

Archaeological sites & Indigenous values: the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage Area

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Abstract

This paper arises from a project undertaken for the Department of Environment and Heritage (now the Department of Environment, Heritage and Water). In the course of this project it became apparent that an area valued for its outstanding natural values including its biodiversity and evolutionary history was also a rich cultural landscape. It contains not only unique archaeological evidence of a complex ceremonial culture but the very landforms that comprise this World Heritage Area (WHA) bear testament to the rich spiritual life of the Indigenous people who lived there and whose descendents now hold these places close to their hearts. Failure to recognise the Indigenous values of the area and the contemporary connections of Aboriginal people to this World Heritage estate has led in places to a form of cultural dispossession where Aboriginal people are relegated to the status of distant stakeholders in the management of their own heritage.

Results of this study have not been published in the intervening years since the project was completed and it is hoped that this paper will raise awareness of the need to recognise the Indigenous values in the formal listing and more actively engage the Aboriginal owners in management. As a case study this project highlights the complex relationship of Aboriginal people to rainforests in Australia. It demonstrates how this relationship can be overlooked in rainforest landscapes that are valued for their biodiversity and natural values and managed as estates from which Indigenous owners have been removed or are at best treated as absentee landlords.

Introduction

The Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage Area (WHA), formerly known as the Central Eastern Rainforest Reserves Australia (CERRA) was inscribed in 1986 and extended in 1994. The WHA covers 366,507 hectares across NSW and Southern Queensland, and is comprised of around 50 separate reserves (DEH 2000). It includes both cool and warm temperate rainforests, subtropical and dry rainforests which occur as discontinuous patches. It is visited by around 2 million people per year.

These forests were inscribed for their outstanding natural universal values:

- As an outstanding example representing major stages of the earth's evolutionary history;
- As an outstanding example representing significant ongoing geological processes and biological evolution; and
- Containing important and significant habitats for the insitu conservation of biological diversity. (<http://www.deh.gov.au/heritage/worldheritage/sites/cerra/> accessed 8/11/04)

The study out of which this paper arises, involved a review of the information relating to the Indigenous values of the WHA and its immediate surroundings (see Figure 1), recognising that the current gazetted boundary of the WHA was not defined culturally.

For Aboriginal Traditional Owners the WHA is more than a place of spectacular scenic beauty. The striking landscape features hold rich cultural values. Together, the

picture that emerges is of a complex natural and cultural landscape where the very physicality of the landscape has shaped and continues to influence human interaction. This relationship has imbued the landscape with spiritual power and has in turn influenced the evolution of the landform, plants and animals of the area, many of which feature in the Aboriginal creation stories.

In Queensland the Gondwana Rainforest WHA covers a land area that is significant to several Indigenous groups, predominantly Yugambah, Yugarabul/Jagera, Gidabul and Wakka Waka. In NSW it incorporates some of the lands of the Gittabul, Bundjalung, Dhangaddi, Gumbangirr, Wonnarua, Worimi and Biripai. Certain features and places in the landscape have spiritual significance to Indigenous people as well as identifying their links to country. This significance is reflected in oral stories, naming of places and physical evidence in the form of archaeological sites and pathways. The stories shared by Indigenous people have been contextualized over a long period of time and of course provide links with important places outside the protected area reserve system.

The experiences of Aboriginal people across this vast area are varied and of course would be impossible to fully document here, as a consequence many stories will remain untold although some may be available through talking to local Aboriginal people as well as following up on some of the references for this paper. The significance of the area to Aboriginal people has long been known to authorities but has to some extent been 'forgotten' in recent years. In the mid to late 1970s however there was a focus on connections to this landscape that seemed to bode well for the long-term management of its cultural

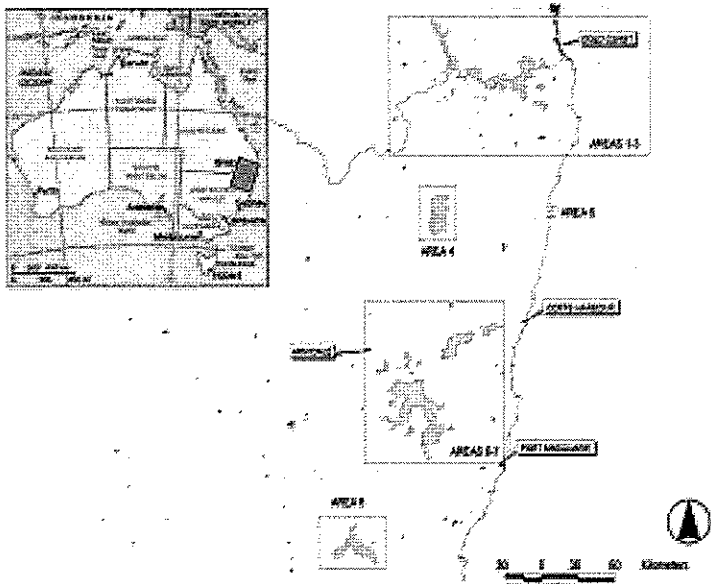


Figure 1: Location of the study area.

values and the involvement of traditional owners (Cremer nd; 1976; 1977; 1979; 1980; 1981; 1990; 2000; Donnelly 1989; Kelly & Donovan 1976; Kelly 1974). Unfortunately this promise has not been realised.

Creation stories-how the landscape formed

Different Aboriginal language groups had different names for the period of time now commonly referred to as the 'Dreaming'. This was the period of time when the landscape of the Gondwana Rainforests WHA was still being formed. The very values for which the landscape has been inscribed on the World Heritage List were created at this time. Beings from the Dreaming created the

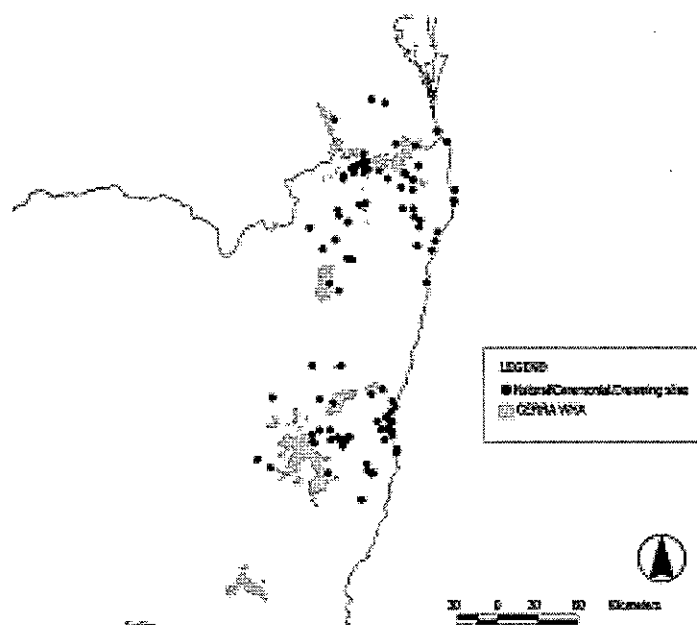


Figure 2: Dreaming or creation sites recorded on the Gondwana Forests Region.

distinctive landforms and the bio-diversity through their actions, their interaction with other dreamtime beings and with the landscape itself. 'Dreaming' or creation sites are sometimes called natural sacred sites. Such sites may have no evidence of physical modification by humans but are evidence of the cosmological forces at work in the creation of the natural landscape and may result from the activities of sentient beings *Butheram* at a time before they altered form to become specific landscape features. But these places are not just stage props in stories about the past. The complexity of Aboriginal concepts of time may be difficult for non-Aboriginal people to grasp but an important distinction between Aboriginal concepts of time and the western idea of linear time is that the past can still be active in the present. By keeping the traditions that were handed down from the 'Dreaming' alive, Aboriginal people can actively engage with those beings and this can have direct consequences on the maintenance of the world around them such as the increase and proliferation of certain species of animals or the health of particular ecosystems.

Scientists tell us that the values of the area were created by geological and evolutionary processes but there are other explanations of equal relevance. The time depth of Aboriginal knowledge and connection to landscape is highlighted by creation stories which explain the formation of the physical landscape. Such oral traditions provide evidence of the continuing connection of Aboriginal people and the landscape since the geological processes that formed it.

There are a range of early ethnographic observers (e.g Palmer 1884) who have recorded aspects of the Aboriginal belief system from the Gondwana Rainforests WHA Region. Many of these accounts need to be considered cautiously as they have often proved to be based on misunderstandings on the part of the European observers especially about aspects such as the purpose of beliefs and ceremonies. There is also a range of information collected from Aboriginal people themselves about these places. Some places may relate to the 'creation' of landscapes, and others, called *djurebil*, also spelt *jurraveel* (Giddabal term.) or *mirera* (Gumbaingir term), to the 'abundance' of natural resources (the latter are commonly called increase sites) and still others to ancestral journeys which record the formation of natural features and interconnections of tribal groups. As such, these sites represent a distinctly Aboriginal knowledge system about the creation and management of the natural landscape and in many cases remain important features of the cosmo-political landscape.

There is ample physical evidence in this area of this Aboriginal knowledge system. There are a total of 20 dreaming or creation sites recorded on the Gondwana Rainforests WHA estate and 111 for the region (see Figure 2). Not all of these sites have had associated stories recorded for them. Many of these places are linked by traditional pathways or travel routes.

Scientists maintain that

CERRA's [The WHA's] spectacular landforms are

outstanding examples of ongoing geological processes. As the Australian continental plate moved over the planet's hotspots volcanoes erupted in sequence along the East coast... (DEH2000:14)

Indigenous owners would agree that the spectacular landforms are evidence of great changes wrought in the landscape and that this change is ongoing. The forces that created the landforms are still active in shaping and reshaping the landscape and in the course of this; these forces may interact with people today in positive or negative ways. In a way, the area is significant to Aboriginal owners and scientists because of similar characteristics and values but there remains a substantial difference in the approaches to managing these. For Aboriginal owners the landscape is sentient and therefore requires, in fact demands, an intimate relationship with people and it has the ability to effect change in the everyday lives of the people who interact with it. The healthy state of the environment is closely aligned with the cultural health and well being of the people and the balance of either can be upset when people ignore their environment or do not follow required protocols. Ideally to protect the environment one interacts with it and protects and maintains the cultural sites within it. For scientists however the landscape, while a place to marvel over, is essentially inanimate and the processes which shaped it, while intriguing, can be described in dispassionate and objective terms once they are studied, broken into their mechanical, chemical and physical components and thereby understood. They too accept that the balance that has resulted in the outstanding natural universal values for which the place has been recognised can be upset however they see its ideal protection in the exclusion of humans and human interactions.

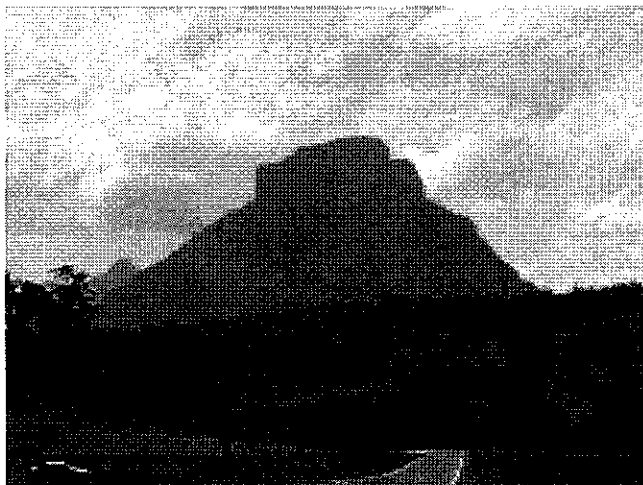


Figure 3: Many of the spectacular landforms in the area such as Mt Lindsay Queensland/NSW border are the result of the activities of important beings. They are often locations where ceremonies were carried out.

Ceremonial sites

The dramatic landforms of the area provide the ideal setting for Aboriginal ceremonial life. Indeed much of the area and the surrounding landscape can be seen as a landscape of power and spirituality. This is not to say that

the rainforest did not also provide the more mundane requirements of day-to-day life, such as food and shelter, but some often isolated and dramatic places were sacred. Access to these places was and may still be restricted according to gender or status. One such place is Mt Warning.

Mt Warning (Wollumbin) 'is one of a series of high altitude high level initiation and wi:un practices sites found in the wider area of the Far North Coast. These very specialised ceremonial sites were key to the social organisation and spiritual life of the Bundjalung and probably neighbouring cultures. The site at Wollumbin with its triad connection, remarkable natural volcanic features, special position in relation to the East coast, relationship to lightening phenomena, (has)...a very particular additional meaning that is echoed in stone arrangements in other parts of the country' (Collaborative Solutions 2001:144).

Ceremonial sites are associated with Wollumbin, Wooroombin and Njimbun Byorgin and the range of rituals carried out across these sites have been described as a 'circuit' (by Roberts pers comm. Sept.,2004) The sites are mythological in that there are stories that describe their creation and they are associated with Butheram, active agents in creation events. Together and with the associated archaeological sites around them, they constitute the most significant and visible elements of the Bundjalung cultural landscape and are recognised as such by Aboriginal groups at considerable distance. Mt Warning (Wollumbin), the Pinnacle (Wooroombin) and Mt Burrell (Njimbun Byorgin) are collectively known as the sacred triangle of the Bundjalung. *Wollumbin* was renamed Mt Warning by Captain Cook in 1770. It was reserved for public recreation in 1928 and dedicated as a National Park in 1966. It was included as part of the Gondwana Rainforests WHA in 1986. The mountain is a well known land mark and can be seen throughout a wide area of the north eastern corner of NSW. According to NPWS records Mt Warning and Mt Burrell have been known to be of Aboriginal significance at least since they were first recorded as sacred sites in 1973.



Figure 4: Mt Warning Wollumbin is a prominent landmark that can be seen for many kilometres..

Together the three peaks Wollumbin, Wooroombin and Njimbun Byorgin have been described as '...the sacred triangle that's what makes us the Bundjalung people. Power and our laws, power and our customs, power and our tradition – the triangle plays a big part in all that' (Roberts in Collaborative Solutions 2001:88). More colloquially the triangle has been described as the 'Vatican of the Bundjalung' (Roberts pers comm. Oct., 2004). The New South Wales Department of Environment and Climate Change (DECC) AHIMS site card (# 4-1-0007) records that this site is 'One of the most sacred mountains to the Bundjalung of the Lismore-Nimbin area, and the central point of their initiation 'trials' which spread out across the land.' Wollumbin is associated with a story of a wild turkey. The rocky point of Mt Warning is the turkey who was wounded on the head with a spear resulting in the little point on top. Mt Warning is both a ceremonial place associated with high level initiation ceremonies and a natural sacred site (or 'dreaming' site) connected to significant creation events and beings.

Bora rings are another specific type of ceremonial site that occur within the region. Different Aboriginal cultural groups had different names for the ceremony that is now somewhat generically referred to by the term 'Bora' (see Bowdler 2000:14). The term 'Bora' was originally a Kamilaroi term apparently referring to the 'first grade' initiation ceremony (Love 1988:106) However, it has become widely accepted as the name to apply to both the physical remnants of the ceremonial ground (ie the 'Bora' ring and pathways) and the initiation ceremony itself and it is used in this way in this report. In south-east Queensland the terms kipper, kippa or keepara are often used in the same generic way. The known distribution of Bora rings in Australia clusters heavily in the Gondwana Rainforest region and seems to suggest that a distinct specialised religious ceremonial system operated in this region (see Figure 5).

Bora rings are described by Bowdler (2000:5) as 'Circular structures of earth or stone.' Further, they are 'usually part of a complex of two or three circles linked by a path or paths. One of the rings is always larger than the others. They are used in what Sutton (1985) calls "man making ceremonies", that is male initiation ceremonies' (Bowdler 2000:9). Typically the rings are around 20-30cm high and the large rings about 30m in diameter and constructed of earth or stone. These constructed circles known as Bora rings occur only in central eastern Australia (Berndt 1974; Love 1988; Bowdler 2000). Following Bowdler (2000), stone arrangements have not been included in this classification except where they are circular and can be confidently assumed to have served the same function as Bora rings or are included within a Bora ground (see for example Etheridge 1918: 101; Black 1944; 1945; McBryde 1974:54-5; Bowdler 2000:11).

Four Bora ring sites are known to exist within the current boundaries of the WHA. However there are many others in the region (for accounts of these see Anon 1962; 1973; 1978; Biala 1959; Satterthwait and Heather 1987). Well known Bora rings in the region include Petroi, Middle Creek, Bellbrook, Mt Anderson, Tucki Tucki, Casino, Lennox Head, Evans Head, Minjungbal,

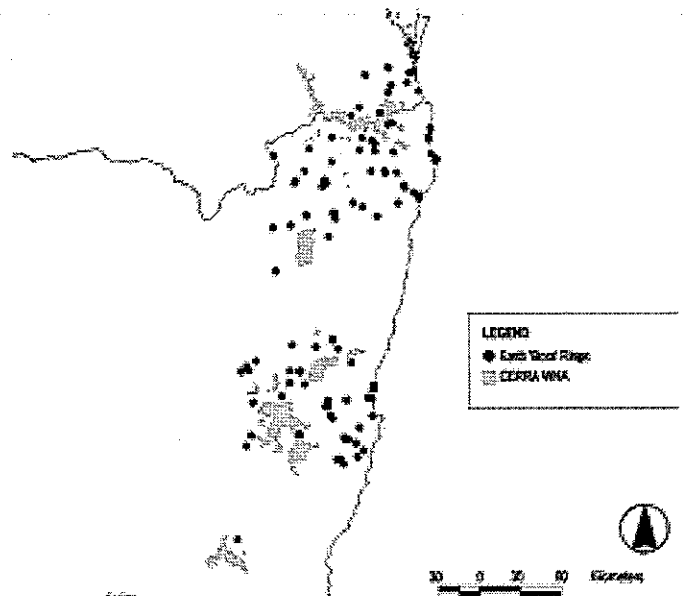


Figure 5: Recorded Bora Ring sites cluster heavily around this region.

Jebbrillium, Waldron Road/Tamborine, Rathdowney; and further afield Samford (Cilento 1962-3; Marks 1968), and Redcliffe (Stacey 1997). Prior to rural and urban development of the area surrounding the rainforest, ceremonial Bora rings would have been surrounded by large site complexes, including campsites that would have been temporary campsites for all the visiting groups attending the ceremony. Ethnographic accounts exist (see Love 1988 for an overview of these) which describe large Bora ceremonies involving several groups who not only came for the ceremony and camped in discrete groups but who also took this opportunity to engage in economic trade between groups. Howitt (1887) describes this as a '...sort of fair or market...' (Howitt 1887:47). Kelleher (2002:261) distinguishes between the 'ceremonial centre' which he describes as the location of large group or inter-group gatherings which are 'well organised and exhibit several levels of spatial divisions: tribal divisions, activity divisions, labour divisions, participation divisions'; and ceremonial places and /or incidental ceremonial activity. The latter he describes as 'smaller in scale and more representative of a highly formalised variant of the logistical support structure'. Bowdler (2000:17) also points out that the ceremonies performed at Bora ring sites were not limited to the actual Bora ground.

In terms of the numbers of people involved there seem to have been major ceremonies which attracted hundreds and perhaps thousands of people and lesser events. There were also shorter and longer versions of ceremonies. Major ceremonies would take place over a period of months, lesser ceremonies over a couple of weeks. Besides the actual initiation ceremonies, other social activities took place, including the exchange of material items, the settling of differences and in some cases, ritualised fighting (e.g Petrie 1904:44, 54, 56).

While the structure which generally survives to the present day is a single ring, the original complex included two or three rings, with a connecting pathway or pathways. A Bora ground also included trees carved with abstract or naturalistic designs, and earth sculptures alongside the path and the smaller ring (see works of Mathews and Etheridge 1918)...

Near the Bora Ground was a general campsite, to house the local people and the visitors from other areas. It was usually located within 500m to a kilometre of the ceremonial area. Such a site would also reflect the economic activity associated with maintaining a large group of people, many of whom would not be contributing in their normal manner to the pursuit of food. (Bowdler 2000:16-17).

Not only would the secular domestic and economic activities required to sustain large groups of people have taken up space but Bowdler also points out that the ceremony itself would not have been limited to the Bora ground and quotes Fife (1995):

...ceremonial activities began at the spectacular ceremonial grounds recorded in the historical literature and then continued at a series of further sites at a distance of up to 15-20 km from the primary ceremonial ground. This pilgrimage is referred to as the Ritual Circuit (Fife 1995: xii).

Unfortunately, with the exception of isolated rings most of the physical evidence for these important ceremonies has been destroyed. Where these places do exist they are usually of great significance to Aboriginal people today. Only within the protected boundaries of the Gondwana Forests WHA is the broader physical evidence of the ceremonial landscape likely to have survived relatively intact. There is no doubt that at least part of the information pertaining to the ritual landscape or circuit remains in Bundjalung territory. For examples see the previous description of the area known as the 'Sacred Triangle' comprising Wollumbin, (Mt Warning) Njimbun Byorgin (Mt Burrell/Sphinx Rock) and Wooroombin (The Pinnacle), which is referred to by Murray John Roberts as the centre of the large Bundjalung initiation circuit where the most senior men would go through their final initiation ceremonies (Roberts pers comm. Sept., 2004).

Another distinctive type of ceremonial site which occurs in the area is stone arrangements (Stead 1987; McBryde 1974). There are an unusual array of stone arrangements throughout the Gondwana Rainforests WHA and the surrounding region. Most stone arrangements recorded in NSW consist of isolated stone cairns rather than monumental structures of standing stones. In the Gondwana Rainforests WHA however the stone arrangements are very unusual in their form and structure. They involve monumental 'standing stones' and in one case, which is unique in Australia, include an anthropomorphic figure constructed from stone.

Serpentine, and Barren Mountain stone arrangements are characterised by their unique construction and are clearly associated with the rich complex ceremonial system in the

area. Connections have been drawn between these stone arrangements and the one at the Petroi ceremonial ground (the latter occurs within forests excluded from the WHA). Stone arrangements have also been linked in the region to higher level initiation ceremonies and further investigation may reveal these sites to comprise a highly significant ceremonial complex on the ceremonial circuit of the region. The stone arrangements are unlike any other in the region and the inclusion of an anthropomorphic figure makes them unique in Australia.

Travelling through rainforest

Many of the dreaming or creation sites recorded in and around the Gondwana Rainforests WHA are linked by traditional pathways or travel routes. Traditional pathways join not only people and resources but significant parts of the landscape that are associated with the Butheram and creation. Knowledge of pathways ensures safe passage and since the pathways must be learnt the process reinforces the transfer of traditional knowledge. There are many pathways known throughout the region (see for instance Fox 2003; Shepard et al 2001; Belshaw 1978; Steel 1984). Many of these are referred to in relation to specific ceremonial and natural sacred sites in sites cards completed by the NSW Sacred Site Survey Team and generally in published texts (e.g McBryde 1978). Until recently however there has been little follow up work focussed on documenting them. The significance of these pathways lies in their role of ensuring social relationships between groups and facilitating passage through country as well as their role as a mechanism for the transfer of oral traditions. They offer the opportunity to conserve and understand natural mythological sites and other important places along their route in a landscape context.

The rainforest as refuge

European settlement of the coastal plain and fertile river valleys drove Aboriginal people into the rugged parts of their territory such as the gorges of Kunderang (Ogilvie 1842 in Hoff 2006:271-273). As pressures for pastoral land along the coast lead to the establishment of stations in the upper reaches of the major rivers, this in turn placed pressures on the usual free movement of the Aboriginal people through this country and led to a resistance phase between 1845 and 1856 (Morris 1989:15ff).

There is ample oral and documentary evidence which is supported by identifiable heritage sites in the area, of the violent warfare waged on the Aboriginal people of the area (Metcalf 1989; Rich 1990; Blomfeld 1981; Cohen 1987; Goodall 1996; McIntyre-Tamwoy 2005; Prentis 1984; Shepard et al 2001; Hoff 2006). From the mid 1840s when the upper reaches were taken up by the pastoralists, the Dhan-gadi resisted and embarked upon a series of sporadic attacks on isolated stations and huts and captured stock. They were in turn subject to punitive expeditions which resulted in several massacres of family groups throughout the region. One of the reasons given for the obvious violence was that Aboriginal people had progressively given way before the incursion of European

settlement in the coastal areas and had retreated into the rugged tablelands. Pushed to the limits of their territory there, 'they turned to fight back'. Blomfield records that here:

these least aggressive of people, now starving and savage turned and fought back. They sallied out of the green timber to drive off large mobs of sheep and to spear cattle, stockmen and shepherds. They were decimated by the European settlers in a series of massacres and murders (Blomfield 1981:4)

In spite of this the Dhan-gadi remained in the Upper Macleay district and retained a degree of social and economic autonomy up to the 1880s.

The period between 1839 and 1845 saw a number of violent attacks on Aboriginal people. A study by NPWS into the Aboriginal Historic sites in Northeast NSW (Rich 1990) identified 11 sites relating to warfare in the Macleay and Bellinger Valleys alone. Hoff (2006) records many incidents in Bundjalung country in the period between 1840 and 1865 (Hoff 2006:103-127).

The present day environment is markedly different to that faced by Aboriginal people in pre-invasion Australia. Effects of European impact on the environment include disruption to Aboriginal firing regimes and the replacement of controlled burns with wild fires, the introduction of European animals including cattle and sheep, cultivation and vegetation clearing. The Gondwana Rainforests provide some indication of what the land was like prior to European settlement. It can easily be imagined how the dense vegetation and rugged terrain could be used to provide some level of safety and refuge for Aboriginal people displaced from parts of their domain by encroaching European settlement.

Discussion

In the course of this project it became clear that the Aboriginal people whose territory encompassed the Gondwana Rainforests have captured the research interests of both professional and amateur researchers since the area was first settled by Europeans. This has resulted in a wealth of early ethnographic accounts (see for example Hodgkinson 1844, Matthews 1896a, Petrie 1904; Telfer 1939) and a number of major academic studies and theses (amongst others: McBryde 1966; 1974; 1978; Morris 1989; Ulm 1995; Mowat 1989). It is surprising then that the cultural values of the area have not been formally recognised in the World Heritage listing.

Whereas the rise of deep ecology (Devall and Sessions 1985) and the scientific endeavour of documenting, describing and cataloguing natural values has led to an increased recognition of natural values; the recognition of the cultural values of natural landscapes has to a large extent diminished in recent years. This is at least in part due to the rapid domination of the 'new archaeology' or processual archaeology which served to separate 'people' from the 'science' of archaeology. In its quest for objectivity the human dimension of cultural landscapes has been diminished to be replaced by an apparently more

scientific approach of describing elements and features such as stone tools and other 'objects'. Added to this, is a growing number of critiques of colonialist approaches from both within and without the discipline, and accusations from Indigenous commentators regarding the appropriation of Indigenous heritage by (predominantly white) archaeologists. These factors have combined to deter researchers, managers and the interested public from continuing to explore, promote and discuss the cultural values of these sites and landscapes.

The outstanding natural values of the area including the striking landscape features (see for example Campbell 1932) are interrelated with the rich cultural values (Gresty 1947; Nayuteh & Finlay nd; NSW NPWS 1989). Together, the picture that emerges is of a complex natural and cultural landscape where the very physicality of the landscape has shaped and continues to influence human interaction (McIntyre-Tamwoy 2005). This relationship has imbued the landscape with spiritual power and has in turn influenced the evolution of the landform, plants and animals of the area, many of which feature in the Aboriginal creation stories. The range of significant Indigenous values in the Gondwana Forests of Australia WHA provide the opportunity to showcase the convergence of natural and cultural landscapes in Australia and present an opportunity for protected area management agencies to establish the benchmark for best practice in the integrated management of natural and cultural values.

The Rainforest and people

One of the greatest gifts that Aboriginal Australians have given settler Australians is an appreciation of the spiritual aspects of the rainforest (2002). Aboriginal people see the rainforest as a sentient landscape where time is not a constant. It is an environment to be respected and enjoyed and at times feared. In the rainforest, the past lives on in the present and certain modes of behaviour are required to ensure safety. The landscape interacts with people who venture into it, just as much as the people interact with the landscape. The actions of people today can affect the health and proliferation of animal and plant species, the abundance of food resources and water. Non-Indigenous Australians often remark on the feelings of awe that are inspired by some of the spectacular mountains, rock formation and waterfalls; they comment on the feelings of tranquillity and spirituality that are engendered from being encompassed by the peace and quiet of the rainforest and they often remark on the landscape in terms of its spiritual importance to Aboriginal people as they struggle to find ways to express their own attachment to the landscape.

If 'we human beings construct the passages of our lives through our cultures and actions...Different cultures, different actions: different traces. [Then] contrasts between the concreteness of place and the elusive duality of the signatures of our lives is nowhere more vivid than on the frontiers where intercultural encounters produce dense and provocative material and imaginative traces' (Bird Rose 2000:215).

If we accept that the *frontiers* shifted over time and today exist as varying levels of intercultural dialogue, then it follows that settler culture is likely to have been altered due to the interaction with the Indigenous culture and that such change may still be continuing as a result of ongoing inter-cultural negotiations or interactions. Deborah Bird Rose remarks that 'Aboriginal people in many parts of Australia have *taught* me to consider country to be a conscious entity' (Bird Rose 2000:215 -my emphasis). It would seem that Aboriginal people have 'taught' many Australians without them being aware of it. They have had an influence on how we as 'Australians' think and feel about the rainforest. It is clear however that there is still more that can be shared in exploring the values of the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia WHA. That exploration must incorporate investigation of the distinctive archaeological sites of the region in a broader multi-disciplinary framework that encompasses historic research and contemporary indigenous attachments to the forest so that this significant natural landscape is in essence, 're-peopled'.

Conclusion

The Gondwana Rainforests of Australia WHA and the surrounding region encompass a rich cultural landscape. This is true particularly in the northern part of the WHA where more information currently exists on the range and distribution of archaeological sites, the rich Indigenous historical record and the contemporary Indigenous knowledge of the area. Whether this is true for the Southern, Barrington Tops/ Mt Royal Section of the WHA requires further investigation.

The full potential significance of the WHA has yet to be revealed. This requires additional investigation into both the archaeology and the social significance of the sites and contexts within which they occur. However, already it is clear that the area contains evidence of a discrete ceremonial-religious system as evidenced by its system of ceremonial sites, natural mythological sites, Bora ring sites and stone arrangements and that some of these sites are examples of extremely rare and threatened site types. Some are clearly of national significance. However, despite some work on recording and describing them further work is required to analyse and synthesise this information to understand how this significance contributes to that of the entire WHA. Additional field survey will undoubtedly reveal more sites in most of the parks that comprise the WHA as most have not been systematically surveyed to date and this information may play an important role in understanding the cultural heritage of the area at a landscape level.

Effective management of this area is predicated on the recognition of both its natural and cultural values and the ability of scientist, protected area managers and Indigenous people to work together – each acknowledging the importance of the others world view. This requires a 'shared understanding of disparate values' (cf., McBryde 1995) rather than the ascendancy of one set of values over the other.

Acknowledgements

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