RA PPORTEURS REPORT
Sarah M. Titchen

Overview
In the short space of a weekend a range of international and Australian speakers presented a total of 28 papers relating to the conference theme Managing a Shared Heritage. The speakers defined the issues and exchanged their experiences in the conservation of places and materials which are the shared heritage of more than one community group. A number of the presentations in which speakers freely shared their personal and cultural heritages were particularly evocative.

The conference was organised into four separate thematic sessions: Finding a Balance; Remote and Ephemeral Sites; Heritage as Cultural Diversity, and Education and Awareness.

Finding a Balance
The tone and focus of the conference was established decisively by Senator Bob Collins in his opening address on the first morning of the conference. Senator Collins emphatically stated that as part of Australia’s search for a national identity it is essential to know, understand and respect your own cultural values and those of others, and to have a positive personal desire to protect and cherish this cultural heritage. He introduced the concept of shared heritage as needing to transcend the modern day view of ownership to that of a sense of joint community interest.

The theme of Senator Collins’ speech was reaffirmed in Professor Isabel McBryde’s discussion of the transformation through time of the appreciation of the cultural, archaeological and scientific values of Mount William in Victoria and Lake Mungo in New South Wales. In recognising historical examples of cultural appropriation at these places Professor McBryde stressed that token recognition of other people’s values of places is not sufficient. She expressed the need to understand and respect the voices of those with other values and other cultural traditions, calling for the recognition and shared understanding of a plurality of disparate values whilst warning against the production of an incomprehensible, amorphous amalgam of values of places.

Professor McBryde called for the stimulation of new modes of thinking and new management strategies in acknowledgment of shared values and suggested four such modes which will be vital to a shared understanding of disparate values: the provision of educational opportunities for Aboriginal people; the establishment and support for genuinely collaborative research; the joint management or

management in partnership of cultural heritage places, and the recognition of social values. Professor McBryde concluded that the sharing process of understanding disparate values will form the basis of a new reconciliation in understanding the past - the result being the enrichment of all Australians.

Appropriation and reconciliation were two issues also discussed by David Ritchie. The past and continuing appropriation of Aboriginal cultural heritage and its values by non-Aboriginals was a central theme in his discussion of cross cultural perspectives of the values of sacred sites. David Ritchie commented that often in identifying and managing Aboriginal heritage the vital need to establish rights for Aboriginal people is being sidestepped - often in a desire to build a national identity for ourselves. Rather than ensuring Aboriginal control of land he believes there is a non-Aboriginal obsession with spiritual values of places.

Practical Approaches to Assessing a Shared Heritage
Following this very effective introduction to the main theme of the conference two practical approaches to assessing shared heritage were presented. Sandy Blair and Sue Feary introduced the Australian Heritage Commission’s Regional Assessment program. Their presentation provided an illustration of a regional model approach to cultural heritage management in the native forests of Victoria and Western Australia. Regional assessment was presented as a methodology well suited to assessing significance in the broadest sense and providing a broader understanding of a sense of place. Intense community participation, expert workshops and theme studies were referred to as an integral component in a developing partnership aimed at achieving the conservation of a diversity and balance of National Estate values.

Marjorie Sullivan compared the significance assessment methodologies used to evaluate a suite of prehistoric and historic sites in the Unions Reef Gold Mining area of the Northern Territory.
Perceptions of a Shared History – Examples from Kakadu National Park and the Northern Territory

The presentations by Richard Mackay and Ivan Haskovic starkly demonstrated the very different and sometimes directly opposing perspectives and perceptions of the shared history of Kakadu National Park. Richard Mackay, in a presentation that revealed the values of the rich and recent distinctive history of Kakadu, laid bare the deficiencies of the Park’s Plan of Management in its treatment of historic sites. He referred to the lack of conservation and interpretation of historic places within Kakadu National Park and warned against an ‘unpalatable form of cultural censorship’. He called for a management strategy for historic places in the Park to be formulated and implemented on the basis of a number of specific recommendations made to the Australian Nature Conservation Agency (ANCA) as a result of recent research in the Park (including the possibility of allowing historic places to recede into the landscape).

Ivan Haskovic outlined some of the difficulties in applying the Burra Charter to the conservation of Aboriginal heritage and discussed the perceptions Aboriginal people have of non-Aboriginal places in Kakadu. Questioning the relative cultural importance of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal heritage in the Park he cited examples of non-Aboriginal places that Traditional Owners did not wish to see conserved and emphasised that Traditional Owners wish to demonstrate care of the rock art in the Park.

The following morning John Ah Kit referred to the myth of shared heritage in the Northern Territory - to the prevailing tendency in the Northern Territory to commemorate English and European heritage whilst hiding the unpleasant history of colonialism, dislocation and subjugation of Aboriginal people. He called for the recognition and interpretation of Australia’s colonial history and the particular significance of this heritage to Aboriginal people.

Bill Harney spoke of his knowledge of both sides of this shared heritage of the Northern Territory.

In revealing the cultural diversity of Darwin as an Asian city Gary Lee highlighted the influence and legacy of Asian/Aboriginal interaction.

In telling the story of her mother Daisy (Ruddock) Cusack, Roseanne Brennan evocatively shared a very personal view of the history of Aboriginal and European contact in the Northern Territory.

Remote and Ephemeral Sites

The history of the ideas and concepts of distance and remoteness and of wilderness in Australia was eloquently discussed by Val Hawkes. Her paper, itself seeking to demonstrate the necessity for establishing the philosophical and historical background to the cultural ideas of those of the past, provided just such a basis for the presentations on remote heritage that were given later that afternoon.

Howard Pearce gave a highly illustrative thematic survey of the diversity and physical condition and integrity of remote historical sites in the Lake Eyre Basin and beyond.

Scott Mitchell presented a view of the Macassan, local, multicultural and Aboriginal trepang industry of the 18th to early 20th centuries. He illustrated the vulnerability of the remaining physical evidence of the industry and questioned ‘who should be consulted about its future - to whom does this heritage belong?’

Gordon Grimwade illustrated a fibreglass molding technique used to record Aboriginal tree carvings - particularly vulnerable and delicate organic artefacts often located in remote areas difficult to access and manage.

Duncan Ross-Watt spoke about the pragmatics, procedures and outcomes of several conservation projects in remote South Australia.

A strident call for action to ensure the better management of Australia’s remote and ephemeral cultural heritage was voiced by Kim Steinle. Kim’s seven point call for action included a call for Australia ICOMOS to lobby for, and contribute to, the preparation of contractual documents more appropriate to current conservation practice.

Dean Whiting discussed the conservation of Maori marae structures in the Central North Island of New Zealand. A broad conservation strategy has been developed to conserve the cultural values of marae as living places - places that are a dynamic mix of history, people and structure. He emphasised the need to consult with local Maori to gain an understanding of indigenous values and traditional knowledge and to train and involve local people in the conservation of marae structures.
Heritage and Cultural Diversity

On the second day of the conference a number of papers provided a regional survey of cultural diversity in Asia and the Pacific.

Dr Wyan Ardika expressed Indonesian cultural diversity as a national asset and the basis of national identity and national pride.

Ombone Aiku spoke of the changing legislative and administrative landscape and current activities of organisations and institutions responsible for preserving Papua New Guinea's cultural heritage. He described a very active and integrated cultural program in that country.

Yung Lun Chen presented a survey of the diversity of the indigenous heritage of Taiwan. His presentation provided a broad historical and contemporary view of the decline, survival and revival of indigenous Taiwanese cultural heritage.

Frank Campbell referred to the recent establishment of the Asia and Western Pacific Network for Urban Heritage and its aim to establish and foster regional integration in heritage management.

Peter James' paper discussed some of the specific problems of Aboriginal heritage protection legislation in Australia and proposed a new model framework. The overall aim and philosophy of the new legislation would be to give equal and comprehensive protection to Aboriginal heritage as already exists for Australia's historic heritage.

Education and Awareness

Suggesting the use of "media as a weapon in saving heritage" Prakash Mirchandani, representing Australian Television International, began a lively session on the role of education in intercultural understanding. He spoke of the new financial and educational opportunities that exist in Asia's "communication superhighways", and strongly suggested that organisations such as Australia ICOMOS take advantage of the opportunity to create a Heritage News Network (HNN).

Lenore Dembski spoke of the importance of education and awareness in protecting Aboriginal heritage values, emphasising that this is everyone's responsibility.

Linda Young referred to intercultural understanding as the key to heritage interpretation and spoke of the interpretive possibilities for further generating improved intercultural understanding.

Rosemary Kornfield surveyed and commented on the variable recognition and interpretation of Australia's ethnic diversity in three sites in New South Wales.

Finally Jeanette Hope spoke of the shared management by Aboriginal communities and land managers of Aboriginal burial site conservation in the Murray Darling Basin.

Final Discussion

At the conclusion of the conference a number of suggestions and recommendations were made.

Particular concern was voiced about the conservation of the historic heritage of the Northern Territory and in particular of Kakadu National Park. A number of conference participants again referred to the heritage of mining and buffalo hunting - not actively conserved in the Park yet possessing important historical, associational, social and political values to many Australians. In expressing their rejection of the deliberate obliteration of this heritage they proposed that a balanced approach to the conservation of Kakadu's history be sought in consultation with the Traditional Owners of the land.

The idea of establishing a Heritage News Network (HNN) was vigorously endorsed by a number of conference participants. The use of HNN to record and transmit valuable traditional knowledge through oral history was suggested as a suitable use of such a network. It was noted that the promotion of HNN would provide much needed employment and training opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It was suggested that Australia ICOMOS could provide the necessary expertise, knowledge and skills to ensure the presentation of an interesting and quality product.

With reference to Peter James' paper on legislative matters it was noted that NASAC (National Aboriginal Sites Advisory Committee) had recently agreed to an offer made by the Australian Heritage Commission to hold a forum in 1994 to discuss the legislative protection of Aboriginal heritage in Australia.

It was noted that there is scant regard for the conservation of intangible non-Aboriginal heritage in Australia.

A recommendation was made that Australia ICOMOS help determine the copyright and intellectual property rights of oral history subjects.

In response to a question concerning whether Australia ICOMOS promotes the training of traditional people it was noted that Australia ICOMOS has an old policy to promote such training. Training of traditional people is seen as a priority and an Australia ICOMOS working group is reviewing and updating this policy.

It was noted that since March 1992 Australia ICOMOS has held three conferences at which the central proceedings related to the theme of the conservation of places with value to more than one group in society. In March 1992 in Fremantle, Western Australia the conference theme was 'The role of Government and the individual in cultural heritage conservation'. The differing cultural significance of the Old Swan Brewery site and Rottnest Island to Aboriginal people and to Europeans were discussed at
length. In November 1992 these issues were again
addressed at Australia ICOMOS’s conference entitled
Whose Cultural Values?.

Although Australia ICOMOS and the Australian Heritage
Commission have commissioned a report and a series of
workshops on conflicting cultural values (Duncan Marshall
and Joan Domicelj) in response to the two 1992
conferences, it was questioned whether the specific
recommendations of the conferences had been pursued by
Australia ICOMOS. It was suggested that the
recommendations of all three conferences be collated, their
status determined and an action plan be prepared to ensure
their adequate consideration. It was further suggested that
new working groups be established to address these
recommendations and that new members be encouraged to
participate in the work of these groups. It was
recommended that a network of conference participants be
established to continue the spirit of the conference in
sharing knowledge and experiences and to communicate
the outcomes of this conference and those held on parallel

Sarah Titchen is a postgraduate student in the Department
of Archaeology and Anthropology, ANU. Her PhD
research is focussing on identification and assessment of
World Heritage Places.