The main issue addressed in these conference proceedings is how to successfully conserve, manage and promote Australia's cultural and heritage resources as a basis for tourism. Much of the discussion centres on the problems and opportunities that answering this challenge presents.

Several problems are highlighted. There is a lack of a well developed philosophy about our cultural heritage. The perception of landscape as a repository of cultural history has only recently begun to enter contemporary thinking in Australia. There is a plea for more intelligent tourism management, which requires coordinated action by government agencies devoted to heritage conservation and tourism development. The role that the corporate sector can play also needs to be considered. The point is made that cultural tourism (also described as cultural heritage tourism and special interest tourism) stands in great danger of being subsumed as a commodity, or to being presented only as entertainment so that its larger function becomes subverted. The overriding tension in the conservation of our cultural heritage is that it is seen as a public resource capable of economic return.

Valuable insights are provided about the meaning of interpretation as it applies to cultural and heritage resources, who it is intended for and why. Interpretation as a communication technique underpins successful strategies to engage visitors in a way that is enjoyable, yet informative. They must be presented with authentic experiences if cultural tourism is to be taken seriously. As one of the speakers at the conference said: 'The values of our heritage places should be presented realistically, holistically and honestly, not selectively to enhance a desired and more comfortable stereotype'.

Our perception of the landscape is based, not just on what we see, but what we know to be there. A seemingly uninspiring scene can be given a different perspective, according to the meaning we impose on it. Understanding the site’s historical context is critical to this process. Several local and overseas examples of possible as well as existing visitor attractions are used to show that interpreting the history of a place has enormous opportunities for tourism. It is pointed out that conservation planning for the tourism potential of historic places should seek to undertake a careful but creative analysis of the site to draw out the hidden themes and characteristics for interpretation.

Cultural tourism provides an opportunity to promote the particular and unique features of Australia. The marketing of these resources should be based on imaginative planning to conserve and enhance our environment and also to provide enriching experiences for tourists.

Putting this issue together has been both enjoyable and thought provoking. I hope that these proceedings contribute to a greater understanding of the meaning of cultural tourism, its future development and the conservation issues which it raises in Australia.

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