editorial

Cultural Landscapes Conference
Robertson  NSW
6-8 November 1996

This small conference was convened to reflect on the growth of interest in and methodological difficulties encountered with cultural landscape conservation, since the first Australia ICOMOS conference on the subject at Lanyon, ACT, in 1988.

At that conference, Professor John Mulvaney urged us to discard two professional obsessions — the tunnel vision of disciplinary “relevance” where blinkered enthusiasm promotes one concern, and the reinvention of wheels by disciplines as they discover the truth that humanity and the natural world interact and change dynamically. He exhorted us to,

Maintain standards within each discipline, but broaden horizons to embrace other disciplines, attend conservation conferences with the assumption that they are relevant, and our heritage of cultural landscapes will be the beneficiary.

How have we fared?

Short reports on work in progress were then given by the following 13 people:
- Dr Isabel McBryde on cultural landscapes of Aboriginal long-distance exchange systems.
- Dr Hilary du Cros on cultural linkages, a concept for Aboriginal cultural landscapes and local government planning schemes.
- Joan Domicelj on cultural landscapes and their inclusion in the World Heritage Convention and on valuing local cultural landscapes.
- Jill Cowley on the United States National Park Service Cultural Landscape Program.
- Iain Stuart on using cultural landscapes as an analytical tool in studying squatting landscapes.
- Margaret Pullar on historic routes in Queensland.
- Dr John Pickard on fences in the rural landscape.
- Hector Abrahams on the assessment of Hagley, Tasmania and moving a road.
- Warwick Mayne-Wilson on assessing heritage values of trees in Kyogle Shire.
- Jane Gardiner on conserving elements of the Alstonville Plateau.
- Pamela Kaufman on a model for incorporating expectations of different communities of interest in the planning process.
- Dr Jim Russell on cultural values in the natural areas of the Upper Mersey, Valley, Tasmania.
- Joy McCann on the Australian Heritage Commission’s cultural studies in forests.

Some of these contributions are published in this issue of Historic Environment. Professor Ken Taylor gave an illustrated lecture entitled ‘A Symbolic Australian Landscape — Painting a Nation’, which was published in 1992 in Landscape Journal.1
The next day started with illustrated talks on the local Shire of Wingecarribee’s heritage study, for which Jocelyn Colleran was the principal consultant in 1992/93. She outlined the brief, methods, resulting 600 records relating to historic rural landscapes and then introduced the sub-consultants who spoke on their detailed contributions to the study: Professor Ian Jackson on historic themes, Jonathon Winston-Gregson on archaeological sites and their connections and resulting patterns of absence, Professor Ken Taylor on delineating patterns of rural landscapes, Chris Betteridge on the development of 50 or so historic gardens in the area, and town planner Carolyn Tallents on how the shire used the study to develop a district control plan from a heritage strategy. An appraisal of this study by Ken Taylor and Carolyn Tallents has also been published in the *International Journal of Heritage Studies.*

The local landscape was inspected through the rain and mist — the remnant native Sutton Forest; the roadside hawthorn hedges; Hillview, a former vice-regal summer residence where the Department of Planning has undertaken major structural restoration works and the local branch of the Australian Garden History Society has volunteered much effort in garden maintenance; and Throsby Park homestead, where Marg Bailey and Peter McKenzie explained the work that has been carried out by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service over the years. From the verandahs, the suburbanisation encroaching on the remnants of Charles Throsby’s pastoral landscape that Conrad Martens had painted could be seen. At Bong Bong, Ian Jack pointed out the evidence of the vanished village, and a remnant forest reserve on the outskirts of Robertson was circumnavigated.

Joan Domicij summarised our over-riding concerns:

- The relationship between practitioners and clients, both government and community — involving cross-cultural and multi-disciplinary briefs for studies, the process, links with heritage planning, community divisions, specialists’ concern about love of place, celebrating success to help solve management issues, practitioners as privileged “listeners”, and the ability to revise the methodology after “listening”.
- Strategies for ICOMOS (public relations versus self-education).
- Anticipation of conflicts and the inevitability of contested values.
- Integrated land management incorporating cultural heritage values.

There was agreement that ICOMOS has a responsibility to breakdown technical jargon and to communicate in plain English the peoples’ stories in the landscape for broad-scale understanding.

ICOMOS should be a promoter rather than a lobbyist and be active in landscape conservation seminars with local government authorities.

The highest priority was communicating a positive and practical outlook for conserving cultural landscapes and heritage, “jumping over fences” with local stakeholders and other stakeholders who determine the outcomes, and
conversing better with other cultural professions to get them to join in conserving our landscapes.

It seems as if our concerns have moved from methodological approaches of academia, to communicating convincingly with the wider community.

endnotes

1 11(2), pp. 127-143.