

eXtremeheritage

Part 2



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Restoring Non-Secular Cultural Heritage in South And Southeast Asia in The Aftermath of a Natural Disaster

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This is the second albeit belated issue of *Historic Environment* devoted to selected papers based on those presented at the conference **eXtreme heritage: managing heritage in the face of climatic extremes, natural disasters and military conflicts in tropical, desert, polar and off-world landscapes** which was held in Cairns, Australia in 2007.

The focus of the papers in this volume range across the themes of the conference and the geographical distribution of the case studies reported spread across Australia, south-east Asia and the Pacific. Overall there is a focus on the Asia/Pacific tropical region with the majority of papers exploring issues related to heritage places in tropical environments.

Wilson, Ballard and Kalotiti provide an insight into some of the pressing issues facing one of the few World Heritage Listed sites from a Pacific Island State. The World Heritage Site, Chief Roi Mata's Domain, is recognised as a continuing cultural landscape. It's importance to contemporary ni-Vanuatu identity is briefly outlined but the focus of the paper are the challenges both environmental and socio-economic, facing the long term conservation of the site.

The paper by Andrew Viduka shifts our focus from consideration of a site threatened by rising sea levels to the practicalities of managing one already at the bottom of the sea. Managing underwater cultural heritage poses unique challenges and the case study of the SS Yongala highlights many of these. The highly volatile undersea environment requires a balance between technical intervention, sophisticated monitoring of the fabric and difficult management of human impacts.

My paper looks at archaeological evidence for ceremonies involving Aboriginal hunting and management of turtles and discusses this evidence in terms of current debates around environmental conservation and Traditional Ecological Knowledge. It shifts across the artificial divide of natural and cultural heritage and demonstrates why understanding culture is an essential step to conserving nature.

Jane Lennon transports us to the Australian outback. She makes a heartfelt plea for a broader consideration of rural heritage in Australia. She points to the increased redundancy of pastoral infrastructure, abandonment and demolition of rural heritage and to the chronic problems of lack of national leadership and insufficient resourcing for this heritage priority. Since this paper was first written in 2007 the situation has only deteriorated with even further cuts to government investment in cultural heritage.

Jane Harrington's paper forms a bridge between the Australian experience and that of Southeast Asia. She writes about cultural tourism experiences in two historic landscapes. Evoking the theme of the conference she points out that *'the two landscapes represent 'extreme' histories in divergent places: the Port Arthur Historic Site in Tasmania as a landscape of punishment and penal rehabilitation, the World Heritage listed ancient city of Ayutthaya in Thailand as a landscape destroyed by Burmese invasion in the 18th century'*.

This paper was written in the lead up to the submission of the Australian Convict Sites nomination to the World Heritage List. As we know Port Arthur was included in this site which was

successfully listed in 2010. In her paper she draws links between the various catastrophic threats that these two very different sites have faced while yet retaining significant values for local and national communities.

Senthilpavai Kasiannan takes us on a journey to one of the most famous and highly visited archaeological sites in the world. For once, the focus is not on the archaeology or architecture but on the need to explore the intangible and socio-cultural values of the site. She calls for the site to be managed as a living cultural landscape where the local community is more than an inconvenient reality that must be managed but is rather a partner in the management of the site and sharing more equitably in the benefits of sustainable tourism.

Still in south-east Asia, Apinya Arrunapaporn discusses the commodification of places that attest to atrocity and violence. She points to the growth of what she calls 'Atrocity Heritage Tourism' and the associated problems for 'authenticity'. In contrast to Harrington's praise of modern interpretive elements such as the artistic ship installation at Port Arthur's dockyard, Arrunapaporn bemoans the introduction of modern sculptures which at the 'Death Railway' as inappropriate and lacking adequate interpretive links to the heritage.

In his paper Jamie Mackee addresses the vexed issue of cultural heritage restoration in the aftermath of natural disasters in Southeast Asia. He points to what he sees as a synergy between system theory and Buddhism based on the nature of holism and the cyclical nature of communication and feedback loops. He discusses this in the context of developing a model for disaster response which takes into account both tangible and intangible cultural heritage values of the region.

This collection of papers complements those in 'Extreme Heritage', *Historic Environment* Vol 22 Number 1 (2009). Together the papers in these two volumes represent all the themes of conference which was ambitiously titled 'eXtreme heritage: managing heritage in the face of climatic extremes, natural disasters and military conflicts in tropical, desert, polar and off-world landscapes'. Many of the presenters were ICOMOS members and together the two volumes reflect the broad range of research and professional interests of members across these diverse and complex landscapes.

Acknowledgements:

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