

THE LANDSCAPE OF BLUE MOUNTAINS ROCK-ART

PROJECT DIRECTORS: Prof. Paul S.C. Taçon (Griffith University), Wayne Brennan (University of New England) and Shaun Hooper (Blue Mountains Aboriginal Community and Blue Mountains World Heritage Institute).

OTHER COLLABORATORS: Dr. Matthew Kelleher (Australian Museum), Dave Pross (Darkinjung Local Aboriginal Land Council), Andy Macqueen (Blue Mountains author and conservationist), Michael Jackson (University of New England) and an extensive network of Aboriginal community members, bushwalkers and students.

DATE COMMENCED: January 2001 (phase 1: January 2001 – November 2003; phase 2 January 2004 to June 2005; phase 3 July 2005 – June 2008).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: This project aims to better understand the relationship between Blue Mountains World Heritage cultural heritage, especially rock-art sites (drawings, stencils, paintings and engravings), and that of other parts of New South Wales and to describe culture change in Wollemi National Park over the past few thousand years. The project involves extensive ongoing community consultation and participation. Besides scientific significance, the results have social significance for Aboriginal stakeholders and are of great value to park and World Heritage Area managers and interpretation officers, tourists and others with an interest in Aboriginal culture, rock-art and the World Heritage Area. The project is divided into three phases, an initial pilot study, an intensive recording phase along a traditional travel route and a general survey, recording and excavation phase. We have almost completed the second phase and seek funding for the third, the largest and most important.

Phases 1 and 2:

Fieldwork is concentrated in the Wollemi region of the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area and over one hundred previously unknown sites, most with rock-art, have been documented in wild, rugged locations during the first two phases of the project. The most outstanding site, and one of the most significant pigment sites of the greater Sydney region, is 'Eagle's Reach'. It was discovered by four bushwalkers in October 1995. Our team, which included Paul Taçon, Wayne Brennan, Andy Macqueen, Evan Gallard, Mathew Kelleher and Jill Ford recorded the site in detail on 6 and 7 May 2003. This was the first scientific assessment and documentation of the site. It was named Eagle's Reach at this time. At Eagle's Reach 206 individual motifs were recorded, consisting of 166 drawings, 39 stencils and 1 painting. They were found arranged in twelve superimposed layers. One of the special features of the site is the large range of Wollemi animals drawn with great skill and accuracy. There are all sorts of birds, mammals and reptiles, including superb goannas, eagles and an uncommon white outline wombat. Rare motifs, such as a double-headed human-like figure and animal-headed beings with human bodies also feature at the site. These creatures, some with bird-like heads, others with macropod-like heads may depict Ancestral Beings but certainly reflect spiritual beliefs common to many parts of Australia. However, in the greater Sydney region they are rare in the pigment art, found only at a handful of sites to the east of Eagle's Reach, in parts of Darkinjung country. The oldest stencils, in red and a dark yellow, are believed to be between 2000-4000 years old. Given the many layers of imagery

at Eagle's Reach, it obviously was important for many generations of Aboriginal people to visit and mark this incredible terrain with symbols of group and individual identity.

Other sites we have discovered are smaller but contain components of what is at Eagle's Reach, as well as other sorts of imagery. Sites appear clustered in certain parts of the Wollemi, often on either side with a ridge travel route between. An investigation of the landscape patterning began in the second phase and is linked to a Cultural Mapping program the Blue Mountains Aboriginal Community recently began. Publications include on-line and published reports, a paper submitted for publication in an edited book and a fifteen minute DVD entitled 'Rediscovering Aboriginal Wollemi' (2004). The project has seen much media interest since being announced in NSW State Parliament by Premier Bob Carr in July 2003. Phase 1 was supported by Australian Museum Research Centre grants (\$23,990). In May 2004, we were awarded US \$17,500 from the National Geographic Society for Phase 2 (to be spent by end of June 2005). We are currently seeking funding for Phase 3.

Phase 3:

Phase 3 is the biggest phase of the project. Now that we have a large team of Aboriginal community members, students and bush walkers trained and experienced in both rock-art survey/recording and negotiating/surviving in such a challenging environment we are ready to look at the big rock-art picture for the Wollemi region. The objectives of Phase 3 are (a) to develop a predicative model for locating rock-art and other Aboriginal sites in the Wollemi; (b) document traditional travel routes and Dreaming tracks; (c) finish survey in key areas; (d) record as much of the rock-art as possible in detail and before sites deteriorate from natural processes and increasing tourist pressure; (d) excavate a number (at least five) of significant rock shelters with art in order to better determine age of occupation and associated activities; (e) contribute to a management and preservation plan to be developed for the area; and (f) make a documentary film on the rock-art, the documentation process and the Aboriginal community members involved.