IDENTIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT OF RURAL CULTURAL LANDSCAPES
The National Trust's Method: and a Relevant Case Study

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INTRODUCTION

The method adopted by the National Trust of Australia (N.S.W.) in assessing landscapes for classification and entry in the Trust's Register is one which pays attention to three major features of the Trust's activities. The first is the necessity to implement the objects of the Trust as set out in the National Trust Act, 1980, Section 4 in relation to landscapes. A step towards this is to identify those places it considers have heritage significance to the community and which deserve conservation. The criterion adopted is the definition of the "National Estate" in the Australian Heritage Commission Act, 1975. The second feature of the Trust's activity which influences the method of landscape assessment is a property of its membership. The Trust is an independent community organisation open to anyone who supports its aims and objectives. Work in identification and assessment of places of possible heritage value by the committees is voluntary and unpaid.

The conjunction of these first two features of the Trust's activities has important influences on the work of landscape assessment. The process adopted needs to be responsive to the fact that a voluntary force of motivated people is nevertheless unpredictable in the expertise available and effect of time demands on manpower at any given moment. As a consequence of these issues, the process must maximise the value of the review of draft classifications by expert individuals and representatives of interested organisations when they are available, be flexible in time-frame and be efficient in demanding as little field work as is possible in achieving the best quality ends. In addition the process must get maximum value from the diversity of expertise available without allowing this diversity to obstruct or sectionalise the work of assessment. A way of avoiding these problems is to make use of consensus judgements where possible within an external review process (see Fig.1).
At any particular time, a limited or biased range of expertise will be available to any voluntary organisation. The Landscape Assessment Committee’s response to this has been to develop a manual of practice (soon to be available publicly) which sets out a process leading to producing classification proposals. The range of expertise necessary to fully operate the method may not be available at any given time but all the areas which are typically of concern are detailed and an assessment team collects base data which can be reviewed by others. The review is built into the assessment process.

The method assumes that typical expertise required is at a professional level in the natural sciences, earth sciences, design, history, planning and archaeology areas. It further assumes that an understanding of the biophysical attributes of the landscape is fundamental to interpretation of heritage values within it.

The third feature of the Trust’s activities which influences the method of landscape assessment is that the Trust is active in conservation action on a day-to-day basis. Trust Environment Section staff are occupied for a large proportion of their time in responding to enquiries, planning proposals, government initiatives, EISs and other reports, etc. concerning conservation issues. For these activities increasingly detailed information on heritage values and appropriate conservation action is required. The complexity and scale of the landscape is such that a major concern of the assessment method is to supply information to staff of sufficient precision and detail on conservation action to allow ready response appropriate to a wide range of demands.

**WHAT IS A LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION AREA?**

‘Landscape’ is often popularly interpreted as ‘scenery’. In relation to its objects and the definition of the national Estate, the Trust uses the term to cover a much wider spectrum including natural areas, scientific and geological sites, wildlife habitats, modified and cultural landscapes, aboriginal sites, scenic rural areas, parks and gardens.

**Statement of Principles**

- The National Trust regards a Landscape Conservation Area as a place of environmental heritage importance within the boundaries of which certain actions or controls may be necessary to retain its present character and preserve or restore its character in the future.
- The implication of its classification is that the reasons for its classification can be made explicit as statements of the special values contributing to the qualities of that place. These values should always be preserved and where possible reinforced, and be the basis on which recommendations for development of policy, environmental controls and any other action necessary to protect these values are made.
- The special values may be man-made (the product of a period of human habitation) or natural, or result from a particular interaction of these two.
- Landscape Conservation Areas are not museum pieces and are not expected to remain ‘frozen’ in time. Their special values may best be served in the future by removal of disruptive elements, by appropriate planning and design of new developments and by sensitive restoration and rehabilitation of existing elements of heritage value.
- The important principle to be followed is to respect the essential character of the area by preserving those elements which give the landscape its character and values and by treating existing elements and adding new ones in a controlled, sympathetic and judicious manner.
- The fact that a landscape may not be classified or considered worthy of classification does not mean that no consideration of conservation values should apply to it. The Trust believes that wise land use practices and conservation of natural resources, should apply in all circumstances.
- The values which contribute to a Landscape Conservation Area are not confined to that place. A boundary drawn on a map is only a general means of encompassing definable values or sets of values. It does not imply a fixed line beyond which need for appropriate management is absent.
- A landscape may be classified if it displays any of the heritage values described in the Trust’s Act. All categories of values do not exist for every landscape: a scenic landscape could have no scientific value and one high in cultural value could be quite unattractive.

**The Landscape Conservation Area Listing Programme**

The programme to identify, document and assess a Landscape Conservation Area is usually broken up into five phases:

- identification of potential Landscape Conservation Areas
- preliminary research and information collection
- field inspection, inventory and assessment
- draft listing formulation
- further research and classification proposal.
Identification of Potential Landscape Conservation Areas

Potential Landscape Conservation Areas will usually be identified in one of four ways:

* personal knowledge of a member of the Landscape Assessment Committee;
* through regional surveys, e.g. Illawarra, Hunter, Southern Highlands;
* through thematic surveys, e.g. land use types, natural systems;
* through recommendations from other committees or Trust staff.

Preliminary Research and Information Collection

Preliminary research and information collection aims to establish the context within which a proposed LCA exists, streamline the field inspection stage and highlight areas requiring study. There is normally an abundance of information on the biophysical and social characteristics of the area in question available from government departments and authorities, local government, academic institutions, library and archival material and community groups. Of special interest at this stage are features of the landscape which can help to define boundaries of the LCA and describe the major elements of the character of that landscape. It is not necessary to collect information on all of the following aspects, but all will be relevant to some of the reasons for proposing a classification.

(a) Biophysical attributes of the landscape

1. Geology
2. Geomorphology
3. Soils
4. Vegetation
5. Hydrology
6. Climate

(b) Human use attributes of the landscape

1. Land use
2. Settlement patterns, transport, service infrastructure
3. Land ownership and tenure
4. Planning issues.

(c) Attributes of the landscape with possible heritage value

It is no doubt possible to find something of value in every landscape. There are none with no natural values and probably few with no cultural values. The problem is to examine landscapes candidly for values of (heritage) significance which can be explicitly stated and defended.

1. Scientific values

These can relate to any of the biophysical attributes of the landscape to interactions between them and to perspectives far beyond its boundaries. The values will often concern flora, fauna, habitats, ecosystems, geological and geomorphological structures or natural processes in terms of uniqueness, rarity, unusual or significant distribution in space, endangered striking and educationally valuable examples.

2. Historic values

Historic values relate to a hierarchy of sources ranging from conventional historic objects to qualities more akin to cultural values. Although it is somewhat artificial to separate historic and cultural values, there are advantages in highlighting the difference between traditional 'object and site' approaches to conservation from contemporary views of cultural landscape values. This hierarchy could be characterised thus:

- Objects - familiar heritage items: buildings, cemeteries, bridges, factories, machinery, gardens.
- Sites - documented sites previously bearing objects of historic value. Objects barely discernible or gone.
- Places - documented places of historic value. No objects related to them.
- Patterns - distributions of undocumented and probably unclassifiable objects, sites and places. Aboriginal history in this hierarchy falls toward the lower end. Particular sites and objects are often only symbolic of attachments to the larger landscape.

3. Cultural values

These relate to ongoing human interaction with the landscape which may or may not produce material change. A hierarchy from material to less material sources of values could be:

- Objects - buildings, parks, monuments, plantings, etc. of cultural but not individual heritage value.
- Places - burial grounds, gathering places, recreation areas, lookouts, landmarks, aboriginal sacred sites, etc.
- Patterns - development patterns, transferred designs, vernacular design, responses to physical landscape constraints.
- Symbols - writings, music, painting, etc. in response to landscape qualities. Aboriginal art sites, totems.
- Meanings - generic landscapes recalling the work of interpreters (e.g. artists, writers), landscapes as statements of attitudes (to nature, to society, etc.).

Frequently none of the material evidence of cultural value will be worthy of classification in its own right and few objects and places will have documented values. There is no necessary relationship to aesthetic values. It should be remembered that the historic-cultural split is artificial, but it has value in reorienting attention away from objects in landscape and towards the search for
pattern and meaning. As discussed later, these may be the most important (and least tangible) of cultural values.

4. Aesthetic values

Whilst ultimate interpretation of scenery is subjective, it must be based on the existing physical fabric. Landscapes can and should be interpreted in visual terms in four ways:

- Basic perception processes relate most to the Analytical experience of landscape
- Compositional
- Aesthetic

Aesthetic values are assessed systematically. The committee adopts an ‘expert consensus’ approach to the evaluation which is subject to review. No necessary relationship is assumed between positive aesthetic values and any other value category.

FIELD INSPECTION INVENTORY AND ASSESSMENT

Field work is streamlined by preliminary research and prior generation of sketch maps of possible land system boundaries, etc. The main activities are:

- Overview
- Reconnaissance survey (‘windscreen’, foot, etc.)
- Documentation/photography
- Focus on cultural, aesthetic, specific scientific values
- Team meeting on boundaries, land units, etc.
- Decision: proceed to draft listing/abandon.

DRAFT LISTING FORMULATION

The proposal for classification has three main components and these are expected to support each other. The components are:

- delineation of the Landscape Conservation Area and its boundaries
- reasons for National Trust classification
- recommendation for conservation action to conserve the values embodied in the reason for classification.

Delineation of the LCA and its boundaries

Kinds of boundaries

- (a) Literal boundaries
- (b) Physical boundaries of limited extent
- (c) Natural (biophysical) boundaries
- (d) Ecological boundaries
- (e) Scenic boundaries
- (f) Non-continuous boundaries

Reasons for listing

Reasons given are explicit statements of the heritage values (see above) which can be supported by evidence and assessment of their significance. They are supported by the description of the LCA and recommendations for conservation action.

Recommendations

Identification and reasons for classifying an LCA are recognition of its heritage value: recommendations are the means to its conservation. They are made in the light of the following considerations:

(a) relationship to existing Trust policies;
(b) practical consideration of means of implementation;
(c) understanding the roles and responsibilities of the various agencies at which recommendations may be directed;
(d) necessity for flexibility of interpretation in the future;
(e) implications for consistency within the draft classification.

HILL END CONSERVATION AREA CLASSIFICATION: A CASE STUDY

In 1976 the Urban Conservation Committee of the National Trust (N.S.W.) classified the village centre of Hill End as an Urban Conservation Area, responding to interest in the history of the area which culminated in declaration of the Hill End Historic Site under the new National Parks and Wildlife Act of 1967. The boundary was a 2 km radius circle centred approximately on the Royal Hotel and encompassing most of the Historic Site, parts of the Town Common, alluvial and reef mining workings and surrounding countryside.

When the Historic Site Draft Plan of Management was mooted it was thought, in the light of comments made previously by the Trust in this context, that a reassessment of the Conservation Area might be appropriate.

The landscape assessment process

The process was an abbreviated version of that described above. The identification and preliminary research phases were largely already complete. However, the needs of the assessment process in relation to the biophysical attributes of the landscape, human use qualities and values not addressed by the previous classification required some preliminary research.

The first part of this was to develop an understanding of the regional context of Hill End both biophysical and geographic.

The biophysical attributes of the landscape

Topographic and geological maps show Hill End/Tamboroo to occupy a shallow upland valley, part of an undulating plateau dissected by a number of streams draining north to the Macquarie River and south to the Turon River. Surficial geology locates the area within the Hill End Trough, a complex geosynclinal fold system.
striking north-south. Erosion of the steep dipping strata and their differential hardness and resistance to weathering has produced a landscape with a north-south 'grain' at macroscale. Soil types and agricultural use, stream and road patterns mirror this grain: areas of poorer soil lands being steeper and often uncleared appear as natural vegetation. Better soils are typical of less resistant rocks and these lands are more intensely developed agriculturally, extensively cleared and with improved pastures in many cases. Intermediates and abrupt changes between these land types are striking.

The topographic situation of the immediate Hill End area is at the edge of the plateau top, with deeply dissected valleys leading to the Turon River to the south of the town and gently sloping plateau toplands to the Macquarie River northward. The gold-bearing strata outcrop north-south, are exposed in the Turon River slopes and overlain by alluvial deposits of recent sediments on the plateau top and Tambaroora area. The town of Hill End is overlooked by Bald Hill, a residual cap of tertiary basalt with characteristic vegetation.

The natural vegetation of the area shows a variety of influences which vary with proximity to the mined areas. Clearing and grazing better soils and harvesting of timber from poorer soils for mining use has produced a vegetation of distinctive structure. Eucalypt species capable of regrowth from underground structures have produced even-aged stands of dense coppice regrowth. Understory growth is frequently very sparse, reflecting compaction and erosion loss of topsoil.

**Human use attributes of the landscape**

Before the discovery of gold deposits the land of the area was put to agricultural use, mainly grazing for wool production. The soils are fair to poor in productivity and the area of only moderate rainfall. Much land was and is of marginal agricultural value and a great deal of the plateau edge too steep for intensive use. Transport to and from the area has limited its development. Road access only is available and the steep and erodable terrain was a road-making problem from early days. Its low agricultural productivity and location away from main trade and transport routes made supply of materials and export of products a limit to growth. Main access in earlier times was via the Bridle Track to Bathurst and a similar track to Sofala, a nearby gold boom town. Availability of water has also limited development.

Gold mining in the area occurred in two major periods: the Tambaroora alluvial fields which peaked between 1852 and 1870, and the Hill End reefs which boomed between 1870 and 1874. Mining continues today (both alluvial and reef mines) but at a very restricted rate. The two types of mining and their locations produced landscapes of quite different qualities.

The linear settlement pattern of Hill End and Tambaroora villages reflects the geology and gold deposits and their north-south orientation. The layout of Hill End shows two periods of growth, pre-1860 with rather free and irregular lot sizes and layout, and post-1860 when a town planning survey imposed a strict rectilinear grid and increased density. Town size was restricted by surrounding leases. In 1870, 8000 people (the largest inland population in N.S.W.) were crowded into the village precinct.

Though the village was tiny, it had attached to it an enormous Common, reaching from the Turon River to beyond Tambaroora. If only by default this served to conserve a great deal of the mining landscape of the area to the present.

**What should a classification of the cultural landscape encompass?**

Hill End - Tambaroora has a well-documented history, a stock of historic buildings, sites and items of archaeological heritage and the extraordinary photographic record of Beaufoy Merlin. Why propose a further classification of the goldfield?

**The notion of cultural landscape**

Without delving into semantic or etymological argument, it is probably fair to say that this term is largely an acknowledgement of a growing realization that a reductionist assessment of separate values in heritage conservation does not give a good account of the complexity or interrelatedness of elements which produce apparent 'character', or 'place' or more romantically 'genus loci' in the landscape. This realization is not confined to heritage conservation: it has surfaced in literature, art, geography, landscape architecture and in sociology. Increased sophistication in assessing individual values (e.g. scientific, historic, aesthetic) has not led to a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of landscape: indeed it has often produced polarized opinion in relation to both assessment and conservation action.

There are interesting parallels in ecology, which is (or should be) a holistic science attempting to relate organisms and environments. Endless argument attaches to theories of succession (the process of development of a natural system) and classifications of ecosystems (the
products of such development). Determinism gave us succession and climax ecosystems (c.f. history and geography): more recently we have theories of a continuous variation in response to environmental forces both biological and physical (c.f. phenomenological and semiotic developments in history and philosophy). So at one level every ecosystem is unique (there are no others exactly the same) and at another generic (a rainforest is more like another rainforests than any other ecosystem).

Both ecology and the cultural landscape notion attempt to describe a dynamic relationship between organisms and their environments in both biological and physical terms. A problem for development of a more 'ecological' theory of cultural landscape could be that both scientific determinism and phenomenalist historiography miss the mark: the first by treating mankind as mere animals, and the second by considering that the landscape exists only in the mind.

THE PATTERNS OF HILL END - TAMBAROORA

From the preceding descriptions a variety of interacting patterns emerge which help to explain the spatial qualities of the landscape. The underlying geology and geomorphology impose a geometric linearity on the development pattern, location in space and scale of the landscape. A response to this in terms of land use, was the delineation of the ‘Town Common’ to prevent encroachment of residential and commercial development on to the gold leases. The Common does not therefore, describe land within the town precinct for common agricultural use, but a prescriptive response to the location of the gold deposits. It is vast and in part precipitous.

The two town locations responded to a further aspect of the geological pattern: Tambaroora on the gently sloping plateau top developed first in response to discovery of alluvial gold which could be mined with existing technology and labour-intensive methods. Development shifted to Hill End on the escarpment edge when reef mining technology and capital inflow allowed larger companies to begin exploiting reef gold. Along with this, greater capitalization allowed the expansion of activities to places closer to sources of resources and transport of ore and materials to these sites.

The organisation of Hill End itself is a microcosm of this geometric linearity, aligned north-south and constrained in extent by surrounding leases and the common, it is connected to Tambaroora to the north by the Mudgee Road which follows the alignment of the deposits and Tambaroora Creek, the site of extensive alluvial mining activity in Golden Gully.

The alluvial and reef mining landscapes are distinctive. Alluvial workings are on gently sloping lands, some now used agriculturally and characterised by massive gully erosion structures and limited regrowth of vegetation, often being invaded by exotic vegetation now adopting a new role in the landscape (e.g. pine, hawthorn, briar, blackberry). Reef mined landscapes are often steep, with complex micro-topography of mullock heaps of broken rock, occasional residual machinery and head frames, and coppice regrowth of eucalypts over a depauperate understory.

Delineation of the cultural landscape

A decision to adopt a new boundary was made after identification of the above patterns. It encompasses most of the ‘Town Common’ and its junction with the Turon River, the Bridle Track from the river to the town of Hill End and some alluvial workings to the east and north of the town. It extended to the north of the common to include the Valentine Mine site. The reason for adopting this boundary is that it encompasses most of the cultural landscape that is particular to Hill End, that it is a boundary with meaning in itself to the people of the area, that it is not arbitrary as was the previous boundary and is thereby a better statement of values, that it is an area the tenure of which is compatible with heritage conservation action, and that it is geometrically and spatially intelligible in relation to the historic and biophysical landscape.

Elements of the cultural landscape of concern to conservation - some questions

Setting a boundary is in a sense the easy part of a classification. In cultural landscapes the next difficulty is to decide on actions to be taken to conserve cultural values. Since a cultural landscape is dynamic and ought not to be ‘frozen’ in time, there are considerable problems in conservation action. It will not only be difficult to decide on the degree of tolerable intervention but also, since natural forces operate in the landscape whether any intervention is appropriate which would oppose these.

Rather than deal with all the possible conservation actions in this case study, let us focus on just two as examples, one which relates closely to the built fabric and one to the larger landscape.

Within the village of Hill End many of the houses and some sites now without buildings, have remnant gardens. A striking avenue of trees exists on the main entrance road, Beyers Avenue and some properties surveyed before the gold rush are large enough to have substantial trees. The remnant gardens, avenues and tree plantings date in many instances from the 1870s. House gardens are losing their character through neglect, damage and grazing by rabbits and stock on the Common and disease: some avenue trees have died and been replaced, and other trees are dying of old age or other causes. What is the appropriate action on these important cultural elements? Can landholders be required to restore their gardens and from where would appropriate materials come? Do new developments need landscape schemes with identical species/layouts, or is it more appropriate to...
acknowledge the cultural significance of new fashions in garden design (e.g. the native garden). Should all dying trees be replaced by identical species and if so, when? Should replacements be inserted into avenues now so they will be mature when deaths occur (and alter the appearance of the avenues and perhaps their cultural significance?). Can a landholder be required to replace a dead tree anyway and if perhaps it is a Tree of Heaven of a Camphor Laurel, both now considered pests, but previously valuable for aesthetic/cultural reasons, should it be replaced with the same, or a new species? These questions have clear enough answers where restoration is concerned, but in the cultural landscape notion the answers are anything but clear-cut.

A further example is in areas influenced by alluvial mining. These have little positive aesthetic appeal, though their cultural meanings are undoubted. The microtopography of some of these, e.g. Golden Gully, is most striking, with sheet and gully erosion of sediments, frequently having undergone several phases of redeposition, producing terraced and gullied areas with up to 5 metres relative relief and of great complexity and colour variety. As previously stated, vegetation is depauperate and exotics are becoming frequent.

What is appropriate conservation action in this case? New alluvial mines are subject to stringent sedimentation controls; an elegant statement of new cultural attitudes to landscape. Should the old mine areas be stabilised so that sedimentation does not threaten downstream water quality further, or should the process of change to the landscape be allowed to continue? Would the answer be the same if the mining was now nearly indiscernible and if controls are appropriate, should we place them within the delineated cultural landscape, or outside it and simply intercept any environmental impacts off-site? Should we halt colonization of sites by exotic species soon to be invasive weeds in line with a more ecological view of things, or control this invasion for aesthetic or restorative reasons?

These lists of questions are not exhaustive but point out some difficulties with the cultural landscape notion. The abandonment of a pseudo-objective stance seems necessary in assessment for reasons argued earlier: however, its abandonment poses problems for the independence of assessment and action. A more interactive and perhaps ‘ecological’ concept of landscape also seems appropriate and might even offer a possibility of integrating an understanding of human and natural processes in the development and management of the landscape.