

TRADITION OR INVENTION: REMEMBERING AND REVIVING MEANING OF PLACES

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I would like to acknowledge the Nambia people here at Mosi Oa Tunya (Victoria Falls) and thank them for their welcome to ICOMOS earlier this week. I also dedicate this paper to colleague Pat Vinnicombe, the South African and Australian rock art specialist, who died earlier this year, working on the cause of the protection of rock art in Western Australia.

Continuity of intangible cultural values often required a tangible manifestation. This may be a place where the relationship between the physical nature of the place – its fabric and the ‘intangible’ associations with that place and the meanings that place has to a group of people have continued through time. Such associations and their cultural significance are increasingly recognised in national and international systems. For example, Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park was recognised in 1994 as World Heritage for its spiritual landscape, manifested by associated ceremony, song and dance.

Elsewhere a continuity of the relationship of intangible value and place is disrupted, often due to changes that are imposed from outside. The intangible connection to that place is at risk of breaking, and may need to be revived in order to continue. What does revival mean in terms of the authenticity and integrity of a heritage place?

This paper examines two cases in Australia where the revival of community intangible values has resulted in physical manifestations that have had mixed and contrasting receptions. The first example is that of the repainting of the Wandjina rock art sites of the Kimberley region of North West Australia in 1987 by the Indigenous community using a federal government employment fund. The second case is that of the building of a ‘replica’ mountain hut in the alpine region of North East Victoria. I have had dealings with both projects. (Figure 1 – location of both case studies)

In both cases, fabric has been altered or created as part of this cultural revival, and has raised issues relating to potential conflicts between the management of tangible and intangible values. In presenting these two cases and briefly comparing them to others elsewhere, I shall look at the possible tensions or conflicts that may arise in the management of the associations and meanings at these places.

Case Study 1 – Rock Art Repainting

The first case study is in the far north west of Australia in the extensive Kimberleys. In the wet tropics, this is an extensive area of rugged sandstone plateau dissected by rivers, remote from main population centres (distances), although increasingly it is a destination for Australian and international tourists wanting a wilderness and / or Indigenous Australian experience. For this area is not only rich in natural biodiversity but has a rich and longstanding and still vital Aboriginal culture.

I have explained aspects of the Australian Indigenous cultures in past papers at ICOMOS Scientific Symposia, which although there were 300 different language groups, do have some overall similarities in their spiritual relationship people to ‘Country’ (a term applied to the land). An Aboriginal community does not own the land, rather it ‘owns’ them, for they have a major obligation to the wellbeing of the land and the ancestral ‘Dreaming’ figures who created the land. The term ‘Dreaming’ is a poor one to describe the Aboriginal cosmological explanation of the environment. Whilst to others it may appear as a ‘natural landscape’, it is in fact a cultural landscape, for every hill, every waterhole, every feature is the result of the actions and interaction of these creator beings as they travelled through the landscape and formed it. The meanings attached to these actions are understood at many levels from stories for children, with lessons to them of behaviour of what to do or not to do – often this level is passed on to tourists – to deep philosophical lessons that are secret and sacred. These last are only revealed to initiates at various levels, and only to those with responsibility as traditional owners or custodians for the special sites and places that reveal the creation story. These custodians may be men or women and other places are special men’s or women’s sites.

Aboriginal people do not have ‘linear time’ in their culture, the ‘Dreaming’ is still living and current, and therefore dangerous to those who are not initiated in how to behave at such a sacred site. Certain rituals are required; these may include painting and repainting of some of those places to maintain the health of such a site and the creator being, who is understood to dwell within its image in the rock. (Sale 1993)

To Western scientific systems, Aboriginal people first arrived in Australia some 60,000 years ago, and archaeological and new scientific dating techniques show that repainting is a very long practice. European settlement of this area was late (late 19th century) and is still sparse – primarily for vast cattle stations.

As a result, Aboriginal customary practice was little changed until in 1967, labour laws were changed that required employers to pay Aboriginal workers – stockmen, domestic staff, drovers (men and women), crocodile and buffalo hunters the same wage as non-Aboriginal workers. Some pastoralists asked the Aboriginal to leave the cattle station as they could or would not pay them. In leaving, usually for coastal towns, they were leaving their land and were unable to fulfil their sacred duty to the ‘Country’.

One of the best known rock art styles in the Kimberley is of the *Wandjina*, representation of spirit figures, large round-eyed mouthless anthropomorphic figures with a radiating head-dress. These were first recorded by a European in 1836; they were also ‘interpreted’ by van Daniken as astronauts in his ‘fantasies’ of cultures introduced from outer space. To the local Aboriginal culture, the Ngarinyin people, they are ancestral beings that control the weather. Other figures in this rock art style, include identifiable zoomorphic and biological figures (Figure 2).

In 1987 the media headlines blazed: *ancient rock art defaced, age old culture of all mankind damaged* etc. A pastoralist had raised the alarm at the repainting of the rock art on his property (cattle station), maintaining that a federally funded employment program was used to take young people back to their original ‘Country’ to repaint their heritage rock art sites. He claimed that *young town dwellers of both sexes, without supervision, with housepaint obliterated past motifs, trivialising their significance and adding inappropriate graffiti* (Figure 3).

Although from the outset, it was understood that the pastoralist who had raised concerns about visitors preferring the ‘ancient-looking’, had interests in developing tourism to the sites himself, the federal heritage agency was obliged to investigate, as did the state heritage agency. Although the concerns were found to be largely groundless the funding was withdrawn (Bowdler 1988).

So what really did happen? As community members from the funding recipient, the Wanang Ngari Association, explain (Mowarjarli and Peck 1987:71, 72):

At a big meeting we decided that we would only re-paint sites that were faded and needed re-painting. Photographs were taken at each site before any re-painting too place. We talked to the custodians of the sites and they agreed that the re-painting should be done. An elder was present at each site when it was re-painted and told the stories about the place and showed the young people how to re-paint the sites.

Our language and our art must be shared and given to the next generation – this is how it has always been. It is not just nice to re-paint the site, it’s got to be done. You see Wandjinas have power and we must look after them so the power is used properly.

...Mostly the figures were repainted just as they were, but sometimes they where the earlier work was faded put in our own idea of what had been there before. New figures were added at two sites.

...We are proud of our effort and believe the job has been well done...

Since then although cultural revival is strong and emerging modern expressions of Ngarinyin culture in music and dance are vibrant and reflect cultural continuity, ceremony and ritual have once again lapsed.

On the other hand elsewhere in Australia, Aboriginal communities have sought to re-paint rock art, or even paint new rock art, including in areas where cultural traditions have been disrupted for more than 200 years. A strong drive for such cultural revival has been in order to provide their youth with a cultural understanding in the face of despair, high unemployment and socio-economic difficulties (see Truscott 1993)

In this case study, we see how an attempt to revive a tradition, and one that had the full community’s support, fell foul of notions held by some outsiders of how such heritage should look. Those complaints by people outside the Ngarinyin community held more sway with funding agencies and to some degree the heritage experts, many of whom were deeply divided about the re-painting, and who should decide about such matters. The Ngarinyin to whom the rock art was an important physical manifestation of culture, but even more importantly, an intangible symbol of cultural continuity, were broadly ignored. This would not be the case in Australia some 15 years later where there is a far greater acknowledgment of Indigenous intangible values and rights to self-determination about their heritage, tangible and intangible.

Case Study 2 – Craig’s Hut

The second example is at the far opposite end of Australia in the far south east of the mainland, in the alpine region, and was also presented in late November 2002 at Australia ICOMOS’ celebration of the International Year of Mountains and the International Year of Cultural Heritage (Truscott 2003). Today this is a popular recreational region of fine food and national parks, beloved for winter skiing and summer bushwalking, and more or less just out the backdoor of Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra. This area is the site of the expression of another form of intangible heritage – a legend and its expression today, known from a famous Australian poem:

*And down by Kosciusko, where the pine-clad ridges raise
Their torn and rugged battlements on high,
Where the air is clear as crystal, and the white stars fairly blaze
At midnight in the cold and frosty sky,
And where around the Overflow the reedbeds sweep and sway
To the breezes, and the rolling plains are wide,
The man from Snowy River is a household word today,
And the stockmen tell the story of his ride.*

This ballad, *The Man from Snowy River* was written by Andrew Barton Paterson – ‘Banjo’ Paterson - in 1895. The publication sold out within a week and the poem forms part of Australia’s myth and national cultural identity. It is worth noting that a legend is a *non-historical or unverifiable story handed down by tradition from earlier times and popularly accepted as historical.*

I will return to the return to the poem later, for the focus of my paper is Craig's Hut (Figure 4). Found in the Alpine National Park above Mansfield in Victoria just beyond the Mt Buller ski resort, Craig's Hut sits high on a ridge in a spectacular alpine setting with fine views of Victoria's high country and of Mount Cobbler. The hut itself is said to be a replica of a pioneer's hut.

Craig's Hut was built in 1982 as a replica of a pioneer hut for the Australian film *The Man from Snowy River*, then in a sequel film and television series. The hut was later rebuilt in 1995 as a tourist attraction. In Mansfield pictures of Craig's Hut are displayed prominently, featuring in posters in shop windows, post cards, and on the front of tourism information materials.

However, the hut is not a replica, neither its form nor its location replicate the construction of a pioneer or mountain hut and its sitting on a mountain ridge exposed to the weather is not where any self-respecting pioneer and Mountain Cattleman would locate any such structure. Also, the graves around the hut are fake.

Craig's Hut was found to have social value in the Regional Forest Agreement process that included consultation with communities about their heritage values (Context 1997). Both the Mansfield community and others, in fact the High Country community generally clearly found it the most important of all the Mountain Huts; the statement of significance drafted for the Australian Heritage Commission Register of the National Estate outlines its heritage values:

Craig's Hut is of aesthetic significance because of its aesthetic appeal, spectacular setting and evocative association with a major Australian film. The Hut is constructed in a bush vernacular style in a dramatic mountaintop location with extensive panoramic views. It is a replica of a pioneer's hut built for the film 'Man from Snowy River' in 1982 and later rebuilt as major tourist attraction. The hut is frequently visited by the local community and others because of its values, and is depicted in tourism publications. (Criterion E1)

The legend of *The Man from Snowy River* is an interesting example of myth-making and its role in forming cultural identity, even in nation-building. The poem itself was at a time of intense discussion at the end of the 19th century regarding the Australian character. Paterson and Henry Lawson, both writing for the influential weekly, *The Bulletin*, at the time, were debating the Australian urban character and the Bush Myth with Paterson fostering the notion of the Bush Man - the larrikin - the anti-authoritarian, egalitarian Australian we so treasure as part of our national identity today. It was only 20 years later that the heroic story of the ANZACs at Gallipoli in World War I took place to add to this legendary aspect of the Australian personality.

Even the horse in the poem reflects this character:

*He was hard and tough and wiry – just the sort that won't say die –
There was courage in his quick impatient tread;
And he bore the badge of gameness in his bright and fiery eye,
And the proud and lofty carriage of his head.*

The poem *The Man from Snowy River* very clearly expresses this aspect of the Australian character. It must be noted that even at the time of writing it was as a symbol, not as an account of any true event. Nonetheless its very iconic nature has meant that its meaning is repeatedly revisited and used, such as the films in the 1980s, taking place at a time when we celebrated our Bicentennial. The 1980s was also the height of the conflict in Victoria regarding ongoing cattle-grazing in national parks, something that had ended in New South Wales in the late 1960s.

It is still revisited, such as recently in other Mountain celebrations, for example in the adoption of *The Man from Snowy River* as its own in Corryong in North East Victoria, which has an annual Man from Snowy River Bush Festival, as well as a Man from Snowy River Museum. The town also claims one of its own; Jack Riley as the original Man from Snowy River. This claim is hotly debated, with many other individuals also identified as the original 'Man'.

I do not wish to debate whether such appropriations of the Man are genuine celebrations or cynical commercial uses to tempt cultural tourism. But it is clear that the *Man from Snowy River* is now a cultural icon expressed not only in poem and film but in spectacular events, such as seen in the opening ceremony of the 2000 Olympics in Sydney and since at the Sydney Royal Easter Show in 2001 and 2002 as well as in a recent musical.

There are other examples of building new places to express symbols and cultural icons that have influenced cultural identity and how a nation sees itself:

A famous one is the Romantic neo-medieval castles built by mad Ludwig II of Bavaria, such as Neuschwanstein built in the foothills of the European Alps (Figure 5). Built in 1869, Neuschwanstein is a fantasy castle decorated in images that draw on Nordic sagas that supposedly took place many hundreds of miles from Bavaria along the Romantic Rhine. Ludwig's obsession influenced Wagner as seen in his *Nibelungen Lied* operas. Such symbols of the past came at the time of the unification of Germany under Bismarck for the first time ever in 1871. Again later such symbols were taken up and favoured by Nazi Germany.

Such romantic notions of nation were also used elsewhere such as in Hungary and the Czech Republic later in the 19th century to stake a claim of cultural identity separate from the domination of the Austrian Empire. Churches, palaces and public buildings were nationalistically decorated with heroes from medieval mythic sagas staking claims to the land and a past based on ethnicity and autonomy.

Such reference to and use of past myths is also seen in the appropriation of an extant place for rituals and celebrations without historical fact. A well known example of this is found at Stonehenge with the Druid festivals at the summer solstice that started in the 19th century. Today Stonehenge is as well known for its New Age symbolism including the ongoing Druid ceremonies as for its historic and archaeological importance (Figure 7).

Much of this myth has thus now become fact, even protected as heritage, telling historical stories of past social value. For example, Neuschwanstein has a huge annual visitation with most people totally unaware of or ignoring the real castle ruin dating from the Middle Ages on the nearby hillside.

Does such mythologising matter? Lowenthal confirms in his article "Fabricating Heritage" (no date) that

Heritage should not be confused with history. History seeks to convince by truth, and succumbs to falsehood. Heritage exaggerates and omits, candidly invents and frankly forgets, and thrives on ignorance and error. Time and hindsight alter history, too. ... Heritage uses historical traces and tells historical tales. But these tales and traces are stitched into fables closed to critical scrutiny.

I am not sure that this is how heritage significance is viewed in Australia but Lowenthal reminds us of Renan's statement to his fellow French *Getting its history wrong is crucial for the creation of a nation* (Renan 1882)

and in quoting Australian poet Les Murray (1984) that:

Australians are said to spend more of their spiritual energy in quests for enshrined symbols of identity than in any other pursuit; worship of the past in Australia is one of the great secular religions.

Certainly this homage of the past is manifest at Craig's Hut, which has probably a higher visitation than the approximately 200 'real' mountain huts in the Australian Alps. Some of them predate Paterson's poem of 1895, such as the 1889 Wallace's Hut also in the Alpine National Park (Figure 8).

Such mythologizing or fabrication of the past may matter when it comes to the allocation of resources and community energy, for example, Craig's Hut has an active 4WD club that maintains it regularly. Some historical huts have similar Friends Groups co-ordinated by Parks Victoria, but very few of them; and they all urgently need maintenance and active care.

This situation potentially creates conflict and tensions between the real and the recreated – the fact and the fantasy – and is a problem to heritage managers in deciding how to deal with it. As such, whilst I find the associations and meanings of Craig's Hut living evidence of our cultural icons, I am also aware the Paterson's ballad is itself NOT history, but is part of a fabricated heritage that was created in the name of national identity.

In this paper I have contrasted two cases, one where cultural continuity and maintenance of intangible values was thwarted, and another where the continuity of the intangible was added to by a fantasy. I trust in highlighting both these Australian cases, I have raised our awareness of the issues (although perhaps not resolved them) regarding the intangible values attached to place. The question is whether such intangible values have the potential to conflict with or add to our celebration of the full meaning of heritage places and whether we in ICOMOS have the knowledge, insight and wisdom to protect such heritage for all its values.

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ABSTRACT

Continuity of intangible cultural values often requires a tangible manifestation. This may be a place where the relationship between the physical nature of the place – its fabric – and the ‘intangible’ associations with that place and the meanings that place has to a group of people have continued through time. Such associations and their cultural significance are increasingly recognised in national and international heritage systems. For example, Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park was recognised in 1994 a World Heritage for its spiritual landscape, manifested by associated ceremony, song, and dance.

Elsewhere a continuity of the relationship of intangible value and place is disrupted, often due to changes that are imposed from outside. The intangible connection to that place is at risk of breaking, and may need to be revived in order to continue. What does such revival mean in terms of the authenticity and integrity of a heritage place?

This paper examines two cases in Australia where the revival of community intangible values have resulted in physical manifestations that have had mixed and contrasting receptions.

The first example is that of the repainting of the Wandjina rock art sites of Northwest Australia in 1987, by the Indigenous community used a federal Government employment fund. Both young men and women were introduced to a traditional ceremony to repaint earlier traditional motifs at sacred sites. The new motifs and the use of modern house-paints were regarded by many as not traditional. The ensuing outcry from rock art experts, local tourism guides and heritage authorities, some in support others against the project as a desecration, was a watershed in Australian heritage understanding of intangible value and the role of such social heritage significance in the management of heritage places. This issue that has been debated extensively (e.g. Mowaljarli et al, 1987 1988) for the past 15 years, and has become an emotive one as other Aboriginal communities have sought to revive rock art traditions.

The second case is that of the building of a ‘replica’ mountain hut in the alpine region of Northwest Victoria. The hut symbolises the High Country way of life celebrated as part of this continuity of traditional shelters high in the mountains of Victoria, that were used in the past by cattlemen bringing cattle to the high alpine plains in the summer. This practice has almost stopped in the face of strong environmental conservation policies to protect the High Country as national parks.

Yet strong intangible values continue in the area, with song, story, film and festival maintaining the association (Context 1997; Truscott 2000; 2003). What is the role for a ‘fake’ hut, at a time when a growing number of visitors and tourism development pushing local icons are increasing pressures on heritage managers of heritage?

In both cases, fabric has been altered or created as part of this cultural revival, and has raised issues relating to potential conflicts between the management of tangible and intangible heritage values. This paper will address the conflicts inherent in such management and the myths of heritage conservation – is it really the fabric that is important or its use for the maintenance of intangible values? The paper will address some solutions, examining various international models for ‘managing’ intangible values and its associated place.

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