

Dr Peter Emmett,

Curator's pick of treasures from *200 Treasures*

1 . Tasmanian Tiger pup, *Thylacinus cynocephalus*

Extinct, Australian Museum Collection PA.762 preserved in Tasmania, 1866

This Tasmanian Tiger female pup, with distinctive long snout and body stripes, was collected and pickled in 1866 by George Masters, then Assistant Curator of the Australian Museum. This was 70 years before the last known animal died in the Hobart Zoo in 1936. The Thylacine is the most notorious example of species extinction by humans in the 20th century. The consolation of such loss is that the body of this pup has been preserved in this museum for ongoing study. Some scientists even have ambitions to clone a Tasmanian Tiger from its DNA.

2. Tindalo or carved chalk head

Chalkstone. Collected from Nggela Island, Solomon Islands, 1911

Australian Museum Collection E019217, acquired 1911

This small 'tattooed' head or Tindalo, so beautifully carved from chalkstone, embodies the spirit of a dead man who possessed great mana or power. Tindalos were owned by chiefs, warriors or sorcerers and used to exercise powers in sickness, health, love, war, fishing and fighting. It was collected by Percy Black, Chief Inspector for Burns Philp, the Australian shipping company trading in goods and labour. Like many traders, missionaries and tourists, he was an avid collector of Pacific "curios", now more respected as museum "treasures". On Nggela Island a Tindalo was traditionally placed in a sacred place associated with its spirit. Today, this Tindalo will be celebrated in the Australian Museum's Westpac Long Gallery treasure trove.

3. Captain Cook's Hawaiian 'ahu'ula or cape

Olonā fibre, feathers. Hawaii, given to Captain James Cook by chief Kalani'ōpu'u, 1778 or 1779.

Australian Museum Collection H000104, acquired 1894

This feathered cape is not only an exquisite and highly-treasured item of Hawaiian regalia but it is loaded with added significance because it was a gift from chief Kalani'opu'u to Captain Cook, on his fateful visit to Hawaii in 1778-79. With all the symbolism of the gift, it was part of the strange entanglement between Europeans and Hawaiians that unfolded so badly with Cook's death. The feathered cape, made to give physical and spiritual protection to chief Kalani'opu'u, did not protect Cook.

4. Opalised pliosaur, *Umoonasaurus demoscyllus*, nicknamed 'Eric'

Coober Pedy, South Australia, Early Cretaceous, 120–110 million years ago

Australian Museum Collection F.99374, purchased by public appeal from Comrealty, 1993.

This treasure really triggers the imagination. "Eric" the pliosaur, an aquatic carnivorous reptile, swam in a vast Australian inland sea about 110 million years ago. As the sea retreated about 10 million years later, perfect conditions were created for opal, Australia's unique national gemstone, to form - opalising Eric's bones.

5. Edward Collett's notebook

52 pen and ink drawings on paper, bound. Brungle Station, Tumut, New South Wales, 1914

Australian Museum Collection AMS459/7, purchased from T L Hubbard 1981

Australian Museum collections have many treasures to reveal the continuity of Aboriginal connection to country and custom, and for me one of the most powerful and poignant is a small notebook in the archives owned by Edward Collett, from Brungle mission, near Tumut, in 1914. His remarkable sketches straddle two worlds: some are simple repetitions of numbers, letters, fruit or fish like in a schoolbook; while others are detailed depictions of ceremonies, including what appears to be the Bogong Moth feast staged by Aboriginal people in this region for millennia.

6. Cerussite from Broken Hill

Proprietary Block 14 Mine, Broken Hill, New South Wales, Australia, before 1930

Australian Museum Collection D.32152, registered 1933

Of all the treasures in the Australian Museum minerals collection, I am drawn to the Cerussite for its spectacular quality of sparkle. No wonder it is considered the finest of its type in existence: for its long-bladed crystals formed by the chemistry of carbonated water and the mineral galena; and for its sparkle!

7. Model of a funerary boat

Wood, plaster, pigments. Egypt, Middle Kingdom (about 2055–1650 BCE)

Australian Museum Collection E060381, donated by the estate of E Wunderlich 1962

I love this boat model tomb offering more than the iconic mummy and coffin, because it represents an entire imaginary scene from Ancient Egypt - the transport of the dead to the afterlife across the Nile, guided by dog figure Anibus. Of course, like many antiquities in public and private collections, it's hard to tell what parts are original, re-purposed and faked for the centuries-old tourist market, only adding to its intrigue and story.

8. Roro feathered headdress

Feathers, cane, shell, turtle shell. Collected from Port Moresby, Central Province, Papua New Guinea, 1923

Australian Museum Collection E027490, acquired 1923

This incredible headdress exudes all the flamboyant qualities of Papuan culture and environment, and the sheer inventiveness of the adaptation of animals and plants into body adornment as celebration of the living and spirit worlds - a reflection of an intimate entanglement of nature and culture. We know the exact origin or provenance of this headdress because it was photographed by Frank Hurley being worn by its maker, when collected by Australian Museum scientist Allan McCulloch in 1923. Hurley's photograph is as much a treasure as the headdress.

9. Night Parrot (*Pezoporus occidentalis*)

Central Australia

Australian Museum Collection PA.8393, registered 1878

Australian parrots are amazing - for vibrant colours and quirky, clever food gathering. Many have that raucous larrikin Oz spirit but the night parrot is famously shy and elusive in its arid spinifex habitat. Not seen since 1912, it was thought extinct until new sightings began in 1979, making it the twitchers'; holy grail.

10. Tree-kangaroo skins, *Dendrolagus* species

Skin of Buergers' Tree-kangaroo, *Dendrolagus goodfellowi buergersi*

Australian Museum Collection M.29689

Skin of Lumholtz's Tree-kangaroo, *Dendrolagus lumholtzi* Australian Museum Collection M.9108, registered 1967

Mammalogists from the Australian Museum have contributed much to the identification and conservation of these superb mammals. Ellis Troughton described museum specimens in the 1930s, Tim Flannery explored Papuan rainforests in the 1990s and Mark Eldridge studied DNA sequences in the 2000s. This ongoing research not only reveals much about the species variety of tree kangaroos but of the ancient connections between Australia and PNG.

11. Manly mogo or stone axe Stone, wood, resin, plant fibre

Manly, Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, early 1800s

Australian Museum Collection E086449, donated 1995

This beautifully made mogo, a hafted stone axe, an essential part of man's toolkit, is a rare survivor of the Aboriginal people of the Sydney region. An Aboriginal man gave it to a young Manly girl in the 1830s and it remained in her family until donated to the Australian Museum in 1995. If it had come to the Museum before 1879, it might have been destroyed in the Garden Palace fire of 1882 like the Museum's early Aboriginal collection.

12. Morning Star Pole by Terry Dhurritjini Yumbulul (Warramiri people) Wood, ochre, string, feathers

Elcho Island, Northern Territory, Australia, 1982

Australian Museum Collection E078903, purchased from the artist 1983

The morning star ceremony demonstrates a powerful link between Aboriginal astronomy and spirituality. The morning star, Venus or Banumbirr by the Yolngu, came across the sea from the east, creating and naming animals and lands as she crossed the shoreline. The “strands” that radiate with dancing are light rays, which return souls of the dead to their resting place on the morning star. This outstanding pole, made by Warramiri man Terry Dhurritjini Yumbulul, appeared on the Australian Bicentenary \$10 note.