



AMRA Newsletter

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE AUSTRALIAN ROCK ART RESEARCH ASSOCIATION (AURA) INC.

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Dampier report October 2004

Further to my previous report on the ongoing Dampier saga (in *AURA Newsletter* 21/1: 2–6), and my severe critique of the planned rock art monitoring project, here is an update on the most recent developments. On 19 March 2004 the International Federation of Rock Art Organisations (IFRAO) announced that it will expand my independent study (begun in 1968) into the effects of the industrialisation of the Dampier Archipelago. This would especially focus on the effects on the rock art of the area. IFRAO also plans to compile a full inventory of the rock art, a measure the state agencies have consistently avoided for four decades.

On 22 March 2004 IFRAO nominated the Dampier Rock Art Precinct for the National Heritage List of Australia. Two months later, on 23 May 2004, the National Trust of Australia supported IFRAO's submission, requesting the government to fast-track the application by IFRAO. However, two days before the Commonwealth Minister was to rule on the National Trust's emergency application, following intensive pressure and lobbying from the

State Government of Western Australia, the National Trust withdrew its request for emergency listing on 1 June 2004.

IFRAO has also submitted the Dampier Rock Art Precinct for the Endangered Sites List of Sacred Sites International, a body based in the U.S.A., on 12 April 2004. Towards the end of April, the Japanese conglomerate Japan DME, comprising Mitsubishi, Itochu and steel maker JGC, announced that its one-billion-dollar development at Dampier may not proceed. This follows the previous defections of all other major proponents. More than two years after the announcement of the state government that there would be a 'bonanza' of \$8 billion in petrochemical plants at Dampier, only one minor player, Burrup Fertilisers, remains committed to this plan. Its parent company in India has an abysmal environmental record, having caused the destruction of a fishing industry through its polluting of waterways. The construction site of Burrup Fertilisers was affected by trade union activity in July, when on 29 July 2004 a Federal Court ruling was made in favour of the unions.



Figure 1. One of the climate and emission monitoring stations now operational at Dampier as a result of the endeavours of IFRAO and AURA, with CALM staff in attendance. This one is near the so-called Climbing Men panel.

More than two years after I had suggested an alternative model for future industrial development in the region (on 8 July 2002), the state government reported that it will investigate alternative sites along the coast, at Maitland/West Intercourse Island, Boodarie, Cape Lambert/Dixon Island, Cape Preston, Onslow and Oakajee, near Geraldton. This announcement on 12 August 2004 was immediately followed, two days later, by a media release by BHP Billiton, Australia's biggest gas and oil producer: it prefers Onslow as the site for its planned \$4 billion development of a liquefied natural gas plant. MP Robin Chapple MLC of the Greens described the choice as socially and economically sound. Obviously the government's hand was now being forced by the major corporate players, who had become increasingly averse to the idea of becoming known as cultural vandals.

In June 2002, responding directly to my report in *Rock Art Research* of the deterioration of rock art at Dampier (Bednarik 2002a), the state government had announced that it would commission a scientific study to investigate the matter, allocating \$350 000 for this purpose (later increased to \$400 000). It took more than two years to get this show on the road, to 12 August 2004 in fact. It was on that day that the project of monitoring air quality and patina colour at Dampier was finally commenced by the governmental scientific agency CSIRO (Fig. 1). Just a few weeks later, on 1 September, I began the setting up of test stations for the Rock Art Deterioration Study by IFRAO, the World Monuments Fund and the Traditional Custodians. This independent research project will complement the four-year CSIRO study funded by the state government. Whilst the CSIRO project addresses ambient air emission monitoring, climatic work, accelerated weathering experiments and colour changes, the IFRAO study will focus on the geochemical regime at the rock face, and will seek to establish what processes are causing deterioration of ferromanganous crusts, the precise nature of the deposits, and the prospects of long-term palliative intervention. In other words, it will address the key issues that were omitted from the government study. However, in our own interest we will endeavour to collaborate with the CSIRO scientists in this, as their emissions data are of obvious importance to our study and will save us having to conduct this expensive part of the research.

I have now collected preliminary data on the air pollution at Dampier; on the extraordinary stockpiles of explosive, volatile or toxic materials at the industrial facilities; and on the preparedness of the operators of the LNG facility to deal effectively with a major disaster. On all three counts it is evident that the facts are not publicly available and I shall call on the Premier to disclose them before the state elections early next year. The local population needs to know these facts, and it needs to be informed of the dire consequences of building a string of LNG-based petrochemical plants within the small space of central Murujuga (Burrup Peninsula), as the government still intends to do. More directly to the point of the protection of the rock art and stone arrangements in the Archipelago, I am extremely concerned to find that the Premier of Western Australia, Dr Gallop MLA, has not kept his promises to me. He has not protected the cultural heritage at all, in fact the incidence of destruction has increased significantly in the last two years. He has not informed us of any of the ongoing destruction. I have had to find out about it through numerous site inspections and interviews. Here are the facts:

1. Between mid-2003 and mid-2004, several parties have destroyed many more rock art and stone arrangement sites. In particular, contractors of the state government have been most active in this ongoing process. The construction of the still incomplete East-West Service Corridor (King Bay Base to proposed but largely unused industrial area) has caused the removal of 159 decorated boulders, and the destruction of

another six petroglyph sites on bedrock. I have photographed and filmed the removed boulders, which have been dumped at the foot of a small rock outcrop that is itself a petroglyph site. Many of the boulders are damaged, and by having been taken from their original sites and placed among vegetation they will rapidly deteriorate, both through grassfires and the lower ambient pH regimes next to plants.

2. Of two teams of cultural heritage consultants surveying different areas near King Bay in September 2004, one had been instructed not to involve Aboriginal people. These surveys are to list all cultural contents of these areas, which will be either removed or destroyed to make room for road widening and re-routing connected with upgraded security requirements, an elevated observation area for tourists, and for unspecified future developments around the port area. The Dampier Port Authority will next year destroy these cultural assets, with the full approval by the government, which besides petroglyph clusters include substantial stone arrangements (of the terrace, wall and tunnel types).
3. Damage of sites by tourists or local visitors, which has been very limited until recent years, is becoming a significant problem at three cultural sites readily accessible to the public. The same applies to pilfering of sites. In particular, there is a significant increase in the incidence of graffiti at the eastern King Bay site, and the major stone arrangement of the King Bay plaque site has been extensively vandalised, apparently in the last years. Even the signs prohibiting damage have been vandalised (Fig. 2). The Department of Indigenous Affairs has been notified, but this is not expected to lead to any action.



Figure 2. Vandalised protective sign at plaque site, King Bay, Dampier. The monument of stelae and petroglyphs is in the background.

The lack of any management plan or of any will by the government to attempt protecting the cultural precinct is the underlying reason for the third item. I have surveyed the vandalised site of 138 standing stones or stelae, with the following results:

- 40 stelae remain standing and appear undamaged;
- 25 remain standing but have had their tops chopped off with well-directed blows (Fig. 3);
- 6 more, minus their lopped off tops, are laying on the ground;
- 10 have been smashed and the fragments are laying on the ground (Fig. 4);
- 23 have been thrown to the ground but appear undamaged;
- 34 are askew and need to be aligned upright (Fig. 5).

When I re-discovered this monument in 1968 it was fully intact, presumably in the state it had been in exactly a century previously, at the time of the Dampier massacres (Bednarik 2002b). AURA President Ken Mulvaney believes that it had remained undamaged until quite recently, as confirmed by my most recent photograph of the site, dated July 2000. The Senior Custodians of the four Native Title Claimants, the Yaburara, Mardudhunera, Wonggoo-tt-oo and Ngaluma will, in the absence of any indication that the relevant government agencies will intervene, re-introduce traditional tribal law for the maintenance of this site. Traditional custodianship of cultural sites involves two forms of maintenance: spiritual or ceremonial, through conducting appropriate ceremonies; and physical, through repair and protection of such sacred places. The revival of this ancient site management system, unambiguously the preferred solution under any conditions, will be a first step towards asserting traditional indigenous rights over the Dampier cultural precinct generally.

Robert G. Bednarik

REFERENCES

- BEDNARIK, R. G. 2002a. The survival of the Murujuga (Burrup) petroglyphs. *Rock Art Research* 19(1): 29–40.
- BEDNARIK, R. G. 2002b. The Murujuga Campaign of 1868. *Rock Art Research* 19(2): 133–4.

Please visit <http://mc2.vicnet.net.au/home/dampier/web/index.html> and sign the Dampier Petition.



Figure 3. Three stelae with chopped off tops.



Figure 4. Smashed stele laying on the ground.



Figure 5. Stele standing askew.



AURA Treasurer's financial statement 2003/2004

ELFRIEDE BEDNARIK

Balance in hand on 30 June 2003: \$18 458.98

INCOME:		EXPENDITURES:	
Sales of books	415.92	Postage	587.45
Bank interest	452.33	Business Affairs Registration	33.00
Hamilton registrations	1670.00	MCC Grant expenditures	4816.90
Sales of conference merchandise	352.00	Telephone and Faxes	173.75
		Stationery and photocopies	165.85
		Subscriptions	45.00
		Bank and merchant account fees	466.21
		Hamilton venue and expenses	2622.16
		Refunds, Hamilton registrations	105.00
		Printer cartridge	145.00
TOTAL	2890.25	TOTAL	9160.32

Balance in hand on 30 June 2004: \$12,188.91

AURA Newsletter

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