



Charlie Dortch

Wayne Webb & Sandra Bowdler

To cite this article: Wayne Webb & Sandra Bowdler (2014) Charlie Dortch, Australian Archaeology, 79:1, 81-82, DOI: [10.1080/03122417.2014.11682022](https://doi.org/10.1080/03122417.2014.11682022)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03122417.2014.11682022>



Published online: 17 Mar 2016.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Charlie Dortch

Wayne Webb

Pibulmun/Wadandi elder

A cousin of mine (now deceased)—a wonderful academic visionary called Michael—first introduced me to Charlie. Michael knew that I and members of my family continued to practise our traditional and cultural activities, so he introduced us to each other. Thus we met Charlie, an enthusiastic archaeologist from America's south who stutters slightly when excited—and boy could he get excited picking up stones and rocks, showing us ancient tools, giving them strange names and showing us all sorts of technical details, like percussion points, dorsal scars, flakes, quartz and chert!

He introduced us to digging holes with what I thought was a brickie's trowel, but soon learned was an archaeological tool. Deeper and deeper he would dig, coming up for air only to sieve the buckets he collected and take notes and back to it again. He reminded of us of a prairie dog, popping up in different places around the southwest. Charlie's enthusiasm soon had us hooked on what he called archaeology. As a Pibulmun/Wadandi blackfella whose life up until then had existed on common sense, the academia of it all still amuses me, but it has also provided me with great opportunities.

Charlie has enriched our lives and we have spent wonderful days at Devils Lair, Quinninup fireplaces and Mokidup (Ellensbrook), listening and learning together. Besides being honoured to know and work with Charlie, our friendship has enabled us to work with three generations of Dortchs (Charlie, Joe and Hazel) and, in return, four generations of Webbs have benefited from his teachings—Mum and Dad (deceased), myself and wife Toni, our son Zac, and our 14 year old grand-daughter Sharna, who is the latest member of our family now interested in artefact identification. It's a sort of Aboriginal/archaeological symbiosis or intergenerational Dortch and Webb interaction.

What I thank Charlie for is showing non-Aboriginal people that, in the southwest, the Pibulmun/Wadandi people lived and thrived, and helping to dispel the myth that the REAL Aboriginal people live above the 26th parallel and those of us in the southwest do not exist. He has shown respect for our boodjara (land), our people and our families, and I am sure he will be around for many more years to come. Congratulations Dr Charlie Dortch for a long overdue recognition from academia and Aboriginal Australia.

And a Suggestion from One of Our Readers: A Personal Note

Sandra Bowdler

Archaeology (M257), The University of Western Australia, 35 Stirling Highway, Crawley WA 6009, Australia <sandra.bowdler@uwa.edu.au>

My first meeting with Charlie Dortch was in 1976. I was at the time a PhD student at The Australian National University (ANU), and was working on material I had excavated on Hunter Island in northwest Tasmania. The main site I was working on was Cave Bay Cave, which at the time was one of a handful of Pleistocene sites in southern Australia with similar archaeological characteristics and problems, including Devils Lair. I was fortunate in being able to visit Western Australia (WA) while research was still being carried out at the latter site. I was met by Charlie at Perth Airport, where my first impression was the gorgeous heat, and the second was of one of the most energetic colleagues I have ever met. He kindly offered me accommodation at his home, and from the airport to Fremantle he explained to me the archaeology, geomorphology and vegetation of the Perth coastal plain, before even a mention of Devils Lair was made.

A few days at Devils Lair itself was quite a treat, and I have fond memories of sitting around a campfire with Charlie, Duncan Merrilees and Jane Balme (then a student). I also had memorable nights on Charlie's back verandah, where he produced flagons of red wine. One of them had a familiar brand name, Kaiserstuhl (Port 2009), and gradually the truth emerged ...

A then more-or-less recent letter to the journal *Mankind* (as it was then called) had been headed 'And a suggestion from one of our readers'. It was in response to an article by Grover S. Krantz, who I had thought was himself a joke, although I learnt

subsequently that he was a very serious scholar. In his paper entitled 'Cranial hair and brow ridges' (Krantz 1973) he had suggested that one of the functions of brow ridges may have been to keep the hair out of hominins' eyes; it was accompanied by appropriate selfies, with Dr Krantz decked out in artificial brow ridges. (Look it up if you don't believe this, but make sure you look at a copy in a library with the photos.)

And a Suggestion From One of Our Readers

In view of our somewhat isolated position and in order to promote a feeling of good fellowship, I have felt for some time that Australian prehistorians would benefit from having some sort of shared physical feature, rather as naval officers wear beards. Since reading an article by Grover S. Krantz in *Mankind* (December 1973), I have been intrigued with the idea of our having ourselves fitted with artificial brow ridges similar to those described by Krantz. These need not be worn on all occasions, and I am sure that they would be inappropriate much of the time. Nevertheless on purely professional occasions the attachments would be most suitable and could even be useful for providing protection from flies or sun in the field, enabling one to mask one's feelings when addressing students, and in providing welcome privacy if not relief from inflamed eyes.

I suggest that these attachments be used and if the proposal catches on we could of course elaborate on other features, perhaps on the basis of academic rank or speciality. For instance university professors, many of whom are scant of hair, could easily be fitted with sagittal crests; and museum

men, who are not required to speak often or to use difficult words or phrases, could be fitted with boxers' rubber mouthpieces in order to simulate prognathism. (But really this last is as easily induced by pressing the tongue against the inside of the upper lip.) In brief, there are a number of means by which a variety of marked effects can be produced easily and with almost no discomfort.

Wolfgang Maria Von Kaiserstuhl

Western Australia

Ms. received February 1974.

References

Grover, S.K. 1973 Cranial hair and brow ridges. *Mankind* 9:109–111.

Port, J. 2009 Last days of iconic wines. *The Age* April 7, 2009.

Retrieved 20 October 2014 from <<http://www.theage.com.au/news/entertainment/epicure/last-days-of-iconic-wines/2009/04/06/1238869893677.html>>.

Von Kaiserstuhl, W.M. 1974 Letter to the Editor. *Mankind* 9:235.