Sandy Blair

Sandy Blair is currently principal conservation officer in the Regional Assessment Branch of the Australian Heritage Commission. She has six years experience in identifying and conserving cultural heritage Australia-wide through her work with the commission's Historic Environment Section.

Discovering the cultural values of natural areas such as Australia's native forests is a more recent obsession. Sandy is particularly keen on working with local communities to identify their heritage places. Sandy has a PhD in cultural history, and has previously taught in university history departments.

Forest sites [abstract]

There are a large number of redundant sites in forests: for example, the remains of mining, failed agricultural and pastoral ventures, and abandoned settlements. Questions that need to be asked in relation to these are: are they culturally significant? Who to? And what is their future?

Some assessment of these sites is being undertaken as part of the Australian Heritage Commission's regional assessment work in East Gippsland and the Central Highlands region of Victoria, and in south-east Western Australia, projects that are completed or nearly so. Similar projects are about to commence in south-east Queensland and north-east New South Wales.

The benefit of regional assessment projects is that they link heritage survey work and identification of cultural significance with conservation advice for land managers, based on a regional understanding of all national estate values. The importance of this approach is seen, for example, at mining and sawmilling sites in the Central Highlands of Victoria.

Another strength of regional assessment projects is the inclusion of community consultation and appreciation of community heritage values which lead to strong community ownership of outcomes.