

Interpreting Archaeology

*The Home of Archaeology lies in the Heart of Modern
Communities*



*NSW Premier's Department and SGE Credit Union
Travelling Fellowship Project*

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NSW Heritage Office

Places where history happened are powerful witnesses to the reality of past events, individual achievements, dramatic change and past lifeways...Most of these places do not speak to us directly. Their stories need to be "interpreted" before people can understand them...We have an obligation to communicate the powerful stories these places have to tell to the public...Historic places that are valued will be preserved.

(Thomson and Harper 2000:6)

FOREWORD

First and foremost, my sincerest thanks to the NSW Premier's Department and the SGE Credit Union for providing the essential financial support and encouragement to make this project happen. I am indebted to the NSW Heritage Office for endorsing my proposal, and for so generously granting me extended leave to expand my tour beyond the initial two-week proposal. The extra time to conduct interviews and undertake site visits gave me a far broader perspective and understanding of the benefits of public archaeology programs that I hope we can adapt and implement here in New South Wales.

Brad Fallon, thank you for driving me thousands of miles across the States, getting me to site on time and, most importantly, for keeping me sane. My gratitude to Lianne Hall for so kindly proof-reading and editing my final document.

Last of all, my heartfelt thanks to the archaeologists, education, and interpretation professionals for taking the time to meet with me, for preparing comprehensive packages of information, and ultimately, for providing me with the 'flesh and bones' of this report. In particular, I would like to thank Karen Berggren, Sara Bon-Harper, Elaine Davis, Caroline Dobranski, Robin Gabriel, Tracy Hayes, Barbara Heath, Barbara Little, Margaret McLean, David Myers, Peter Pilles, Matt Reeves, Stanley South, Travis MacDonald, Octavia Starbuck and Mark Varian. You have given me a wonderful insight into your dynamic public archaeology programs. I hope that I have done justice to your ideas and achievements. I thank you for your wisdom and inspiration.



Historic Mining Remains, Durango Colorado

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As new developments and urbanisation in NSW forge ahead, increased pressure continues to be exerted over our State's precious surviving archaeological resource. Each day, more archaeological sites or relics are being excavated and destroyed, as a part of the development process. When adequately recorded and interpreted, archaeologists have demonstrated that archaeological remains can enrich our understanding of Australia's history.

In order to gain a broader understanding of how archaeological resources are valued, managed and effectively interpreted, numerous archaeological sites, centres and organisations were visited and reviewed as part of a 'Public Archaeology' study tour to the United States of America in early 2002.

Archaeological systems and practices that emphasize public outcomes, education and interpretation are a key management tool for many of America's significant archaeological sites and resources. Where these systems have been implemented, major reductions in vandalism, looting at public archaeological sites and illegal excavations have been recorded. Innovative archaeological programs and activities have led to renewed community pride in local cultural heritage assets and increased activism for the protection of significant cultural heritage sites.

As part of my study tour, many of America's 'best practice' public archaeology programs and practices were assessed for their relevance and application to the effective management and interpretation of New South Wales's archaeological resources. In particular, the economic, tourism, cultural and educational benefits of 'archaeology' for cities and local communities were reviewed.

America's cultural places and archaeological centres have flourished and gained community support because archaeological research and activities are carried out imaginatively, with a strong public component. People have become activists on behalf of significant archaeological resources and sites because they have been given the opportunity to directly experience and cherish archaeological remains for themselves.

Where communities foster their cultural assets, governments authorities have been given the public support to deal with developments more sensitively and tourism is booming in places that retain their distinct heritage values. Significant archaeological sites in America continue to

be preserved; attract private and government funding for conservation and interpretation; and attract thousands of local and international visitors each year, generating millions of dollars per annum for their respective communities.

The results of the study tour clearly demonstrate that proactive public education and interpretation of archaeological resources is the quintessential key for people to gain an understanding of, and respect for, the rich cultural information that lies in our archaeological record.

The synthesis of ideas gleaned from the study tour provide the NSW Heritage Council with an opportunity to reflect upon current archaeological management practices and to consider the established of a system, that promotes public education and community activism as a key management tool for New South Wales's archaeological remains.

It is only through the innovative exposure of archaeology to the general public, the development of exciting education forums, interpretative programs, 'hands on participation' volunteer opportunities, tours, displays and co-operative tourism ventures that we can inspire the passion, commitment and action necessary at both the professional and grass roots level to protect NSW's significant archaeological resources for the generations to come.



U.S. Parks Ranger giving a guided tour of Mesa Verde, Colorado

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

When thoughtfully integrated into development proposals for sites and cultural interpretation projects, archaeological remains have the ability to inspire, educate and fascinate the general public, like no other heritage resource. Yet, comparatively little has ever been published on how to successfully manage and interpret archaeological remains for the 'non-archaeologist'. There are even fewer documented analyses of the economic, educational, urban design and cultural benefits for cities that include the public interpretation of archaeological remains in their development and cultural heritage management programs.

In order to gain a clear understanding of how archaeological resources are valued, managed and effectively interpreted internationally, a 5 ½ week study tour of leading cultural sites and agencies in the United States of America was undertaken.

Through the work of the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management and many other state and private organisations, the United States of America has established itself as a world leader in the public interpretation of archaeological resources. The general public are given many opportunities to appreciate archaeology and to become actively involved in the discovery and interpretation of our past. Examples of outstanding, innovative interpretative public archaeology programs and policies are prolific.

As a result, America's interpretative public archaeological programs were assessed for their relevance and application to the effective management and interpretation of New South Wales's archaeological resources. In particular, the economic, tourism, cultural and educational benefits of 'archaeology' for cities and local communities were analysed.

It is anticipated that the recommendations of this paper will form a strong basis for the NSW Heritage Office to develop and administer a "Public Archaeology System" - a dynamic and multifaceted management system for ensuring that New South Wales's historical archaeological resources are preserved, investigated and interpreted in a manner that maximises community, economic, tourism, cultural and educational outcomes. This type of management system is an innovation for the State and Federal Governments of Australia.

2.0 BACKGROUND

As new developments and urbanisation in New South Wales forge ahead, increased pressure continues to be exerted over our State's precious surviving archaeological resource. It is estimated that less than 5% of New South Wales's historical archaeological resource now remains unexcavated. The rest has been destroyed or removed as the result of environmental degradation, ongoing development and the adaptive reuse of sites. Each day, new archaeological sites or relics are being excavated and destroyed, as a part of the development process.

Archaeologists are in the same position as environmentalists of 30 years ago, who realized that the country's water, soil and air were being polluted at an alarming rate. The red flags are up for archaeology.

Judith A. Bense, Archaeologist (1991:9)

When adequately recorded and interpreted, archaeologists have demonstrated that archaeological remains can enrich our understanding of Australia's history. Investigations of NSW's archaeological remains have provided us with histories of past lives and activities that can challenge or add vital new information to that already synthesized from written historical records, photographs, standing buildings and oral histories.

Archaeological reports are, however, generally written by archaeologists for archaeologists, thus rendering them as coded, inaccessible documents, impossible for use as interpretative tools for the general public. In addition, most forms of media, particularly print and visual, generally promote the 'mysticism' of archaeology. Archaeologists are depicted, stereotypically, as elite 'academics' who travel to exotic locations in search of priceless archaeological treasures. As a result, the majority of historical archaeological remains discovered 'locally' in Australia, despite their significance and rarity in terms of Australia's cultural history, are overlooked by the local media and are under-represented in government town planning policies, conservation projects, tourism publications, heritage displays, activities and educational programs.

In New South Wales there are two key agencies responsible for the protection, management and conservation of archaeological resources. They are the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Heritage Council of New South Wales (NSW). Aboriginal objects and places are protected under section 90 of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* which is administered by the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Historical archaeological relics more than fifty years old are protected under the Section 139 provisions of the *Heritage Act 1977* and are generally managed by the NSW Heritage Office under delegated authority from the Heritage Council of NSW.

With respect to historical archaeological remains, the Heritage Office is responsible for the:

- provision of specialist advice to the Minister for Planning and the Heritage Council in relation to the protection, conservation and management of archaeological remains, in accordance with the provisions of the Heritage Act;
- development of best practice standards, policies and guidelines for the treatment and conservation of historical archaeological remains that are known or anticipated to exist in NSW;
- education of local councils, local communities, relevant stakeholders, developers and government agencies in relation to the protection and management of historical archaeological resources; and
- development of programs and innovative strategies that will provide the communities of today and tomorrow with the opportunity to become actively involved in the celebration, appreciation and conservation of the State's rare and significant archaeological resources.

In 2000 the *Review of Historical Archaeological Planning Systems and Practice in New South Wales* prepared by the NSW Heritage Office (Allen and North 2000), identified the need for public interpretation as a key priority in managing the State's archaeological resources.

Currently, however, the primary aim of the Heritage Office's 2000-2005 Strategic Plan (as it pertains to the management of historical archaeological relics) is the development of more effective, streamlined systems to administer the current relics provisions of the Heritage Act. The existing relics provisions afford blanket protection to all historical archaeological relics, more than fifty years old, below ground level.

Despite the strength of the relics provisions in the Heritage Act and the heftiness of fines for the unauthorised disturbance of historical archaeological relics (up to \$1.1 million), the Heritage Office regularly discovers illegal works, including bottle-collecting, sale of rare artefacts from sites, vandalism of sites, non-compliance with approved archaeological excavation permits and the unauthorised destruction of archaeological sites. This is coupled with a lack of emphasis in the current strategic framework to ensure that the decisions relating to the management of archaeological remains result in significant public outcomes.

Most importantly, the relics provisions of the Heritage Act do not provide strong emphasis on the education of communities, heritage managers and developers alike, so that they can learn to appreciate and 'best manage' rare archaeological resources for current and future generations.



Archaeologists and volunteers at work in Parramatta, Sydney 2002

For historical archaeology to be worth doing it must have an outcome which is useful to the people of NSW not just the secular profession of archaeology.

Caitlin Allen and Maclaren North Historical Archaeologists (2000)

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Aims and Objectives

In order to meet the objectives of the study tour, my research was focused on the:

- (a) examination of how government agencies, archaeologists, heritage educators and non-profit/private organisations incorporate archaeology into development planning policies and controls, heritage conservation programs, community education and tourism activities;
- (b) analysis of award-winning interpretative programs of significant historical archaeological resources and sites; and
- (c) exploration of the demonstrated economic, community, town planning, tourism and educational benefits associated with established public archaeology systems and programs across the United States.

Several criteria were applied in order to identify appropriate sites to visit and assess. They included:

- *archaeological resource typology;*
- *demonstrated 'best practice' public archaeology strategies;*
- *ability to adapt interpretative practices and programs for New South Wales; and*
- *identification of study constraints and limitations.*

These are briefly summarised below.

3.1.1. Archaeological Resource Typology

As the proposed focus of the study tour related to improving the management and interpretation of late 18th century – 20th century historical archaeological resources in NSW, it

was essential for the study destination to contain a historical archaeological resource similar in age, variety and type to that likely to be found in Australia.

However, as indigenous and non-indigenous cultural remains often co-exist within the same sites in New South Wales it was considered important that the study review also included visitation to indigenous archaeological sites and interpretative centres.

3.1.2 Demonstrated 'Best Practice' Public Archaeology Strategies

Through the work of the National Park Service, the State Historic Preservation Office and numerous other heritage agencies, America has now established itself as a world leader in the public interpretation of historical archaeological resources. Several different sites and institutions, awarded for their outstanding archaeological programs, were visited in order to assess the various programs and strategies developed for the interpretation of archaeological resources.



Town Creek Indian Mound, North Carolina USA

Site visits included a mix of:

- **self-guided tours** (such as New York Unearthed, Franklin Court and Town Creek Indian Mound);
- **professional guided tours** (such as Canyon de Chelly, Hubble Trading Post and Monument Valley),

- **site visits in association with specialist staff** (such as Poplar Forest, Drayton Hall and Elden Pueblo);
- **site visits, followed by interviews with specialist staff** (such as Monticello, Homolovi Ruins, Charles Town Landing Site and Montpelier).

Several cultural heritage protection agencies, including the U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service, US Department of Agriculture Forest Service and the State Historic Preservation Office were visited. Successful archaeological programs implemented by such organisations were investigated and assessed for their application to New South Wales's archaeological resources.

Centres with a primary focus on heritage education and archaeological research were reviewed: These included the:

- **Getty Institute** LOS ANGELES
- **New York Unearthed** NEW YORK
- **Crow Canyon Archaeological Centre** COLORADO
- **Anasazi Cultural Centre** COLORADO



New York Unearthed, a free archaeological interpretation centre in the heart of New York

A total of 23 'house museum' and 'archaeological' sites were visited. They included:

- **Drayton Hall** South Carolina
- **Charles Towne Landing State Historic Site**
South Carolina
- **Poplar Forest** Virginia
- **Monticello** Virginia
- **Montpelier** Virginia
- **Hubble Trading Post** Arizona
- **Historic Halifax State Historic Site**
North Carolina
- **Franklin Court** Philadelphia
- **85 Broad Street** New York
- **Town Creek Indian Mound Site** North Carolina
- **Elden Pueblo** Arizona
- **Homolovi Ruins** Arizona
- **Canyon de Chelly** Arizona
- **Mesa Verde National Park** Colorado
- **Chaco Canyon** New Mexico

A complete list of organisations and institutions visited are outlined in detail in Table 1.0, 1.1 and 1.2, and are reproduction in Appendix B.



Reconstructed Foundation of the 1809 Stone House, one of several Slave Quarters on Mulberry Row, Monticello, Virginia

3.1.3 Ability to adapt interpretative practices for New South Wales

The United States contains many examples of sites and programs that interpret pre- and post European indigenous cultural remains and historical archaeological remains, dating from the early 18th century through to the early 20th century. The management frameworks and programs developed for the interpretation of these archaeological sites and resources can be easily modified and implemented for the management of archaeological sites and resources in New South Wales.

3.1.4. Constraints and Limitations

Due to time and financial constraints, the study tour focused on the review of a representative sample of interpretation institutions, agencies and professionals in the United States. Within the United States, it was not always possible to spend as much time at individual sites, as was warranted, due to the strict timeframe of the study tour.

In some cases, not all facilities were operational at each site visited. However, all efforts have been made to obtain additional information, as required, in order to provide an accurate overview of those sites visited, and to guide the development of sound recommendations for this report.



Archaeology plays an important key in the interpretation and understanding of life at Monticello.