

# NOTE

## re contribution by Graeme K Ward to Bednarik Festschrift

A paper entitled 'Rock-markings and Sustainable Indigenous Australian Cultural Heritage Tourism' and attributed to me appears on pages 368-379 of PC Reddy (ed) 2007 *Exploring the Mind of Ancient Man. Festschrift to Robert G Bednarik* (Research India Press, New Delhi. 413pp ISBN 81-89131-09-5) that apparently was published in February 2007.

That version of my paper has been mis-published and should be ignored. The text following is the original and correct version of the paper.

### **Problems with printed version of paper**

1. The printed version of my 'Rock-markings and Sustainable ... Tourism' paper contains not only the text of the final version, but also elements of a previous version and that had been eliminated using WinWord 'Track Changes'. I was not offered the opportunity to 'proof' the text of this paper before it was published, at which time these mistakes would have been evident.
2. Alterations were made to the text, presumably by the editor, without advice to or consultation with me. This has led to the introduction of mistakes.
3. Footnotes that were integral to the paper were not printed.
4. Some of the photographs have been stretched laterally providing a distorted picture of the objects and persons illustrated.
5. Biographical notes not included; don't mind about that but picture of author without context of bio make it look as if picture was intended by author to be part of paper. Impression is exacerbated by it being apparently only paper with an author picture.

# Rock-markings and sustainable Indigenous Australian cultural heritage tourism

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***Abstract.** Cultural heritage tourism involving Indigenous Australian places is increasingly popular; places with rock-markings are the main focus of much tourism. Commensurately, there is a growing field of research into the practice, policies and ethical aspects of Indigenous cultural heritage tourism. My particular interest concerns the potential costs and benefits to Indigenous communities. Many individuals and community groups in rural and remote areas of Australia consider cultural tourism as a step toward lessening of economic dependence upon welfare; more importantly for some it is perceived as an opportunity to show visitors to their country and to share with outsiders knowledge of their cultural heritage. Others, of course, are not so sanguine about the advantages of cultural heritage tourism, are reluctant to deal with outsiders, and are concerned about the dangers of revealing the significance of aspects of cultural heritage. Here I will consider some examples of relatively low-key tourism initiatives taken by Indigenous Australians that involve places with rock-paintings and carvings, and the role of research and protective measures in enhancing the sustainability of these initiatives.*

## Introduction

Tourism is a major industry in Australia, contributing significantly to employment and GDP. Systematic development of Indigenous Australian cultural heritage for tourism has recently received greater emphasis, and has been promoted by federally funded initiatives. The Australian Tourist Commission publishes a 'Market Research Intelligence on Aboriginal Tourism' with the aim of providing increased knowledge and understanding of Indigenous tourism; in discussing interest in Indigenous tourism experiences it emphasized that interaction and authenticity were important – visitors wanted to meet Indigenous Australians and to learn from knowledgeable persons. Aboriginal Tourism Australia has provided 'guiding principles for the tourism industry to operate in ways that respect and enhance the cultural heritage and living cultures of Aboriginal communities'. The Australian Heritage Commission produced a guide to protection of Indigenous heritage places from planning and development decisions that is relevant to tourism initiatives.<sup>1</sup>

Tourism has been described, by an Indigenous commentator, as an appropriate activity for Indigenous Australians since it provided the opportunity to maintain contact with homelands; but Indigenous Australians were poorly represented in the industry.<sup>2</sup> One of the factors limiting Indigenous participation has been the inability of Indigenous groups to access finance to initiate a venture because of their inability to use land held

in perpetuity on behalf of a community as security. There are, however, examples of successful joint ventures between Indigenous groups – providing access to and knowledge about their cultural heritage – and non-Indigenous entrepreneurs – obtaining custom and providing logistics.

A major concern in any tourism enterprise that targets indigenous cultural heritage places is the impact that it might have upon that cultural heritage. The most obvious is the possible adverse affects upon the fabric of the place; many rock-markings are particularly susceptible to vandalism or the unthinking actions of visitors. Less obvious are the potential impacts upon the cultural values of a place and the adverse effects that these might have upon members of the community responsible for maintenance of those cultural values. Damage to the fabric of a place and its cultural heritage values can mean loss of its attractiveness to visitors, and more importantly, its significance to traditional owners and custodians.

There is increasing appreciation that such Indigenous places need to be properly managed and conserved in order to protect the interests of Indigenous custodians, and to be able to sustain continuing visitation. 'Cultural heritage tourism management' ranges between the minutiae of 'condition reporting' and related conservation measures, through techniques of visitor management, to questions of ownership and control of use of intellectual property. Research in all these areas, and implementation of a series of applied projects, was supported by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies under its Rock Art Protection Program (RAPP) over the last two decades. The results of this program, and more recent research are available to provide advice for protection and management and the development of management plans where required.<sup>3</sup>

The perception of many researchers of an increasing threat from visitation and tourism to areas containing rock-markings is one shared, in many instances, by the traditional owners of such places. Especially in northern Australia, rock-markings are of continuing spiritual significance to Indigenous Australians. Traditional owners are seeking to protect their cultural heritage in the face of increasing pressures of national and international tourism. Visitation has several cross-cultural features, among which is a continuity of respect for culture and its manifestation in place that is mixed with a desire to share understanding of cosmology with outsiders and to obtain material benefits from the exchange.

### **Indigenous tourism**

Tourism involves many thousands of Australian and overseas tourists each year. Indigenous culture is a major attraction; surveys have shown that a majority of overseas tourists wish to experience some aspect of Indigenous Australia. The question arises of the preparedness and ability of Indigenous Australian communities to handle the demand for access to their heritage places.

Many Indigenous cultural heritage places targeted for tourism are sites containing rock-markings; they are the obvious targets for tourism because they are the clearest non-portable manifestations of the expressive culture of Indigenous Australians, and, as such, most readily interpreted for and understood by outsiders. In the southeast of Australia, visits to rock-painting sites are usually controlled by government agencies such as parks services. In these instances, most visitation occurs without the

participation of Indigenous Australians, without the benefit of their interpretation, and without tangible benefit to the Indigenous community. In some places this is changing, with Indigenous individuals and communities sharing management and, increasingly, developing tourism enterprises themselves.

While in the south, due to a longer period and greater intensity of disruptive cultural contact, meanings of many sites with rock-markings might be only superficially known, such places continue to have generalised cultural significance to community members. In northern Australia, however, more places with rock-markings are of continuing cultural significance, and members of the relevant communities know the meanings of the motifs and their roles in cultural maintenance.

Cultural tourism is seen by some agencies to be a source of 'development' for Indigenous Australians. Most Australian jurisdictions are encouraging this interest with a view to lessening welfare dependency, particularly in remote areas, and increasing the tangible benefits to the wider community of greater numbers of tourists. Most States and Territories have offices concerned with the development of such tourism and might provide assistance to community groups and others in its development. Surveys have found, however, that there is a relatively low level of Indigenous participation in cultural tourism. And while there may be increasing interest among Indigenous Australians in participating in and benefiting from tourism, misunderstandings about the path between aspiration and outcome are common, as is a lack of understanding of business strategies. While many Indigenous community members recognize the opportunity to benefit, not only in material terms, but also to promote understanding of their culture, they foresee adverse impacts of tourism, and the need for strategies to manage these impacts.

### **Management and protection of rock-markings in the face of increasing visitation**

Many aspects of tourism might impact adversely upon Indigenous lifestyles, cultural values and cosmology. Significant here are potential adverse impacts of cultural tourism upon both the fabric and cultural significance of Indigenous places. Some key issues are: What measures can be implemented to conserve cultural heritage places to protect them and to ensure that where it is wanted, cultural tourism can be sustained? If the tangible attributes of a place can be protected, how to protect their intangible cultural values? Relatedly, who has the right to develop and exploit such cultural heritage?

Tourists, notoriously, can cause damage both to the fabric of heritage places and to their cultural significances. There are many instances of the former. Places with rock-markings in Victoria, for example, have had to be protected from vandalism by enveloping steel cages. In southeastern Queensland, rock-markings have been stolen from sites. Management authorities prefer, where places are subject to large numbers of visitors, to construct walkways and board-walks to guide visitors to the main viewing places to keep the curious a suitable distance from sensitive areas to protect rock-markings.

Increasingly, Indigenous communities are now consulted about such measures and their approval sought for protection and development by government or commercial agencies of their cultural places. In most jurisdictions, custodians have formal ownership of sites and areas including national parks, and are involved in the development of policy implementation and day-to-day management of such sites and

areas by formal management plans and joint management arrangements (Baker et al. 2001). In the past, in some instances in central Australia, places of ceremonial significance have been abandoned when they have become the subject of visitation.

While Indigenous communities have actively sought participation in such developments, and might have various reasons for seeking to initiate tourism, those expressed to me are two-fold: first, there is the desire to share one's culture with others; second, to gain monetary benefit, particularly in remote regions where there are few economic opportunities and limited opportunities available to those marginalised in an increasingly stratified society.

How to develop sustainable visitation at a heritage place can be summarised with these questions: What do visitors really want? Which places should be targeted? How should visitors be managed, and what physical means are necessary to protect rock-markings? Some answers are provided by previous research, which includes analysis of comments in visitors books, visitor surveys, and observation of visitor behaviour at cultural places<sup>4</sup>.

First, surveys and personal observation of visitors at rock-marking sites indicate that tourists have expectations of the spectacular; the X-ray paintings of Kakadu National Park and Arnhem Land are commonly-known images (e.g. Chaloupka 1993). Most visitors don't want to have to walk far; but others are prepared to trek greater distances with the promise of seeing out-of-the-way places and experiencing the feeling that they are among the first outsiders to visit a remote place. (Restricting vehicles to a significant distance away from a site helps protect it from unauthorized access.) Visitors want good interpretation of the places and rock-markings they are seeing. Signage that welcomes and informs visitors is not only appreciated as providing knowledge about places and rock-markings, but is also known to control visitor behaviour by clearly signifying that places are managed and, by increasing respect for places, to mitigate adverse impact. Many visitors want more: to be told the cultural significance of the rock-markings by representatives of those who are responsible for the imagery, either because they made the images or they are responsible for maintenance of the place. Typically, however, tours are self-guided or led by non-Indigenous operators. Redmond (2002) has explored matters of ownership of intellectual property and competing uses of Indigenous cultural heritage places for tourism that have been exacerbated by claims that some rock-markings were not made by Indigenous Australians and therefore are not subject to cultural heritage provisions.

Second, while controlling visitor access can protect rock markings, it is clear that guided visitation is not only more acceptable to visitors but is preferable for site conservation. Information about places and imagery needs to be interpreted for each particular situation. For examples, I draw upon fieldwork conducted over the last few years in northwestern Kimberley (in the north of Western Australia), and the Wadeye area (northwestern Northern Territory).

### **The Ngarinyin Bush University**

The Bush University operates in the northwestern Kimberley (Anonymous 2004). As a joint venture between the Ngarinyin Aboriginal Corporation and a tour operator, responsibilities are divided and the profits after expenses are shared. The tour operator provides advertising, booking arrangements, local transport, meals and accommodation

for tourists. The Ngarinyin provide venues and guides, and traditional owners who participate in each tour are paid wages. A typical tour takes place over six days and five nights. Visitors are collected from a regional centre and flown by light aircraft to an airstrip whence they are transported in four-wheel-drive vehicles to the tour bush camp. The camp is in a picturesque setting adjacent to a billabong on land excised from a pastoral lease for use by Ngarinyin clan members. Accommodation is under canvas, and meals taken around an open campfire. Places visited are located on pastoral leases. No alcohol is permitted at the camp or on the tour. Those seeking involvement in an intensive and sustained cross-cultural experience, with traditional owners in their own country, and wanting to learn the significance of sometimes dramatic imagery are prepared to pay the fees required.

A typical day comprises a visit to rock-markings followed by lunch and a bush walk or drive to one location where women might discuss women's business with their Ngarinyin tutors, and to another for men's activities (a favourite is controlled firing of dry-season vegetation). Tour-members are encouraged to photograph rock-markings. The pace of the day is relaxed, with walking and swimming as well as some lengthy four-wheel drives along unpaved roads and cross-country. After return to the camp, there is personal time, followed by a shared meal around the campfire and discussions with the Ngarinyin and perhaps didgeridoo-playing. Books about the cultural landscape are available at the camp.

Senior Ngarinyin traditional knowledge-holders lead the tours, sharing accommodation and meals, travelling to their cultural heritage places with the visitors, and – importantly – interacting directly and sharing their knowledge about those places and of their culture. Visits to rock-markings are accompanied by appropriate ceremonies, including 'smoking' of places where there are burials (Figures 1 to 3). The atmosphere is one of respect for ancestors, their places and paintings. It is one that readily transfers to the visitor.



Figure 1. Traditional owner, Paddy Neowarra, smoking Moneru shelter (AW-02.11 Moneru smoking)

During my period of observation, there were as many Ngarinyin as there were visitors; the older Ngarinyin were pleased to have the opportunity to return to country that might otherwise be inaccessible to them, and the visitors delighted in having one-to-one relationships with the Ngarinyin. On this occasion, there was a mix of overseas and Australian tourists; all were tertiary-educated. Typically, few among the visitors had previous personal interactions with Indigenous Australians; and this, they stated, was a major attraction.

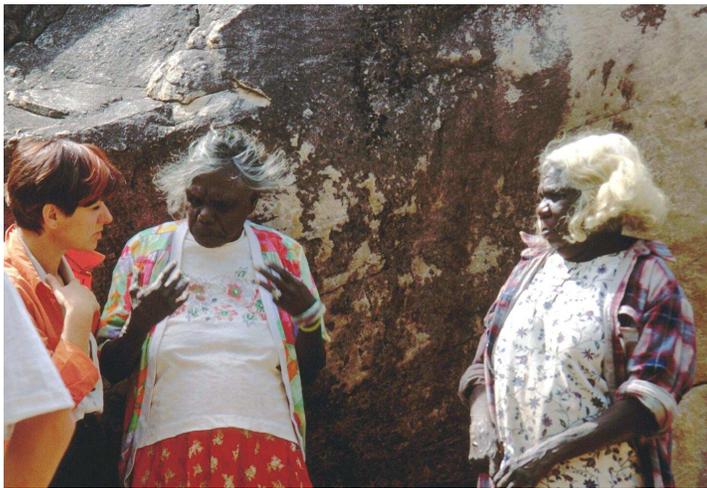


Figure 2. Female traditional owners interacting with visitor at Moneru site (AW-02.12 Moneru female traditional owners)



Figure 3. Rock-markings: examples of Kimberley Wanjina motifs (AW-04.23 Moneru Wanjina)

Visitor behaviour clearly was influenced by the ceremonial approach of the Ngarinyin to their cultural heritage, the ritual and respect shown to places, the ancestral presence, and the rock-markings. Visitors responded enthusiastically to information about places and paintings, asking questions, which, in turn, encouraged the Ngarinyin

to further discussion. It appeared that the respect shown by the traditional owners for their places readily elicited the same from visitors. Visitor behaviour was exemplary at the rock-marking sites, and no overt control measures were necessary. There were, at all of the sites visited, no formed walkways, boardwalks, signage or barriers.

There were neither indications of vandalism nor other unwanted behaviour at any of the places to which the Bush University had exclusive access. At another site near a stopover on a popular tourist route, however, there had been vandalism and other signs of disrespect. This was sufficient to reduce to tears one elderly Ngarinyin woman who had not visited the place for many years. The contrast between this publicly accessible place and the others was remarked by the visitors who decried the lack of proper management by the authorities and the behaviour of unsupervised tourists.

The increasing degree of respect developed by Bush University participants for places to which they were guided transferred to the Ngarinyin themselves, and was demonstrated by visitors in general discussion of Indigenous subjects around the campfire in the evening.

The research literature and the popular book produced by senior Ngarinyin knowledge-holders (Ngarjno et al 2000) reinforces the message that the traditional owners are aware of the significances of the places within their territories and can interpret the meanings of rock-markings. Because they are in control they are not under pressure to reveal more than they wish, so that any unwanted impact upon their own socio-cultural 'law' and cosmology is mitigated. It is clear also, from observations in the field, that persons likely to join the Bush University can exercise restraint in questioning.

Two major factors protect Ngarinyin rock-markings from the potentially adverse effects of tourism. First, the relative isolation of the region (although it is subject to private tourism developments), and lack of public access to most sites. Second, the traditional owners' approach to site visitation – one that goes beyond that of the usual guided group tour. Tour participants are a 'captive group' whose visitation is closely but indirectly supervised by an equal number of Ngarinyin with whom and with whose interests they come to identify.

Bush University participants appreciate that they are able to see rock-markings inaccessible to others, to have images interpreted for them and to access directly the traditional knowledge-holders. This is done during a period in which proper interpersonal relationships are consolidated, in isolated but attractive surroundings with appropriate infrastructure support and with a degree of comfort. The visitors consider themselves privileged, express gratitude for the experience, and extend their appreciation to a wider realm of Indigenous affairs.

### **Palumpa, Daly River Aboriginal Reserve**

The Palumpa Aboriginal tourism initiative is, like the Bush University enterprise, a locally initiated one, but more low-key and targeting a different audience. Its locus is a major cultural place in the Wadeye-Port Keats area, in the southwestern part of the Daly River Aboriginal Reserve, which occupies a large part of the western part of the Top End of the Northern Territory. The reserve is bordered by the Daly River in the north, the Fitzmaurice River in the south, the Indian Ocean in the west and Wardaman country

in the east. Palumpa is the common name of a settlement and cattle station to the east of the township of Wadeye, and is on the road between Darwin and Wadeye. In common with many other residents of Wadeye and the various outstations within the reserve, traditional owners resident in Palumpa have an intimate knowledge of their country.

The major cultural place in the vicinity of Palumpa is Papa Ngala, the 'Sun Dreaming' site. Its main shelter and secondary shelters in Ngerempe area are a half-hour-drive from the Palumpa settlement. The major complex of rock-markings comprises the intensively painted Sun-Dreaming site and several minor rock-markings in the immediate area, and other associated places at nearby Ngerempe. The central motifs at Papa Ngala have been dated to circa 1000 years BP, while the start of oxalate formation on stable surface – with the potential to encase paintings from the time of its formation has been dated to more than 13 000 years ago (Alan Watchman personal communication 2004).

A Palumpa family has recently initiated a reasonably successful tourism enterprise as a joint venture with a Darwin-based 'adventure tour' operator. Aussie Overlanders is a Darwin-based tour company that specialises in small-group tours departing from Darwin and going to the East Arnhem Land region and sometimes crossing to the Daly River area before returning to Darwin. It is popular among back-packers; on some tours it places an age restriction upon participation. Tourists are taken in a four-wheel-drive Toyota of the troop-carrier configuration. It tows a trailer carrying swags and supplies. Over four or five days the young tour participants get to know each other quite well.

The owner of the tour company considered that interest in Kakadu National Park was decreasing and sought opportunities in other areas. Members of the Palumpa family are traditional owners of the area near the Palumpa settlement, and are familiar with the cultural places within their area, particularly the 'Sun Dreaming' site known as Papa Ngala. Tours to the area began in the dry season of 2002, with groups of about six persons. The tourism industry experienced a significant downturn in 2003 and there were fewer tours. This year, despite the late start to the Dry, there have been three tours, some with the maximum number of nine persons. The operation has a down-to-earth, low-cost character. Interviews with participants participating in two tours during 2002 and 2004 confirm that most learnt of the Aussie Overlanders Kakadu-Palumpa tour from recommendations by others.

According to the agreement between the tour company and the Palumpa family, the tour company provides all advertising, booking and logistic arrangements. The Palumpa family conducts the cultural component of the tour when the group is in the Palumpa area. In its first two years the tour involved visitors in a program of two half-days and one overnight camp in the Palumpa area. Having arrived in the Palumpa area late morning, the group visited Papa Ngala that afternoon, then camped in a nearby area adjacent to a billabong, before departing for Darwin the following day. Because of the interest in the tour and the Palumpa area in particular, and because of the wishes of the Palumpa family to extend the opportunities to themselves of the visits, the tour now extends over three days and two nights. The extra time in the Palumpa area is taken up with a long walk from the camping area to a waterfall, and a morning spent with members of the Palumpa family talking about bush foods and other cultural attributes of the area; the group may be broken into those being instructed in Men's Business and Women's Business matters.

A five-day tour costs about \$600 per person. The Palumpa family is paid according to the number of persons on the tour, and the Palumpa family representative conducting the tour is paid a wage as well. Many members of the family participate, and members of the tour group are made to feel welcome at Palumpa and involved in the cultural landscape through which they are conducted.

Participants confirmed that the opportunity of a visit to an Aboriginal cultural place in the company of traditional owners was a major attraction of the tour. It was clear also from our conversations, that other attractions included a pleasant, clean camping place and a location in which safe swimming was possible.

Papa Ngala, the main tour focus has the advantage not only of being a spectacular painted places, but also one of which the significance of the imagery is known and made available to visitors by members of the family leading the tours. The stories are intrinsically interesting and tour participants gain from them some insights into cultural activities and the significance of the place. Moreover, the results of recent research are available, including dating of the imagery and analysis of other site functions. The site, set in a dramatic landscape, is relatively accessible; the camping area nearby is a pleasant area with a large billabong in which to swim, and a waterfall to walk to, and bush foods to experience. The numerous small sites near the camping area provide visitors with the opportunity to ‘discover’ them for themselves.

On the other hand, access to the main site is limited by a relatively long climb over broken ground, followed by a steep ascent to the painted area where the small space adjacent to painted surfaces limits numbers that can be accommodated; the main site has a lack of variety in painted motifs. (Figures 4 to 6)

Likely impacts of visitation on the cultural heritage values of the main site include the possibility of damage to painted and carved surfaces on the floor of the shelter across which visitors must walk, and painted walls that they are likely to brush against unless warned of their existence; stone tools litter the shelter floor. There is need for supervision to ensure that surfaces are not touched and tools not collected.

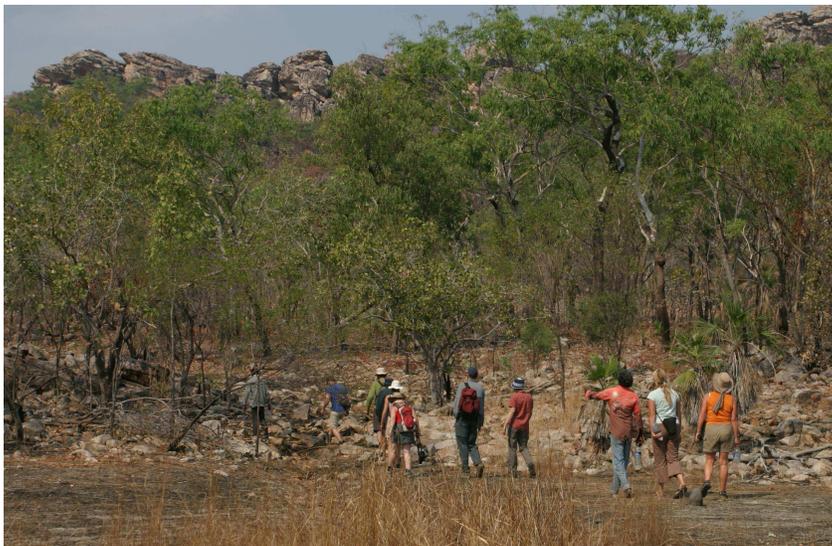


Figure 4. Visitors approaching Papa Ngala (BF-11.06 PN)

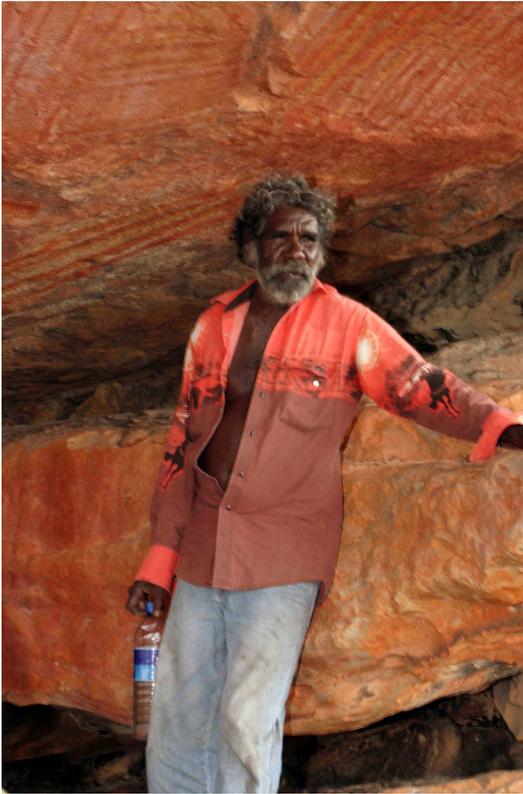


Figure 5. Traditional owner, Hector Minjin, at Papa Ngala (Sun Dreaming) site (BF-11.18 PN)

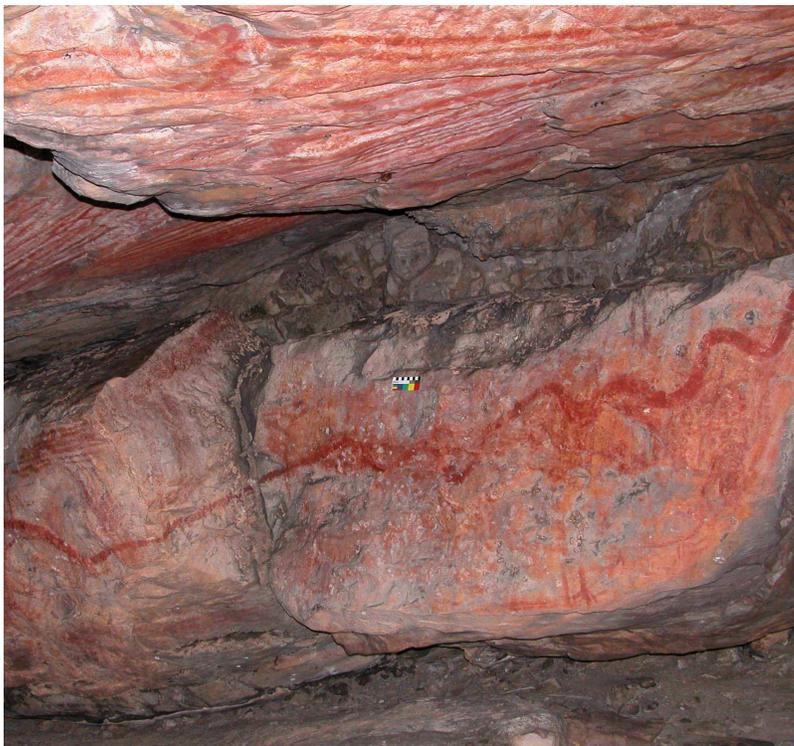


Figure 6. Creek motif at Papa Ngala (Sun Dreaming) site (BC2 MC DSCN0133 PN1)

There are several other cultural heritage places in the vicinity of Wadeye with potential for low-key cultural tourism. Their rock-markings are as interesting and more varied than those of Papa Ngala, and at several sites cultural stories might be provided to visitors. Limiting factors include the isolation of the area and lack of infrastructure but, more importantly, lack of younger community members available to lead tours.

## **Discussion**

The following points are drawn from Australian literature on visitation at Indigenous cultural heritage places, my observations of visitor behaviour at several locations, and from discussions with Indigenous custodians about their expectations of tourism ventures, and with various groups of visitors regarding their expectations and the extent to which these were met by their tourist experience.

It is useful to consider the business of Indigenous cultural heritage tourism from the perspectives of the three main parties involved in any such enterprise: the traditional owner, the visitor, and the tour operator.

### ***The traditional owners' perspective***

Do members of communities in remote areas, particularly those enveloped in extensive reserved lands want cultural tourism? Some don't; others recognise that employment opportunities in district centres and adjacent outstation settlements are limited. Some places have been more self-sufficient in the recent past. At Wadeye, for example, there were market-gardens, a bakery, and various constructions to be undertaken. Such work was not well paid, and it didn't take long in the 1960s for men and women to work out that 'sit-down' money was a better deal than labouring. More recently, local residents used to build houses – as they did the church and the clinic and many other earlier buildings – but new building regulations mean that construction work and much other work is done by non-Indigenous tradespersons who fly in on Monday and out on Friday afternoon.

Cultural tourism is seen by some as an appropriate and achievable way of earning money. Discussions with traditional owners about their desire to be involved in tourism reveal, however, that the prospect of remunerative employment is only one aspect. What is most frequently mentioned as a desire to 'share country' with outsiders. People are proud of their country and their knowledge of it. They think that Whitefellas should know about it also, and appreciate that they, the traditional owners, are caring for their country. An essential aspect of caring for country is maintaining and passing on knowledge about places in that country.

### ***The visitors' perspective***

Knowledge about country is one of the things that outsiders seeking a cultural heritage experience value most highly. Such is already known to be a factor in the choice is made by tourists, particularly overseas visitors to Australia. It comes out most strongly in interviews that I have conducted with participants in tourism initiatives in the Kimberley and at Palumpa.

Visitors want to go to beautiful country, they want to experience the rugged grandeur of remote Australia; they might want to swim in clear waters, to see unusual bird-life and to avoid crocodiles; they might enjoy camping out under the stars and

photographing imagery in rock-shelters. But mostly they take tours to remote areas in the expectation of visiting Indigenous Australian's country and learning about it; not through the mediation of the tour guide, but from the Blackfellas themselves. And not from any Indigenous Australian, but from the people who own the country, who know it intimately and who might be prepared to share a little of it with an outsider.

### ***The tour company***

There is a third-party to all of this. The role of the cultural heritage tourism operator – sometimes 'eco-tourism' operator – can be an essential one. Potential visitors might not know how to make contact with and make a suitable arrangement with the traditional owner, and many traditional owners in remote areas will not have the resources to explore the opportunities or handle the formalities of arrangements with visitors. The resources needed are varied: they are educational, financial and include communication and other management abilities necessary for tourism entrepreneurship.

The cultural heritage tourism operator must know his market, develop enticing Web-resources, pitch his product competitively, and always be aware of the value of 'word-of-mouth' advertising. The operator must have a wide range of other skills, including the ability to navigate a packed four-wheel-drive vehicle, or to choose and manage reliable and capable others to do so, to provide for, look after and manage a perhaps disparate group of tourists; and must be able to manage relationships, often demanding, with the traditional owners who provide the essential focus of the tour.

If visitors most value being shown Indigenous cultural heritage places by the traditional owners of those places, and if the custodians are willing to guide small groups of visitors, then, surely, a major potential adverse impact – that of visitors – upon cultural places has been controlled? Yes and no. Visitor-custodian exchanges can result in positive appreciation of cultural heritage and this experience can generalize to wider appreciation of indigeneity. But not all custodians involved in these initiatives will be aware of some of the pitfalls in tourism at their cultural sites.

Some places will inevitably suffer from increased visitation – it may be difficult to route visitors away from areas where they may brush painted walls, walk across carvings before noticing that they exist, crush stone tools beneath their feet; and numerous persons in enclosed spaces can change the atmosphere and encourage growth of unwanted organism over rock-markings. If the custodians taking the group don't ensure that visitors are aware, or if they don't set the example, or don't recognize the stone tool, then the damage will occur.

There is a role for those providing training in tourism for custodians and those studying visitor management and site conservation factors. The provision of research results might enhance the visitor experience, and assist in addressing a frequent question asked – that of the age of rock-markings. Some visitors are satisfied with the advice that 'images were made in the Dreaming', others are pleased to incorporate archaeological results, including dating and regional comparisons, into their appreciation of the imagery.

An engaging visitor experience might involve the combination of visual imagery and their interpretation through traditional accounts and the passing on of research results. In fact almost any stories relating to the place can be grist to the tourism mill. A story of how a Whitefella was stopped from unlawfully bringing tourists to a place, for

example, or how markings were recently added to the site by a traditional owner, can prompt discussions of ownership of places and intellectual property that, in turn, can significantly increase visitor appreciation of matters of importance to both the Indigenous and the wider community. Caution: Discussions around a campfire can get heated!

Custodians should be aware of factors affecting the sustainability of tourism at their cultural places. Visitor impacts upon the fabric of a place can be discussed and suggestions made for monitoring these and practical methods of implementing ways of mitigating any such impact. Traditional owners need to be aware also – before irreversible changes take place – of the potential impact of visitation on the ‘cultural significance’ of place to them.

## **Conclusion**

There appears to be an almost insatiable desire on the part of tourists to explore new regions, and for tour-operators to identify new places to include in tours. In some places, this is matched by the desire of Indigenous individuals and family groups to share the perceived advantages of cultural tourism. The main focus of much Indigenous cultural tourism tends to be sites with rock-markings. A major concern should be developing awareness and assessment of the impact of tourism on heritage places, not only the physical fabric of such places but their cultural significances.

There is increasing appreciation that such Indigenous places need to be properly managed and conserved in order to protect the interests of Indigenous custodians and to sustain continuing visitation. The results of research in a wide variety of areas of cultural heritage tourism management can provide a substantial basis for protection and management advice.

Cultural tourism is now developing in some previously untargeted remote areas of northern Australia. Traditional owners of cultural places on reserved lands are advantaged by having effective control of their lands and thus of visitor behaviour. Observation of the implementation of joint ventures between local communities and tour companies show that such initiatives can be beneficial to all parties involved, but that there continue to exist concerns relevant to the sustainability of cultural heritage tourism.

Visitors to Indigenous Australian cultural heritage places, especially those with rock-markings, often have expectations of seeing spectacular images, like those known from places such as Ubirr, Nourlangie and the Kimberley. Not all Australian rock-markings are as visually engaging. Where a comparably satisfying visual experience is not available, a different and better one needs to be provided if visitors are not to be disappointed. Such an experience can be provided by a well-interpreted tour that provides information to engage the visitor in a cross-cultural appreciation and to enhance understanding beyond that of the merely aesthetic. A traditional owner who has the authority and ability to speak for a place will accomplish this best.

Visitor response research and personal observation suggests that not only do visitors want good interpretation; they also wish to know the cultural significance of places and of particular rock-markings. Moreover, most do, or would, highly value having interpretation made by traditional knowledge-holders. This factor might be

valued more importantly than the type of image seen, and overcome perception of difficulty of access, particularly by a sub-set of tourists who are better educated and prepared to pay for the experience.

Guided visitation is not only desired by many tourists, but also preferable in terms of site management factors. For those places where access is restricted, little or no physical means of site protection are necessary where a guided-tour can be implemented.

Information provided by traditional knowledge-holders, when the traditional owners control the place and are custodians of their knowledge, need not threaten the socio-cultural significances of that place if the visitor experience is appropriately handled. Thus, traditional owners may gain the economic benefits that they desire, and retain the socio-cultural significance of a place and protect the integrity of its fabric. As well, traditional knowledge-holders can enhance and extend the cultural understandings of visitors who seek to learn of traditional cultural landscapes and, particularly, rock-markings.

### **Acknowledgments**

I acknowledge guidance and assistance from traditional owners of the places described here, discussions with visitors and others, and support from AIATSIS. A part of this paper was presented to a meeting of Section française de l'institut international de conservation (SFIIC) at the Institut de Paleontologie Humaine, Paris, 23 May 2002, and which was published in a limited circulation conference pre-proceedings as 'Indigenous Australian rock-markings – steps toward sustainable tourism', pp.110-117 of *L'Art Avant L'Histoire*, SFIIC, Paris; another part was presented to a seminar at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Studies in August 2004. I am pleased to acknowledge useful discussions on each occasion.

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- <sup>1</sup> Australian Tourist Commission, <<http://atc.australia.com/research.asp?>> accessed August 2004; the discussion paper. Anonymous. 2002. *The 10 Year [sic] Plan for Tourism. A discussion paper*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, pp.8-9, 82. The United Nations recently designated a 'Year For Cultural Heritage' (Resolution 56/8 adopted on 21 November 2001); the announcement emphasized the role of cultural heritage both as an expression of cultural identity and as a mechanism for exclusion of the Other (Anonymous. 2002. *The World Heritage Newsletter 34*: insert reverse). Anonymous. 2002. *Segment Insights Pack. Market Research Intelligence on Aboriginal Tourism*. Australian Tourist Commission, Canberra (p.3). Anonymous. 2002. *Respecting Our Culture*. Aboriginal Tourism Australia, Melbourne: p.3. Anonymous. 2002. *Respecting Our Culture. Indigenous accreditation program. Introduction and funding proposal*. Aboriginal Tourism Australia, Melbourne. Anonymous. 2002. *Ask First: A guide to respecting Indigenous heritage places and values*. Australian Heritage Commission, Canberra. Ward (2002a) has provided an expansion of these points.
- <sup>2</sup> Anonymous. 2002. *Ecotourism Australia-wide*. Australian Heritage Commission, Canberra.
- <sup>3</sup> The results of RAPP are available in a series of research reports in the Institute's library, in academic journals and conference proceedings. An annotated bibliography of the research reports is available through the Institute's library catalogue (Ward 2002b). The Institute has encouraged an exchange of information and ideas between researchers, and Indigenous site managers and community representatives in several forums including workshops and international conferences. At its recent major conference, held in Canberra in September 2001, presentations on competing interests in the natural and Indigenous cultural landscape comprised a major part (Taylor et al. 2004).
- <sup>4</sup> Classic examples from Australian researches are those publications by Jacobs and Gale 1994; Rosenfeld 1988; Pearson and Sullivan 1995.