Introduction

Mountains of Meaning: celebrating mountains in the International Year of Mountains

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2002 was the United Nations International Year of Mountains and the International Year of Cultural Heritage. 'Mountains of Meaning' was the cultural heritage component of a bigger conference, Celebrating Mountains, that sought to explore the heritage, environment and tourism of Australia's mountains. The conference was co-ordinated by the Australian Alps Programme in partnership with Australia ICOMOS and held from 24 to 27 November 2002 in Jindabyne, New South Wales.

Modern Jindabyne was built on the shore of Lake Jindabyne after the damming of the Snowy River, as part of the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme of the 1950s, flooded the Jindabyne Valley drowning the old Jindabyne township. Two hours drive south of Canberra, Jindabyne is the gateway to Kosciuszko National Park, a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and a major winter skiing and summer bush-walking destination.

The conference commenced with the Kaju Ceremony – 'a welcome to country' on the shores of Lake Jindabyne that involved singing, welcome speeches from traditional owners and a vibrant exciting Aboriginal dance performance that spectators will never forget. At the time of the conference the region, as much of Australia, was in the grip of a serious drought and it was barely two months later that almost all of the Australian Alps National Parks were severely burnt by bushfires. As many conference papers and discussions focused on the Australian Alps national parks, that information will assist their rehabilitation and conservation.

Australia ICOMOS initially proposed a cultural heritage conference with a focus on mountains to follow on from an Aboriginal Gathering proposed by the Australian Alps Liaison Committee (AALC). This expanded into a major conference embracing three themes, Mountains of Meaning (cultural heritage), Mountains of the Future (environmental issues) and Mountains of Tourism (tourism). A partnership arrangement for conference organisation developed with the AALC providing seedling funding and major support. Australia ICOMOS, as a conference partner was responsible for developing the Mountains of Meaning component and commenced this by posing the following questions:

- How do we identify heritage values in mountains?
- How do we include the community in managing their values in mountains?
- How can people maintain intangible values in a formal national parks context?
- How do we manage cultural heritage values in 'wilderness' areas?

In examining these issues, as wide an input as possible was sought. International visitors provided opportunity for comparison resulting in a recognition that many of the issues regarding cultural heritage of mountains are much the same everywhere. Another clear aim was to ensure that the Indigenous and non-Indigenous heritage presentations were in the same sessions, providing for an exchange of experience and a search for common ground with presentations from Queensland, South Australia, the Blue Mountains in NSW and Tasmania.

Australia ICOMOS co-ordinated five sessions specifically dedicated to cultural heritage in mountains, focussing on the following cultural heritage themes of mountains:

- Intangible values, the meaning, spiritual and inspirational values of mountains to people
- The experience of living, working and playing in mountain landscapes
- Design and technology in mountain environments – from vernacular huts and small industrial sites to international engineering and modern mountain resorts
- Managing cultural heritage in mountain areas, particularly co-management with Indigenous people.

The three conference themes resulted in a greater communication between the different disciplines and interests represented in the various theme sessions. A list of all conference sessions and papers is attached.

All sessions noted the importance of heightened community input into decision-making in the identification and management of the heritage and environmental values to found in mountains. Mountains in Australia are generally very sparsely occupied and large proportions of them are dedicated national parks; communities are fiercely attached to these areas, whether local communities, Indigenous groups or the broader community that values them as wilderness and spiritual areas or uses such as recreation.

The papers included in this issue of Historic Environment highlight this key theme of importance to community. They have been drawn from each of the cultural heritage sessions to cover the scope of the meanings of mountains and particular matters related to the conservation and management of mountain places.

The keynote addresses by visiting Canadian Indigenous speaker, Diane Strand, and NSW Aboriginal speaker, Jason Ardler, both stressed the survival and robust nature of traditional Indigenous spiritual values in mountains as well as the overlay of historic importance resulting from interactions between settler groups and local Indigenous people. Their stories are different yet the similarities of experience and
responses in managing such places and values are valuable. Jane Lennon's keynote paper continues this idea by outlining that the meanings to non-Indigenous people is more than the individual elements, the 'dots on the map', stressing a cultural landscape approach.

The theme 'Inspiration and Icons' takes up these ideas in more detail. Jo Wilmott and Glenys Couthardt shared with us their 'living country' experiences as Aboriginal women working with the maintenance and presentation of Aboriginal heritage. Serge Domicelj's paper on spiritual values in the Andes and the motivation behind the meanings of mountains provides important comparative ideas for the Australian experience. By contrast, Marilyn Truscott highlights the importance of understanding what is 'real' and what is 'fabricated' in our attachments and myths about cultural identity and mountain heritage.

'Living and Working' looks more closely at the 'dots on the map' and how they shape the current cultural heritage landscape in Australian mountains. Robert Kauffman's paper discussed how the Gold Rush in the Australian Alps may be overlooked in our current understanding of these mountains. Perhaps today the 'wilderness' factor has allowed us to overlook the traces of this important phase of human activity that has shaped settlement patterns, routes as well as story and meanings to local communities.

More recent memories include the story of recreation in Australia's mountains, and Margaret Doring's paper from a Tourism session highlights how one family has maintained a long connection and association with place over generations. Such connections need to be remembered as part of the management of mountain areas.

Similarly the ongoing connections and associations held by Indigenous communities were a dominant thread throughout the conference. Various sessions had papers on this theme and Australia ICOMOS organised a special session on 'Managing Together' to look closely at examples of co-management. One paper described how the ACT Government is co-managing Namadgi National Park with the local Ngunnawal people, while a paper by Baird et al, explained how in NSW the National Parks and Wildlife Service is transferring to Local Aboriginal Land Councils two park areas that are sacred mountains. By contrast, an international example from Margie Coffin Brown shows how physical heritage features are preserved in US national parks. A complementary session, 'Models and Methods', presented papers ranging from assessment methodologies, including Eva Logan's paper showing how community connections and associations can be heard in the management process, providing an interesting comparison between the Australian experience and that in Welsh mountains.

The importance of community and its memories were clear in two evening sessions, Mountains of Memories, that saw a selection of invited guests talking about their experiences of living and working in the mountains. This was planned to bring the cultural heritage of the mountains alive, and did so, ably facilitated by Alistair Grinbergs with Eva Logan. Neville Gare, former manager of Kosciuszko National Park, Noel Gough, former Snowy Hydro engineer, Neen Prendergast of an early local grazing family, and Stuart Garner, a slab hut builder from Adelong, discussed living and working in the mountains – anecdotes and tragedies. Tom Barry, from a Jindabyne farming family described how life in the mountains had continually improved – allowing people more control of their lives while Dianne and Ian Simpson spoke of their family's heritage of five generations of mountain folk music in the Corryong area of Victoria, and provided an entertaining demonstration of music and folk dancing.

These sessions and various papers highlighted a key point for all, that community connection and associations abound in the mountains. Not only is it essential to identify and manage the cultural heritage of mountains as a multi-layered cultural landscape, but it is essential to include the intangible values that are held by all communities connected to those landscapes in conservation decisions.

**Conference Committee**

The Australia ICOMOS Committee for the cultural component of the Conference was based in Canberra and consisted of Juliet Ramsay, Convenor; Sarah-Jane Brazil; Aedeen Cremin; Alistair Grinbergs; Eva Logan and Marilyn Truscott.

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