

Environment Australia in the year of Cultural Heritage



The United Nations' Year for Cultural Heritage focuses on the tangible and intangible elements which combine to give us our cultural identities—a sense of where and who we are. Each country has its own defining attributes which make its culture distinct—festivals, food, customs, sports, artworks, landscapes, buildings, and monuments. For those working in the cultural heritage field, the challenge is to ensure that these pieces of our heritage are not only conserved, but also appreciated and hopefully, understood.

The Commonwealth Department of Environment and Heritage, Environment Australia, is responsible for the safekeeping of several aspects of Australia's cultural heritage—its Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultural heritage places and its shipwreck heritage. It also works to prevent the loss of moveable cultural heritage objects overseas. The Department develops and implements a range of policies and programs which are aimed at finding the best approaches to these challenging tasks.

Significantly, in this United Nations' Year for Cultural Heritage, major changes are expected at the highest level of Australia's government. The Commonwealth is changing the way it protects its heritage places. Legislation currently before Parliament will see the introduction of a National Heritage List and a Commonwealth Heritage List. This represents a major overhaul in heritage legislation and a rationalisation of the way the Commonwealth and States identify, protect and manage places of heritage significance.

Complementing this legislation, the Council of Australian Governments

(COAG), this year, established a new forum of Federal and State Ministers. The Environment Protection and Heritage Council will work to strengthen the national approach to managing and protecting Australia's environment, including its cultural heritage places. The Council has agreed to develop Australia's first integrated national heritage policy. The Commonwealth and the States are also working together to develop a National Maritime Heritage Strategy due to be released for comment this year. This will promote an integrated approach from all tiers of government to protecting the nation's 6,500 shipwrecks and associated land-based maritime heritage.

Internationally, Australia demonstrated its commitment to sharing its World Heritage expertise by signing a Memorandum of Understanding with UNESCO, which provides for ongoing co-operation to promote and implement the World Heritage Convention. The Asia-Pacific Focal Point for World Heritage, hosted by Environment Australia, continues to assist and foster best practice management of cultural and natural World Heritage values in a range of projects across the region, including Thailand, Samoa, Vietnam, Indonesia, Laos and Fiji. A demonstration project for heritage conservation, cultural tourism and local community development in the Pacific has been established in Vanuatu.

The Australian Heritage Commission, a Commonwealth statutory authority linked with the Department, is also working in partnership with the Chinese State Administration for Cultural Heritage and the Getty

Conservation Institute to enhance the management and protection of the World Heritage sites of Mogao and Chengde. It is also working with Deakin University on a comparative analysis of cultural heritage site significance, management and interpretation in China and Australia. The Commission also supports a Memorandum of Understanding with ASEAN and AusHeritage on conserving and promoting the cultural heritage of the Asia-Pacific region.

In Australia, the Department is striving to discover more of Australia's rich cultural heritage and is also committed to making this research freely available. This year, it has published research on Australian working women, on the Chinese in Australia and associated places and on how to better appreciate Indigenous cultural heritage places. Publications available are:

▼ *Women's employment and professionalism in Australia: histories, themes and places* (launched on the 100th anniversary of women's franchise)

▼ *Tracking the Dragon: a guide for finding and assessing Chinese Australian heritage places* (see photo), and

▼ *Ask First: a guide to respecting Indigenous heritage places and values*.

Together with the *Australian Historic Themes Framework*, published last year, these documents are useful in interpreting the material culture of our past. This work is being complemented by further innovative research into individual historic themes which tell Australia's national stories. The first of these studies focuses on 'creating an Australian democracy'.

The government nominated Purnululu National Park for World Heritage



Professor Alice Tay AM with the President of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, and the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Dr David Kemp pictured in the gardens of Parliament House in February 2002 at the launch of 'Tracking the Dragon—a guide to finding and assessing Chinese Australian heritage places. Photo courtesy of the Australian Heritage Commission.

listing in February, for its outstanding Indigenous cultural and natural values, and is preparing for a possible nomination of the Royal Exhibition Building, Melbourne, which would be Australia's first non-Indigenous cultural nomination. The government has also supported a range of activities to enhance engagement with Indigenous managers of Australia's World Heritage properties, including the March 2002 World Heritage Managers Workshop, an exchange of Indigenous managers between the United States, Canada and New Zealand.

Efforts to spread and gather information on the value of cultural

heritage places has also been accelerated by this year's *Ecotourism Australia—Wide: Online Conference*—a cyber-discussion on tourism at natural and cultural heritage places.¹ The Department is also sponsoring the cultural heritage component of two conferences in November—the International Year of the Mountains conference at Jindabyne, NSW, and the International Ecotourism Conference in Cairns, Queensland.

There is much to celebrate in the United Nations' Year for Cultural Heritage as Australia has both old and young cultural heritage to explore and cherish. Our treasured heritage places and objects are part of a bigger

picture—one in which they are linked with the intangibles of our values and traditions.

✉ Article prepared by Environment Australia, the Department of Environment and Heritage, >www.environment.gov.au<, phone: (02) 6274 111. All publications mentioned in the article are available free from the Australian Heritage Commission on 1800 020 652 or email to abc@ea.gov.au. The full publications list and online order form are available on the internet at: <www.abc.gov.au/infores/publications/publicationslist.html>.

¹. The conference took place in August 2002. You can visit the website until August 2003 at >www.ecotourismaustraliawide.net/Ecotourism_ome.html<.

Freize! it's a gourmet lunch

The famous Mural Room at Grossi Florentino has been the venue for many a celebration with its distinctive 1930s Florentine themed murals completed under the direction of the celebrated artist Napier Waller.

Join well known curator/lecturer Kenneth Park for an inspiring professional development session that will look at

issues of historical interpretation and conservation as well as allowing you to hear the story behind the murals and experience the history of this lovely restaurant. Lunch includes a glass of sparkling wine on arrival followed by two courses with selected wines, of fee and petite fours.

Date: Saturday 26th October
Time: 12–2PM

Cost: \$55.00 (bargain)
Booking: Bookings are essential, call Meredith Blake on (03) 8341 7344 or regional freecall 1800 680 082.



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