Abstract

Historic roads are an essential element in the morphology of cultural landscapes. Identifying routes across the landscape enables a chronology of human movement, transport links and the socio-economic context at certain periods to be constructed. Overcoming the 'tyranny of distance' is a national historic theme in Australia and road access networks are often overlooked in heritage surveys. A cultural landscape approach to assessing the heritage values of roads linking criteria, themes and places is offered.

The earliest roads in central and north Queensland were constructed to provide dray access to coastal ports. Long abandoned and forgotten, their routes in part are now walking tracks in national parks. Tourism provided the later rationale for access to scenic lookouts, but are tourists able to decipher the hidden histories in the sweeping landscapes they view?

The tracks and routes were different entities at different times in their history and this layered cultural landscape needs interpreting to today's viewers. In addition, rich association of words, songs and images with travelling through the Australian landscape is part of our heritage.

A study of road types at specific periods provides a better understanding of the evolution of our landscapes. Roads are essential features in cultural landscapes. These linear links across the natural terrain form pathways between nodes of human activity and, by identifying access routes at different periods, a chronology of roads can be constructed. To this chronology can be added other factors, such as the socio-economic context at that period and technology in use. As well as the tangible evidence of road surfaces, alignments and pathways the intangible evidence remains conserved in place names, words, songs and images of the road.

How Australians experience landscapes is partly determined by how access to them is gained – on footpaths, rough bush tracks or smooth roads. The soft padding of human feet, the clip clop of horse's hooves, the rumble of iron rimmed dray wheels, the scrunching of tyres on gravel or the purr of rubber tyres on bitumen – all sounds associated with our road heritage and part of experiencing the landscape. This experience of landscape is also determined by speed of engagement as well as the scale – an hour's laborious struggle through dense scrub or an hour's flight across a whole bioregion. Unless the road is identified as a layer of physical evidence in that changing landscape, we cannot understand the evolution of the landscape as roads are both part of the story enabling access and human impact on the landscape, and features in their own right.

The 'tyranny of distance' is a national historic theme in Australia but road networks are often overlooked in heritage surveys although individual components may be identified, assessed and listed such as bridges, drystone walling and embankments. Many roads have been upgraded and changed but sometimes roads are abandoned, overgrown and forgotten; sometimes they are built over and the original reason for construction lost as they become part of a new network. Interpretation of roads, old and new, provides cultural itineraries for tourists and travellers.

Cultural landscapes

The term 'cultural landscape' was introduced to the English-speaking world by the American geographer, Carl Sauer:

The cultural landscape is fashioned out of a natural landscape by a culture group. Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape is the result. Under the influence of a given culture, itself changing through time, the landscape undergoes development, passing through phases and probably reaching the end of its cycle of development. With the introduction of a different, that is, alien culture, a rejuvenation of the landscape sets in, or a new landscape is superimposed on remnants of an older one. The natural landscape is of course of fundamental importance, for it supplies the materials out of which the cultural landscape is formed. The shaping force, however, lies in culture itself (Sauer 1925: 46).

Sauer's contribution contains many of the ideas which are now the current concern of heritage conservation – interrelationships over time, patterns in the landscape of changing activities, layers of evidence. Cultural landscapes became a concept for analysing the ties between culture and the environment in two methods of study; examining visual evidence in the landscape such as building types and field patterns, and examining cultural perceptions and visual preferences.

The many definitions of the term 'cultural landscape' now embrace a diversity of signs of the interaction between humankind and its natural environment:

Cultural landscapes are cultural properties and represent the "combined works of nature and man"...They are illustrative of the evolution of human society and settlement over time, under the influence of the physical constraints and/or opportunities presented by their natural environment and of successive social, economic and cultural forces, both external and internal (UNESCO 2005: paragraph 47).

As well as the physical landscape with its geological structure and vegetation covering, the landscape can be seen as a cultural artefact, with designed elements, with evolving or changing elements, with relict elements and with intangible associative elements. These associations are the repository of collective memory and as such, these landscapes may become familiar to people through their depiction in paintings, poetry, legend or song.

Associative cultural landscapes may include large or small, contiguous or non-contiguous areas, or linearity or other linear landscapes or seascapes. These may be physical entities or mental images embedded in people's spirituality, cultural tradition and practice. Important examples include Aboriginal dreamscape, the Silk Road from China to the West, the pilgrimage routes to Jerusalem, Santiago de Compostela and Mecca.

Roads in the Australian landscape:

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Roads in the Australian landscape:

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In the continental landscape of Australia with its huge distances and small scattered populations, Aboriginal pathways linking...
wells and mound springs provided the first transcontinental routes such as those on the ochre trails. Taming distance has been a national obsession in developing Australia and its regional economies since the arrival of the First Fleet.

From 1788 the Great Dividing Range acted as a barrier to European transport from the eastern seaboard. Roads, tracks and trails resulting from exploration and settlement developed under colonial governments using convict workforces. The crossing of the Blue Mountains in 1813 by Baxland, Lawson and Wentworth opened the interior and promoted road construction in response to demands for new settlement (Lee 2003).

As pastoral use expanded across the interior, stock routes became important in supplying food to the growing colonies. European exploration of the Murray-Darling river system in the 1830s by Charles Sturt led to the Overland Stock Route from NSW to SA. This passed along the northern bank of the Murray River by 1838, and was known as the Wentworth Road, effectively linking NSW and SA. From the 1850s until the end of the 1880s the Murray-Darling river system provided an important boat service to the developing pastoral districts of Victoria, SA and NSW.

Roads and tracks to the gold fields via many diggers’ rests formed the access sinews for subsequent closer settlement and the carving up of the once wooded landscape into agricultural allotments. The surveyors often came after the miners and used their tracks as the basis for survey as it was too difficult to move whole villages straggling along the dray tracks that had developed. This is well illustrated by the winding main road through Chewton in central Victoria. But elsewhere in rural areas the surveyors laid out their grids in formal blocks shaping the land into geometric patterns bordered with roads, lanes and easements enabling access to individual farms, reserves or townships and forming the basic layout of the countryside today. They also marked out road reserves that were never constructed and today they are shown by lines of mature trees marching across the landscape giving it so much character especially in the flatter, grain growing districts.

In the north and west, establishment of routes lagged behind due to the slower exploitation of resources and geographical differences. Routes such as the Birdsville and Strzelecki tracks through pastoral districts in SA, and the Gun Baral Highway in the Northern Territory and Western Australia, remain in use today. The arid nature of the interior, lack of easily navigable rivers and climatic differences hindered the development of transport networks in particular in the Tropics where the difficulties of land transport were compounded by the wet season.

Australia was linked to the rest of the world in 1877 via the Overland Telegraph Line to Darwin and the submarine cable to Britain ending almost 100 years of isolation by sea. This ‘information highway’ which had developed in urban areas from 1854 had the potential to overcome huge distances. It also required stations and inspection routes for maintenance of the line and in remote rural areas these lines formed part of the web of a pattern of scattered settlement.

The iron roads – railways – were introduced in the closer settled coastal areas in the 1850s and provided a quick and reliable means of transport and communication. Roads fed into the railheads and at points of trans-shipment of produce hamlets and towns developed. But railways were constructed in response to the political desire to encourage growth and agricultural development after the initial gold rushes on the eastern side of the continent. While the nature of the terrain, topographical surveys and engineering techniques determined the routes, political expediency, regional rivalries and agricultural and mining demands influenced their location. In NSW, SA and Victoria, railways radiated out from the capital cities but in Queensland seven lines were built westwards from the principal ports along the coast to transport primary produce for export. These rail networks were not linked by a coastal line from Brisbane to Cairns until 1924 and the Pacific Highway north-south along the coast was not completed until World War II (Pullar 1995).

The introduction of the motor vehicle revolutionised urban and rural transport during the 1920s but did not have a major impact on infrastructure until the post war period of the 1950s and 1960s, when roads became a national priority for politicians elected on platforms of development and growth. However, the development of motor transport enabled many short trips. Roads in coastal areas developed quickly, changing patterns of seaside visits from ship, railway or tram to using the motor car which also functioned as ‘a bathing box on wheels’ (Davidson and Spearritt 2000: 137). The parallel development of taking to the ‘open road’ for bushwalking (Croll 1928) and motor ‘touring’ to beauty spots of ferny glades, mountain lookouts or palm-fringed oases and to the new national parks led to construction of new scenic roads. Depression era road works by ‘susso’ gangs further expanded this network with tourist roads such as the Great Ocean Road along the Otway coast in Victoria, the road to Wilsons Promontory National Park and to Mt Buffalo chalet (Lennon 1989).

Postwar private ownership of cars, including Australia’s own Holden, steadily increased and the lure of roads for tourists was encouraged by Redex Trials through the outback, the rise of camping grounds and caravan parks (2000 by 1965) and the spread of motels dotted along every major highway. Bus travel and the rise of tourist coaches have developed in parallel to the point where tourism is now the major industry in many scenic parts of regional Australia. And in the cities, massive road congestion has led to the rise of new freeways, ring roads, tunnels under harbours and superhighways. Roads dominate and rail services are mostly for freight.

This chronology of road making over the past 200 years is evident in many landscapes where the initial track followed an Aboriginal pathway, then developed into a road, either a formal gazetted one or a convenient access route. As well as the actual roads tracking through landscapes, the need for people to locate their exact position there has led to the rise of associated industries concerned with maps, guidebooks and traveller’s accommodation as well as servicing vehicles.

Cultural and ecotourism are now big industries requiring tracks through the Australian landscape and interpretations of those routes. Roads are clearly elements in our cultural landscapes and essential arteries in this vast continent, either allowing speedy connection or winding back along the homeward track.

**Typologies**

Roads in landscapes might be studied according to a typology based on chronology:

- Aboriginal pathways
- Explorers’ routes
- Tracks, especially pack tracks
- Surveyed roads administered by local and divisional roads boards
- Stock routes – from the 1860s to the specific Travelling Stock Routes post war
- Mail routes – the quickest and easiest
- Coach routes – Cobb and Co from 1860s to 1930
- Main roads – impact of Federal Roads Act 1926
- Unemployment relief roads
- Recreational roads
- Defence roads
- Highways
- Freeways.

These categories provide opportunities to study and understand the impact of roads on our landscapes, both actual and metaphorical. By combining physical evidence from the typologies of roads with historic studies of socio-economic issues, a richer appreciation is gained of their role in shaping and being shaped by their cultural landscapes.

Australian heritage assessments of roads in the landscape

Australian heritage practice has concentrated on places and their associated collections using the principles outlined in the Burra Charter to assess cultural heritage significance and guide the development of conservation management policies. Roads are cultural infrastructure but their location, alignment and development respond to and in some cases are determined by natural factors such as terrain. The cultural landscape concept involves a broadening of place-based assessments to consider changes over time, context, setting and the interaction of humans on natural environments and the natural environment on human response.

The new Australian Heritage Council in assessing nominations of places of ‘outstanding heritage value to the nation’ must consider the attributes of places against statutory criteria. All heritage values of a place must be considered, not only its natural, Indigenous or historic components in isolation. By applying the Australian Historic Themes (2001) tracks and roads can be assessed as part of a wider historic and social story and be seen in a landscape context. Australian cultural heritage assessments at all levels of jurisdiction use basically the same criteria – it is the thresholds for listing which vary so that a place may have multiple values that reach different levels of significance from international to local.

The following table links criteria, themes and places to show this inter-relationship. A place like the Hume Highway or the Great North Road as part of the Blue Mountains convict landscape may satisfy one or more criteria and several themes might also apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Thematic categories</th>
<th>Physical attributes</th>
<th>Possible examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.a the place’s importance in the course or pattern of Australia’s cultural history</td>
<td>3.3.2 Looking for overland routes. 3.4 Utilising natural resources. 3.14.2 Using Australian materials. 4.2 Supplying urban roads.</td>
<td>Drystone walls, stone bridges - response to topography, available materials and engineering techniques. Scenic designs to highlight landscape.</td>
<td>‘Great North Road’, from Wisemans Ferry. Road across the mountain range. Castle Crag subdivision street layout.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.b the place’s possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Australia’s cultural or natural history.</td>
<td>3.3.2 Looking for overland routes 3.4 Utilising natural resources 3.14.2 Using Australian materials 7.7 Defending Australia</td>
<td>Side cuts, stone walling, brick culverts, corduroy roads - represents rare expressions of road systems</td>
<td>Dalrymple Gap Track, north Queensland. Rare vegetation remaining on stock routes. Defence roads – QLD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.c the place’s potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Australia’s cultural history.</td>
<td>3.8.7 Building and maintaining roads. 3.11 Altering the environment.</td>
<td>Archaeological evidence; use of new construction materials.</td>
<td>Forgotten routes from convict or pre-gold rush construction, eg. wool roads – Braidwood to Jervis Bay, 1841.</td>
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<td>2.d the place’s importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of Australia’s cultural places or environments.</td>
<td>3.8.7 Building and maintaining roads. 5.1 Working in harsh conditions.</td>
<td>Scale, design and construction appropriate to function, era and setting – represents outstanding examples of the development of road systems.</td>
<td>Colonial masonry bridges, eg. Lennox Bridge 1822. Birdsville and Strezlecki Tracks in SA. Inns on a Cobb and Co coaching route.</td>
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<td>2.e the place’s importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by a cultural group.</td>
<td>3.8.7 Building and maintaining roads. 5.1 Working in harsh conditions 7.8 Establishing regional identity.</td>
<td>Acknowledged as having outstanding aesthetic characteristics linking natural features.</td>
<td>Great Ocean Road, Victoria. Freeway sections designed to give scenic vistas.</td>
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<td>2.f the place’s high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.</td>
<td>8.10.4 Fine designs. 8.10.5 Advancing scientific knowledge.</td>
<td>Demonstrates specifically Australian solutions to the design and construction of road systems.</td>
<td>Adaptation of timber bridge building techniques. Early use of Monier concrete bridges in Victoria.</td>
</tr>
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<td>2.g the place’s strong or special association with a particular community for social, cultural or spiritual reasons.</td>
<td>5.1 Working in harsh conditions. 7.8 Establishing regional identity. 8.11 Making Australian folk lore.</td>
<td>Community initiative. Place names. Songs. Artworks. Memorials.</td>
<td>The Lions Road over Scenic Rim of the NSW – QLD border. 'I've been everywhere man'. Dog on tucker box five miles from Gundagai.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.h the place’s special associations with the life or works of a person or group important to Australia’s cultural life.</td>
<td>3.8.7 Building and maintaining roads. 8.7 Honoring achievement 8.9 Commemorating significant events.</td>
<td>Place names. Songs. Artworks – all showing important associations with the development of road systems.</td>
<td>Great North Road as an example of convict workmanship. Hume Highway, following Hume and Hovell’s 1824 route. Anzac Parade. Bicentennial freeway.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.i the place’s importance as part of indigenous tradition.</td>
<td>2.1 Living as Australia’s earliest inhabitants.</td>
<td>Dreaming tracks. Song lines.</td>
<td>Wagyl route by Swan River, WA.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These nine criteria provide many indicators for assessing historic routes, tracks and roads to determine their heritage values in a cultural landscape context. However, the following case study provides an illustration of how one place may have many values of varying levels of significance.

**Dalrymple gap track cultural landscape**

The North Queensland landscape around Cardwell is dominated by rugged forested peaks and where the Bruce Highway crosses Damper Creek, a walking track heads off in a south westerly direction along the alignment of the original dray road to the Valley of Lagoons (Lennon 1994). This track passes through open eucalypt forest then climbs steeply up through rainforest over the Cardwell Range crossing through Dalrymple Gap at 360m above sea level. About 200m before the Gap, the creek is crossed by a stone bridge. The track then passes through dense rainforest and follows the cascading Dalrymple Creek on its journey to the Herbert River valley. Most of the 10 km walking track lies within Lumholtz National Park, part of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area, and ends at a carpark in the pine plantations of Abergowrie State Forest.

The historical significance of the Dalrymple Track and the stone bridge has been recognised leading to its entry on the Register of the National Estate, its classification by the National Trust of Queensland in 1976 and its listing under the Queensland Heritage Act 1992. The track retains the remains of a large timber bridge, stone paving, stone-pitched walls, several formed creek crossings and a grave of an unknown traveller.

The history of the use of this track shows that it has been an Aboriginal pathway, an explorer’s route, a dray road, a government gazetted road, a mail route, a pack track, a stock route, a military defence route and finally, a recreation trail (See Figure 1). Evidence of all these uses gives new meaning to the wild country of the Wet Tropics and makes it a layered cultural landscape:

a. Aboriginal pathway

The Bama of the Wet Tropics have four main language groups each with many dialects related to their place of living in the landscape – swamps, coast range, tablelands. Between Cardwell and Ingham, Girramay is spoken; Warungu speakers lived in the headwaters of the Herbert valley. The Dyirbal (Jirrbal) occupied the area north to Innisfail. The Bama are considered different from other Indigenous groups in Australia,

![Dalrymple Gap track](image)
because of their high population density and their distinctive material culture.

A system of well beaten paths criss-crossed the region from the coast to the inland connecting all the clans and in the open pockets of Tableland rainforest there were semi-permanent camps. The paths were maintained for travel to access seasonal foods and resources as well as other Bama and their Storyplaces. During the windy period of the dry season tablerlands people would come to the coast — when walnuts, Burdekin plums and quondongs were ripe. When wattles are in bloom the mud crabs are at their fattest; in the period before ‘the Wet’ marine turtles and dugong hunting were high-prestige activities. Providing large quantities of food enabled large gatherings. Controlled grass burning was carried out in conjunction with hunting drives for wallabies, grey kangaroos and other mammals and reptiles, although it also made travel easier and rid the area of leeches. Food resources became more restricted during the wet season which was the leanest time of the annual cycle (Bottoms 2000:38-42).

Within the Shire of Cardwell the most important Aboriginal tracks are those named after early European settlers — the Dalrymple, Kents and Sullivans Tracks and the Bilyana Track. Aboriginal resistance to European settlers continued into the 1870s; Aborigines planning to attack a road party near the Gap were massacred and in 1873 Robert Johnstone, sub-inspector of Police, recorded ‘dispersing large mobs of blacks’ in the area, a euphemism for shooting them.

b. Explorer’s route

Inspired by Leichhardt’s 1845 glowing account of the potential for grazing on the well-grassed Valley of Lagoons in the Rockingham Bay hinterland, George Elphinstone Dalrymple had led an overland party to the Valley of Lagoons in 1859 and found it all that Leichhardt described. With the Scott Brothers, he took up this land stocking it with 25,000 sheep and 4,000 cattle by 1863.

On 1 January 1864 the pastoral districts of Burke and Cook were opened for settlement and squatters in the Upper Burdekin and beyond wanted closer sea access. With Government approval, Dalrymple and Arthur Scott prepared to establish a settlement at Rockingham Bay and ‘to find a route to the interior’. In February 1864 accompanied by an Aboriginal guide, Cockey, they explored country south from the tiny settlement at Cardwell. An Aboriginal track across swamps led them straight to the Gap and later Dalrymple blazed a better route over forest country. By easy spurs, they climbed above the saddle of the gap and found that it descended to a scrub-filled gorge in the Herbert valley seen by Dalrymple the previous year. This gap between Mount Leach and Mount Arthur Scott has been known since as Dalrymple’s Gap.

c. Dray road

Now that a route out of the Rockingham Bay basin had been found, the task remained of blazing a suitable dray track to the Valley of Lagoons. On 15 February 1864, Dalrymple and his party left the settlement to mark the track. The wet season slowed progress and they did not return until 26 April, driving cattle to Cardwell. Volunteers soon cut a passable road through the scrub and mountain sidings.

d. Government gazetted road

The trafficable dray road was still not substantial enough to act as a reliable main artery between Rockingham Bay and the hinterland stations, 100 miles away. Considerable expenditure was required. A government road party was shipped to Cardwell and Dalrymple proceeded with Mr Conlan, the road overseer, to mark out the route to be formed through Dalrymple Gap to the Vale of Herbert station, reducing the length of road from 36 miles to 28 miles. Conlan and party then constructed the ascent of Dalrymple Gap on the coast side, while the western side was left out in three sections to hasten the completion of the work. The stone bridge which survives close to the Gap was built during this period.

Towards the end of 1864 and 1865 the road was used extensively. The difficulties of crossing the ranges with laden drays were enormous and cartage costs at £26 per ton were extreme even 100 years ago.

e. Bypass

The road over Dalrymple Gap was never regarded as an easy one by teamsters. Once a longer but easier route was found from the interior to the settlement on Cleveland Bay, the squatters preferred this port, Townsville, and thereafter all attempts to retrieve Cardwell’s position as the premier port of the north coast were futile. In addition, in 1872 an easier alternate route to the Valley of Lagoons via Cardwell Gap was opened.

f. Telegraph route

The telegraph line to Cardwell opened in January 1870. This was despite many troubles from difficult terrain, extensive clearing, troublesome Aborigines and ‘Jungle Fever’ breaking out in the gangs of workmen, five of whom died while cutting through the scrub. The telegraph line came through the Gap. Because the final route of the overland telegraph ran from Darwin to Adelaide, the line out to the Gulf from Cardwell was abandoned. However the line over the Gap to Cardwell was maintained until the 1920s.

g. Pack track

Cattlemen established in the upper Herbert Valley from 1868 and sugar growers settled on the lower Herbert in 1870. The area was an offshoot of Cardwell and, as such, had no centred population and no means of separate existence. All supplies and materials were packed over Dalrymple Gap or shipped via Hinchinbrook Channel from Cardwell.

h. Mail route

The Cardwell jetty was built in 1872 and coastal steamers carried a twice monthly mail service. From Cardwell, packhorse mails with a fortnightly service were carried 238 miles to Georgetown via Dalrymple Gap to the Vale of Herbert station, thence to Glenduh, Cassady’s and Junction Creek.

i. Stock route

Stock were still driven over the Gap to Cardwell until 1927 from which time the track was largely abandoned by users and the Shire as an asset to be maintained.

j. Military defence route

It was considered as an evacuation route for civilians in case of a Japanese invasion during World War II.

k. Recreational trail

The Governor, the Marquis of Normanby, visited Cardwell in October 1871 and after crocodile shooting was taken to Dalrymple Gap for a picnic lunch. This itinerary was repeated on his final vice-regal visit in September 1874. Today the Dalrymple Gap track is part of a network of walking tracks through the Wet Tropics.
The preceding analysis illustrates that the Track itself has heritage significance because of its association with:

- establishing a route to connect inland pastoral properties with a port – criterion a;
- construction of the earliest (1864) surviving civil engineering work (the stone bridge) in mainland North Queensland – criteria b and f;
- spectacular scenery recognised for its aesthetic values since European settlement – criterion e;
- picnics parties visiting the Gap from the 1870s – criterion g;
- an early North Queensland explorer and later Member of Parliament – criterion h; and
- with a traditional Aboriginal pathway – possibly criterion i.

These multiple values can be assessed according to the range of criteria suggested. Their thresholds would however vary from State to local, while the Wet Tropics is itself of outstanding universal value for its biological diversity and on the World Heritage List.

The cultural landscape model also offers a framework for assessment, management and interpretation of the Track. In its many forms the Track enables this coastal mountain landscape to be seen as a different entity at different periods – the Aboriginal landscape of seasonal pathways, a stock route and transport corridor enabling the struggling settlers to connect to markets, an escape route in case of invasion and now a walking route to escape from the coast to the heritage forests. The Track becomes a central line in the cultural landscape, and although small in area, it has had a major influence at different periods on regional economic and social development. Physical evidence from these various periods should be conserved and interpreted to the public as a means of illustrating the layers in the cultural landscape.

**Other examples of roads determining Queensland cultural landscapes**

The Bump Road from the Hodgkinson goldfields to Port Douglas, established in 1877 as a pack track and operational until World War II also follows the general chronology outlined for the Dalrymple Gap track. In 1884 Christie Palmerston led a party from Innisfail to Herberton through the dense jungle guided by Aborigines. This track became the single lane Palmerston Highway built as unemployment relief in 1935 (Pullar 1995:17).

In Isla Gorge National Park at the Flagstone Hill end, there is a section of the original dray road from Roma to Rockhampton established in 1863. The wide sandstone paving using the Telford method of placing similar sized cobbled stones was to halt the speed of descending teams. However, there is no interpretation of this dray road.

In 1866 Cobb and Co started services in Queensland and by 1900 had established 39 routes running 7750 kilometres to distant communities from railheads. By combining coach and rail it was possible to reach any town of consequence in Queensland from Brisbane. But motor cars and air services hastened the decline of coaching and in August 1924 the last Cobb and Co coach was replaced by a truck on the Surat to Yuleba route. That coach is conserved in the Cobb and Co museum in Toowoomba (Tranter 1990). This coaching network can be regarded as an overlay in the cultural landscape of pastoral Queensland with the coaching routes determining the development of settlements at stopping places.

Now that sections of the former Bruce Highway have been made redundant by the Sunshine Coast motorway, a traveller’s rest reserve at Caloundra turnoff provides a picnic stop and interpretation of the history of the highway’s role in developing that district and the hard work involved in building roads before heavy machinery was available (See Figure 2). It is through local stories such as this that the role of roads is shown as a major driver of settlement and regional development creating a distinctive, cultural landscape illustrating human interaction with the terrain.

**Conclusion**

Tracks cross the continental landscape of Australia but the ‘tyranny of distance’ remains depending on the technology of the traveller. Tracks require interpretation in order to understand their significance which can be described by application of heritage criteria. Human interaction with the landscape has varied depending on the technology available for movement across the terrain – feet, hooves, wheels, tyres. The speed and rhythm of this movement has also resulted in a rich association of words, songs and images from Waltzing Matilda to being ‘On the Wallaby’.

Tourism provided the rationale for access to scenic lookouts, but are tourists able to decipher the hidden histories in the
sweeping landscapes they view? Road access to Queensland’s Lamington Plateau, Mt Glorious and the Scenic Rim was slow to develop and the current alignments are part of historic routes which gave settlers access to clear the bush and create the cultural landscape of today. Road safety issues, the volume of traffic, new vehicle types and regional tourism promotions are threatening this heritage as pressure to upgrade alignments to modern standards is applied.

As the Hume Freeway snakes through the valleys of north eastern Victoria enabling rapid passage, do we see Hume and Hovell’s Buffalo mountain? Or in rushing along the newly straight freeway cutting like a Roman road through the Burringbar Range from the Tweed to Byron Bay, do we read the layering of previous agricultural uses? Does speed obliterate our reading of the distinctively Australian landscape or is our vision only as far as the adjacent freeway roadworks, referred to recently as ‘Toot’n’car man pyramids’?

Ancient footpaths taking the easiest route for humans, short-lived pack tracks and winding dray roads have given way to constructed roads of varying classes. These roads have impact both as heritage items in their own right and as components in our cultural landscapes.

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