DREAM THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM?

SHARED HERITAGE, SHARED VALUES, OR SHARED UNDERSTANDING OF DISPARATE VALUES?

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Let us begin at my local service station and its current display, advertising oils produced by an Australian company. To convey this message the advertisers use a striking image of Ayers Rock - a globally recognized symbol of the Australian landscape, Australia's deserts and its outback heritage. They are not alone in choosing this Australian icon. The registration circular for this year's International Conference on Accelerator Mass Spectrometry presented 'an invitation from Australia' featuring Ayers Rock, wetlands at sunset and Sydney's opera house reflected in blue harbour waters. In Australia, intending participants are told:

Ancient red landscapes co-exist with spirited young cities on blue ocean harbours...this vast land renders you silent - listen to the resounding stillness of Ayers Rock.

This magnificent icon has other names and other meanings. If we call the rock Uluru we re-contextualise it as a place of major significance to the Aboriginal people of that part of Central Australia, its values rooted in the spiritual affinities between people and land in Aboriginal culture.

Yet these values may be totally unknown to the customers who easily read the intended symbolism of the advertisement at my service station. Few could share those other values, or perceive the many-layered meanings encapsulated in the image.

So questions arise about significance, the values held by places we regard as 'heritage', and how these values may be sustained in management. Further, we must ask how can a plurality of cultural values held by one place for different groups within our society be recognized and accommodated in its management? That is the theme of this paper, and one very appropriate for an ICOMOS symposium in Darwin, itself a meeting place of cultures. The city stands on the northern rim of our continent: looking to Asia, close to Melanesia, backed by the traditional lands of Aboriginal people, and founded as a vital link in the sea routes of the nineteenth century European colonial world.

The theme 'Shared Heritage' acknowledges both the plurality and the distinctiveness of the traditions from which places derive their significance. It is a complex perspective. It is also an inspiring ideal. But is it achievable? Or should it indeed be seen as achievable? Hence my title from the Man of La Mancha - the idealist dreamer of impossible dreams. It reflects my concern that if the values held by places are embedded in discrete cultural traditions, to what extent can they be shared? On the one hand there may be elements that for powerful cultural reasons cannot be shared, on the other the question of loss in any resulting amalgam of disparate values. Will it always be a matter of differing value systems, and in times of 'hard' management decisions, the exclusive allocation of priority to one or the other? At an earlier ICOMOS meeting Ian Stapleton considered the case of the Swan Brewery in Perth, which raises exactly this dilemma (1992). Should we not then be discussing the need for a shared understanding of these disparate values?

There will be situations where values that are deeply rooted in the specifics of certain cultural traditions may not be sharable. So perhaps what we should be sharing is the cross-cultural understanding of the power of these values, sharing respect for this understanding and a willingness to accommodate it in assessing and managing heritage places. This raises the vision ('Impossible Dream') of an integrated Australian approach to heritage, accepting the diversity of values, understanding each perspective in its distinct context, and its role in the wider scene. In many ways this problem has analogies with the various levels of meaning and significance which must be considered in approaching World Heritage listing and the management of those sites of 'outstanding universal significance' which itself may be multi-layered, and require balancing the 'global' against the 'local'.

A shared appreciation of the existence and power of multi-layered values may be the first and perhaps major route to new approaches, not only in assessing heritage significance but to managing places sympathetically and creatively for Australians of differing cultural backgrounds. We may not yet in Australia have a 'shared culture', but this denotes a melding of all those disparate cultural traditions in our society into a new entity. Indeed many would argue against such a creation. So heritage managers have to meet the challenge of managing a multi-faceted heritage, and sustaining its various values.

Sharon Sullivan has argued that management is only effective if it is rooted in the values of the culture whose heritage is being managed. Given the range of values involved, her statement that 'conservation policy must evolve from the society whose heritage it seeks to
preserve' (Heritage News 14(2), 1991) itself gains new complexity. This is especially so if the wider society, or its dominant legislating majority, is not itself rooted in the traditions whose material manifestations it claims and seeks to preserve as heritage. Ignoring this advice can lead to alienation in discounting or disempowering the views of the present holders of those traditions (see David Richie this volume). Further it carries the threat of appropriation or of ‘cultural imperialism’ as Byrne (1991) and Sullivan (1993) have both argued in powerful papers.

The search for culturally appropriate management is a challenge many heritage professionals are meeting. It is one, which like ‘the impossible dream’, offers rich rewards. Is there also perhaps, as with the Man of La Mancha’s dream, an ethical imperative? Certainly ethical obligation enjoins both respect for the values identified as significant by the inheritors of those different cultural traditions, as well as commitment to involving them in management.

In these contexts sharing may seem an elusive entity. What are we sharing: knowledge? - or belief systems? - or the values that underpin that knowledge? In these domains, if we are serious about cross-cultural understanding, we must be ready to accept situations in which ‘sharing’ may be neither culturally appropriate nor possible. For example, situations will arise involving information which is restricted, or in which, for culturally important reasons, information loss must be accepted. This is relevant to the assessment of values of Aboriginal sites. Often the values can be asserted but their specifics not imparted for there are none among the arbiters qualified to receive such knowledge. Those concerned with management of Aboriginal sites could cite many examples where the impossibility of sharing restricted knowledge has been misunderstood by those of differing cultural traditions (Creamer, 1989 pp. 134-135). Maori scholar Jonathan Mano-Wheoki reminded a previous ICOMOS meeting that:

By definition a sacred site is one whose significance is only fully apprehended by a community steeped in its own system of mystical or metaphysical belief. (Historic Environment 9 (1 and 2): p. 35)

He also discussed situations in which significant traditional stories could not be passed on as there were no longer any living descendants with the right to transmit them. The loss of physical heritage must also be accepted where conservation is counter to traditional mores. So he expressed concern at the preservation in the National Museum of New Zealand of the oldest surviving carved house, Te Hau-ki-Turanga, built in the 1840s, the decade of the Treaty of Waitangi. By Maori values this sacred object which should have returned ‘to the elements’ was ‘desacralised’/decontextualised by the intervention of the conservation policies of what he termed the introduced ‘museum culture’.

Other problems arise if we confuse a commonality of concern with sharing of values or of knowledge. Commonality of concern need not lead to shared perspectives, or to integrated interpretation. Indeed there may be interpretation from one perspective alone, even appropriation or transformation of values (conscious or unconscious). In illustration we may consider situations where we can identify common concern for, or interest in, important places in the Aboriginal cultural landscapes of south-eastern Australia.

My first example is the Mt William greenstone quarry near Lancefield in Victoria. It illustrates sentiments from the early decades of this century, largely rooted in the Social Darwinism of the late nineteenth century. They drew strength from the paternalistic concern of the amateur pioneers of Australian ethnography for what they judged a relic culture doomed to extinction. These scholars recognized the importance of Aboriginal culture, but not any continuing active involvement of its holders in its study or recording once ‘contaminated’ by contact with European civilization. They remained passive ‘subjects’.

The viewpoints were in a sense those of natural history, regarding the Aborigines as separate from the modern world, ‘isolates of historical interest’ (term taken from recent discussions of DNA research among indigenous peoples – see press reports for 26/11/93). Aboriginal people were considered incapable of contributing even to the continuing management of their own significant places.

These attitudes, and appropriation of custodial control, may be discerned in the history of the Mt William quarry, a site which has been the focus of my own archaeological research since the early 1970s (McBryde 1978, 1984, 1986). Its significance as a place of power, a strictly controlled resource, and a major source of important raw materials distributed over vast distances through exchange networks is described in the late nineteenth century ethnographic record, especially in the writings of Howitt (1904). He drew on information from Barak, then leader of the Yarra Aborigines, and related to the site’s traditional owners and managers (McBryde 1984, 1986). The site now holds many levels of meaning: the documented values to Aborigines of the nineteenth century; its archaeological importance; and its emerging heritage values for Aboriginal people today, descendants of the nineteenth century Wurundjeri.

Robert Paton recently surveyed the history of research and management of this site since the 1840s. Fascinating insights relevant to our theme emerge from his work. Very early local European residents of the Lancefield district became aware of its archaeological importance, and argued with government and scientific bodies for its preservation.
In later years further excursions were arranged, led by teachers and field naturalists. A local journalist, Guthridge, produced an account of the site in a booklet entitled *The stone age and the Aborigines of the Lancefield District* (Guthridge, 1910). From 1910 there was active discussion of the site's preservation. Through Kenyon of the Victorian Historical Society a case was made to Baldwin Spencer of the National Museum of Victoria for consideration by the Museum's Committee on preservation issues. Unfortunately these early moves were blocked by some local land owners (Mulvaney and Calaby, 1985 pp. 260-261). However representations to government bodies continued from 1917 to 1921 (led by the local member of Parliament, Cameron) with the support of the Historical Society, field naturalists and various scientists.

Cameron argued that a reserve of twenty five acres should be fenced in:

> to be held for all time as the great historic landmark of Australia, furnishing the only indication or proof that we have that this country was inhabited for hundreds of years before the white man came here.

It was argued that it reflected ill on the government that such an 'historic landmark' had not been reserved. Later revisions of the proposal included plans for Aborigines to return to the purchased reserve where they could:

> resume the making of their boomerangs and stone axes, and live to an extent the life of their ancestors.

This was considered a more appropriate existence than cultivating hops at Coranderrk or being taken to the 'quagmires of Gippsland'. It was envisaged that visitors from other parts of the world could be taken to view this historic reserve, and presumably also its historic inhabitants - frozen in time. Unfortunately no-one seems to have consulted the Aborigines themselves on the matter. With Cameron's death in 1923 the momentum of this local campaign for preservation of the site seems to have collapsed.
The arid landscape of the Willandra Lakes region with its lunettes edging the long-dry basins of Pleistocene lakes is typical of those which inspired Australian landscape painters of the fifties: Drysdale, Arthur Boyd and later Nolan. Drysdale was important in shaping this changed perception of Australian landscape. His vision was not...

...the Golden Summers of his Impressionist predecessors - but red dust, drought, desolate townships and their few indomitable inhabitants.

(Jennie Boddington, 1987 p. 9)

We see this powerful vision vibrant in his 1945 painting of the Walls of China. Here the landscape, as Bernard Smith puts it, appears 'alien to man, harsh, weird, spacious and vacant...it only tor heroes and clowns, saints, exiles, and primitive men' (quoted Boddington, 1987 p. 14). So Aborigines entered Drysdale's world as he himself commented:

those days...wild brown stone-age people roamed this country which was their own.

(Drysdale. 1962 – quoted Boddington, 1987 p. 49)

Drysdale's words highlight an artistic vision of the Aborigines, their culture and its place in the Australian landscape, which gained prominence in the 1950s. It is still powerful in our artistic and literary worlds. In this vision the Aborigines and their culture are symbols, powerful aids to exploration of one's own personal and national identity. Here again there are dangers of appropriation as icon (See Byrne, 1991 and Attwood & Arnold, 1992). In this vision neither the vibrant living continuity of Aboriginal culture, nor the lives of Aboriginal communities within the landscape, have reality except as symbols. Lake Mungo has acquired important values in this artistic vision of Australian landscape and identity. Sydney Nolan has spoken of the vital role visits to the area played in his personal artistic and spiritual journeys (Brown, 1989).

In a sense Nolan, as reported in 1989, had appropriated Mungo as his very personal place, for to journey there was a 'homecoming'.

I had the feeling it was right that we came here. You see, I feel I belong here, and while I'm here I'm happy.

(Brown, 1989 p. 11).

Not only painters but potters, photographers and poets seek inspiration in the sculpted landscape of the dunes and the vestigial presence of ancient Aboriginal culture. To them such visits constitute a spiritual experience, but one situated in their own cultural values and traditions.

For me it is the negative image of Ayers Rock. Ayers Rock sticks up and is there for all to see. In this area the landscape is more subtle. One has to be immersed in the landscape. It has a mystical air. In a sense it is the kind of site that is sacred to everyone.

(McGrath, 1984).

To the travel writer for the Canberra Times the mystery was there, but derived from the archaeological vision of ancient life ways. The ancient hunter (in spite of the archaeological significance of Mungo Lady!)

...pervades one's senses when exploring the Lake Mungo National Park...a journey of 40,000 years and now back where we had begun we realised that what we had encountered was another way of seeing things and a new perspective of time.

(Canberra Times, 21/2/1993 p. 23)

To archaeologists Lake Mungo is also a place of pilgrimage. It has produced an important archaeology from the range of sites stratified in the dune’s Pleistocene deposits. With the succeeding Holocene record this offers evidence on changing human use of this spectacular geomorphological landscape over at least 40,000 years. The earliest dates for these sites hover at the very limits of radio carbon dating techniques with promise of extended chronologies from the application of thermoluminescence dating (TL). The 40,000 year dates opened new areas of Pleistocene archaeology to investigation. The archaeology’s international significance was rapidly recognized. The Willandra Lakes Region became one of Australia’s earliest nominations for World Heritage listing as a record of cultural and landscape history of ‘outstanding universal value’!

To Aboriginal people, both local and Australia-wide, Mungo’s archaeology has been of paramount significance. In the 1970s it documented the deep antiquity of Aboriginal occupancy of the continent. This provided important statements at a time of political shifts and changing perceptions of Aboriginal collective self awareness. The sites of the Mungo Lunette could be seen as symbols of Aboriginal cultural continuity and survival. Here there was an incorporation of archaeological knowledge into Aboriginal perceptions of identity and tradition (See Creamer, 1988 p. 58).

To local Aboriginal people the archaeological record carries further meanings. The female cremation burial, ‘Mungo Lady’, is important as a symbol as well as a person from a distant past. ‘We owe her so much’ as Badger Bates said in 1992 (pers. comm.). To Badger Bates and other members of the local communities of Western New South Wales, Lake Mungo and its archaeology have particular as well as general significance. This has been articulated clearly over the last eighteen years, not least in the roles taken by local leaders such as Alice Kelly and Mary Pappin from Balranald, Lottie Williams and Roddy Smith from Dareton and Wentworth, William Bates and Alice Bugmy from Wilcannia. They present local Aboriginal views to the scientific community and heritage managers. Questions of custodianship and control were raised as early as the mid
1970s by the Balranald community.

Local Aboriginal people in the last decade have been active on management committees set up by government agencies, asserting their role as custodians of past heritage. They value Mungo as a 'magical place', 'sacred ground' to quote some comments from local elders recorded in television interviews (SBS Programme 'Spirit to Spirit', 28.10.93). While acknowledging the value of the archaeologists' contribution they still regard the area as of special significance to Aboriginal people and look to a future in which research is conducted by Aboriginal archaeologists.

To the local non-Aboriginal community Lake Mungo also holds major importance. There is pride in the recognition of its archaeological significance, nationally and internationally. However there is also concern over the implications of the involvement of heritage management, national and international. This can be exacerbated by a sense of loss of control over what had always been seen as directly controllable, one's own property and its management. There was also the perception of intrusion by different levels of government into what had previously been the domain of local government: local rural affairs and enterprises such as tourism.

The group most directly affected have been those land holders of the World Heritage Area suddenly engaged with heritage management at the local and international level. What impact will World Heritage listing have on their running of their properties? Many had already an intense and long-standing concern for the protection of historic and Aboriginal sites on their properties, for example the Barns families in Joslin and Mungo stations, or Angus Faugh whose valuable collection of Aboriginal artifacts is now curated in the Research Centre at Lake Mungo National Park. Meeting the concerns of Willandra land holders will be an important task for those devising the management of this World Heritage Area. Their involvement in conservation policy will be an essential element in its success.

So Lake Mungo has acquired levels of meaning and special values for many Australians. Like Mt William it is a place of power. Much of its symbolic value is rooted in current debates on collective self-identity: Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. Many non-Aboriginal visitors have more concern with visions of a pristine Aboriginal past belonging to distant millennia than of the Aboriginal culture of the present. Opportunities for learning other perspectives could be developed but are often allowed to slip away.

However for archaeologists and Aboriginal people some significant opportunities have been taken up. In 1989 a workshop on research was held at Lake Mungo National Park. Its aim was an overview of past studies in the environmental and cultural fields of research. Participants included scientific investigators, local Aboriginal people and local land holders. It was a sharing of research results, of information, and a recognition of the genuine interest each group held in the landscapes of the Willandra. The researchers there made an open statement of their commitment to Aboriginal custodianship of the past and its physical remains, including the human remains. In January 1992 the cremated bones of the 'Mungo Lady' were returned to the elders of the local communities at a solemn and moving ceremony held on the lunette near the original site. This occasion was one of genuine sharing of experience and perspectives. It brought researchers, Aboriginal people and local land holders together to celebrate a new beginning. The return in a very real sense represented a realisation of 'the impossible dream'.

On this special occasion archaeologists committed to the conservation ethic, and to the scientific values of their discipline, acknowledged the important values held for others by those fragile bones, accepting the symbolism of their return to Aboriginal control. Aboriginal people on their part openly recognised the value of archaeological research and its contribution to knowledge of their past. The elders who received the finds also had sitting by their side Mr Barnes of Joulin, holder of the land on which the find was made. All this was the more significant given the unfortunate and irreconcilable clash of values between archaeologists and the Aboriginal Community over the Kow Swamp human remains in 1990.

Other changes in the public legislative domain reflect new attitudes that find a focus on Lake Mungo. Currently the New South Wales Government is preparing its Aboriginal Ownership Bill for Lake Mungo National Park. This will transfer ownership of this area, (and of two other significant Aboriginal places: Mootwingee - Mutawintji, and Yarrowick) to local Aboriginal communities. Joint management with the NSW National Parks Service is being discussed, and will maintain this spirit of shared perspectives – building on, but exceeding, mere commonality of concern. This should provide management appropriate to the plurality of values held by Mungo National Park, and to its very special Aboriginal significance. Wider legislative and management changes are under consideration for New South Wales. These will implement the recommendations of the Task Force established some years ago to report to the government on future provisions for Aboriginal cultural heritage.

For the Willandra Lakes World Heritage Area as a whole the management plans currently being developed are likely to have strong involvement from local Aboriginal communities. Land holders, scientific researchers and relevant Government agencies, (both State and Federal) will also contribute to management policy and its implementation. In this we will hope for structures in
which shared understanding of disparate values emerges as a directing force, and in which community values and social significance are recognized as vital components.

There is now a new arena for all of us to develop innovative perspectives based on understanding and acceptance of values important to others in our society, and held to be present in those heritage places we investigate and protect as researchers or managers.

Such developments must be active processes, interactive with those concerned. Token recognition of the existence of other values is hardly sufficient. We must accept what cannot appropriately be shared, listening to those other voices in the debate and respecting their messages. What should we do beyond listening to the voices that inform us of other values? Are there further ways of promoting shared understanding? A number of new directions seem vital. First one might stress the promotion of educational opportunities for Aboriginal people in the fields of anthropology, archaeology, conservation and heritage management. Here we should recognize that as well as sharing our knowledge, skills and techniques, as educators we must be ready to see them taught and applied in new ways, ways that are culturally appropriate, so that a genuinely indigenous archaeology may emerge. The tradition of archaeology in our region will thus be enriched by new understandings and new perspectives.

Collaborative research projects form a second important direction for development. Colin Pardoe has called joint research ventures 'sharing the past' (1990, see especially p. 209; see also McBryde, 1985, p. 2 and Creamer, 1989 p. 130). They may also lead to a shared future for its physical remains, and the expression of new perspectives that could emerge from educational change. As Creamer points out 'integrating traditional with scientific pathways to knowledge of the past could yield a creative and meaningful interpretive synthesis' (1989, p. 130).

A third area is the development of joint management programmes for heritage areas. Important models are already in place at Uluru and Kakadu in the arrangements between traditional Aboriginal owners and the Australian Nature Conservation Authority. They are rooted in acknowledgment of Aboriginal custodianship of the past and control of its physical expression in country, and carefully structured in their legislative and administrative bases. Similar arrangements are also in place in New Zealand where, Sarah Titchen tells me, they are referred to as 'management in partnership'.

A fourth vital direction for the future lies in the recognition of community values as relevant to the assessment and management of heritage areas, and a concern for social values as well as scientific values in heritage discourse. Recently programmes elicitting and accommodating community values have been established by the Australian Heritage Commission. Already they are providing new insights relevant to management policies.

Such developments foster exciting innovation, appropriate to the multi-layered values held by so many of our heritage places. They may also stimulate new modes of thinking about the past and about heritage, as well as about the pragmatics of its management. Shared understanding of disparate values may become the ‘Impossible Dream’ fully realised. It could be empowered by the realisation that maintaining the cultural values and visions of those separate collectives within society enriches society as a whole. (Cf. the comments of the Torres Strait Islander speaking in the Boyer Lecture Series on ABC Radio on 20.11.93).

Two hundred years ago that curiously perceptive soldier, Watkin Tench, was perplexed by the challenge of cross-cultural communication between Aborigines and Europeans:

......no difficulty, but of understanding each other, subsisted between us. Inexplicable contradictions arose to bewilder our researches, which no ingenuity could unravel, and no credulity reconcile.

(Tench Complete Account, 1783[1961] p. 200.)

If we consider shared heritage as a matter of sharing the process of understanding differing values and working to accommodate them, then perhaps at last we may resolve these contradictions. They may acquire new meaning, and we may achieve new understanding of the past and of the needs of shared management for its material remains, thus enriching the lives of individuals and of society. Howard Creamer (1989) highlighted the relevance of T.S. Eliot’s Little Gidding. Its words are an appropriate conclusion:

And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

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