Book Reviews
The First National Park: A Natural for World Heritage

Geoff Mosley
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If you have been following the news, you will know that there has been speculation and hype around the exploration of a potential World Heritage nomination for Sydney’s Royal National Park. Much of the effort has been led by the local community group ‘First National Park’, who has urged both federal and NSW state politicians to get on board. Yet despite all of the support and media releases, the key question is what would World Heritage status for a property such as Royal National Park look like?

The First National Park: A Natural for World Heritage is a publication brought into fruition by the efforts of the First National Park group and published by Sutherland Shire Environment Centre. Written by nature conservationist, Dr Geoff Mosley, the book sets out to address why Royal National Park and its two adjacent reserves, Heathcote National Park and Garawarra State Conservation Area (known together as ‘the Royal Reserves’) deserve World Heritage status. However in the pursuit of its mission to define the World Heritage values of the Royal Reserves, Mosley’s book is not a relaxing, nor easy read. The 243 page narrative follows a strict policy document style, being report-like in its organisation into parts and sections. The publication includes very strong descriptions of the geology, natural vegetation and climate of the Royal Reserves. The history of the initial years of the park after its establishment in 1879 is also well done, with the discussion highlighting the various uses of the park, including its sanitary and recreational origins to counter the adverse health effects of Sydney’s urban living conditions. There is discussion of the resource extraction of gravel and timber from the Royal Reserves, the acclimatisation of exotic plant and animal species, and the use of the park as a pleasure ground. Yet where Mosley’s descriptive history lets itself down, is in the ‘Aboriginal History’ section, where Mosley’s scholarship intimates that the Dharawal were a prehistoric people who occupied the Royal Reserves long before European settlement. While he makes reference to the work of Les Bursill, a Dharawal historian/archaeologist/anthropologist, and former Sutherland shire local, Mosley’s scholarship might have benefited from broader discussions with the La Perouse and Illawarra Local Aboriginal Land Councils, to bring his past tense archaeological discussions into the contemporary.

It takes 99 pages of careful description of the genesis of the park to get to the book’s main argument that the Royal Reserves should be inscribed on the World Heritage List as a cultural property – more specifically as an ‘associative cultural landscape’. Mosley contends:
The three ‘Royal Reserves’ are held here to be of Outstanding Universal Value for both their cultural and natural values and as cultural landscape. They are outstanding as cultural landscape for the role they played in the development of the internationally significant national parks movement and for the way they are representative and illustrative of the social, economic and cultural forces which were operative at the crucial time when these exceptionally important ideas were developed. The Royal Reserves also have outstanding universal geological, biological and natural beauty values and hence are considered here as mixed cultural and natural heritage. (Mosley 2012: 100)

Mosley’s promotion of the Royal Reserves as a cultural landscape should be commended – it is exciting to see a professional, trained in the natural discipline, promoting recognition of natural and cultural values together. Nevertheless, I would like to take a moment to draw attention to some of the issues that Mosley’s case for World Heritage status brings to the fore. My discussion will primarily concern itself with the World Heritage cultural criteria. Mosley recommends that the Royal Reserves be nominated as an associative cultural landscape under World Heritage cultural criterion (vi) – in its reference to direct or tangible associations with ‘events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance’ (UNESCO 2013). Mosley contends that the cultural criterion (vi) of the Royal Reserves is associated with the ‘nineteenth century transformation of the urban parks movement to a nature based movement’, in addition to the ‘development in the 1930s with ‘events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance’ (UNESCO 2013). Mosley contends that the cultural criterion (vi) of the Royal Reserves is associated with the ‘nineteenth century transformation of the urban parks movement to a nature based movement’, in addition to the ‘development in the 1930s with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance’ (UNESCO 2013).

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the plans of its first trustees make it clear that the intention was to plant exotic trees, import exotic animals, notably deer, and create an exotic pleasure garden for the people of Sydney. The true turning point towards natural landscape conservation in New South Wales came in the 1940s with the reservation of the Kosciusko National Park. (Jeans and Spearritt 1980: 3)

Mosley (2012: 159) softens his promotion of nature conservation in the ‘Conclusion: summary and recommendations’, by noting that the changes in the approach to the management of the Royal Reserves demonstrates ‘an increasing priority given to nature conservation over a range of other options’. It was at this stage that I thought that it might have been a better approach for Mosley to have more comfortably embraced the recreational beginning of the Royal Reserves and to then explain that out of this a nature conservation ethic developed later on, as the public became concerned about the damage they were causing to their surroundings – certainly the scholarship by Australian, Tim Bonyhady (2000) supports an argument of this kind. Mosley also goes onto make such statements as ‘no other national park has been so closely related to the development of the wilderness area protection movement as has the first National Park’ (Mosley 2012: 118), which led me to question how this ‘wilderness area’ (along with a nature conservation focus), works with his discussion of managing the integrity of the culturally introduced species and weeds in the Royal Reserves?

My final point is around how Mosley (2012: 104-105) makes the connection between the need to continue to care for the Indigenous archaeological sites of the Royal Reserves and his discussion of ‘the development of the national parks movement’ idea – cultural criterion (vi). Again, my confusion comes down to what Mosley means by the ‘national parks movement’? If the Royal Reserves is in fact a part of the national park idea led and promoted by the United States, then it needs to be recognised that this movement initially sought the complete removal of any trace of Indigenous groups from national parks (Keller & Turek 1998). The settler countries of Canada, New Zealand and Australia followed suit with this, and it is only in recent times that caring for Indigenous heritage values is being recognised as a part of the work of national parks organisations across these countries. There needed to be further unpacking of this discussion, and perhaps if Indigenous heritage values are to be considered as part of the World Heritage associative cultural landscape recognition of Tongariro and Uluru-Kata Tjuta national parks.

When I came to the end of Mosley’s book, I personally wondered if the urban factor of the Royal Reserves, in contrast to the rest of the new world’s more remote national parks, might not be the platform to launch a cultural World Heritage nomination from? With the current intense international cultural heritage focus on historic urban landscapes, change, and resilience, consideration of the changing uses of an urban national park as a pleasure ground – not necessarily about nature conservation, might be significant? The Royal Reserves could be a real point of difference from national parks in other settler societies. For example, it would be great to highlight how railway access was a significant contributing factor to the establishment of the Royal Reserves so that Australia’s first national park was open to all classes of people to escape urban Sydney. After the introduction of railway excursions and the establishment of the branch line to Royal National Park Station in 1886, there was a major increase in park visitation with annual numbers growing from 38,000 in 1892 to 170,000 in 1903 and 250,000 in 1910 (Mosley 2012: 47; it is unclear where these statistics come from as there are no references). This is in contrast to the national parks of the United States, which due to their remote locations, had to be visited by people in motor cars, which would have resulted in a select class of visitor.

Nevertheless, Mosley’s book makes a useful contribution to a dialogue on the potential for World Heritage nomination of the Royal Reserves. The book highlights that there is still a lot of work to be done to prepare a robust nomination dossier for the Royal Reserves so that the property might be included on Australia’s World Heritage Tentative List before Australia as the State Party to the World Heritage Convention can make a nomination.

Paulette Wallace
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**Imperial San Francisco: Urban Power, Earthly Ruin**

Gray Brechin


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The outline history of San Francisco and northern California is well known, of course, and that history, as told by author and historical geographer Professor Gray Brechin (PhD) becomes a ripping yarn in *Imperial San Francisco: Urban Power, Earthly Ruin*. Published in 1999 by University of California Press, with a second edition in 2007, featuring a new preface and post 9/11 insights. While Brechin illustrates the story with extraordinary characters, remarkable facts and great overarching themes, this publication is also highly significant in highlighting the role that water plays in urban settlement. A parallel can be drawn between the West Coast of North America and the East Coast of Australia which have cross-fertilised each other from the early 19th century, so it is not surprising to see parallels with San Francisco (and Los Angeles) in Sydney and Melbourne. This may be the most important reason for Australians to read *Imperial San Francisco*. There may be lessons to learn.

The reader must understand the meaning of the word ‘imperial’ in the title. There are clear references back to ancient Rome, such as to politics and economics, architecture and infrastructure, history and literature. But Brechin also means an imperial system of exploitation of resources, people and land. He notes that in the 1840s the Golden Gate, the entrance to San Francisco’s harbour, was named after the Golden Horn, the Byzantine gateway to the East. The underlying legacy, more than three centuries old, of the Spanish Empire is also present. Then there is the imperial concept and irresistible drive of Manifest Destiny. San Francisco had lessons to learn from the ancients.

If San Francisco looked towards the mountains which provided wealth and water but isolated California from its east, it also looked west across the Pacific to Asia, specifically China, Japan and the Philippines. San Francisco correctly saw itself as the gateway to the Pacific and entitled to tribute. In reverse, the Chinese called San Francisco ‘the Golden Mountain’. The city’s sense of dominion was imperial.

There is also the sense of imperial supply. Brechin develops this theme cleverly as several threads: the city’s hinterland feeding its population; the mining of gold and other minerals, particularly from the Comstock Lode; the supply of water, particularly from the Hetch Hetchy dam; and the profits from land subdivision. This all brought great wealth, concentrated in the hands of a few families. Brechin shows how magnates, moguls, several mayors and a few madams made massive fortunes by supplying people with what they needed. These fortunes also paid for...
much culture, allowing for example, the University of California to develop (the University is only rivalled by the Hearst family for the longest entry in the book’s index).

One obvious parallel in the history and development of Australia is the discovery of gold and its ramifications. The gold rushes brought people and the people demanded, but didn’t necessarily succeed in gaining democracy. Gold brought Asian immigration and with it Chinatowns in Sydney and Melbourne which parallels San Francisco’s. Melbourne, built on gold and the financial capital of Australia from at least the 1880s, demonstrated similar sub-colonial aspirations like San Francisco, but in the South Pacific. For example, Melbourne business interests subdivided Suva as the new capital of Fiji; and the Colonial Sugar Refining Company, based in Melbourne, was a major influence in Fiji until the 1970s. Another parallel can be found between the Broken Hill Proprietary Limited which was based in Melbourne and the Comstock Lode, in San Francisco (and might the Hearst newspaper dynasty, founded on one-sixth share of the Comstock Lode, be seen as a parallel for the modern Murdoch dynasty?). But there are also differences. In Australia there was a different Indigenous culture from that of the Americas and no pre-existing colonialist past, such as the Spanish. Gold was found in remote places in California rather than amongst the existing but relatively new pastoral settlements of eastern Australia. After reading Imperial San Francisco one could imagine Sydney and Melbourne to be American cities which happen to have British political and legal systems.

The strongest difference is that no Australian city has had the same concentration of arms manufacturing industry, or research and technology sector supporting it, as San Francisco. Brechin demonstrates the importance of San Francisco in the development of the atom bomb. This begins during the early 1940s and continues through to the present dominance of Silicon Valley.

Water supply is perhaps the essential thread through the book. Brechin was a keynote speaker at the Australia ICOMOS Watermarks conference in 2011. In his well-received address, he compared and contrasted the supply of fresh water to the cities of San Francisco and Los Angeles. Both these American cities influenced the development of eastern Australia cities. Both were badly situated for water supplies, either from the heavens or the earth. The city of San Francisco receives the equivalent of 77% of Melbourne’s precipitation and just 42% of Sydney’s, mostly in the winter months. Los Angeles is located effectively in a desert, thereby receiving much less. The Los Angeles River, now a miserable concrete drain rather than a watercourse, provided less water than Adelaide’s Torrens River. There is no river and there are very few streams in San Francisco. One critical difference is that no Australian city has yet sold its water supply to private interests; perhaps a lesson learnt from the shenanigans of Californian profiteers! The great Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works, based on London’s model, has been remodelled as Melbourne Water. It is still a utility owned completely by the state government. While not a perfect institution, it continues to provide one of the cleanest water supplies in the world (and removes the city’s sewerage efficiently).

Imperial San Francisco is recommended for anyone visiting the city for the first time as well as for anyone who has already been there and wants to understand the city better. The author’s racy but easy to read style carries you along because it is clear this extraordinary story is based on thorough and impeccable research. The diverse illustrations are well chosen but the schematic maps might have corresponded better with the text for the sake of non-American readers. The story of San Francisco is a ripping yarn with lessons for Australian cities. Imperial San Francisco certainly is highly recommended.

Dr Timothy Hubbard