not a moral luxury, but a practical necessity.’

The Centre for Dialogue – the first of its kind in Australia – is of international and national significance. Strongly supported by the Victorian Government, it places Melbourne, and Australia, at the cutting edge of the dialogue of cultures, religions and civilisations.

‘It is an initiative which the University believes can make a significant contribution through research, education and community engagement,’ Professor Camilleri said. ‘Our work will be inter-cultural – exploring a great many religious and cultural traditions – and interdisciplinary. It will bring together insights from many fields, including cultural studies, religious studies, education, international relations, sociology, law, philosophy, history, and economics.’

The Centre is supported by a wide cross-section of educational, professional religious and community organisations, as well as many scholars in Australia and internationally. This is reflected in the diverse membership of the Centre’s Advisory Board.

Its Board of Management is headed by Elizabeth Proust, Chairman of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra. She was until recently Managing Director for Esanda, and in the late 1990s Secretary of the Department of Premier and Cabinet in Victoria.

Master of ceremonies at the launch was journalist and commentator Phillip Adams, who conveyed to the gathering the enthusiastic messages of support received from scholars and universities, religious leaders, as well as foreign ministers and ambassadors – and both the present Secretary-General of the United Nations, and his predecessor, Mr Boutros Boutros-Ghali.

Professor Camilleri said the key aims of the La Trobe University Centre for Dialogue included:

- educational projects designed to promote inter-cultural/inter-civilisational dialogue in schools and universities
- research that addresses the challenges and opportunities presented by cultural, religious and political diversity and conflict
- community engagement across ethnic, religious and cultural divisions – locally, nationally, regionally and globally
- policy advice to governments, community organisations, and international agencies
- international networking.


‘A world wild with the delirium of hatred’

THE LAUNCH also saw the Centre’s inaugural Annual Lecture, delivered by distinguished international jurist, Judge Christopher Weeramantry, former Vice President of the International Court of Justice.

Renowned for his landmark judgments on the role of culture in international law, Judge Weeramantry spoke on ‘The Dialogue of Cultures: Religions and Legal systems - an Imperative of our Times’.

He said: ‘Something is seriously wrong somewhere with our attitudes towards our fellow planetary citizens.

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Forum features
Anwar Ibrahim

FORMER Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dr Anwar Ibrahim, was guest speaker at a recent forum, jointly sponsored by the Centre for Dialogue, the Victorian Council of Churches, and the Islamic Council of Victoria – one of many events in which the new Centre is involved.

addressing an audience of around 100 people, Dr Ibrahim stressed our identity as human beings cannot be compartmentalised.

He said humility was required to recognise ourselves – whether we were Muslims, Christians, Hindus, buddhists – as parts of a great cultural tradition, greater than any of our particular traditions, and ourselves as players in the process of developing human maturity.

The key concept was not tolerance, he said, but how to ‘know, understand and appreciate one another – including one another’s faith’.

Honoured for work with alcohol-related brain injury

MARTIN JACKSON, Director of La Trobe University’s Psychology Clinic, has been recognised for his research and extensive community work in helping people with alcohol and substance related brain injury.

Arbias Ltd – which since 1990 has provided specialist services for Victorians with alcohol (and substance) related brain injury (ARBI) – recently opened a new training room bearing his name. The room was officially opened by University Chancellor, Mrs Sylvia Walton.

Based in Brunswick, Arbias is a not-for-profit company. It has about 50 staff specialising in disability, alcohol and other drugs, counselling and management. Mr Jackson has been Director of the Arbias Board of Management since 1992 and its senior clinical neuropsychologist since 1998.

Mr Jackson’s research is into the effect of substances on cognitive functioning, particularly alcohol and benzodiazepines, and the ability of neuropsychological testing to predict everyday behaviours, such as driving and managing personal finances. His research has been published in many journals, including the *Medical Journal of Australia* and the *British Journal of Addiction*. He believes that the greatest challenge is to modify people’s substance use patterns to prevent the damage from occurring in the first place.

As well as teaching and training students and clinicians at La Trobe and Arbias, Mr Jackson also trains workers with Turning Point and the Department of Human Services.

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The most compelling task of all the social disciplines is to examine why we permit the paradox of entrenching differences when unity is our burning need.

‘What is the cause? There has been a total breakdown of communication and of understanding. Each community, each religion, each nation is locked in within its own inherited compartments of knowledge and beliefs. Walls of separation prevent a vision of the modes of thought, the problems, the strengths and weaknesses of the other.

‘Dialogue at every level is the answer and the promotion of dialogue is the most vital need of our time.’

He said dwindling earth resources, instant electronic communication, burgeoning international travel and an increasing world population were among the factors forcing the realisation that we are one global family sharing a common planetary home.

‘It is self-evident that we are increasingly becoming global citizens rather than citizens of this or that sovereign state, for no state is truly sovereign in this heavily interdependent world.

‘Though togetherness is the only prescription for human survival in this nuclear age, we are a community torn apart with divisions, splintered into groups and festering with resentments, misunderstandings and hatreds.

‘As Rabindranath Tagore so tellingly observed in one of his famous poems “The world today is wild with the delirium of hatred”.

‘Every culture, every religion, every legal system is a part of the universal inheritance of humanity and has so much richness to offer to all.’
Onassis Prize for Hellenic Centre

THE NATIONAL Centre for Hellenic Studies and Research at La Trobe University has been awarded one of two 2006 Onassis International Prizes for its promotion of Hellenism.

The prize is widely regarded as second only to the Nobel Prize in international recognition and prestige.

It comes with a grant of (US)$200,000, which will be presented to the Director of the Centre, Professor Anastasios Tamis, by the President of the Hellenic Republic in Athens in October.

Professor Tamis says this year’s awards are unique since both have gone to universities – La Trobe in Australia, and Harvard in the US.

It is also the first time an award has gone to Australia. Previous recipients include Harold Macmillan, Bishop Desmond Tutu, Helmut Schmidt, Vaclav Havel, Jimmy Carter, and the Greek composer, Mikis Theodorakis.

Welcoming the achievement, the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Brian Stoddart, praised the energetic direction of the National Centre by Professor Tamis, his colleagues and staff.

‘The award also represents a tangible and impressive return on investment for the many members of the Hellenic community in Australia who have co-operated to establish and enhance this Centre,’ Professor Stoddart said.

The National Centre for Hellenic Studies and Research was established in 1997 with generous benefactions from Melbourne business man, Dr Zissis Dardalis and Marathon Food Industries. It operates under the leadership of the Society for Hellenic Studies and Research, and is strongly supported by the Greek community.

Centre Patrons include the President of the Hellenic Republic, the President of the Republic of Cyprus and former Prime Minister of Australia, Malcolm Fraser.

The Centre has helped develop and maintain strong academic links between Metropolitan Greeks and Cypriots and Hellenes of the Diaspora to enhance social, cultural, historical, linguistic, anthropological, scientific and other research.

Professor Tamis says the Centre brings practical benefits by enriching the lives of Greeks and Cypriots and the wider Australian society in which they live.

While acknowledging the quality of study and research on Hellenism conducted in the Centre, he says the Onassis Prize means ‘we now feel stronger the responsibility to strive for excellence in our effort to enhance the precious values of Greek civilisation, history, language and heritage in Australia and the wider region of Australasia, including China which, along with Greece, is one of the most important civilisations of antiquity.’

Former La Trobe Vice-Chancellor, Professor Michael Osborne, Chair of the Society for Hellenic Studies and Research, added that the National Centre would continue to expand its promotion and dissemination of Hellenism, and was already successfully developing programs of study and research in China.

Focal point

THE CENTRE – with its large library, archives and other collections – has become a focal point for Hellenic study and research in Australasia and beyond.

With a staff of some 20 researchers, it comprises three specialist research institutes: the Australian Institute for Macedonian Studies; the Institute for Cypriot Studies and the Institute for Pontic and Asia Minor Studies.

The Dardalis Archives of the Hellenic Diaspora are a key feature of the Centre. Their contents are accessible by digital technology to scholars world-wide. More than 60 collections are available on-line and others on CD-ROM.

The archives comprise original documents, manuscripts, photographs, journals, monographs, audiovisual and other materials retrieved from Greece, the Middle-East, the Americas, Africa, Asia and Europe.
Research grant from Greece

THE GREEK government has awarded an $850,000 research grant to the National Centre for Hellenic Studies and Research.

The award was announced during a visit to the University in September by Greece’s Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Theodore Kassimis, accompanied by the newly appointed Greek Ambassador to Australia, Mr George Zois.

Professor Tamis said the grant, in ten annual instalments of $85,000, will be used to carry out research projects on the Greek language, history and Greek migration and settlement in Australia and the wider Australasian region.

La Trobe University Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), Professor Erich Weigold, said the University was extremely grateful for this latest support from the Greek Government.

‘The award highlights the excellent work of the National Centre for Hellenic Studies and Research. The National Centre is one of the distinctive features of La Trobe University and forms an important bridge between academic work and one of the key community groups in Australia and elsewhere,’ Professor Weigold said.

THE UNIVERSITY’S Greek Studies Program, in the School of Historical and European Studies, also provides one of the most diverse and dynamic programs of its kind, in a city claimed to be the largest Greek-speaking polis outside of Greece and Cyprus.

It offers units in Greek language, culture and history from antiquity to the present day, at undergraduate, honours and postgraduate levels.

Its undergraduate program in Modern Greek is offered both on the Bundooora Campus for La Trobe students, and at Parkville for students of the University of Melbourne.

Understanding Europe

THE VALUE of La Trobe University’s European Union subject for advancing a deeper understanding of international relationships was demonstrated with the launch of Innovative Universités European Union (IUEU) Centre at the main Melbourne campus at Bundooora recently.

The subject was pivotal to La Trobe’s successful bid for the Centre, one of the three Australian-based European Union Centres opened at Federation Square on July 31 by European Union ambassador Bruno Julien.

IUEU Centre Director, Dr Philip Bull, says the core unit in La Trobe’s Bachelor’s degree course in Contemporary European Studies – and a popular second and third year unit for other students – will now be taught in all six universities involved in the Centre: in the lead institutions La Trobe and Macquarie Universities, as well as Griffith, Newcastle, Flinders and Murdoch Universities.

Dr Bull says this will be the first time in Australian tertiary education that a subject from one university will be taught in other universities.

He also announced the appointment of prize-winning author and academic Dr Stefan Auer, from the Dublin European Institute, University College, Dublin, for whom the EU subject will be a primary teaching responsibility.

Dr Auer is the author of Liberal Nationalism in Central Europe, published by Routledge in 2004 and recently republished in paperback. He takes up his appointment in October.

Dr Bull says the EU subject has also achieved recognition outside the University, among EU and other diplomats for generating better informed opinion about the EU.

Ambassador Julien said there were now 22 such EU centres in the world – in the US, Canada, Japan, Korea, New Zealand and Australia.

‘The initiative is designed to reinforce and broaden links between the EU and the host country, to inform and stimulate debate on the European Union, and to widen and deepen the relationship at all levels.

‘Centres such as these are ideally placed to encourage informed discussion on bilateral and international issues in which we – Australia and the European Union – play an important role.’

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The fact that an animal’s remains are found in your hearth doesn’t mean you’ve made a meal of it…. That, at any rate, was the theory of La Trobe University archaeology researcher, Jacqui Duncan.

Five years later, armed with the results of new field excavations at Lake Menindee and expert archaeological dating by University of Melbourne colleague, Dr Matt Cupper, the two scientists announced their evidence at a news conference held at the Museum of Melbourne at the start of Science Week.

Their controversial conclusions suggest that prehistoric humans might not have been responsible for the extinction of Australia’s giant marsupials some 50,000 years ago – creatures like the diprotodon weighing up to 2.5 tonnes or the giant kangaroo, a metre taller than today’s largest ‘big reds’.

Instead, they argue that starvation brought about by arid climates of the last ice age was a likely cause, casting doubt on the more popular alternative hypothesis which blames human hunters.

Ms Duncan says the archaeological site of the new research is a set of dunes at Lake Menindee, on the Darling River in NSW, called ‘Sunset Strip’.

‘The site, originally discovered in the 1930s, contains an extensive record of human occupation including hearths, human burials, middens, and stone scatters.

‘It also contains the remains of twelve extinct megafaunal species including five species of sthenurine or short-faced kangaroos, giant wombats, three large macropodines, marsupial “lions” and Diprotodons.’

This site was re-excavated by Ms Duncan in 2001 as part of her Masters research in archaeology. Dr Cupper conducted geomorphological investigations and dated the dune deposits that contained the megafaunal and cultural remains. The research was funded by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.

‘Our aim was to determine whether human hunting or climate change caused the extinction of the megafauna at this site,’ Ms Duncan explains.

‘During the excavation a hearth – or ancient fireplace – was uncovered that contained the remains of a giant kangaroo-like marsupial, implying that humans cooked and consumed this megafaunal species.

‘Despite the discovery of this evidence, it is possible that the megafaunal bones are a secondary deposit, and that they are older than the hearth.

‘It may be that around 45,000 years ago people were camping on a dune which contained just below the surface 10,000 year old bones and when they dug the hearth, these ancient bones became mixed up with the hearth.

‘We determined that there is no evidence of humans butchering the marsupials. People were not even at the scene, with the oldest evidence of humans at the site at least 10,000 years after the giant mammals went extinct.

‘This seems likely because all of the other evidence uncovered during our investigation suggests that megafauna died of starvation from drought caused by climate change at around 55,000 years ago.

‘The results from this investigation also demonstrate that the human antiquity of the site extends to around 45,000 years ago, making it the oldest archaeological site in the Darling River region.’

Ms Duncan says while the finding that drought is the most likely cause of the giant marsupial deaths at Lake Menindee is significant, further research needs to be done at other sites ‘to confirm the real culprits of the continent-wide extinction of Australia’s megafauna’.

The study was published in the August issue of the international journal Quaternary Research.
ONCE UPON a time – around 2,400 BC – a few dozen people set up the small village of Marki on the island of Cyprus.

They survived on their cereal crops and livestock – harvesting wheat and barley, raising sheep, cattle, donkeys, goats and pigs, and hunting deer – and engaged in mining and processing local copper.

With an average life-span of thirty to forty years, most village women died before their first grandchild was born.

Yet these early Bronze Age people lived in congenial style, in well-constructed houses of stone and mudbrick, within large communal courtyards – the social centerpiece of village life, where families congregated en famille or with other families from neighbouring houses.

There were relationships of kinship and friendship between the villagers of Marki and neighbouring settlements, but over the next few hundred years, as their population expanded, the villagers’ lives became increasingly complex.

Where once several families baked bread in a common courtyard, individual families now retreated to their own hearths. They stored their grain in jars and bins inside their houses, instead of communal storage facilities, and many villagers began making their own pottery in preference to bringing it in from larger centres nearby.

Relationships became more formal, households exhibited increasingly more need for privacy, and the sharing of resources within and between households diminished.

Gradually the village itself changed shape. Originally a small and close-knit community of several households linked by open courtyards, Marki soon acquired the accoutrements of greater sophistication. Rectilinear, more individualised architecture and walled courtyards with doorways ensured greater household privacy, while an increasingly dense network of village streets and laneways controlled access between the houses.

By about 2000 BC the centre of the village had shifted. An egalitarian, community-oriented way of life had succumbed to village hierarchies and newly-evolved concepts of property ownership, wealth, and inter-generational inheritance: reflected particularly in the two biggest compounds, which appear to have survived intact across ten generations. By the middle of the Bronze Age, this thriving village had been deserted – no longer able to sustain itself, or perhaps caught up in a wider migration towards bigger regional centres.

We know these things about Marki because La Trobe archaeologists Drs David Frankel and Jenny Webb and 150 student volunteers have spent ten winters interrogating the archaeological clues the
villagers left behind – the pottery sherds, human and animal bones, broken jewellery, chunks of village walls, and other detritus of their daily lives over 500 years and 20 generations of occupation.

We know the social and economic status of the householders, the size of their households, the structural, social and economic relationship of each household to the next, and even quite intimate details about relationships within households – across five centuries.

If there’s a voyeuristic element to such intense domestic focus, that’s quintessentially the Frankel-Webb style: Dr Frankel calls it ‘household archaeology’, and Dr Webb describes it as ‘putting people back into the landscape’.

It translates to a forensic examination of domestic tools, technologies and practices in order to understand the relationships and behavioural patterns behind them – including the mechanisms for transferring cultural knowledge and skills from one generation to the next.

The result is an intimate profile of village life in the early Bronze Age – revealing not only how life was lived in this village, but new insights into a much wider slice of ancient history.

According to the archaeologists, Marki was one of a small but tightly integrated set of villages on Cyprus historically identified by their ‘Philia’ culture – a distinct, short-lived cultural system that emerged during the transition from the Late Chalcolithic era to the Early Bronze Age.

Marki is the only site providing Philia artefacts from both settlement and burials, affording a unique opportunity for archeologists to look beyond the objects to the tightly networked cultural system that produced them.

What they found informs the final chapters of their 15-year ARC-funded study of the Early and Middle Bronze Age on Cyprus – now consolidated in the massive second volume of their groundbreaking study – the 750-page Marki Alonia: An Early and Middle Bronze Age Settlement in Cyprus: Excavations 1995-2000 published in Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology by Paul ASTRÖMS FÖRLAG, Såvedalen, Sweden, 2006. The volume includes a DVD which contains all the primary documentation and an extensive visual archive of the site and artifacts.

In the first part of the project (published as ‘Marki 1’ in 1996, after three excavation seasons), Frankel and Webb argued that Anatolian migrants rather than any internal events introduced metallurgy and other Bronze Age customs and technologies to Cyprus.

They have reinforced that argument in ‘Marki 2’ with new evidence from the suite of behaviourally-based research methodologies developed in situ over five further excavations, between 1995 and 2000. As in all good stories, however, the Marki narrative has many threads, and running through both volumes of the Marki tale is another original version of Cypriot pre-history: one side of a compelling story of the coming together of ancient cultures.

The interaction between them was not what recent history has taught us to expect. Measured against more recent colonizations, the arrival of Anatolian peoples in Cyprus at the beginning of the Bronze Age might easily be seen as an invitation to conflict. Yet – on the evidence from Marki and other sites – these settler and indigenous groups lived side by side, pursuing two different ways of life.

‘Within 100 to 200 years, there was no trace of the Chalcolithic way of life. Everybody on the island was archaeologically Bronze Age,’ Dr Frankel says.

Marki 1 and 2 constitute an in-depth study of one of those groups – a Bronze Age settler community – at the onset of the Bronze Age. The authors have already embarked on their next big story: what it was like on the other side. That project – involving the excavation of a Chalcolithic settlement in the same region – will begin in earnest in 2007.

A fundamental contribution

A SITE REPORT such as Marki Alonia is a fundamentally important outcome of archaeological excavation. This book makes contributions in three ways. As a primary document presenting evidence it will be used as a source for generations of archaeologists in the future. As a contribution to archaeological methodology, it introduces new approaches to analysis and explanation. The broader interpretations change and significantly enhance our understanding of the past.
LA TROBE UNIVERSITY has taken over research on muttonbirds, or Short-tailed Shearwaters, in Bass Strait, nearly 60 years after it began.

The work is being led by the Marine Ornithology Group in the Department of Environmental Management and Ecology at the Albury-Wodonga campus.

Formerly a joint project with the Tasmanian Department of Parks, Wildlife and Heritage, it is the world’s longest, continuous study of a wild vertebrate. It was started by famous Australian ornithologist, the late Dr Dominic Serventy of the CSIRO, in 1947.

Conservation biologist and head of La Trobe’s Marine Ornithology Group, Dr Catherine Meathrel, has been working on seabirds in Bass Strait since 1988.

In addition to her muttonbird research, Dr Meathrel and her team of Honours and PhD students and local Aboriginal assistants have been working on the rare Pacific Gull over the last seven years, in the Furneaux Group of islands.

An attempt in 1993 to have Pacific Gulls – Australia’s only large native gulls – listed as ‘threatened’ failed as a consequence of the lack of information about this species.

Dr Meathrel is anxious to compile enough information about the Pacific Gull to have it placed on the endangered species list. It is one of 48 species of seagull worldwide, about one third of which are endangered.

Her group is studying various aspects of the birds’ breeding biology and ecology and Dr Meathrel hopes soon to initiate research on Pacific Gulls and other seabirds

that breed on Goose Island, including Little (Fairy) Penguins and Sooty Oystercatchers.

Goose Island is one of the more remote islands in the Furneaux Group of islands, near Flinders Island, in Bass Strait. It is an elongated granite island of about 109 hectares. The northern end has spectacular large boulders, the shoreline is indented with deep gullies and occasional beaches while the south-western coastline has spectacular bays and headlands.

A lighthouse, rock walls, foundations of buildings, and graves of deceased lighthouse keepers are at the southern end.

Dr Meathrel spends five months a year, from November to March, on Great Dog Island in the Furneaux Group. Last October, PhD student Dr Bruce Robertson began detailed research of Pacific Gulls nesting on Goose Island, in a Tasmanian Conservation area, while Dr Meathrel conducted her mutton bird research 40 nautical miles away.

Dr Robertson, above, spent three and a half months on Goose Island studying the gulls over the breeding season, banding more than 500 chicks. A retired Warragul veterinary surgeon, Dr Robertson is now researching the gulls for his PhD, after having spent nearly 30 years studying them as an amateur.

Drs Meathrel and Robertson have also supervised the construction of a hut on Goose Island to accommodate up to four researchers. Life there will be more comfortable than in the small, 100 year old mutton-birders’ hut Dr Meathrel uses on Great Dog Island. In February 2005, 100 kph winds blew off part of the roof and one of the walls.

Dr Meathrel says little is known about the Pacific Gull and only two academic papers – one of them by Dr Robertson – have been written on this species. She says there may be five distinct populations in Australia, one of which is centred around the Bass Strait Islands.

She says Dr Robertson’s research has revealed that there remain only about 8,800 Pacific Gulls and the fact that they are in distinct populations may make their plight even worse.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature stipulates any bird species which has less than 10,000 individuals is in danger of extinction within 10 generations.

To demonstrate they are endangered, Dr Meathrel says you have to prove two things: that they are decreasing in numbers, and that their range is declining.

‘Because of the lack of research in the past, we are unable to show they are declining. So we have much work to do. We are sure our work will make a major contribution to the knowledge-base about seabirds.’
Why education often fails Indigenous students – but there is Hope for the future

Research that examines the history and practice of education for Indigenous students in Australia and its widespread failure to meet their needs – and suggests ways to incorporate new forms of learning for them – is the subject of a new book by La Trobe University’s Raymond Nichol.

Titled Socialisation, Land and Citizenship Among Aboriginal Australians: Reconciling Indigenous and Western Forms of Education, it has been published by the Edwin Mellen Press, New York. The book is being distributed in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe, and Australia.

Mr Nichol, a senior lecturer in Education, played a significant role in developing Indigenous education programs and resources at the Bendigo campus.

Head of Education at Bendigo, Professor Vaughan Prain, says the book offers ‘insights into the Aboriginal experience of Australian education which has largely been unacknowledged’. The author argues that culturally appropriate education for people of Indigenous descent is not a privilege – it is a fundamental right.

The book explores Indigenous Australian education, particularly over the last thirty years, and suggests ways to reconcile dominant western and Indigenous forms of education.

It is based on an ethnographic case study and wide-ranging consultation with Indigenous Australians.

The book has been hailed for the way in which it traces the history of an Aboriginal community from pre-contact times to the present, detailing its social structure, relationships, education and rituals prior to European contact.

One reviewer described it as ‘a most useful account of the social processes that produced the existing situation in which a large proportion of the Aboriginal population lack the motivation, skills and power to effect changes in their lives.’

Mr Nichol says he hopes the book will increase understanding of the context of education for Aboriginal students and their communities.

‘It aims to provide insight and directions for students, educators and those in allied professions, particularly in Indigenous studies, Indigenous education and health, and community development courses.’

Equally, he says non-Indigenous people have much to learn from the Indigenous world. ‘However Indigenous knowledge and methods of learning are often ignored or discounted by metropolitan, industrial societies.’

Mr Nichol says the book and his research, on which it was based, have attracted interest around the world for their relevance and comparative insights.

Professor Rob Gilbert, from Queensland’s James Cook University, notes in the preface: ‘Combining the careful eye of the historian, the analytical techniques of the anthropologist, and the educator’s appreciation of people’s potential, the author creates a detailed picture which should be read by all interested in the education of minorities dispossessed by dominant cultures.

‘The approach taken here ensures that the work is significant not only for an Australian audience, but for anyone wishing to understand the experience of First Nations peoples in this globalised age … the book derives insights and recommendations which offer positive directions for the future, and which will be of enormous benefit to educators everywhere.’
Despite common assumptions – and some scientific studies – linking footwear to impaired balance in elderly people, a new study by La Trobe researchers suggests their footwear may not be to blame for their increased risk of experiencing a fall.

According to the new study, there is no podiatry profession in Japan, so they were particularly keen to learn about it,’ he said.

But don’t blame the shoes

D

espite common assumptions – and some scientific studies – linking footwear to impaired balance in elderly people, a new study by La Trobe researchers suggests their footwear may not be to blame for their increased risk of experiencing a fall.

Older people apparently are more at risk of falling indoors when they walk around in their socks or are barefoot.

Taking podiatry to Japan: Dr Menz and interpreter, Yoetsu Ogata, prepare for a recent conference at Hirosaki University. Dr Menz spoke about his research into falls and balance – and the profession of podiatry. ‘There is no podiatry profession in Japan, so they were particularly keen to learn about it,’ he said.

According to the new study, there is no evidence that structural variations in footwear make any difference to the incidence of elderly people falling, whether they are indoors or out.

These are the surprising results of a one-year study of 176 people aged 62 to 96 living in a Melbourne retirement village, aimed at comparing the different characteristics of footwear worn by elderly people prone to falling with those who are not.

The study – Footwear Characteristics and Risk of Indoors and Outdoor Falls in Older People, by Hylton Menz (with Meg Morris and Stephen Lord) – was published in the latest issue of the international journal, Gerontology.

By closely monitoring the kind of footwear worn indoors and outdoors by 56 men and 120 women – and their incidence of falling – the authors of the study were able to compare the variations in footwear between elderly people who fell and those who didn’t.

The result: whatever the conditions or circumstances, and no matter what variations in shoe type – whether the height of the heel, the flex in the sole, the fit, or the fixing (shoe laces, Velcro, zipper, straps, buckle, or none) – there were no significant differences between older people who did and did not fall during the 12 month follow-up period. Of the 176 participants, 50 (or 29 per cent) fell indoors and 36 (21 per cent) fell outdoors, and those who fell indoors were more likely to have fallen while barefoot or wearing socks.

These results defy many earlier studies which have implicated variations in footwear as a contributing factor to falls and fall-related fractures among the elderly. But they confirm at least two previous studies identifying a six to 10-fold increase in risk among old people walking around indoors in bare feet, socks, stockings or other sole-less footwear.

The chief investigator of the study, Dr Menz – a National Health and Medical Research Council’s Australian Clinical Research Fellow in the Musculoskeletal Research Centre at La Trobe’s School of Physiotherapy – says this study breaks new ground in comparing the footwear characteristics between ‘fallers’ and ‘non-fallers’, and assessing these separately according to whether the falls occurred indoors or outdoors.

The study had also excluded from its final analysis any indoor falls that occurred among elderly people accessing their shower or bath, to ensure the data on falls associated with people not wearing shoes was not erroneously inflated.

‘The main implications for preventing falls is that there may be some value in recommending that older people wear shoes where possible inside the home, rather than going barefoot or wearing only socks,’ Dr Menz said.

‘Our results do not provide any guidance for recommending one style of shoe over another to prevent falls.’

Taking podiatry to Japan: Dr Menz and interpreter, Yoetsu Ogata, prepare for a recent conference at Hirosaki University. Dr Menz spoke about his research into falls and balance – and the profession of podiatry. ‘There is no podiatry profession in Japan, so they were particularly keen to learn about it,’ he said.
What is the best kind of footwear insert to treat plantar fasciitis – a nasty foot condition that can feel like a hot knife being driven into your heel, and afflicts up to 100,000 Australians every year?

La Trobe University senior lecturer and research coordinator in the Department of Podiatry, Dr Karl Landorf, has come up with an answer that has surprised many members of the podiatry profession.

His recently completed PhD research on plantar fasciitis found little difference in the beneficial effects of expensive, individually designed orthoses in the form of footwear inserts (insoles) compared to a ‘standard’ prefabricated off-the-shelf insert.

‘This finding was quite unexpected and surprised some members of the podiatry profession,’ said Dr Landorf who joined La Trobe last year.

His research findings were recently published in the journal *Archives of Internal Medicine*. One of the top eight medical journals in the world, it has a print circulation to over 100,000 physicians in more than 75 countries.

Dr Landorf’s investigation of 135 patients with plantar fasciitis took two and a half years to complete, and he says it was the most thorough and extensive ever conducted.

He explains that plantar fasciitis, which affects the heel, is an inflammation of the plantar fascia, a band of strong tissue that supports the arch of the foot. An estimated 70,000 to 100,000 Australians seek treatment for this condition each year, many of them experiencing severe pain, particularly when they first step out of bed in the morning.

‘The longer sufferers are on their feet, the more intense the pain becomes, making this an extremely difficult affliction for people like shop staff and others who spend their working day on their feet,’ he said.

‘This condition often puts people in a Catch 22 situation. People are usually about 40-60 years of age when they develop this condition – the age when they are often starting to put on weight. Many are advised to walk to counteract their potential weight problem – but cannot do so because of the pain from their plantar fasciitis.

‘While podiatrists have for many years prescribed footwear inserts for plantar fasciitis – and some research has been done on them in the past – nobody had ever carried out such a rigorous randomised trial evaluating their effectiveness. Further, previous research had only investigated the effectiveness of footwear inserts in the short term up to three months,’ he said.

After attracting 135 people with plantar fasciitis by advertising in local papers, Dr Landorf randomly allocated each participant to wear one of three types of orthoses for 12 months.

One group received a ‘sham’ orthosis – an insert of material so soft it quickly flattened and had little if any effect. A second group received a standard, relatively inexpensive off-the-shelf device and the third received an orthosis specifically designed (customised) for them after analysis of their feet. The subjects were unaware which type they had received.

The trial found that in the long-term (12 months) there was no difference in effectiveness between all three orthoses. However, for the first three months both the customised and prefabricated devices produced small but significant benefits compared to the sham orthosis.

‘So there is a short-term benefit from appropriately designed foot orthoses. However, on average there was no difference in effectiveness between the relatively cheap prefabricated device and the more expensive customised orthosis used in our study, even up to 12 months of treatment,’ he said.

Dr Landorf said there were significant cost differences between the customised and prefabricated orthoses. Therefore, if orthoses are deemed necessary for the treatment of plantar fasciitis, practitioners should prescribe an appropriate prefabricated orthosis first, rather than a more expensive customised device.

‘Fortunately there is a natural course in the progress of plantar fasciitis as it normally gets better over time. It usually lasts about 6-12 months, but can be longer or shorter for some patients. Nevertheless, the need for cost-effective pain relief in the short-term is critical, and this research has made a significant contribution to this,’ he added.
La Trobe University biochemist, Associate Professor Michael Ryan, has won the 2006 Roche Medal for outstanding achievement in biochemistry or molecular biology. Dr Ryan and his 12 member research laboratory in the Department of Biochemistry focus on mitochondrial biogenesis.

He says mitochondria are the ‘powerhouse’ of cells – essential for cell viability. Mitochondrial defects are associated with diseases ranging from heart, liver and kidney problems to neurological disorders.

The production of mitochondria requires the constant synthesis of specific proteins. Dr Ryan studied a family of proteins, known as molecular chaperones, for his PhD at La Trobe in the early 1990s under the supervision of Professors Peter Høj and Nicholas Hoogenraad, and later at the University of Adelaide.

In 1997 he won an Alexander von Humboldt Research Fellowship and led a research group at the Institute for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology in Freiburg, Germany, where his research focused on the import of proteins into mitochondria in yeast.

Dr Ryan also leads the Biology Group in the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Coherent X-ray Science.

Pro Vice-Chancellor Research, Professor Erich Weigold, in congratulating Dr Ryan, noted that PhD graduates of La Trobe’s Department of Biochemistry have now won this award twice in the last three years.

The 2004 medal went to Dr Trevor Lithgow, who also trained in the Hoogenraad laboratory. A former lecturer at La Trobe, Dr Lithgow now works in the Department of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology at the University of Melbourne.

Professor Peter Høj also won this award in 1992 while in the Department of Biochemistry at La Trobe. He later moved to the University of Adelaide and is now Chair of the Australian Research Council. A recent member of the Department, Federation Fellow Professor David Vaux, also won the Roche medal in 2000.

Professor Weigold said the Roche Medal wins helped highlight the University’s strength in biochemical and biomedical research, which has developed under Foundation Professor of Biochemistry, Bruce Stone, and continues through the leadership of the current Head of the School of Molecular Sciences, Professor Nicholas Hoogenraad.

The School attracts more than $4 million in outside research grants annually. It offers Medical Sciences and Chemical Science degrees, an immunology subject – and a new Medicinal Chemistry course, informed by its research effort, is being developed.

Dr Ryan will receive his medal and give a plenary lecture at the 1000-delegate ‘ComBio’ Australian Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology combined conference in Brisbane on 26 September.

LA TROBE UNIVERSITY philosopher, Associate Professor Janna Thompson, has received a prestigious Eureka Prize – one of Australia’s leading awards for science and science communication.

Dr Thompson’s win was for her book Taking Responsibility for the Past (Polity Press) and other publications on this subject.

She received the $10,000 Australian Catholic University Eureka Prize for Research in Ethics for explaining why members of societies have responsibilities for the deeds of their predecessors and what they ought to do in reparation for historical injustices.

The result is a theory that deals with central issues in political ethics which has implications for policy making in Australia.

Dr Thompson teaches environmental ethics, feminism, political philosophy, and her major research deals with intergenerational justice and global justice.

She has spent the last three years as head of an ARC Special Research Centre dealing with applied philosophy and public ethics based at the University of Melbourne.

Dr Thompson says her work in applied ethics arises from a conviction that it is important for philosophers to critically assess the values of their society and to participate in debates about important public issues.

Some of these issues are: what historical obligations do we inherit from our family, community or nation? Are we responsible for the sins of our
Historian Dr Richard Broome was short-listed in the non-fiction category for his book, * Aboriginal Victorians: A History Since 1800*. It was cited as ‘an important and timely contribution to our understanding of frontier conflict and race relations at a local level.’

‘Based on impressive scholarship, it offers a brave and compassionate analysis of Aboriginal survival in the face of changing government policies of segregation and assimilation,’ the judges noted.

In the Queensland Premier’s Awards, David Corlett has made the shortlist for his book *Following Them Home: The Fate of the Returned Asylum Seekers*, in the section for advancing public debate. The book is based on his La Trobe PhD thesis, supervised by Professor of Politics, Robert Manne.

And to complete the La Trobe east-coast trifecta in Premiers’ literary awards, Head of Chisholm College, Terry Collits, earlier this year won the $15,000 biennial prize for literary scholarship in the New South Wales Premier’s Literary Awards for his book *Postcolonial Conrad: Paradoxes of Empire*, on Joseph Conrad, one of the most important and debated western novelists of the 20th century.

### ABR - La Trobe Annual Lecture

The Australian Book Review - La Trobe University Annual Lecture – a literary event held in three states – this year featured Ian Donaldson, Director of the ANU’s Humanities Research Centre.

The lecture, ‘Matters of Life and Death: The Return of Biography’ examined some of the forces behind the resurgence of interest in biography, and recent examples of the genre.

Professor Donaldson is consultant editor for *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* and a general editor of *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, due for publication in twenty-five volumes in 2007, and is completing a life of Jonson for OUP.

The lecture was held on La Trobe’s main Melbourne campus at Bundoora, at the National Library, Canberra, and travels to the Art Gallery of South Australia in Adelaide on Sunday, October 8.

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**Students win EU awards**

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LA TROBE students Ella Bourke and Heidi Werner have won two EU prizes, presented to them by Ambassador Julien at the official opening of the Centre.

Ms Werner chose to study the European Union at La Trobe as part of her languages, business and cultural studies degree at the University of Passau, Germany, during her compulsory semester abroad under the Study Abroad program.

As a European, she was already familiar with EU history, but did not understand how it worked – or why its member states sometimes collaborated and sometimes found themselves at loggerheads.

‘I had a very idealistic view on the EU feeling that it should be a supranational organisation shaped by cooperation among the member states rather than a platform for intergovernmental bargaining.’

She selected her major essay topic *A Critical Evaluation of the Common Agricultural Policy from its origin to EU enlargement in 2004* ‘because the CAP is – due to its economic irrationality – one of the most controversial EU policies, permanently causing fights among the member states.

‘It is a good example of intergovernmental bargaining, for in this matter the European nations – the net contributors on the one hand and the main beneficiaries on the other – try to pursue their own interests instead of coming to agreements that suit both groups.’

Ms Bourke, in the third year of a Bachelor of Laws/Bachelor of International Relations degree, undertook the EU topic as part of her broader interest in global governance.

Her essay also dealt with obstacles standing in the way of a treaty to establish a constitution for Europe.

Both students want to work eventually in the international or multilateral arena.
LA TROBE UNIVERSITY this year sponsored the Melbourne Writers’ Festival opening Keynote Address at the Melbourne Town Hall. It was delivered by internationally acclaimed scientist, explorer, conservationist and author, Tim Flannery.

Professor Flannery spoke about climate change at a session chaired by ABC Radio National’s Robyn Williams.

Ten members of La Trobe University took part in the Festival. And one of the Festival’s major overseas guests, Bolivian writer, Edmundo Paz Soldán, brought a segment of the Festival to the main Melbourne campus at Bundoora.

A leading figure in the urban, pop culture realist Latin American literary movement known as ‘McOnDo’, Paz Soldán gave a talk on recent trends in Latin American literature, chaired by La Trobe Spanish scholar and Deputy Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences, Dr Lilit Thwaites.

Dr Thwaites describes Paz Soldán as an important new voice in world literature. He has won the National Book Award in Bolivia and divides his time between Bolivia and the USA, where he is an academic at Cornell. He has written six novels – including The Matter of Desire and, Turing’s Delirium, recently translated into English – and four short story collections, as well as co-editing two collections of scholarly essays.

Vice-Chancellor, Professor Brian Stoddart, said La Trobe was delighted to sponsor the Festival’s opening session.

‘Following the recent publication of Reflected Light: La Trobe Essays by Black Inc., this is a further way to highlight the role the University plays as a principal centre for public intellectuals.

‘We are building on our previous strong support for this Festival, as well as for other major cultural, artistic and literary events in Melbourne and regional Victoria.’

Another focus of the Festival involved La Trobe History scholar and ‘Summiteer’, Dr John Hirst, author of Sense and Nonsense in Australian History. He chaired a conversation with Geoffrey Blainey – as well as the Festival’s controversial closing night ‘The Last Word’ debate on ‘Stolen Generation or hijacked history?’ This was the long-awaited debate between Professor Manne and Melbourne journalist, Andrew Bolt.

Other La Trobe authors at the Festival included multi-award winning Australian author, Emeritus Scholar Dr Inga Clendinnen, whose latest book is Agamemnon’s Kiss; Professor Marilyn Lake, who is working on biographies of Australian Federal fathers, HB Higgins, Alfred Deakin, Edmund Barton and WM Hughes; Dr Richard Broome, who specialises in the history of Aboriginal Victorians; Adjunct Professor and media commentator, Morag Fraser; Media scholar, Dr Sue Turnbull; historian Dr Corinne Manning, co-author (with Richard Broome) of the recent biography of Melbourne Aboriginal activist, Alick Jackomos; and anthropologist Sally Warhaft, editor of Well May We Say: the Speeches that made Australia and The Monthly magazine.

Dr Thwaites with Edmundo Paz Soldán on the Bundoora campus.

Robert Manne, left, and Andrew Bolt answer questions at the Writers’ Festival.

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Trifecta in Premiers’ literary prizes

WORKS BY La Trobe University authors have been short-listed in Premiers’ literary awards in all three mainland eastern states this year.

Professor of Politics, Judith Brett’s ‘Quarterly’ Essay, Relaxed and Comfortable: The Liberal Party’s Australia was shortlisted for the Victorian Premier’s Literary Awards for ‘an essay advancing public debate’.

The judges described it as a ‘subtle and persuasive essay (that) identifies

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