



TIME TO CHANGE THE CULTURAL HERITAGE MANAGEMENT PARADIGM?

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Gamilaraay Resource Use Project is a three-year collaborative research project focused on the documentation of modern and historical Aboriginal knowledge of resources, resource-use and resource management in the Namoi, Gwydir and Border River catchments of northern New South Wales.

The project has been designed and coordinated by members of the Gamilaraay community in full partnership with academic researchers and the government instrumentality (Department of Infrastructure Planning and Natural Resources) responsible for land use decisions in Gamilaraay Country.

In this region of rural New South Wales traditional Aboriginal ways of life are generally perceived as being lost. However Aboriginal traditional ecological knowledge of natural resources within Gamilaraay country is substantial and ongoing. It is of continuing social and cultural importance to the Gamilaraay community. This knowledge has been maintained despite an ever-increasing decline in access to such culturally important resources.

We present some of our research findings in the context of the prior recognition of "landscape as heritage" (Ross, 1996; Cotter et al., 2001) and maintain that the cultural heritage management paradigm, having expanded from site to landscapes, should now also work to accommodate traditional Aboriginal ecological knowledge as heritage.



Stephen Porter (second from left), recording the ecological knowledge held by Gamilaraay Elders: Mr Vic Porter, Mr Mick Taylor, Mr Bob Swan and Mr Merv Allen from the Caroonia - Washallow area at Goran Lake, Breeza Plains



Maria Cotter speaking with Mr Ted Fields Sr, a Gamilaraay Elder from the Washallow about his knowledge of natural resources and their use by Gamilaraay people.



Mr Victor Dennison pictured in front of a bush orchard of yodle he has brought in from the bush and placed in his home garden. Victor indicated that the yodle was a food resource he had consumed when growing up at Toomelah.

2. RESEARCH DESIGN

The project has been guided by the need to recognise and maintain Gamilaraay ownership of the traditional ecological knowledge held by Elders, and to recognise and maintain respect for these knowledge holders.

To do this we have:

Established protocols for the ethical conduct of the research project including:

- > Establishment and maintenance of informed consent via strong community liaison processes including employment of Indigenous Researchers
- > Establishment of clear guidelines for the use and storage of informant information. The digital recording of all interviews provides ready feedback and quick access to interview data for individuals. Each individual is provided with a CD copy of each interview.
- > Provision of options for participation especially including non-participation as an acceptable choice.

Established protocols for information exchange including:

- > Development and distribution of Information Sheets, Newsletters and Fact sheets
- > Building of relationships with the community
- > Primary statement of Intent leading to acceptable/achievable outcomes ('no pie in the sky').

Established a draft Intellectual Property (IP) agreement with the Gamilaraay community - IP protection for Gamilaraay people paramount.



Emu eggs have a special cultural function within the Gamilaraay community. They are a seasonal food resource, that when available is bartered and/or used to meet family obligations. Reciprocity and exchange are key elements of the social function of Emu eggs.

"Snottygobbles" or Mistletoe fruit are a well liked Aboriginal food resource. Mistletoes are parasitic on a number of different host plants and Gamilaraay people indicate that the taste of this fruit varies with the host plant, and that some Mistletoes are preferred over others.



Bernadette Duncan holds the leaves and fruit of the Gruee (or Kruee) *Owenia acidula*. This fruit occurs in small groves in the western parts of Gamilaraay country. It usually ripens in summer, and is said to be thirst quenching.



"Rosey apples" are the fruit of *Rhagodia* spp., a type of saltbush which grows in the western areas of Gamilaraay country. This fruit is eaten by Gamilaraay people when found ripe in the bush. The fruit is small so that it requires patience to get a feed.



The Bumble (*Capparis mitchelli*), though an uncommon species, is distributed widely across Gamilaraay Country and is a valued food resource.

3. MAJOR EMPIRICAL RESULTS (TO DATE)

- > 31 Primary informants interviewed;
- > 10 Secondary informants contributed information;
- > At least 45 native plant species documented;
- > At least 3 introduced plant species documented;
- > At least 30 native animals documented;
- > At least 4 introduced animal species documented.

AND RECOGNITION OF:

- > Continuing resource use tradition, and continuing cultural importance of traditional natural resources.
- > Continuing knowledge of traditional material culture (design, manufacture and adaptation) for natural resource acquisition.
- > Of important places related to resources, their use and/or acquisition (e.g. sandstone ridges, box woodland communities, riverbanks and waterways).

PLUS OBSERVATIONS ON RESOURCES POLICY:

- > Aboriginal Access to land is paramount to ensure Aboriginal interest in natural/cultural resource management issues, and to continue ecological based traditions within the community.
- > Individual Knowledge holders are the key to 'consensus' positions about Aboriginal values in land.
- > Interrogation of Aboriginal aspirations and values in land with regard to achievement of access, and both tangible and intangible benefits to the community is required.



Priscilla Harrison pictured in front of a lignum bush on the Boom-to-Mungindi Road, May 2004. Lignum is a plant of particular importance to Gamilaraay people being a known habitat for important bird and animal species.



The late Julie Whitton (left) and Ursula McGrady (right) fishing on the banks of 'Boobera Lagoon', May 2004. Boobera Lagoon is a special place to Gamilaraay people. At the time of their visit these two Elders from Toomelah agreed that a visit to Boobera "refreshed their spirits".



Merv Allen (right) an Elder from the Caroonia area, shows a fish trap made of chicken wire to Araluen Cotter, Mick Taylor, Vic Porter and Bob Swan look on. Mick noted that his grandmother made traps of a similar design but using willow branches and reeds indicating a long tradition of adapting a traditional fish-trap design.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

> The Gamilaraay community of northwest New South Wales has a substantial knowledge of natural resources that by its detail and specificity can only be assessed as derived from traditional Aboriginal cultural transmission.

> This ecological knowledge has been maintained despite the fact that the Gamilaraay community increasingly lacks access to culturally important resources and places where such cultural transmission can occur.

> The traditional ecological knowledge held by the Gamilaraay community is culturally important providing a link between cultural expression and landscape.

> In the Gamilaraay community context Aboriginal ecological knowledge must be recognised as being a part of Aboriginal cultural heritage - heritage is not just about "artefacts and sites" nor is it simply about the occurrence of "artefacts and sites" within a landscape.

> The incorporation of Aboriginal ecological knowledge within the cultural heritage management paradigm potentially allows for better management of natural and cultural resources, particularly as this knowledge relates to endemic species and places where such species occur.

References:

Cotter, M.M. et al., 2001. Heritage Landscapes: Understanding Place and Communities: Southern Cross University Press, Lismore NSW.
Ross, A. 1996. Landscape as Heritage. Tempus 5: 7- 17.

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