Kakadu National Park is one of the most well known and significant national parks in Australia. Inscribed on the World Heritage List as a place of major universal value for its natural habitat and Aboriginal sites, Kakadu is an outstanding item of environmental heritage. The Park wetlands are also listed under Convention Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat. Significant areas within the Park are Aboriginal freehold land leased to the Director of National Parks and Wildlife. Many of the traditional Aboriginal owners continue to live in the Park.

Kakadu National Park is approximately 120 kilometres east of Darwin and covers an area of 19,804 square kilometres. It extends south-east from the coast of Van Diemen Gulf through flood plains and lowlands fields to the sandstone escarpment and dissected Arnhemland Plateau. The Park was established in three stages: Stage 1 in 1979, Stage 2 in 1984, and Stage 3 in 1987/89/91.

While it would be easy to consider Kakadu as significant only in the terms of the concepts espoused in the introductory sentences above, to do so is to underplay the richness and significance of Kakadu’s most recent past - to fall into de facto censorship of the very phase and process which has resulted in the complex cultural landscape that is Kakadu today. Though not currently a major focus of interpretation, the historic resources within Kakadu are an integral part of its sense of place and, most significantly, provide a focus and physical evidence of Bining (Aboriginal) and Balanda (non-Aboriginal) interaction.

The principles of the 1991 Kakadu National Park Plan of Management recognise the need for conservation of natural and cultural features and are also cognisant of the ownership of much of the Park by Aboriginal people, who live there and continue to use the land for practical and spiritual purposes. The maintenance of the integrity of Aboriginal people’s cultural relationship with the land is a primary management objective and there are a number of formal management mechanisms in place to ensure input from Aboriginal people and liaison with traditional owners.

One of the key management objectives of the Plan of Management is ‘to establish the significance of historic sites in the Park and, as far as possible, preserve and interpret them to visitors, especially sites which demonstrate interactions between Bining and Balanda’. [Australian National Parks & Wildlife Service (ANPWS) 1991]. In fulfillment of this objective, the Australian Nature Conservation Agency (ANCA) commissioned a Survey of Historic Sites which was completed in 1992 and 1993.

This paper is largely derived from work undertaken as part of the survey project and particularly from the consideration of issues that were addressed in determining how ephemeral, unattractive, decrepit, decaying but highly...
significant historic resources should be managed in a place that has been added to the World Heritage List for Aboriginal and natural values.

Kakadu’s Historic Sites

An understanding of the significance of the historic sites within the Park, which together represent layers of history that document its most recent cultural history, is crucial to the development of appropriate management strategies. While in many respects the activities associated with the Park’s historic sites reflect uses that were destructive to the environment and to the local Bining population, through both disease and social disruption, many historic sites also document interaction of the two cultures and provide a physical manifestation of a process that has changed Bining society and culture into what it is today. Both Bining communities and those involved in cultural resource management in the Park recognise that historic sites have importance as reminders of how things were in the recent past. Additionally, some sites individually attest to important periods in the development of northern Australia generally and are significant in that respect.

Although previous contact between Bining and Balanda occurred, it was not until the establishment of Port Essendon and the exploits of explorer Leichhardt in the 1830s and 1840s that the main historic period began. Subsequent late nineteenth and early twentieth century history saw sporadic small scale ventures including logging, limited agriculture and crocodile and buffalo shooting, later leading to tourism and safari operations. The mid to late twentieth century is marked by the establishment of large pastoral leases. More recently mining activities have left an extensive range of historic sites, particularly in the Stage 3 (southern) area of the Park.

The largest historic sites in the Park are a range of substantial homesteads and outstations. In the southern part of the Park these were predominantly pastoral in character. Major historic items include the Goodparla Station and outstations at Minglo, Shovel Billabong and Kunkamoula. In the Gimbat area are a number of homesteads built by the Callanans and others. Towards the northern end of the park the emphasis is more on management and processing of buffalo – the major properties at Munmarlary and Mudginberri both include buffalo processing abattoirs.

Mining remains cover a period throughout the twentieth century. Metals mined include gold at Imarkba and Zamu Creek; copper at Mary River Junction; and uranium mines at Sleisbeck, El Sherana and Palette, as well as Coronation Hill.

Buffalo and crocodile shooting was a major early historic theme in the Park. Although the sites involved are ephemeral in nature, the survey was successful in locating a number including Gougo’s camp at Munmarlary, Paul Bynam’s camp, contemporary sites of Pocock and Wardock in the northern part of the Park and a former camp of Jim McCorry.

The Park contains an extensive array of sites associated with transport and infrastructure. There are a number of historic roads, several of which remain in use, air strips at Fisher, Mudginberri, El Sherana and Cannon Hill and landing sites at Kapalga, Cannon Hill and Bingle. Some of the vehicles themselves remain. There is a shipwreck (not visible) on the East Alligator, wrecks of trucks at Goodparla, the four mile and West Alligator and crashed planes at Gimbat, Goodparla and on the Wildman.

The mid twentieth century saw the development of major tourist camps and safaris at Patonga and Muircla, as well as the development of a tourist attraction at the former site of Nourlangie. In addition, there are many one-off sites including garden leases at Spring Peak; two European burial sites; the site of the Kapalga Mission; and remains of Camp Concern, a protest camp established to oppose a new uranium mine in the 1970s.

Assessing Significance

From a philosophical point of view, although the study team included a prehistorian with extensive experience in consultation with Aboriginal communities, it has been difficult to cope with assessing significance of historic sites from the dual viewpoints of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures.
The site of Paul Bynum's Camp, established for buffalo shooting around the middle of the century is now marked by rusting vehicle chassis and other ferrous artefacts. Rare relics of an essential phase of Kakadu's history, such sites are difficult to access or interpret and a challenge to manage.

This challenge was addressed by ensuring that members of the local Aboriginal community, preferably people who have known links with particular areas or known sites, participated throughout the project. They included members of the Jawoyn, Djabulukgu and Gagudju Associations, traditional elders or spokespeople for a particular country and people who have particular knowledge or experience of the sites. In addition the recording methodology was designed to incorporate provision for separate documentation of Aboriginal viewpoints, recollections, evaluation and suggestions for future use and management.

Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal views were also taken into account in significance assessments prepared using the methodology advocated in the Burra Charter and its guidelines.

Why are Kakadu's Historic Places Significant?

Historic activity in Kakadu National Park is not a major focus of the contemporary value of a place which is rightly inscribed on the World Heritage List for its natural and Aboriginal wonders. Nevertheless, more than a century of activity by European and other cultures has had a dramatic impact and provided the penultimate chapter to the history of the place. Appreciation of the value of Kakadu and what is represented by the existing landscape and individual sites requires an understanding of the more recent post-contact history and an evaluation of the oral/documentary and physical evidence that remains. Post-contact activity in Kakadu centres on a number of themes. While pre-European contact with Macassan and other cultures may have occurred, there is little or no association or physical evidence. Kakadu's documented historic phase commences with the arrival of buffalo escapees and mid-nineteenth century exploration, both recorded in documentary records but not known by existing sites. Buffalo and crocodile shooting provides a dominant early twentieth century theme, soon followed by mining, initially of metals and later of uranium. Concurrent with these resource extraction activities, a period of impact and interaction occurred between the traditional owners and occupants and new European arrivals. This is a theme which continues to this day. In the early to mid twentieth century, four major pastoral properties were established as the Top End became one of the last frontiers in mainland Australia to evidence pastoral properties. Kakadu remains one of the few places in which the hardship, isolation and lifeways associated with the 'opening up' of rural Australia are still evident. More recently, attempts to communicate aspects of this way of life and Kakadu's natural and cultural wonders to visitors has seen a range of tourist ventures, from safari parks to interpretation centres and hotels. The latter part of the twentieth century witnessed growing interest in social issues such as the impact of uranium mining and environmental concerns - the most obvious outcomes of which are the establishment of the Park itself and its inclusion on the World Heritage List.

The historic sites in Kakadu have long term value as physical evidence of a significant phase of Australia's twentieth century history and development. Other areas in public ownership throughout Australia contain major natural landscapes and features, important Aboriginal sites, or historic places of high aesthetic calibre or associated with major events. Kakadu is one of few places which also boast historic sites associated with initial contact between the indigenous population and European invaders and early phases of European settlement and activity. There would be few parts of the Australian public estate which include both substantive physical evidence of the first contact between Bining and Balanda and associated oral traditions. As historic places alone, the sites have value as they demonstrate aspects of twentieth century pioneer settlement and lifestyle - in the context of Bining/Balanda relations and impact they are a valuable public asset.

Historic places and relics are an integral part of the process that has resulted in today's Kakadu National Park. Though not viewed as attractive as Aboriginal rock art or sublime...
natural panoramas, the post-contact sites in Kakadu are important as focal points of visual and historic interest in a dramatic cultural landscape. Their values are diverse; they have substantial educational potential as evidence of culture, past lifeways and important events; they illustrate the activities and processes of recent chapters in Kakadu's history to visitors; they are distinctive visual icons; and, importantly, they are, in varying degrees, reacted to and valued by the contemporary Australian community, potentially by future generations and significantly by the traditional owners of the Park.

On the basis of these values, the historic site survey project developed the following statement of significance as the basis for future management of Kakadu's historic places:

The historic resources of Kakadu National Park are an integral part of the significance of the place as they provide evidence of the most recent activities and processes involved in the creation of Kakadu today. Specifically, Kakadu's historic sites:

- evidence and illustrate significant historic events in the history of the Park and the Northern Territory;
- include a comprehensive range of physical evidence of the major historic processes and themes in the Park's history, especially buffalo and crocodile shooting, mining, pastoralism and tourism;
- are strongly associated with prominent individuals in both Aboriginal and European communities - some of whom now have a larger than life legendary status;
- provide insight into the lifestyle and conditions of pioneer settlers in early Australia, thereby making Kakadu National Park one of few places in public ownership with potential to demonstrate these aspects of Australian history to future generations;
- provide focal points of historic and social interest within a dramatic cultural landscape;
- include places with distinctive visual qualities;
- display rustic or rural application of craftsmanship and a local Australian application of adoption and "making do";
- display a range of different late nineteenth and early twentieth century construction and operational technologies;
- include places where the physical evidence has the potential to yield valuable information through further investigation;
- have great potential to communicate aspects of Australian, Northern Territory and Kakadu history and former lifestyles by using real places to evoke a response from the visitor. (Godden Mackay, 1993).

**Issues**

The values embodied in Kakadu's historic resources are, unfortunately, insufficient alone to justify allocation of the resources required for adequate conservation. As is the case with most parts of the public estate, these places must compete with other management priorities and with a range of conflicting issues.

Of great significance is the perspective of the traditional owners of the Park who consider some historic sites to be of particular importance through historic association, contemporary utilitarian value or educational potential, but who would prefer removal of other sites to enable rehabilitation of the landscape in areas of spiritual significance.

When assessed using traditional methodology and criteria it is clear that a substantial number of historic places in the Park have high heritage value and warrant physical conservation and interpretation in accordance with accepted methodologies. There are a series of obligations that arise in relation to such places through the principles and procedures of the appropriate guideline document - the *Burra Charter* of Australia ICOMOS. The inscription of Kakadu on the World Heritage List imposes a range of statutory obligations on the Australian Government, extending to conservation of all cultural heritage within the Park. These obligations are reinforced by its listing on the Register of the National Estate and by requirements of the Federal *World Heritage Properties Conservation Act*. In addition, the Kakadu National Park Plan of Management itself indicates that:

The ANPWS will encourage and carry out research aimed at establishing the significance of historic sites in the Park and methods for their conservation and management. This research will form the basis for future management strategies and suitable conservation measures will be implemented where appropriate. The ANPWS will also investigate, and if possible, implement, ways in which the history of the Park, especially bining-balanda interaction, can be interpreted to visitors. This interaction has considerable impact upon local bining communities and on the subsequent history of the region. (ANPWS, 1991).

While the Plan of Management itself includes an entire section on historic sites and recommends a program of strategies and initiatives, the concept of historic site conservation is not well integrated into the overall plan. For example, landing areas, if found to be superfluous are to be closed and rehabilitated, without consideration of cultural values. Communication of park values makes no specific recommendation for historic heritage. Historic site appreciation is not mentioned as an appropriate passive appreciation activity nor are adequate sites or facilities provided. Opportunities for conduct of research are not
Historic period. The fact is commonly overlooked, perhaps because Kakadu has natural and pre-historic Aboriginal values of world heritage significance. It is understandable that hitherto the emphasis of Park management and presentation has been placed on those sites which exemplify the outstanding natural and pre-historic resources the Park has. That emphasis has tended to obscure the fact that there has been a recent history of Kakadu - a recent history which has been a very rich one, and very distinctive in the Australian context.

It is a history which deserves to be conserved and presented for its own sake, and for the sake of assisting a better understanding of the Park’s non-historic values.

Recent history has applied a very thick and opaque veneer to Kakadu. Because of this, the Park’s contemporary social and physical environment and its world heritage values cannot be fully understood and appreciated unless its recent history is also understood. (Forrest in Troppo et al, 1991).

Although they cannot compete for significance on a world scale with the splendour of Kakadu’s natural landscape or with tens of thousands of years of Aboriginal rock art, Kakadu’s historic sites are items of environmental heritage value which make a major contribution to the overall significance of the Park. Clearly they warrant retention and conservation. However, management of such places is not simple.

The existence of historic sites does present major opportunities to the Park management. Some of the historic places in Kakadu continue to have utilitarian values and are actively used as ranger stations or for other operational facilities. This principle could, for example, be extended to new areas such as Munmarlary. Other sites like Mudginberri, have further potential for development as facilities that might be used by Aboriginal communities. If the principle of the desirability of presenting the historic post-contact chapters of the Park’s history to visitors is accepted, there are a number of places which by virtue of their significance, condition and proximity to main tourist routes present opportunities for upgrading, increased visitation and development of picnic-stop type amenities.

Approach to Management

Both Peter Forrest in his April 1990 presentation to the Adelaide ICOMOS Conference, and Troppo Architects in their 1991 Kakadu Homesteads Survey have passed comment on the significance of the Park’s historic resources. They make some very salient points directly relevant to the development of an overall approach to historic site management in Kakadu:

*The Kakadu region has been the venue for wide ranging and significant human endeavour in the*
more important, decisions about priorities for interpretation, allocation of resources and the manner in which traditional owner views and visitor needs can best be simultaneously accommodated. The level of available resources and the practicalities imposed by the location and condition of many historic sites means that all cannot be conserved and interpreted to a high standard; nor indeed is this necessarily desirable. However, it is considered essential that places relating to the major themes of the park are retained and managed so that they will survive in a meaningful way in the long term and be accessible to, and understood by, visitors. Access and interpretation are therefore regarded as crucial components of site management for any places that are to be actively conserved. For those that are not, it is insufficient to allow them simply to fade from the record completely and a program of recording is warranted. Active removal is considered superfluous as the environmental extremes and physical threats already posed to most sites will result in their eventual demise if active management and physical conservation does not occur. The only justification for removal of historic places can be where their continued presence is in direct conflict with other park values or management needs.

On the basis of the above considerations, the historic sites survey identified six key principles as providing a workable underlying philosophy for the management of the historic resources of Kakadu National Park. They are:

1. Wherever feasible, significant historic places should continue in their existing usage or, if practical, should be adapted for new uses.

2. In view of the limited resources available, funds and efforts should be concentrated on a small number of very important sites, rather than being dispersed amongst a large number of sites.

3. Sites selected to receive limited resources should be of major importance and should relate to one of the key historic themes in the Park.

4. Those sites selected for funding and other resourcing should be targeted for visitation and, in consequence, should also receive appropriate interpretation and construction of necessary visitor facilities.

5. No action should be taken with respect to the majority of sites, apart from additional recording and monitoring/visitation during normal patrols.

6. Sites which are not actively conserved should be allowed to recede into the landscape as nature and history takes their course. Deliberate removal may be justified where this is required by traditional owners, where there is a major conflict with other park values or if there is some other operational imperative, but otherwise removal of historic places falsifies the record provided by the fabric of the Park and consumes scarce resources. (Godden Mackay, 1993).

In other words sites which are significant, easily understood and accessible should be resourced and conserved. The others will effectively be recorded and then allowed to rot. Indeed where traditional owners require so, significant historic places may actually be deliberately removed!

The study report provides a detailed policy and recommendations in the usual Burra Charter/Kerr format for its implementation; but the question inevitably arises as to whether the process advocated is conservation. At one level - conscious abandonment of significant places in a harsh environment - it may be pragmatic but is hardly conservation. Looking at the big picture a different perspective emerges. If the Park’s set of historic resources are regarded as the heritage item being managed, the approach advocated by Kerr and the Burra Charter guidelines works beautifully. This methodology involves gathering of physical, documentary and oral evidence about a site as an initial stage, assessment of the significance of the site through analysis of that evidence, and comparison with other places and identification of desirable objectives arising from that significance. Only once significance is assessed and understood are other matters taken into account. In the case of the Kakadu Historic Site Survey, these issues include the perspectives of traditional owners, statutory requirements arising from the World Heritage Convention and the Plan of Management, the physical condition of the sites and resources available to the Australian Nature Conservation Agency. Taking all into account across the full historic resource leads to the view that the needs of traditional owners and both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Park users are best met through intensive attention to a few places.

A final note about historic site conservation and interpretation. It is pleasing and laudable that the Kakadu management have embarked upon the Historic Sites Survey and a program of conservation and interpretation of key historic sites. Their efforts warrant strong support and continued resources. It cannot be overemphasised that inclusion of the post-contact history of Kakadu in the overall interpretation is fundamental. The sites are there. With the exception of early exploration all major historic phases and themes are represented. Most sites evidence or are associated with the overriding theme of Bininj/Mungguy interaction and the impact of European settlement on the traditional lifeways of the indigenous population.

We cannot understand Kakadu as a complex cultural landscape, nor recognise the process that caused it, let alone respond to its sense of place - irrespective of our own cultural background - unless we are presented with the full
story. To edit the final chapter by omitting historic places is to practice an unpalatable form of cultural censorship.

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