

Extreme Convergence: Cultural Heritage Extremes in Location, Conditions and Practice

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This issue of *Historic Environment* is comprised of selected papers from the **eXtreme heritage** conference held in Cairns in 2007 that were chosen to reflect the range and nature of the themes addressed in the conference. The papers have been reworked by their authors and peer reviewed for this publication. The conference sought to capture a broad range of topical heritage issues under the umbrella of extreme environments and conditions. These were captured in the full title: '**eXtreme heritage**: managing heritage in the face of climatic extremes, natural disasters and military conflicts in tropical, desert, polar and off-world landscapes'.

Historic Environment Volume 21 Issue Number 1 was themed 'Global Climate Change and Cultural Heritage'. It included papers presented at the Public Forum on this subject which was held in conjunction with the conference. It included climate change related resolutions from the conference delegates which were drafted during the conference plenary session.

This current volume will comprise two issues of selected papers from across the sub-themes of the conference. The sub-themes were structured as sessions in the conference program. These included: The Heritage of Desert Landscapes; Heritage Disasters and Risk Preparedness; The Heritage of Polar and Alpine Landscapes; Rainforest, Savannah and Reef: Cultural Heritage in the Tropics; Extreme Experiences in Cultural Tourism; Architecture in Extreme Climates; The Heritage of Off-world Landscapes; the Heritage of Seascapes and Waterways; Heritage, Identity, Conflict and Human Rights.

Also in this issue are a number of book reviews. The editorial committee of *Historic Environment* has recently re-energised its book review section appointing Caitlin Allen as Book Review Editor. Caitlin has assembled a great collection of books to be reviewed.

In the keynote address delivered at the opening of the conference John Hurd spoke of the conservation challenges facing cold climate deserts and therefore of course the challenge for conservators working in those areas. In canvassing the nature of 'extreme' he highlights the role of 'conflict' and 'natural disasters' both of which can result in catastrophic and pervasive damage to cultural heritage. Interestingly, while the theme of conflict is represented in the papers from this conference (see for instance Panjabi and Winter; Balderstone this issue), the theme of natural disasters is not. It is not that this topic did not generate a large amount of discussion over the days of the conference but rather that the convenors of that session structured their contributions around a workshop format rather than formal presentations. This remains a topic worthy of its own dedicated issue in the future. However, in his keynote presentation, Hurd provided delegates with graphic images of large open archaeological sites dramatically destroyed during fierce deluges in Central Asia. In

the paper in this volume he describes the problems of conservation at Otrar. These problems arise from a complex mix of changing rainfall patterns, natural threats and anthropogenic influences including past conservation attempts. This conjunction between natural threats and anthropogenic factors will not be a surprising phenomenon to cultural heritage conservators and others interested in managing tangible and intangible values. Oliver-Smith and Hoffman (2002:3) point out that 'Disasters do not just happen. In the vast majority of cases they are not "bolts from the blue" but take place through the conjuncture of two factors: a human population and a potentially destructive agent that is part of a total ecological system, including natural, modified and constructed features.'

Hurd's message is one he has expressed before- it is two fold. Firstly there is the need for regular maintenance and specifically, maintenance that is culturally based. Secondly he urges conservators to understand the material with which they are working and to privilege historic construction techniques used at a site over hi-tech interventions. One could say this is a variation on the old saying 'less is more' or as he says 'repairing like with like'. Hurd points out that many 'ancient structures lived within the natural ambient environment through routines of regular maintenance' and it is the disruption to this pattern of maintenance whether through abandonment, cultural disruption or modern interventions of other techniques and materials that leads to catastrophic failure of heritage sites and structures. In other words 'A disaster becomes unavoidable in the context of a historically produced pattern of 'vulnerability' (Oliver-Smith & Hoffman 2002:3).

Beth O'Leary provided the keynote address on day two of the conference and took us to an even higher altitude than the Trans Himalayan deserts with a stimulating discussion about space heritage. Serendipitously the day of her presentation coincided with the anniversary of the Apollo 11 landing on the Moon. For many practitioners the idea of 'Space Heritage' at first seems fanciful and it is generally true that we can barely manage the heritage here on our own planet let alone extending our protection to other parts of our universe. O'Leary begins her paper with an inarguable statement that 'The Heavens have always been the cultural property of the world's peoples.' She proceeds to mount a convincing argument for the need for protective measures, including legislation, for specific elements of this 'universal' heritage.

Firstly, O'Leary presents a brief historical overview of the inarguably significant events leading up to the Apollo 11 Landing. In any assessment the rapidity of technological development and the key events involving significant world figures, firmly grounded in the context of the Cold War, mean that the key events throughout this period are of extremely high

historical significance. It follows that the sites which testify to these key achievements such as Tranquility Base on the Moon are also inarguably significant places. These places attest to technological and historical milestones in the development of our modern global society.

Secondly, O'Leary exposes the gaps in our current 'earthbound' heritage legislation which mean that currently, sites related to the history of Space exploration and travel and which occur 'off world' are not protected. This of course might not be a problem if these places were not at risk. However O'Leary does a convincing job of pointing out that such sites are at increasing risk of disturbance from future landings and exploitation of resources and that unless the heritage community engages with this issue soon we risk losing these important heritage sites before the world has really even acknowledged that they exist. Of course the heritage of space exploration is not restricted to 'off world' locations and there are important places on our own planet that form part of this suite of cultural heritage places e.g. Pine Gap and Mt Stromlow here in Australia.

'Understanding the Tensions in Place: Conflict and Conservation in Kashmir' by Panjabi and Winter, shifts our focus to the issues facing cultural heritage in conflict zones. In this paper the authors tease out the complexities involved in applying a conservation framework oriented around values and context rather than a more traditional fabric based approach to heritage. In doing this the authors maintain that the interface between heritage and wider social values requires greater attention. The paper explores the example of Srinagar in Kashmir a region that has endured more than 15 years of conflict. As in many places yet to experience the wealth and economic growth of the western world there are economic and social pressures which effect cultural heritage conservation. Not the least of these is the aspiration to economic prosperity that leads to the conflation of 'traditional' with 'poverty' in the eyes of the community. While it may be acknowledged that cultural heritage is integral to cultural identity; trading 'identity' for 'prosperity' can in some situations seem a small price to pay. Panjabi and Winter do not claim to hold the answers, instead they explore some challenging questions and accompany their text with evocative images of a city poised on an important threshold.

Susan Balderstone takes us to Cyprus, a divided country since the Turkish occupation in 1974, to consider issues raised by the bi-communal conservation projects resulting from the European Union's Partnership for the Future Programme. While it is tempting to assume that cultural heritage projects can be a useful tool for engendering peaceful co-existence and mutual pride, especially where focused on common objectives of social and economic well being' (Balderstone this volume) there are clearly ongoing tensions in this region that prevent the ideal from being reached. The author calls for greater co-operation and mutual respects between the heritage authorities on either side of the border and suggested that a UN sponsored Cyprus Heritage Strategy might be a way of achieving this while building on successful projects already completed.

The advantage of a collection of papers on 'extremes' is that no two are alike and the geographic focus of the papers shifts continuously through a kaleidoscope of places, people and cultures. Fuary takes us from the crowded hustle and bustle of Srinagar and the tensions of Turkish occupied Cyprus to the relative peace and tranquility of the Torres Strait. Fuary's paper

'Reading and Riding the Waves: The sea as known Universe in Torres Strait' was delivered in the Watery Realm session of the conference. As such it focuses on Indigenous understandings of the sea and seascape. Fuary takes an anthropological approach to a consideration of heritage, her paper is as much about the heritage of 'being' a Torres Strait Islander as it is about the heritage places of Torres Strait Islanders. 'To be a Torres Strait Islander is to be of the sea and at home in the sea.' She quotes one Torres Strait Island leader as declaring 'We belong to the Sea'.

In this paper we are reminded of the interconnections between what we now term 'intangible values' and the lived experience of everyday life steeped in the physicality of our environment. Of course elements of Indigenous seascapes can include the arcane, but more commonly it is the mundane and practical realities of existence that shape identity and are the dominant components of cultural heritage. Understanding the 'specialised knowledge domain' that characterizes the Torres Strait Islander relationship with their seascape requires an intimate knowledge of, or affinity with, the sea and all its attributes.

Shelley Greer's paper 'Portals in a Watery Realm- Cultural Landscapes in Northern Cape York' maintains our focus on tropical northern Australia centring on the mainland which forms the southern border of the Torres Strait. The 'portals' of Greer's paper are the lakes, springs and waterways that occur along the far northern east coast of the Peninsula that are linked by a mythological story that reports their creation and weaves them into a cultural landscape bound by the cosmological forces of creation itself. The imagery of a portal, a gateway to the belief systems and cultural practices that lie beyond the physicality of the physical landform, is used to describe the way these places link the present to the past and the traditions of ancestors.

The final paper looks at a perennial threat to Australian cultural heritage places, particularly in rural areas- bushfires. Fire occupies a special place in the Australian psyche. Not only a force of destruction, it is seen also as a creative force, with many of our native plants relying on fire to aid germination. It was used for thousands of years by Australian Aboriginal people to renew and maintain the environment. The devastating force of wildfires however can cause millions of dollars in damages and lost crops to Australian communities and businesses. It can also result in the loss of lives and the destruction of cultural heritage places. As this issue goes to print Australians are still coming to terms with the recent devastating fires in Victoria and some authorities are predicting that the coming bushfire season will be similarly bad. In his paper 'The Timber Phoenix: Bushfires and vernacular architecture' Geoff Ashley focuses on a case study in the Kosciuszko National Park. Specifically the paper reports on the development of the Kosciuszko National Park Huts Conservation Strategy (2005). He highlights the changes in practice linked to changes in the revised Burra Charter (Australia ICOMOS 1999). 'The Burra Charter provides a strong nexus between social significance and conservation policy.' This in turn has led to a shift from a conservation focus on the retention of original fabric to an increased consideration of the social significance and the retention of significant use, meanings and associations.

The papers in both issues of Volume 22 and those on Climate Change already published in Vol 21 are indicative of the wide ranging and robust discussions that characterized this

conference. At the plenary session where an attempt was made to pull together the varied and sometimes wayward threads of the conference a number of resolutions were developed by the delegation. These went some way towards crystallizing some of the ideas for future action for Australia ICOMOS arising from the conference. In addition to the resolution regarding climate change and cultural heritage (already reported McIntyre-Tamwoy 2008) the delegates at the conference drafted three other resolutions which reflect the delegations concerns about conserving heritage in a changing political and physical environment.

Resolution 2: Legislative change: Delegates at the Australia ICOMOS Conference on eXtreme heritage: managing heritage in the face of climatic extremes, natural disasters and military conflicts in tropical, desert, polar and off-world landscapes in Cairns, 19-21 July 2007, recognise that crucial changes to existing legislation are currently being discussed in Australia, particularly in relation to Indigenous cultural heritage. The Conference urges Australia ICOMOS to adopt a watching brief on the current changes to Indigenous heritage legislation and to respond in a timely and appropriate manner to proposed changes.

Resolution 3: Heritage of space exploration: Delegates at the Australia ICOMOS Conference on eXtreme heritage: managing heritage in the face of climatic extremes, natural disasters and military conflicts in tropical, desert, polar and off-world landscapes in Cairns, 19-21 July 2007, have discussed at length the need to develop protective measures to ensure the conservation of important places and objects including now obsolete technology that has played a significant role in space exploration both on and off this planet. The Conference asks that Australia ICOMOS take a lead role both within Australia and internationally in raising awareness of the need to conserve these important cultural heritage places and objects. Specifically the Conference asks that Australia ICOMOS urge ICOMOS international to establish a Scientific Committee to consider and advance this issue.

Resolution 4: Support for ICOMOS Pasifika moved Ian Lilley and seconded Anita Smith.

Delegates at the Australia ICOMOS Conference on eXtreme heritage: managing heritage in the face of climatic extremes, natural disasters and military conflicts in tropical, desert, polar and off-world landscapes in Cairns, 19-21 July 2007, asks that Australia ICOMOS investigate developing links with WAC (World Archaeological Congress) and support the latter's efforts to negotiate with the World Bank and mining companies (particularly Australian ones) to advance capacity building in cultural heritage within local communities in the Pacific region.

Issue 2 of this volume will follow with another selection of papers from this conference. Considered together the three issues of *Historic Environment* from this conference provide a fascinating cross section of contemporary issues in cultural heritage.

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