



## Berndt Field Notes Archive

The Berndt Field Notes Archive is held by the Berndt Museum. After 30 years under embargo, the Museum is pleased to be working with Indigenous and descendant communities to access materials containing cultural knowledge.

The Berndt Museum is an Indigenous-led museum, embedded within the University's [Indigenous Portfolio](#). We follow a community-focused model of custodianship and seek to engage with communities around the cultural care of their heritage and materials. We are active in the repatriation of belongings, objects, works of art and cultural knowledge. The University's [Research Integrity Policy](#) follows the [AIATSIS Code of Ethics](#), recognising Indigenous people's rights to access, maintain and control, and benefit from their [Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property](#).

Compiled by anthropologists Ronald and Catherine Berndt from approximately 1939 to 1985, the Berndt Field Notes Archive details their field trips in Australia and Papua New Guinea. The field notes contain cultural information and, in some cases, sacred knowledge for many communities visited by the anthropologists.

Catherine Berndt endowed the field notes to The University of Western Australia in her will in 1994, placing them under a 30-year embargo until 13 May 2024. This lack of access has caused significant pain to many Indigenous peoples and communities, and it is important that communities are now able to regain access to their cultural knowledge. We are currently undertaking a community-led process for culturally determined access.

### What communities and locations were visited?

The following table outlines the locations and communities visited by the Berndts over a more than 40-year period. Locations are segmented by state, with approximately 70 locations visited.

**Disclaimer:** As current Museum staff have not had access to the field notes, we acknowledge that this is not an exhaustive list and will be updated regularly as the notes are reviewed in tandem with communities. Locations are listed as originally recorded with updated spelling or naming in brackets.

State	Location	Years visited by the Berndts
New South Wales	Menindee	1943
	Woy Woy	1940
Northern Territory	Adelaide River	1945, 1946
	Alice Springs	1944, 1945, 1946
	Arnhem Land	1961
	Bagot	1945, 1946
	Bathurst Island	1946, 1947
	Birrindudu	1944, 1945
	Croker Island	1946, 1966, 1968
	Daly River	1945, 1946
	Daly Waters	1945, 1946, 1947

	Darwin	1945
	Delissaville	1946
	Elcho Island	1947, 1949, 1950, 1958, 1966, 1968
	Ernabella (Pukatja)	1944
	Gordon Downs (Nicholson/Flora Downs) (WA/NT)	1945
	Goulburn Islands	1946, 1947, 1950, 1961, 1964
	Groote (Eylandt)	1947
	Helen Springs	1944
	Inverway	1944
	Katherine	1945
	Koolpinyah	1945
	Larrimah	1945
	Limbunya	1944, 1945
	Manbulloo	1945
	Marrakai	1945
	Mataranka	1945
	Melville Island (Yermalner)	1946
	Milingimbi	1946, 1950
	Oenpelli (Gunbalanya)	1947, 1949, 1950, 1958, 1966, 1968
	Port Keats (Wadeye)	1947
	Waterloo	1944
	Wave Hill (Kalkarindji)	1944, 1945
	Wave Hill Police Station	1944
	Willeroo	1945
	Woolner	1945
	Yirkala	1946, 1947, 1958, 1964, 1968
South Australia	Adelaide	1942, 1943, 1944, 1940
	Dieri	1941
	Lower Murray Bridge	1940
	Maitland	1944
	Meningie	1941, 1944
	Mount Gambier	1944
	Murray Bridge	1942
	Naracoorte	1944
	Ngadjuri	1940, 1942
	Oodnadatta	1944
	Ooldea (Yuldea)	1939, 1941, 1942
	Point McLeay (Raukkan)	1942, 1943
	Port Augusta	1944
	Port Victoria	1944
	Tailem Bend	1944
	Wellington	1944
Yaraldi	1939, 1940, 1943	
Western Australia	Balgo (Wirrimanu)	1958, 1960, 1969, 1973, 1981, 1985
	East Murchison	1957

	Eastern Goldfields	1957
	Gordon Downs (Nicholson/Flora Downs) (WA/NT)	1945
	Halls Creek	1962
	Roebourne (Yirramagardu)	1962
	Warburton (Milyirtjarra)	1959
	Wiluna	1957
	Wyndham	1969
Papua New Guinea	Busarasa (Pusarasa)	1953
	Goroka	1952
	Kainantu	1951, 1952
	Kamano	1952
	Kogu (Kagu)	1951, 1952, 1953
	Lae	1952
	Port Moresby	1951, 1952
	Usurufa	1952

### How to access the Berndt Field Notes Archive

The Museum will undertake community-first access approach to the field notes. We will work directly with descendant communities and their representatives, enabling communities to have control over their cultural property and to determine what wider access is culturally appropriate.

We acknowledge that most communities have never had access to this important archive of cultural material and that many of the people featured in the field notes have now passed away. As the field notes contain cultural knowledge from many different communities, we recommend reaching out to us for an initial conversation to discuss a process for accessing the materials and determining ongoing use.

### What to consider when planning consultation and access

While many notebooks speak to specific community trips, others contain information about multiple locations and/or language groups. For instance, when resources were limited the Berndts would use blank pages at the end of a notebook for another location. When possible, pages will be separated for access, but where information from multiple groups is intermixed, cross-community consultation will be required.

During their fieldwork, Ronald Berndt worked primarily with men and Catherine Berndt with women. We recognise that for the initial review the field notes will likely require differential access to ensure cultural safety, which will be determined by communities.

While we will focus on ensuring community access in the first instance, we understand that communities may wish to use external researchers or advisors to access the field notes on their behalf. We also welcome requests from research projects that are community endorsed, in which researchers have established strong, ongoing connections with community. In most instances, communities should be given the first opportunity to view the contents of the field notes to determine whether it is appropriate for external researchers to view them.

Please note that access to the field notes should be done in consultation with the relevant community/s, in line with the [AIATSIS Code of Ethics](#) and community consultation protocols. Researchers will also need to provide any relevant ethics approvals already received from research institutions.

**[Contact us](#) to arrange an initial conversation to discuss a consultation process appropriate to these different issues and considerations.**

## **What condition are the field notes in?**

Given their age and delicate condition, the original notebooks cannot be handled directly. However, they have been digitised and indexed by date, author, field trip, location and content type. A page-by-page summary of each is available upon request. Printed copies are also available.

A small percentage of the field notes have not been digitised or indexed. We will be working in collaboration with relevant communities on their digitisation.

### Legibility and transcription

The field notes are written in cursive script, in the handwriting of both Ronald and Catherine Berndt, and Arthur Capell's notation system. The notes also contain certain interpretive challenges, for instance languages might be transcribed phonetically, rather than orthographically.

The field notes will require an ongoing collaborative process for interpretation and transcription. We are able to assist communities with transcription services as needed.

## **Ways to view the field notes**

### Digitally

Digitised versions of the field notes are available. Digital access will be provided through secure channels and on the condition the material will not be distributed outside of the approved parties.

### In-person

The Museum holds vast cultural material, works of art and archival collections. These may be of great interest to communities and may relate directly to the field notes contents.

We welcome in-person visits to access the field notes and other cultural material. Please note, visits must be booked in advance to ensure we have adequate staff to assist. We recommended getting in touch about your visit at least 6–8 weeks in advance.

## **Apply for access**

Please [fill out the form](#) to arrange an initial conversation. If you have any questions or issues with the form, please give us a call on (08) 6488 2854 or email [berndt.museum@uwa.edu.au](mailto:berndt.museum@uwa.edu.au)