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# CAIRNS GIRL TO BECOME MUSEUM SCIENTIST

Miss Sandra McGinness, daughter of FCAATSI's Joe McGinness, began training as a museum conservator at Sydney's Australian Museum in August last year. Sandra, who comes from Cairns and now lives in Darlinghurst, has a scholarship from the Australian Council for the Arts, which enables her to study as she works.

A museum conservator is a person who uses technical and scientific techniques to preserve the

valuable collections in museums from the bad effects of humidity, temperature and light. Sandra, who is 17, has enrolled at Sydney Technical College for a science certificate and is also being trained on the job by Miss Sue Walston, who is the official conservator at the Australian Museum. Sandra McGinness got the job over other applicants because her 5 years at high school, as well as the types of subjects which she did, gave her a good grounding for the necessary extra studies she must do.

*Sandra McGinness*



Almost from the start, Sandra has been battling against mould. Last September's rain and humidity in Sydney caused mould to attack the millions of dollars worth of rare objects stored at the Australian Museum. Ever since then, Sue and Sandra have been busy with dry brushes, a vacuum cleaner and fumigators, to kill the mould and stop it from spreading. The job is so huge and so urgent, that in November two temporary assistants were hired to help with the work.

Apart from fighting the mould, Sandra is concerned with making a detailed record of the present condition of objects at the Museum. This information will be useful for comparison in later years. She is also busy making a record of the atmospheric conditions in the galleries and storage areas of the Museum, and is learning how to handle and preserve delicate objects.

As there are only three conservators in Australia so far, the field will be wide open to Sandra when she graduates. She will virtually be able to "write her own ticket". While she is concerned with every part of the Museum's collection, and not just Aboriginal objects, she is looking forward to going on field trips to Aboriginal rock carving sites in New South Wales. Sue Walston, her teacher, has a research grant from the Institute of Aboriginal Studies to find out why Aboriginal rock art deteriorates and to find out how best to remove the marks left on rock sites by vandals. It is by means of work such as this that people like Sue Walston and Sandra McGinness will help preserve the art of the old tribes for the enjoyment of Aboriginal people as yet unborn.