



AIATSIS
Australian Institute of Aboriginal
and Torres Strait Islander Studies

MEDIA RELEASE

Further understanding of Australian Indigenous cultures, past and present through undertaking and publishing research, and providing access to print and audiovisual collections

80-year-old archived material valued by Kimberley visitors

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A four-person group from the remote Kimberley communities in the Fitzroy Valley visited the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) last week to work with the field notes, genealogies, maps and photographs recorded over 80 years ago by anthropologist Phyllis Kaberry.

The group – three Gooniyandi people and one Walmajarri person – were Jimmy Shandley, Marminjiya Joy Nuggett, Lillian Chestnut and Russell Topliss – accompanied by the Australian trustee of the Dr Phyllis Kaberry Collection, Professor Sandy Toussaint from the University of Western Australia.

Developed as a collaborative project with the group, including Topsy Chestnut, a senior Gooniyandi woman who was unable to travel at the last moment due to illness, Professor Toussaint described the visit as a ‘significant moment for everyone.’

“Family members were able to draw on their knowledge of ancestors, as well as known places and events, and combine this with information recorded 80 years ago by Kaberry.”

“Our work shows the intrinsic value of collaboration over time, and the importance of Aboriginal people themselves having direct access to documented material from the past,” Professor Toussaint said.

“Marminjiya and Jimmy were impressed with a series of field notes, genealogies and maps, and Russell, Lillian’s son and Topsy’s grandson, was very happy to find information about his family history.”

Professor Toussaint added that Lillian had found photographs in the larger AIATSIS Collection of her mother as a young woman. Given the circumstances, Lillian and Russell were able to take home to Topsy photocopied material, and stories about the information they found.

“It is wonderful that Kaberry’s field notes and genealogies – and maps and photographs – are preserved as part of the substantial collection of archival and contemporary material held at AIATSIS.

“For descendants to be able to look at field notes and see photographs helps enormously with family histories, continuing family ties, and associated concerns such as native title issues. We have all worked very hard interpreting the material, and it was a long trip here – and it’s a long trip back – but everyone has made plain that the trip has been very worthwhile,” Sandy Toussaint said.