

# Community Consultation and Collaborative Research in Northern Cape York Peninsula – a retrospective

*Shelley Greer & Maureen Fuary*

## Abstract

*This paper describes research, undertaken in the 1980s, which resulted in the development of a community-based approach to archaeological research in northern Cape York. It begins with an archaeological doctoral project that was underpinned by the desire to undertake adequate and appropriate consultation with traditional owners. However, northern Cape York is extremely culturally complex, stemming largely from the Indigenous and non-Indigenous history of this region over the last 150 years or so. A joint anthropological-archaeological project was undertaken, initially to identify appropriate traditional owners but which was subsequently expanded to include the recording of cultural information.*

## Introduction

This paper describes collaborative archaeological-anthropological research undertaken in northern Cape York from the mid 1980s to the early 1990s. At that time there was neither the model nor the language for doing comprehensive archaeological consultation in indigenous communities. Indeed, for archaeology at the time, the interests of the indigenous community were seen to be tangential to the archaeological project. There are perhaps many reasons for this, but a large part revolved around the dominance of the processual paradigm in Australian archaeology and the types of approaches this engendered. However, this was a time of change within Australian archaeology, particularly in relation to an emerging Aboriginal 'voice' within the discipline. This was (at least in part) the result of a number of cultural heritage projects in New South Wales under the auspices of the Cultural Heritage Division of the National Parks and Wildlife Service run by Sharon Sullivan. These included the Sites of Significance Program under anthropologist Howard Creamer and Aboriginal Sites Officer Ray Kelly. Egloff's work on Mumbulla Mountain was similarly influential as was that of McBryde, while Jonas' work for the Australian Heritage Commission laid out many Aboriginal perspectives on archaeological sites (Egloff 1981; McBryde 1974, 1978, 1985; Jonas 1991). This research was conducted in south-eastern Australia, where there was a long history of European settlement and illustrated that working with Aboriginal people was important – regardless of the nature and extent of contact. The '80s also heralded a number of theoretical developments in post-processual archaeology that allowed this 'voice' to be heard. But while the present project was both directly and indirectly influenced by all of these developments, it preceded the development of good consultative models now taken for granted in many domains of social/political policy.

The description of the ways that this project evolved from standard archaeological practice, to something substantively different provides a window into the

challenges and benefits of archaeologists working with and in community, and with anthropology. It also provides insights into how collaborations between Australian archaeologists and local communities have developed in the last few decades. In this case study what began as a purely archaeological project became an active collaboration of the two disciplines with Aboriginal community members. We argue that the particular dynamic between Aboriginal people in the region, the researchers, and the research itself over the lifespan of the project, resulted in a distinctive piece of research with its own signature. Although the archaeological field research was completed in 1987, this paper focuses on previously unpublished aspects of the project, namely, the use (in concert) of anthropological and archaeological techniques and understandings from the outset of the project. This differs from instances in which ethnographic information collected in the past is used to interpret archaeological evidence, although this might form a component of the present approach. It is also different to ethnoarchaeology in which (for the most part) archaeologists undertake field studies in order to construct models of past 'behaviour'. Our approach is concerned with locating and recording sites and features within the context of the recent past and the present as a starting point for investigations into understanding their place in the humanised landscape, and it emphasizes the critical roles played by Aboriginal land owners and others in this research process.

The project began with the doctoral archaeological project of Greer (1996a) whose initial aim was to examine evidence for social and economic intensification at the tip of Cape York. This area has been, theoretically at least, understood as being on the edge of a major divide in terms of economic mode with mainlanders maintaining a gatherer-hunter existence and Torres Strait Islanders engaging in horticulture (Moore 1979; Harris 1977). For reasons explained more fully below, the present project was initially conceived as a necessary precursor to effective consultation. Our aim was to identify the traditional owners of particular tracts of land and develop an

appropriate consultation process regarding the proposed archaeological work. It resulted, however, in the development of an approach to the study of the Aboriginal past in Australia in which archaeological and anthropological work is undertaken with a single research purpose.<sup>1</sup> We suggest that this differs from the vast majority of work in both disciplines in this country and for this reason consider it fruitful to document the process through which this approach unfolded.

## Which community?

Our research revealed a complex cultural and historical background to northern Cape York people and communities. The establishment and subsequent history of the village of Injinoo or Cowal Creek (as it was known in the 1980s) has been at least partially documented in Fuary & Greer (1993), Greer (1996a, 1996b), McIntyre-Tamwoy (2002a) in conjunction with the community and Sharp (1992). The brief sketch presented here reflects community perspectives which we accessed through participant observation, a number of open-ended as well as strategic interviews, and discussions during and subsequent to the 1980s. This complexity illustrates why consultation was not straightforward and required anthropological expertise.

Injinoo is situated on the western side of the Peninsula, just southwest of the tip of Cape York (see Figure 3). At the time that archaeological fieldwork was conducted from 1984-1987, the population was approximately 300. Prior to the establishment of the settlement in the early 20th century, the northern Peninsula was occupied by three major Aboriginal groups and several sub-groups, with many connections amongst them and with people of the Torres Strait islands to the north. While other terms are used sometimes today<sup>2</sup>, in the 1980s community members offered the following classifications to describe three key pre-settlement Aboriginal or mainland groups (see also Figure 1):

1. 'Seven Rivers people' who occupied the land on the west coast of the Peninsula from the Dulhunty River north to somewhere between the Jardine River and the location of the present settlement,
2. 'McDonnell people' who occupied the central part of the Northern Peninsula from the Jardine River to the Dulhunty River, and
3. 'Sandbeach people', comprising 'Whitesand', 'Cairncross-Somerset', and 'Red Island' peoples. Their land is said to have extended from the Olive River on the east coast, north through Shelburne, Orford and Newcastle bays to Cape York, continuing down the west coast to meet the Seven Rivers boundary.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, Cowal Creek community members recognized their strong historical and continuing connections with the Kaurareg, whose traditional land and sea territories focused on Muralag (Prince of Wales Island) and other islands immediately to the north in the Torres Strait. Mainland people, particularly the Gudang<sup>4</sup>, whose lands centred on the northern coast, are reported as engaging in a range of other social and cultural interactions, including marriage, with the Kaurareg



PEOPLES: A. Sandbeach B. Whitesand C. 7 Rivers D. McDonnell River  
A1 Cape York-Red Island 'tribe' or 'mob'  
A2 Somerset 'tribe' or 'mob'  
A3 Cairncross 'tribe' or 'mob'

**Figure 1:** Approximate customary domains of 'tribes' and local groups, Northern Cape York (from Fuary & Greer 1993: 86)

(Moore 1979, Fuary and Greer 1993, Greer, Henry and McIntyre-Tamwoy in prep). Border skirmishes appear to have occurred between Seven Rivers and Red Island people from time to time and there are accounts of at least one major fight occurring just south of the Jardine River, not long before the immense disruptions wrought by European and non-European contact and settlement:

*That's where they used to fight. The Seven Rivers mob used to chase the Red Island mob back. The Red Island people couldn't go any further south than Ichera (Gel Point), and no further north or north-east than Somerset. (SG & MF interview with JT May 1987)*

The McDonnell people, sandwiched in the hinterland between the east and west coasts, were said to have enjoyed more harmonious relationships with the Sandbeach and Seven Rivers people, exchanging marriage partners with both (SG & MF interviews with EP, SW & MC, May 1987). Thus, in northern Cape York, there were at least three 'flows' of connection: a northerly liaison extended out into the Torres Strait and on the mainland; a more limited relationship prevailed between the people of the east and west coasts; and a more robust and dynamic set of connections in both directions was facilitated by the McDonnell River people. This appears to have been the case just prior to settlement.



**Plate 1:** "Native Village – Small River camp – Cape York" from The Annual Report of the Chief Protector of Aboriginals (1916). John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland.

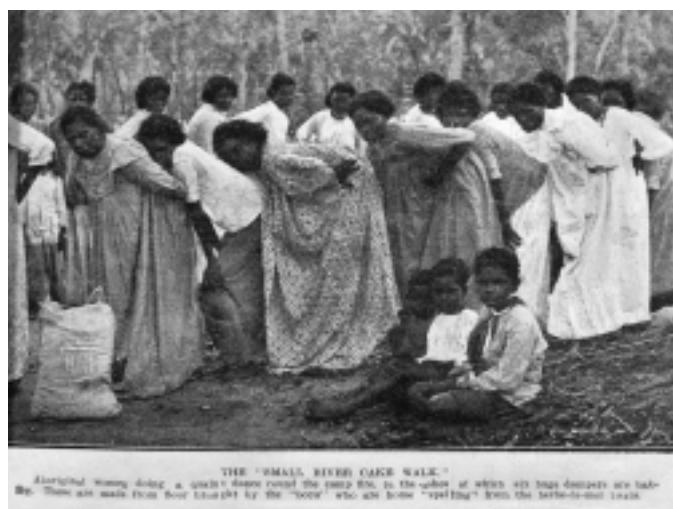
The village at Cowal Creek was established by the people themselves rather than by any missionary endeavour or other obvious intervention some time before 1916, when the village was noted in the Queensland Parliamentary Papers (Queensland Parliamentary Papers 1918).

An Aboriginal man, Alec Seven Rivers is said to have gathered up and brought together all the Seven Rivers, McDonnell Rivers and Red Island people at Cowal Creek (aka 'Small River'), because of its proximity to cargo supplies (SG & MF interview with JT May 1987; MF interview with AW November 1992). Thus while some people were choosing life in the village, Alec 'gathered up' others (such as McDonnell people) by force, so the impetus to settle at Cowal Creek must be understood as a somewhat constrained decision. Elsewhere, Aboriginal people throughout Queensland were being forcibly pulled into reserves and missions after the passing of the *1897 Aborigines Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act*. The definitive factors influencing Cowal Creek's establishment remain somewhat speculative but would have been powerfully affected by white settlement. This included the developing cattle industry, the Jardine empire at nearby Somerset, the establishment of telegraph stations, missions and reserves and the intermittent but powerful effects of the largely unpoliced bêche-de-mer and pearling industries. The result was massive exploitation, demoralisation, increased mortality and morbidity, and the wholesale transformation of Aboriginal people's lives in this region. For instance, on 6th May 1898, Walter Roth wrote that although

*No women, or children under puberty, are [now] allowed to be shipped ...there is every reason for believing that the women are picked up again on the sandbanks from some thirty to fifty miles down the eastern coast of the peninsula...It would appear that just lately at Thursday Island there has been quite a revival in pearlshell surface diving, and it is probable that even more blacks than those already employed (about 300) will be required. At present they are*

*being recruited principally from the western coast of Cape York Peninsula, along that tract of country known as the 'Seven Rivers' [i.e., the coast district between the Jardine River and the Batavia]. (Parry-Okeden 1898: 4)*

Fuay (2004: 6-7) has invoked the assessments made by Roth (1898,1900) to argue that the impact of these industries was extremely powerful indeed. When he was Northern Protector of Aboriginals, Roth (1900) claimed that the societies of Aboriginal people all down the east coast did not require protection as they had been irreparably damaged through their contact with the maritime industries. On the west coast, he graded the extent of Aboriginal social and physical 'degradation' on a north-south axis from the tip of Cape York south to Musgrave near Mapoon (Fuay 2004: 6-7, Loos 1982: 142, Henry, Greer, Fuay & Morrison 2003).



**Plate 2:** The "Small River Cake Walk". From The Queenslanders 12/9/1919: 27. John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland.

The role of McLaren, resident at Uthingu from 1911- 1920 is also worthy of further investigation. His coconut plantation attracted many Aboriginal people yet his silence regarding Jardine's notorious activities at Somerset and the establishment of Cowal Creek some time prior to 1916 is puzzling (McLaren 1966). His plantation may well have served as a residence model, and he clearly states that a group of people came into his plantation and eventually settled a 'few miles down the coast' (McLaren 1966: 120-122). Our research indicates that the Sandbeach people first established a temporary camp at Red Island Point and from there moved to Cowal Creek.

Inland people appear to have congregated around the telegraph stations (after 1895) accessing European food and blankets, and coastal people may have also established camps there. Thus the coming together of relatively disparate groups at Cowal Creek, from before 1916 till the 1930s may not have been unprecedented in the broader region. It may be that as the telegraph stations shut down, new places were sought from which desired European goods could be accessed safely and regularly. Certainly McLaren's outpost at Uthingu would



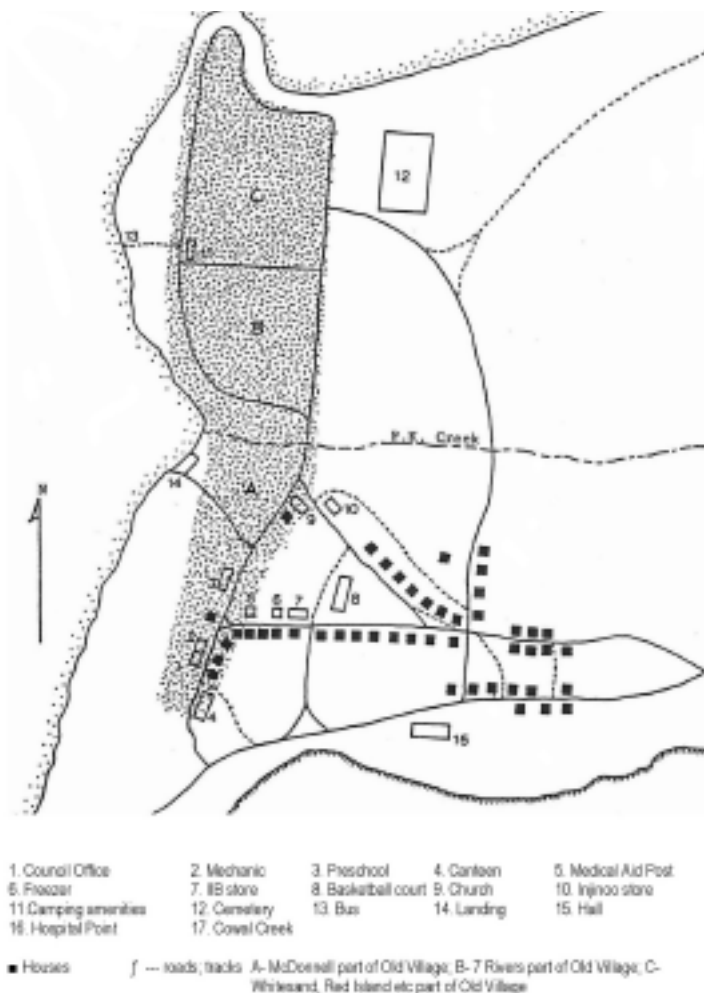
have been familiar to all the groups in the region, and Cowal Creek would have afforded residents ready access to trade goods from Thursday Island (Fuary & Greer 1993), and a market for their own produce.



**Plate 3:** The village circa 1919. In *The Queenslander* 12/7/1919: 27. John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland.

Fission and fusion of territory was common practice in Aboriginal societies (Sutton 1981; Sutton & Rigsby 1982), and during the enormous social upheavals of the 19th century in Cape York the fusion of territory would have occurred as some groups on the frontier diminished, and others coalesced with related groups. While not all northern Cape York peoples moved to the settlement at once<sup>5</sup>, by the late 1920s the 'Old Village of Cowal Creek' was comprised of Seven Rivers, McDonnell, and the Sandbeach peoples. This demographic composition was reflected in the settlement layout (see Figure 2) which had three distinct 'villages': McDonnell people occupied the eastern side of P.K. Creek while the Seven Rivers community were located adjacent to them but across the creek. The remaining groups, who shared linguistic and other affiliations, were located to the west near the end of Hospital Point.<sup>6</sup> The dynamics of the 'Old Village' were complex and in some ways followed pre-settlement patterns of enmity and alliance. For instance, McDonnell and Seven Rivers people maintained marriage links, whilst the enmity between Seven Rivers and Red Island people continued, the latter building their bark and palm-trunk houses on stilts with removable ladders, for fear of surprise attack (SG & MF interview with MC May 1987).

By at least 1919 the community was under control of the state with a body of men occupying the role of 'Councillors'. There was also a resident 'blacktracker': we know from the historical literature that such men performed the role of 'dispersing' people and rounding them up into reserves. Between 1919 and the beginning of 1920, 32 people out of their population of 200 died from influenza, and the remainder "moved to south of the Cockatoo River, Utinu [*sic*] and other places" for a while. At nearby Somerset an estimated 105 people succumbed (Queensland Parliamentary Papers 1920: 7).



**Figure 2:** Cowal Creek – Old and New Villages (as remembered in 1987, from Fuary & Greer 1993: 87).



**Plate 4:** "Kings and Sons of Kings", Small River, about 1919. In *The Queenslander* 12/7/1919: 27. John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland.

In the 1920s and 1930s the arrival of a teacher (Jomen Tamwoy) and an Anglican priest, (Francis Bowie) with their respective families from the Torres Strait, marked another chapter in Cowal Creek's cultural make-up.

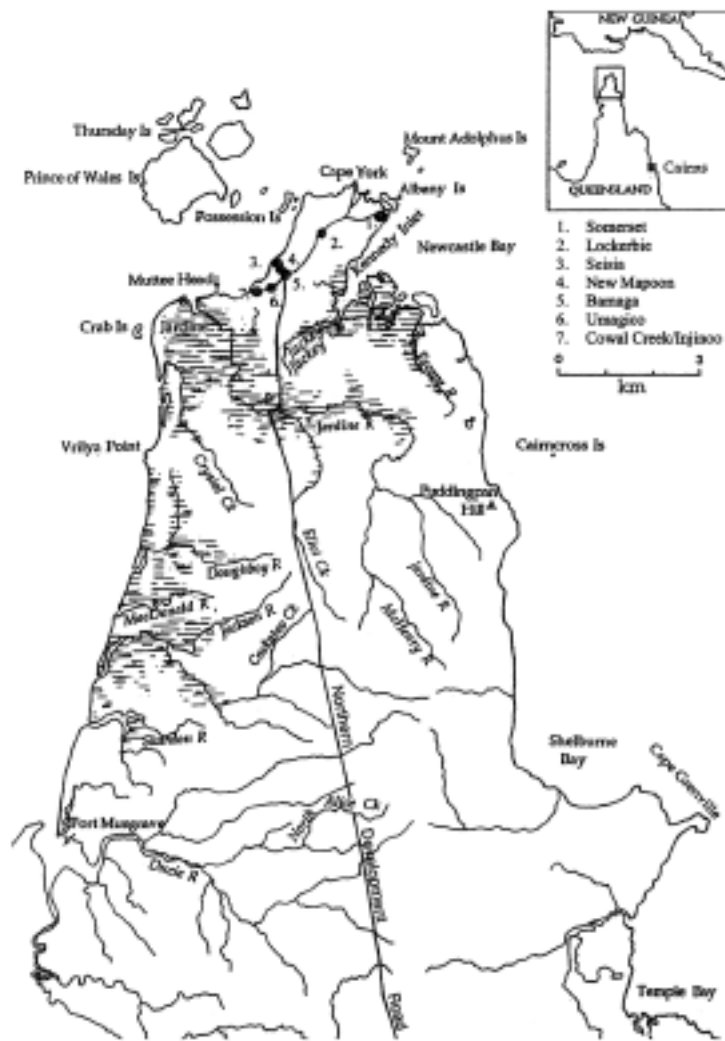
While up to this point people had been self-supporting through the sale, on Thursday Island, of garden vegetables and the catch from their two fishing vessels, the mission and school structure encouraged their adoption of Islander styles especially in gardening and village structure (see for example, Queensland Parliamentary Papers 1920, 1925, 1927). This Torres Strait Islander influence and presence continues today, through the descendants of these people and through more recent immigration and marriage. In addition, although Kaurareg people were forcibly 'relocated' by the Queensland government to islands further north in the Torres Strait, marriage with mainland peoples continued. It was also during this period that some McDonnell people at least, returned to their homelands (Queensland Parliamentary Papers 1933: 11).

In the 1940s when the focus of World War II shifted to New Guinea, Cape York and nearby Torres Strait were transformed into war zones. As American and Australian troops complete with the heavy equipment and artillery of war moved into the region, local people left their homes and moved into the surrounding bush for security. At Cowal Creek, the three main groups established separate settlements, returning only for supplies.

Many local men were involved in transportation of goods and services between the Torres Strait and the mainland (MF interview with BR December 1992). A huge Army/Airforce base was set up in the scrub adjacent to Jacky Jacky Creek while smaller installations of equipment and personnel were scattered throughout. Jetties were built, and roads were constructed. The area was crawling with military personnel and the resulting social interactions with local people was something of a double-edged sword (see Fuay & Greer 1993: 64-66)

Following World War II, the Queensland government established the Northern Peninsula Area (NPA) as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander reserve in the late 1940s. This exacerbated the cultural complexities as a number of other groups of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were relocated to this area. It marks a phase of forced relocations of people to the region, with these movements being regulated and orchestrated by government. A brief overview of this aspect of the NPA's history follows (see also Figure 3).

Shortly after World War II, the Queensland government sought to relocate Saibailgal, people predominantly from the northwestern Torres Strait island of Saibai, after their island had suffered partial inundation during an unusually high tide. After some negotiation, it was decided that the mainland was the most appropriate site for their resettlement. Not all Saibailgal shifted from their home at Saibai, but those who moved in 1947 included some men who had spent time both at Cowal Creek and nearby Muttee Head, possibly during the war (see Figure 3). In 1949, a village was established at Ichuru with the permission of the Cowal Creek people. This is the community now known as Bamaga. A smaller village, present-day Seisia, was established on the coast adjacent to Red Island Point, as some of the Saibailgal migrants were reluctant to live at a distance from the sea.



**Figure 3:** Location of communities in the NPA (from Greer 1996a: 90)

In 1963, Aboriginal people from the former mission at Old Mapoon (to the south on the western coast of the Peninsula), were removed under duress to northern Cape York by the Queensland government. This coincided with the development of the bauxite industry in the area. 'New' Mapoon was established for these evictees at a place known as Charcoal Burner, eight kilometres northeast of Cowal Creek. Similarly, people from Port Stewart (and later Lockhart River mission), on the eastern side of the Peninsula, were forcibly resettled at Alau. This is the village today known as Umagico, four kilometres north of Cowal Creek.

During this era, the Queensland government made Bamaga the socio-economic and political hub for the region and schools. A sawmill, brickworks, slaughterhouse, farm, baker, shops, post office, bank and government offices were all established there. On the NPA reserve each of the communities (Cowal Creek, Umagico, New Mapoon, Seisia and Bamaga) had their own council of elected members who met collectively on matters of common interest as the Combined NPA Council. Bamaga Community Council (essentially a Torres Strait Islander organisation) exerted considerable influence over proceedings, partially through sponsorship by the State

government and by the fact that their own Chairman occupied the Chair of the NPA Combined Council for a long period. By the 1980s while people who claimed traditional affiliation with this area through birthright and marriage could be found in almost all northern Cape York communities, Cowal Creek represented the historical and symbolic focus of pre-settlement groups, knowledge and practice.

In Queensland, throughout this period, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were dominated by the infamous reserve system that constrained their rights and lives. However, by the 1980s this system of political and social control was unravelling in the face of Australian and international pressure. In the latter part of this decade, a desperate State government introduced the Deeds of Grant in Trust (DOGIT) system which was a significant if not totally acceptable change in Indigenous land tenure arrangements in Queensland. This was followed in the next decade by the passing of the *Queensland Aboriginal Land Act 1991*, the *Mabo Decision of 1992*, the *Commonwealth Native Title Act 1993*, and the *1998 Amendments to the Native Title Act* following the High Court's *Wik* decision in 1996. These, along with other state and federal developments had direct and indirect impacts on the socio-political landscape of northern Cape York. One effect of these was a dissipation of the dominance and influence that had developed around the fundamentally Torres Strait Islander community of Bamaga and the emergence of Cowal Creek/Injinoo as the acknowledged political focus for northern Cape York traditional owners.

But this is a later chapter in the northern Cape York story. Our purpose here is to demonstrate that the work we undertook in our collaborative archaeological-anthropological project was contingent on the unfolding of this complex history. While this information was known (at least in part) by community members, and while a small amount of specific linguistic work had been undertaken previously in the region (e.g. Crowley 1980) and therefore parts of the story were undoubtedly known to other researchers, a comprehensive account had not been published at this time.<sup>7</sup>

In subsequent sections, we backtrack to outline the process by which the information slowly and painstakingly came to light. We have here inverted the process of providing first 'method' and then 'results' to emphasize the social, political and historical complexity that confronted the archaeologist when beginning fieldwork. Superficially, the communities could be divided according to their history of establishment and cultural make-up: Bamaga and Seisia as mostly Saibai Islanders; New Mapoon and Umagico as Aboriginal communities relocated from further south on the west and east coasts respectively; and Cowal Creek as the conglomerate of peoples whose traditional lands were now encompassed by the NPA. However, after only an initial visit by Greer, it was apparent that such classifications could not be totally sustained (Greer 1996a, 1996b, 1999).

## Research and consultation in the NPA

When Greer began archaeological research in the NPA in 1984, only three sites were listed on the Queensland register of sites for the area north of the Jardine River. These were the sites recorded and excavated by Moore (1979) and the former government residence and Jardine headquarters at Somerset (see also McIntyre-Tamwoy 2002b). As the project required the detection of a broad range of sites, the initial focus of the work was a program of site location and recording. Initial consultation consisted of a preliminary visit to the area and, at the direction of Queensland government officers, a formal meeting with the Combined NPA Council. The research proposal was presented and the Council agreed that the archaeological project could proceed. This initial meeting and outcome fulfilled the requirements of the State government permit requirements of the time. However, a consultation process that was limited to this requirement would have been seriously deficient in terms of a broad range of ethical and political issues. Fundamentally, this 'level' of consultation did not ensure that we were talking to the traditional owners of the specific tracts of land earmarked for intensive investigation. Given the complex socio-cultural history of the region and the fact that community councils were elected along the lines of local government, consultation that was restricted to the council structure had limitations (see also Greer 1996a). Greer's professional approach to consultation went beyond minimalist conceptions, although the difficulties of penetrating the entanglements of pre-settlement, historical and recent connections within the NPA presented a challenge.

### The First Season: identifying the problems

The 1985 archaeological field season began with a program of general reconnaissance and further consultation. As previously noted, the latter was not legally required, but sprang from the researcher's personal ethical stance that wherever possible, consultation should be undertaken with traditional owners. This was confirmed once the cultural pluralities of the region began to unfold. Funding was obtained from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies to employ two local Indigenous co-workers to facilitate access around the region and the location and recording of archaeological sites. The research design included an initial period of reconnaissance followed by the employment of a systematic survey strategy. This, however subsequently was abandoned for a number of reasons (see Greer 1996a).

By the end of the 1985 field season approximately 30 new sites had been located, including campsites, middens, story places, and stone arrangements. Some preliminary work was also undertaken on recording stories and songs at the request of local people. This highlighted an emerging perception that while people had some interest in the distant past (the primary concern of the archaeological research), they were far more concerned with recording and preserving some of the intangible elements of their living culture such as language, stories, places and songs (see also Byrne 1993,



1998). A compounding factor, as is often the case for indigenous communities, was that those with the most knowledge of these aspects of culture were elderly. A sense of urgency was thus added to the research environment. The archaeologist found herself acting as an ethnographer, albeit ill-at-ease in the role. It became apparent that the unravelling of the recent past in this region was an ethnographic project in itself. The dilemma then was to 'capture' an anthropologist with the relevant skills to assist.

At the close of this field season the program for more detailed consultation had not progressed to the satisfaction of the researcher. In fact, effective and adequate consultation seemed increasingly difficult as the historical and social complexities of the communities unfolded. Preliminary work had revealed Cowal Creek as the focus of traditional owners who were, however, also to be found in other villages in the NPA and in towns and cities in Queensland and further afield. It was further confirmed that other research skills would be needed to sort out who exactly should be consulted in relation to places chosen for detailed investigation, and that this would be a major undertaking in itself. Thus, at the end of the 1985 fieldtrip, two key resolutions concerning consultation had been established:

1. That consultation had to be undertaken at a number of levels, and while it began with individual councils and the Combined NPA, this should be the beginning of such a process, but not an endpoint; and
2. that an anthropologist had to be found to unravel traditional claims to specific tracts of land and to respond more effectively to community requests for the recording of culturally significant knowledge.

### **The Second Season: developing a collaborative approach**

At the beginning of 1986, the research remained distinctly archaeological, and a set of large campsites on the east coast were targeted for intensive archaeological investigation, including mapping, excavation and surface collection. The primary aim of consultation at this stage was to identify and consult with traditional owners for the area on the east coast in relation to the proposed investigation of these areas.

In keeping with the formal legal requirements of consultation, the combined NPA Council was contacted for permission to undertake this work. However additional consultation was undertaken in Cowal Creek. In this season, a social anthropologist, Maureen Fuary, who had significant experience in adjacent Torres Strait, joined the team for a short time in an informal capacity. This greatly assisted the consultation process in a number of ways. Firstly, Fuary's fluency in Torres Strait Creole, a language closely related to Cape York Creole, was invaluable when translating the complex ideas surrounding the archaeological project to community members of Cowal Creek. This facilitated a confidence that the planned work was understood and that permission was given with this knowledge. Doubts about this had been raised in the previous field season in relation

to the community's heightened interest in the recent past and their frequent requests for Greer to undertake ethnographic work. In addition, Greer noted that she was often identified around the communities as a 'ranger'. This related to the Indigenous Queensland government officers who had day-to-day responsibilities for the care and maintenance of archaeological sites and also the recording of cultural knowledge. She wondered at this point whether the initial permission for the archaeological project had been based on such a misunderstanding of her primary skills, expertise and research interests and that the community imagined her task as one of collecting contemporary cultural knowledge.

Specific consultation began with members of Cowal Creek Community Council as formal representatives of the traditional owners. As a result of these discussions, a 'speaker' was identified who could work with the researchers on the east coast sites. While not immediately apparent at the time, this person had to have specific knowledge (including familiarity with practices) and language skills that would ensure that even visitation to this area – let alone invasive work on archaeological sites – was safe and in keeping with contemporary beliefs and practices.<sup>8</sup> For the remainder of the fieldwork, collaboration between the archaeologist, the anthropologist and community members revealed deeper epistemological and ontological dimensions of place-people relationships. A picture began to emerge of contemporary Indigenous beliefs and practices surrounding 'archaeological sites'. While consultation had begun as an attempt to mitigate the potentially destructive aspects of invasive archaeological techniques, it concluded in this field season with a rich understanding of the way community members perceived places that archaeologists term 'archaeological sites'. For the latter these are repositories of information from the past; for the former they are places where past and present collide – mnemonic devices that kick-start the memory and actually *facilitate* access to the past. Access to and acknowledgement of this greatly influenced the direction of subsequent archaeological work in this region (see Greer 1996a, 1996b, 1999; Greer et al 2002; 2002a, 2002b) and confirmed the researchers' commitment to a tandem anthropological project. This was started in 1987 and is described in the following section.

### **The Cowal Creek Country Survey**

In response to discussions with members of the community, anthropological research was directed at quickly and strategically establishing the cultural 'make-up' of the Cowal Creek/ Injinoos community, with a project entitled 'The Cowal Creek "Country" Survey'. This included:

1. discovering how people identified themselves in terms of the known Aboriginal groups or 'tribes';
2. determining how an individual's parents identified and any patterns of descent that were being followed;
3. collecting life histories to establish how individuals and/or their parents or grandparents came to settle at Cowal Creek;

4. documenting those who had the same group affiliation; for example, eliciting the names and details of all the McDonnell people that individuals could remember, irrespective of whether they were alive or deceased, resident at Cowal Creek or elsewhere; and
5. identifying named places and land identified with each group, known boundaries between groups, significant places and sites, and proper and improper conduct at certain places. This was not to establish boundedness, nor to suggest that boundaries are impermeable and absolute, but rather to document where people saw their land as being located, and to record their strong notions of who had primary rights to which tracts of country; who had the authority to make decisions about what happened on tracts of land, and who could use its resources.

As this research progressed, the relationship between cultural belief systems concerning land and specific sites assumed greater importance. The expertise of the archaeologist and the anthropologist were complementary and interdependent in this work and both were reliant on the generosity, experience, knowledge and confidence of their Cowal Creek co-workers.

By this time, the archaeologist had spent several periods of 2-3 months duration in the field developing relationships and understandings in relation to attitudes, beliefs and practices that are incorporated into everyday life. She was also keenly aware of the differences between community perspectives about the places on which the team worked and the types of archaeological interpretations that were possible. The anthropologist's long-term experience in Torres Strait (at this stage she had been working there for 8 years) provided the trigger to investigate particular aspects of beliefs and practices that were familiar from that experience. In addition, she brought to the project her disciplinary experience in field techniques and the application of anthropological knowledge.

As part of this stage of consultation, the concept of a 'Keeping Place' or Community Resource centre emerged,<sup>10</sup> the idea being that such a place could provide a physical and symbolic focus for the information collected and documented throughout the life of the project. These and other pressing issues formed the central focus of a public workshop, which took as its model the formal Public Meeting. During that era of the 1980s it was the most appropriate means by which to discuss important issues in the community of Cowal Creek/Injinoo. Unlike a Public Meeting however, our meeting ran as a workshop in which active and equal participation between participants was the norm.

The workshop was held on the 19th July 1987. A core of approximately 25 people attended and actively participated, and each of the self-identified Aboriginal groups within the community of Injinoo was represented.<sup>11</sup> The aim of the workshop was to provide a space in which social identities could be identified, acknowledged and articulated at group and individual levels and to establish what was culturally most important to them.

Following a general introduction by the researchers,

participants broke into three groups: Seven Rivers people, McDonnell people, and a combined Whitesand-Cairncross (Sandbeach) group. Each group nominated a scribe who recorded the key elements of their discussion on butcher's paper. The participants spent a lot of time defining who they were and were not, with younger members being firmly directed by their elders, and they also highlighted what they collectively regarded as the key issues for them about their heritage. In usual workshop style a nominated individual from each group reported back to the larger group toward the end of the proceedings and shared their group's discussions. Central in their concerns was the need to record the knowledge of the older people and to keep this material in the community.

The six hour workshop was video taped, and the participants reluctantly allowed the proceedings to be brought to a close. There was considerable excitement on the part of both the researchers and the participants, as all sensed that something important and exciting had happened. In particular, it seemed that the workshop was a catalyst for changes (already in train) in the ways that Injinoo/Cowal Creek people identified culturally. Up to this point, at least in the public domain, much emphasis seemed to have been placed on the creation of a unitary, undifferentiated 'Cowal Creek' identity. Indeed the catchcry in the community at the time of the research was that Cowal Creek community members were 'all one nation'. This is not surprising given the history of the establishment of the village and subsequent movements of other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people to the NPA. However at the workshop, there emerged a sense that one could also legitimately identify in terms of more primary cultural affiliations. This is not to suggest that the one supplanted the other, but rather, additional categories of identification were now being expressed. Up to this point very little interest had been shown by outsiders in this essential part of their identity. We were not imposing these categories of identification on people, but were facilitating the process by which these primary senses of self (already being used interpersonally and beyond the formal public domain) were legitimated and put on the public agenda.

### Research Post-1987

1987 proved a watershed year in northern Cape York, particularly in relation to the granting of a Deed of Grant in Trust (DOGIT) to Cowal Creek. Such arrangements were the then conservative Queensland government's version of land rights and Cowal Creek was the first community to receive these. In 1987, archaeologist Susan McIntyre-Tamwoy began doctoral research focussing on the 'historic' archaeological evidence from northern Cape York. From this point, the researchers worked as a team, assisting each other with field work and contributing to the development of a new, community-based approach. McIntyre-Tamwoy subsequently spent several years living and working in the community and her insights into community beliefs and practices have been significant contributions. The most powerful insight to emerge from this research was an alternative understanding of those places which we had previously thought of as 'archaeological sites'.



In the aftermath of the 'Cowl Creek Country Survey', Greer faced a dilemma: to continue with the original archaeological project or to document the process of research as it had unfolded. While she retained considerable interest in the original research project, the issues that had emerged were fascinating and timely. The way that 'archaeological sites' were woven into cosmology was of particular interest, as were the beliefs and practices that were linked to this. These perspectives were in stark contrast to the type of knowledge that archaeologists ascribe to such places. In the late 1980s, relations between Aboriginal people and archaeologists were strained (e.g. Langford 1983). It seemed that this tension may have stemmed from the difference between archaeologists and community perceptions of 'archaeological sites'. While these undoubtedly took different forms across Australia, it was thought that the insights which this experience offered might be useful.

Another outcome of the research was the establishment of the Injinoo Lands Trust. By this stage, Cowl Creek had taken a leading role in negotiations for indigenous rights in the region. The name 'Injinoo' (a Seven Rivers name for the place on which the village was located) had been added and the Injinoo Lands Trust had been established. The latter had jurisdiction over 'cultural matters' such as consultation and comprised traditional owners from all the major groups. For instance, consultation would no longer be undertaken by the community council but rather by the Lands Trust.

In 1992 we were approached by the Injinoo Land Trust to organise a large body of data about the social history and composition of the community, including relationships of community members to each other and to country. To this end we synthesised and critiqued the following:

- genealogical and land affiliation material documented in 1987,
- genealogical material gathered by Susan McIntyre-Tamwoy in 1991-1992
- additional material collected by Maureen Fuary at Injinoo (with the assistance of Margaret Genever) in 1992 and
- published and archival materials.

Two workshops were then run by Maureen Fuary in 1993 at Pajinka Wilderness Lodge, to discuss our report with members of the Injinoo community. After making amendments the report was finalised and forwarded to the Land Trust in November (Fuary & Greer 1993). The authors and the Lands Trust saw the report as a baseline from which the detailed documentation of the relationships of particular Injinoo people to each other, and to particular areas of country could be undertaken. This was seen to be particularly important if the community decided to prepare a case for claims to land, either in terms of native title (after Mabo), or in relation to the *Queensland Land Act* (1991).

## **New directions: consultation is research**

In the initial stages of research, consultation consisted of requesting permission to locate and record sites.<sup>12</sup> In the second stage, it revolved around requests to do more

intensive work on specific sites, focusing on the extent to which archaeological practice may impede on contemporary beliefs and practices. In the final stage, which incorporated the anthropological project, the focus was on contemporary affiliations, beliefs and practices. In other words, 'consultation', previously thought of as an 'aid' to archaeological research was transformed into an integrated component of the research itself.

This collaborative approach had several implications for our research practice. It facilitated an exploration of the nexus between contemporary Cape York beliefs (in which past and present are encapsulated in particular places) and archaeological interpretations which are largely based on lineal conceptions of time. This was factored into the archaeological research itself, so that serious consideration was given to the effects of archaeological understandings of the past when juxtaposed against those of the community (see Greer 1996a, 1996b, 1999; Greer *et al.* 2002; McIntyre-Tamwoy 2002a).

Apart from our primary aims, this collaborative venture also provided understandings of the ways that people across the Cape York-Torres Strait region are (and were in the recent past) culturally and socially connected. In turn, this has opened doors to further collaborative work in which, amongst other issues, the antiquity of these connections is being explored. It has facilitated the development of a theoretical and methodological framework for current research on Cape York as a place of connection, linking suites of cultures on the mainland to the south and the Torres Strait to the north (Henry, Greer, Fuary & Morrison 2003; Greer, Henry & McIntyre-Tamwoy in prep). It has also invigorated the original archaeological project as it is likely that these connections are at the heart of any social intensification in this region.

This new collaborative work revolves around the notion of 'practice'; a central interest of archaeology and anthropology. An understanding of the beliefs and practices of a people is at the heart of anthropological investigation; the archaeological record is equally a record of the obvious as well as the inadvertent practices of people. Both disciplines have unique ways of accessing 'practice' which distinguishes them from disciplines that rely primarily on the more 'conscious' practices enshrined in documentary evidence. Our intent is to utilize both disciplines in a gradual unpeeling of the past, beginning with recent or 'historic' times.

What has emerged from this research is that consultation is not merely a preliminary stage or a process in which permission to work in particular places is obtained. In fact, although the term 'consultation' has cogency within the Australian archaeological and cultural heritage communities, it is now probably an inappropriate gloss to apply in this context. Rather than a concept of 'consultation' – which implies that one is consulting in relation to something else – the message from our experiences is that collaborative archaeological and anthropological work with the close involvement of community members has the power to greatly facilitate and elaborate our understandings of the past and the present in this country.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the invaluable assistance provided by the following people: the late Mr Daniel Ropeyarn, Mr Meun Lifu, Mrs Miriam Crowe, the late Mrs Esther Peter, the late Mr Jardine Tom, Mr Andrew Peter, Mr George Williams, the late Mr Edward Wymarra, Mr Lawrence Asai, the late Mr Joseph McDonnell, Mrs Magdalene Cotis, Mr Asai Pablo, Mrs Cecelia Ropeyarn, the late Pauline Nawia, the late Mr Arthur Woosup, the late Mr 'Snowy' Woosup, Mrs Gina Nona, the late Mr Alick Pablo, the late Mrs Tina Pablo, the late Mrs Bethena Ropeyarn, Dr Susan McIntyre-Tamwoy, Ms Margaret Genever, Professor Isabel McBryde, Mr Bernard Charlie (Chairman, Apudthama Land Trust) and Mr Angelo Comino (State Library Queensland).

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## Endnotes

1. The work by Robins and Trigger (1989) is perhaps close to the present approach
2. Since our early work in Injinoo (1987-1993) people there have been referring to themselves as: Angkamuthi ('Seven Rivers' people), Yadhaykenu ('Sandbeach' people), and Atambaya ('McDonnell' people). While 'Cairncross-Somerset' were regarded as a group in the 1980s, for a period in the past they were seen as distinct local groups from different languages or 'tribes': Cairncross as part of Yadhaykenu (from Escape River south to Orford Ness), and Somerset as part of Djaragara. Currently all the northern Sandbeach people are referred to as Yadhaykenu, and those from south of Orford Ness to Shelburne and Margaret (Makan) bays as 'Whitesand' people or Wuthati (Fuary & Greer 1993: 3-7).
3. Related but distinct Aboriginal people to the south of this 'Sandbeach' boundary (from the Olive River to Princess Charlotte Bay) also identify as being coastal, sandbeach people (Thomson 1934, Rigsby & Chase 1998). Together they form a large, cultural bloc.
4. The language groups were comprised of smaller groups which we refer to as 'local groups' or mobs. Thus, the Gudang (part of the Somerset mob), based between the tip of Cape York and Fly Point, and the Red Island mob (Gumakudin), based between Cockatoo Creek /Jardine River to Cape York on the western side, were 2 of the local groups of the Sandbeach people (Fuary & Greer 1993: 6). See Figure 1.
5. The telegraph station at Atambaya (in McDonnell country) operated from 1887 until 1929. Aboriginal people were not permitted near the station until 1895, and Ursula McConnel (1939) states that when the station closed, McDonnell people shifted from there to Cowal Creek (Fuary & Greer 1993: 9).
6. Residential areas were subsequently moved to more elevated ground around 1952 to the 'New Village' (SG & MF interview with MC, JT, ML & EP May 1987).
7. The account provided by Sharp (1992) which was based on earlier fieldwork is selective in terms of emphasis and extent and simply did not exist at the time of our fieldwork.
8. In northern Cape York a 'speaker' is one who has language and other cultural knowledge, and as such, can 'talk to and for country'.
9. Although recognised as being somewhat problematic, this is the term which community members used at that time to identify and differentiate themselves.
10. These were only just starting to be thought about in Australia. By 2006 IKPs (Indigenous Knowledge Places) had been set up by the Qld State Library in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, including Injinoo. The desire is still strong in small, local communities to have their own places, rather than having to travel to a regional centre.
11. We confirmed these groups with the participants before they self-selected. We based this identification and nomination of key cultural groupings and distinctions on a number of detailed personal interviews we had conducted with key members of the community prior to the workshop, in the Cowal Creek 'Country Survey', and with the workshop members themselves.
12. Indeed this is often how community consultation is currently undertaken by members of the public sector, despite a strongly developed set of parameters and protocols as to how to appropriately consult.