

HERITAGE INFORMATION SERIES

Interpreting Heritage Places and Items Guidelines

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INTERPRETING HERITAGE PLACES AND ITEMS: GUIDELINES

This document provides guidance about best practice in heritage interpretation.

It applies to all types of environmental heritage: natural and cultural (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) and also to movable heritage – any natural or manufactured object or collection of heritage significance. The umbrella term **item** means a place, building, work, relic, movable object, precinct or landscape.

1 DEFINITIONS

These definitions are adapted from definitions in heritage charters and guidelines for use with terms in the NSW Heritage Act.

Aboriginal people(s) with cultural association – means Aboriginal people(s) with a cultural or historical association with an area not necessarily deriving from descent from original inhabitants. Consideration must also be given to Aboriginal people who reside in an area where there are no identified traditional owners or Aboriginal people who have traditional association to that country. (see also **Traditional owner**)

Aboriginal Culture – The culture of a group of people or groups of peoples comprising of the total ways of living built up and passed on from one generation to the next, and evolving over time.

Aboriginal Heritage – The heritage of a group of people or groups of peoples is represented in all that comes or belongs to them by reason of birth and includes their spirituality, language and relationship to land.

Associations mean the special connections that exist between people and an item.

Conservation management plan (CMP) means a document that identifies the heritage significance of an item and sets out policies for retaining that significance and is prepared in accordance with Heritage Council guidelines.

Conservation Management Strategy (CMS) means a document that identifies the impact an activity may have on a heritage significance of an item and sets out measures to minimise the impact of a proposed activity on the heritage significance of the item and is prepared in accordance with Heritage Council guidelines.

Environmental heritage means those places, buildings, works, relics, infrastructure, movable objects, landscapes and precincts, of State or local heritage significance.

Fabric means the physical material of the item including components, features, objects and spaces.

Heritage Impact Statement (HIS) means a document that records the heritage significance of an item by using a Heritage Data form and sets out broad strategies for retaining that significance and is prepared in accordance with Heritage Council guidelines.

Heritage significance refers to meanings and values in relation to the historical, scientific, cultural, social, archaeological, architectural, natural or aesthetic importance of the item. Heritage significance is reflected in the fabric of the item, its setting, use, associations, meanings, records, related places and related objects. Items may have a range of values and meanings for different individuals or groups, over time.

Interpretation means all the ways of presenting the significance of an item. Interpretation may be a combination of the treatment and fabric of the item; the use of the item; the use of interpretive media, such as events, activities, signs and publications, or activities, but is not limited to these. See 7, page 4.

Interpretation plan is a document that provides the policies, strategies and detailed advice for interpreting a heritage item. It is based on research and analysis and plans to communicate the significance of the item, both during a conservation project and in the ongoing life of the item. The plan identifies key themes, storylines and audiences and provides recommendations about interpretation media. It includes practical and specific advice about how to implement the plan.

Interpretation policy: consists of clauses and guidelines that provide an intellectual and conceptual framework for communicating the significance of an item. Policies may deal with fabric, setting, history, archaeology audiences and other people, contents, related places and objects, disturbance of fabric, research, records.

Meanings denote what an item signifies, indicates, evokes or expresses.

Media means the tools, techniques and technologies used to convey the interpretation. These can include signs, orientation, notices, guided and self guided walks, audio guides, installations, displays, models, dioramas, exhibitions, lighting, street naming, holograms, films, video, soundscapes, oral history, maps, brochures, books and catalogues, public art, writers and artists in residence programs, events, activities, role play, demonstrations, educational programs, websites, CD ROM programs, reconstructions, sets, and replicas and other means of communication.

Traditional owner – an Aboriginal person directly descendent from the original inhabitants of an area who has cultural association with the area deriving from traditions, observances, customs, beliefs or history of the original Aboriginal inhabitants of the area. Authorisation to obtain or document information about Aboriginal heritage may be obtained from an Aboriginal person or people who have traditional association to country; these may include traditional owners.

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2 INTERPRETATION – THE SHARING OF CULTURE

The heritage of New South Wales is identified and protected as a means of securing and maintaining landscape, places and objects valued as part of Australian culture and history. Heritage is a cultural asset, part of the identity of NSW, its regions and communities. It is linked with other aspects of culture and tradition, and part of the environment and community life.

Heritage conservation seeks to sustain the values of heritage landscapes, places and objects, individually and collectively, so that the community and visitors can continue to appreciate, experience and learn from them and about them, and so that they can be passed on to future generations.

Heritage interpretation is a means of sharing Australian history and culture with other communities, new citizens, visitors, and people overseas. It is also a means of passing on the knowledge of Australian history, culture and values to new generations.

Interpretation is only undertaken within the cultural traditions of which it is part, and respecting the culture of the audience. This approach is easy to recognise and appreciate in relation to Aboriginal heritage, but it also applies to non-Aboriginal heritage.

The connections between people and natural and cultural heritage are often expressed through art, music, literature, dance, food and other creative works and traditions. These are traditional forms of 'interpretation'.

3 WHY INTERPRET?

The significance of some heritage items is easy to understand; but the values of others are not obvious and require interpretation. Many items have values that warrant interpretation.

Interpretation enhances understanding and enjoyment of heritage items by appealing to different audiences, different levels of experience and knowledge and different learning styles.

Interpretation strengthens and sustains the relationships between the community and its heritage and may provide economic and social benefits for the community.

4 WHEN TO INTERPRET?

Interpretation is an integral part of the experience of significant heritage items. Its particulars are determined by the nature and circumstances of the item.

- For many heritage items, interpretation is an occasional opportunity, often linked with open days or other community celebrations.
- For items which attract visitors, interpretation is an integral component of management.
- For many places, interpretation is undertaken for both educational and recreational purposes.
- For other items, the opportunity for interpretation is provided when the use changes or when works are undertaken.
- For industrial and agricultural landscapes, interpretation is important so that before the use changes, people can appreciate the significance of the place.

Access for interpretation is not always necessary or appropriate for reasons of security, safety, and privacy, or because of the meanings of the item to people. For example, if the use of a building is well known and part of its significance, and that use is continuing, then it may not need other interpretation to communicate its significance. Examples are: a court house, or a religious property or a private residence or a hospital, or a natural area. Access before or during works may be appropriate if new discoveries are made.

5 INTERPRETATION: A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY AND OPPORTUNITY

Heritage conservation is a responsibility shared amongst governments, communities and the owners of heritage places. The NSW Heritage System involves legislation administered by a number of government agencies, including the NSW Heritage Office, the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources and the Department of Environment and Conservation and the Ministry for the Arts.

Interpretation encompasses all the ways in which an item can become known and appreciated. People are increasingly recognising the importance and benefits both of conveying 'what's important' about an item to other people, and of encouraging appreciation of all kinds of heritage, natural and cultural.

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In the recent past, interpretation of heritage was often seen as an end product; such as signs to be erected after the building works or walking tracks were completed. Now, managers and their advisors recognise that many aspects of management impact upon the visitor's perception of an item; and also that there are opportunities for interpretation for workers as well as visitors in day to day management.

The development and management of interpretation may be a collaborative process, involving state, and local governments, museums and private owners.

Owners of heritage items, and state and local government authorities have devised many innovative ways of interpreting heritage items, such as CD ROMs and websites, and artist-in-residence programs.

6 INTERPRETATION IS ABOUT COMMUNICATING

Interpretation means all the ways of presenting the significance of an item, i.e. the importance of an item, beyond its utilitarian value. Significance refers to the historical, scientific, cultural, social, archaeological, architectural, natural or aesthetic value of the item. Significance is reflected in the item, fabric (physical material) of the item, its setting (the area beyond its boundaries), use, associations, meanings, records, related items and related objects. Items may have a range of values and meanings for different individuals or groups.

Interpretation of an item though the care (or treatment) of the fabric, is central to heritage conservation in Australia, and the principles of best practice are set out in the *Australia ICOMOS Charter for places of cultural significance (The Burra Charter)*; *Ask First: a guide to respecting Indigenous heritage values and places*, and the *Australian Natural Heritage Charter* (see 12 Sources of Information).

As well as the care of the fabric of an item, interpretation is also about communicating significance.

Here are some ways of describing interpretation:

Interpretation is the act of identifying or transmitting meaning (Bill Nethery 1995)

Interpretation is an attempt to create understanding (Alderson)

Most people need extra information to understand heritage significance, and interpretation is a means of providing it (Linda Young 1995)

Interpretation is revelation based on information (Robyn Christie)

Interpretation is a means of communicating ideas and feelings which help people enrich their understanding and appreciation of their world and their role within it... (Australian Heritage Commission)

Interpretation is a means of communicating ideas and feelings which helps people enrich their understanding and appreciation of their world, and their role in it. (Interpretation Australia Association)

Interpretation is the communication of the tangible and intangible heritage values of heritage places (Geoff Ashley 2003)

Interpretation is a creative use of historical material/site/concept/ that draws broadly from a range of formal and informal sources (Anne Martin 2003)

Interpretation is the unfolding of the multiple meanings of an object or place (Anonymous 1987)

Interpretation is a way of telling stories about people and places (Kylie Winkworth)

Well conceived and well delivered interpretation demands a clear understanding of both the item and the audience. It can be complex, operating on several levels, using a variety of means and methods, or it can be simple and direct, using minimal words, tools and devices. Successful interpretation engages the audience, and provokes their interest and reflection about the item and its values in a way that sustains the ambience and significance of the item.

7 INTERPRETATION MEDIA

Interpretation can occur in a variety of ways using a variety of media. The media are chosen to match the needs and character of the audience. The media that suit one item and its audience might not be suitable for another item.

Some examples of media are:

AT THE ITEM (place, building, work, relic, movable object or precinct)

Interpretation can include:

Treatment of the fabric - such as the retention of evidence of former use such as signs or marks from machinery now removed

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Use - of the item as a whole - for a building this might mean use of rooms or other spaces, and the retention of gardens as gardens

Furnishings and other objects – both existing and introduced

Objects - existing or introduced

Signs - permanent, fixed, movable and temporary

Mixed media associated with conservation activities (such as recording or works); and interpretation associated with management activities – such as staff training

IN THE SETTING (the area around the item which may include the visual catchment)

Interpretation can include:

Protection of significant characteristics of setting by heritage or planning controls (e.g. height controls to protect amenity); management of vegetation to retain views; signs and viewing places; public artworks, activities related to an area or theme.

PUBLICATIONS / PUBLICITY /SOUVENIRS

Interpretation can include:

Posters, pamphlets, books; internet web sites, interactive search programs; videos, audios and tapes/ CD ROMs; school project material; souvenirs - post cards, models, tea towels, images.

EVENTS/ACCESS TO THE ITEM

Interpretation may include: oral histories, video recordings, providing opportunities for people to assist with maintenance; access to the item through day-to-day use and management; access via tours, open days, events during works; commemorative and celebratory events; events for associated people and special interest groups; and Artist in residence programs.

ACTIVITIES AWAY FROM THE ITEM

Presentation may include:

Events and activities related to the place; exhibitions; other media –such as radio, TV, internet, etc.

8 OPPORTUNITIES FOR HERITAGE INTERPRETATION: WHAT IS EXPECTED BY THE APPROVALS PROCESS?

The approvals process provides opportunities for public appreciation of heritage through interpretation.

For State Heritage Register items undergoing change that requires Heritage Council approval, information about interpretation may be a condition of approval.

As part of the documentation with the application, either a Conservation Management Plan (CMP), a Conservation Management Strategy (CMS) or a Heritage Impact Statement (HIS) will be required.

Each of these documents may include *interpretation* as one of the issues addressed, but with a different level of detail in each case.

The Heritage Office will provide advice about which type of report applies to an item.

For items which require a Conservation Management Strategy or Heritage Impact Statement, advice about potential interpretation will be required, including opportunities for interpretation before, during and after works, the aspects of the item and its significance to be interpreted, and the likely audiences.

The information about interpretation will be short – 1 page. The aim is to encourage the applicant to think about interpretation from the beginning. Opportunities for interpretation may include: guided tours for local residents before works commence; signs for passers by; a talk by an historian; guided tours during works when old fabric or archaeological discoveries are revealed.

A CMP will include a policy for interpretation integrated with other policies for the care of the fabric, research, access to the item, etc. The interpretation policy addresses:

- interpretation of the fabric (material) of the item through its care or treatment
- needs for other interpretation media (if any)
- audience profile & key themes
- opportunities for interpretation during other stages of the project and in ongoing management and potential media
- the reasoning for the policy and links with other policies; and also any matters that warrant research, investigation or discussion, such as research about the audience for interpretation.

The preparation of the CMP may include interpretation, eg linked with site investigations, or other research, or with activities to find and involve people for whom the item has special associations and meanings.

Conditions of consent

The aim of including interpretation as a condition of consent is to provide interpretation of the place *in addition to the conservation of the place itself*. A requirement to prepare an Interpretation Plan is to facilitate interpretation, and to follow best practice; it is not an end in itself.

The *interpretation plan* provides the reasoning for the choice of media, and advice about their design and production. For items where a plan is required it is likely that several media may be used to

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interpret significance, and that interpretation will occur at each stage of the conservation project.

In assessing the interpretation plan, the consent authority will want to know that arrangements are in place to develop, design and produce media (such as signs or other works) that are related to the work or the finished development, and that the need for ongoing management is recognised.

[The Heritage Office is preparing guidelines for the preparation of *heritage interpretation briefs* and *heritage interpretation plans*.]

The Heritage Office has examples of interpretation briefs and the sequence of tasks to be undertaken in an interpretation project.

9 HOW CAN STATE AGENCIES, GOVERNMENTS AND OTHER ORGANISATIONS SUPPORT HERITAGE INTERPRETATION?

- Interpret heritage in their ownership or care, applying the *guidelines for interpreting heritage places & items*
- Adopt the NSW Heritage Office *Interpretation guidelines*, or use them to prepare guidelines specific to the heritage in their care
- Provide funding and grant programs for interpretation planning and implementation
- Compile and secure records about heritage items in their care and make them publicly accessible (subject to cultural protocols and security)
- Undertake and encourage research about heritage
- Integrate heritage interpretation into management, for example, in community and cultural development and the arts and State of the Environment reporting
- Provide training in aspects of interpretation for managers of heritage items and for community groups. This could include training in guiding and related aspects of communication
- Collaborate with other organisations, eg. in open days, exhibitions, the sharing of information and skills, and projects that reveal the relationships between items and their contexts
- Collaborate with other organisations to provide training for marketing and project managers

10 WHAT CAN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS DO TO INTERPRET HERITAGE IN THEIR AREA?

Councils have a key role in sustaining the links between the local community, its history and its heritage. Interpretation is related to many council responsibilities and activities including: property management; libraries, museums and archives; community development, culture and the arts; tourism; and environmental and heritage planning.

Councils can:

- Adopt the *guidelines for interpreting heritage places & items* and use them to interpret heritage in its care – such as town hall, parks, bushland
- Include interpretation in their Corporate or Management Plan, and integrate interpretation and support for it into relevant council departments
- Include heritage interpretation in Cultural Plans and as a factor in State of the Environment reporting
- Include interpretation as an objective in local environmental plans and development control plans and as a condition of heritage approvals
- Provide information and research to assist owners in complying with this condition of approval
- Protect the setting and amenity of heritage items, e.g. to provide green links between areas of remnant bushland, or protect the views to and from heritage buildings
- Collaborate with the community to prepare an Interpretation strategy for the LGA (or a part of it); and to set priorities for interpretation. The strategy can provide a framework to coordinate interpretation planning and research about themes and audiences to guide funding and development of interpretation projects.
- Develop and implement interpretation of important local places and themes.
- Collaborate with Traditional owners and other Aboriginal people to undertake an Aboriginal heritage study with an interpretation component
- Use existing data about the resident community and visitors to understand the potential audience. Support research about audiences for interpretation in their area

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- Engage a historian to research and document the relationships between local people and significant heritage items
- Identify opportunities for interpretation in the council's community-based heritage study or heritage study review
- Engage a museum advisor to work with the community to assess the significance of its collections and to link them with the people, places and historical themes of the area
- Compile records of heritage and its conservation in a local history reference collection (with links to ensure that reports and research produced as part of the approvals process can be stored in the library (subject to cultural protocols and security))
- Provide training for staff, volunteers and community about heritage interpretation
- Collaborate with neighbouring Councils to explore opportunities for interpretation in the region, or for the interpretation of specific themes or types of items, eg common resources or opportunities for cultural tourism
- Collaborate with other organisations and with owners of heritage and community organizations to interpret heritage. (e.g. by preparing interpretation plans for an area of group of items, to which owners could provide specific interpretation about their item, following guidelines; or by an exhibition or open day)

These ingredients underpin and inform best practice in heritage interpretation in New South Wales. They are derived from principles in *the NSW Heritage Act*, *The Burra Charter*, *the Australian Natural Heritage Charter* and *Ask First: A guide to respecting Indigenous heritage places and value*; from documents about heritage interpretation and from investigations about interpretation practice in New South Wales.

The ingredients work together: they are interrelated and overlap.

11 THE INGREDIENTS FOR BEST PRACTICE IN INTERPRETATION

There are many documents setting out principles and other aspects of interpretation practice. They each have a specific purpose, or audience, and mainly relate to items where the majority of visitors are attracted because of the heritage values, for example, place museums.

The **ingredients** of best practice in heritage interpretation (set out in these guidelines) are intended for a wider use: they apply to **all** environmental heritage, natural and cultural, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, and include movable items. They can be applied to both small and large items of state and/or local significance.

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THE INGREDIENTS FOR BEST PRACTICE

INGREDIENT 1 INTERPRETATION, PEOPLE AND CULTURE

Respect for the special connections between people and items

Heritage interpretation is the sharing of culture. Interpretation is only undertaken within the cultural traditions of which it is part, and respecting the culture of the audience. The need for this approach is easy to recognise and appreciate in relation to Aboriginal heritage, but it also applies to non-Aboriginal heritage.

Aboriginal culture and heritage is a central element in Aboriginal identity, history, spirituality and customary law. For Aboriginal cultural heritage, interpretation is undertaken to share information among family, kin and other Aboriginal people and with non-Aboriginal people. It is only undertaken with the approval and direct involvement of a traditional owner or an Aboriginal person/s with cultural association. Community protocols apply as to who may have access to places and knowledge, in accordance with traditional laws and customs.

Aboriginal people's cultural and heritage may not always be confined to traditional country. Many Aboriginal people may also have connections through relocation and removal from traditional country. Aboriginal people have the primary role in interpreting these places, and non-Aboriginal people can assist.

The history of Aboriginal people, as the first owners of the land, underpins the history of many heritage items, and becomes a part of an item's interpretation (particularly for landscapes / natural areas). This notion is encapsulated in the practice of acknowledging Aboriginal people and their country at the opening of special events, and in the phrase 'Always was, always will be Aboriginal land'.

For non-Aboriginal people, the conventions about cultural ownership of heritage, and the related responsibilities, are not clearly defined. Heritage professionals should not assume that they have the right to obtain and document information about Aboriginal heritage items or the skills required to interpret them.

Over the past decade, interpreters and other heritage practitioners have, through working with communities, developed a better appreciation of the connections between people and heritage. New conventions are evolving about the participation in interpretation of people for whom an item has special meanings. Protocols have developed about oral history, the use of photographs and objects, and some intellectual property, and these may also be relevant to other material knowledge and its use in interpretation.

Applying ingredient 1

To respect the associations between people and an item a collaborative approach is appropriate, with heritage interpreters providing opportunities for people associated with an item to participate in planning for interpretation and in preparing interpretation media, such as activities and events.

Aboriginal interpretation of landscape – Lanyon, ACT

Many of the interpretation approaches used at publicly owned heritage items can also be applied to privately-owned items. The paddocks around Lanyon homestead in the ACT are leased for pastoral/grazing/rural use. By arrangement with the lessee, the Museums and Galleries section of the ACT Cultural Facilities Corporation have collaborated with the Ngunnawal people to provide an Aboriginal interpretation of the landscape. Traditional elders have periodically guided tours of the landscape including walks to a nearby scarred tree from which a large section of bark has been removed (possibly for use as a canoe); to the top of a hill, to explain seasonal migrations of both animals and people, and to the Murrumbidgee river to discuss its significance as a food source and as a means of travel. The walks end with a picnic and an opportunity to learn about Aboriginal bush foods.

They have been a popular family activity for over 10 years, and provide the means for Aboriginal people to enable non-Aboriginal visitors to understand and respect the landscape and former land use, and to compare past and present usage.

The Waterhouse weekend at Eryldene

Eryldene, the home of the late Professor E. G. Waterhouse, is best known for its garden of camellias established by the professor, and for the house and garden layout designed by the architect William Hardy Wilson. It is also significant for the picture it provides of family and suburban life on Sydney's north shore. In recent years the Eryldene Trust has broadened its interpretation events to include the Waterhouse family, and their memories of life at Eryldene. The garden will always remain the main focus of interpretation; but the active involvement of family members brings the nature and use of the garden to life for visitors. Some of the family uses of the garden have been translated into events; for example, every August when the azaleas were in full bloom, Mrs. Waterhouse held an afternoon tea party on the tennis court lawn. The Trust often uses the lawn for serving afternoon teas. At the 'Meet the family' weekend in 2003, the grandchildren of Prof and Mrs. Waterhouse provided tours of the house and garden, relating their memories of visiting Eryldene. Also that weekend, some of the family memorabilia, lent for the occasion, were displayed in small showcases. Ian Waterhouse (one of the sons of Prof and Mrs. Waterhouse) is a member of the Trust board and the primary source/authority for information about the house and the family. He is actively involved in the events held at Eryldene, as are other family members.

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Ideally, the CMP will identify the people for whom the item has special associations and meanings (as a group or individually); and also identify the aspects of the item that have special meanings for them. Remember, recent changes to an item may have greater significance to living people than the much earlier past. For many places the surviving documents do not convey the life or character of the item, e.g. an industrial workplace, and contact with workers or management is needed to understand its social history.

Finding associated people and getting their stories can be time consuming and is often overlooked in CMPs, especially if funds are tight. In consequence, this research may need to be undertaken as input to interpretation if the item is to be interpreted in a meaningful way.

The first step is to identify the people. This may have been done in the CMP, but if not, it is included in the interpretation plan or project. Some items may be associated with more than one cultural group, and may have a variety of meanings. See Ingredient 5 – Themes.

For many items, especially those where ownership and use have changed many times, there may be no people with strong associations to the item, and such research may not be needed.

Local communities have a proprietary/custodial interest in their heritage and may be able to collaborate in interpretation.

Professionals involved with interpretation are now approaching their role as one of assisting communities in the interpretation of heritage.

For interpreters, the success of projects often depends on active collaboration with associated people. Where there is goodwill, an interpretation project can be a shared experience with far reaching benefits for the community. Where this does not exist, a project is at risk of being criticised, ridiculed or simply ignored.

By seeking out those who have had particular involvement with an item, and by making sure that more than one associated person or group of people is consulted, a variety of unexpected issues and potential contributions could emerge.

An experienced heritage interpretation practitioner will possess the skills to convey and reveal meaning and information, and will also have knowledge of a range of interpretive media, but the stories, subtleties and nuances can often only be found out from associated people.

Interpreting an inspirational landscape – Illawarra Escarpment

In 1999, with support from the Australia Council, the Illawarra region of Councils engaged Sally Gray and Associates to undertake a cultural mapping project of the Illawarra Escarpment. The aim of the project was to understand the associations and meanings of the escarpment to local communities, and to work with communities to identify themes and locations for art works reflecting and commemorating those meanings. Many local people were involved in discussion about the escarpment and what it meant to them and the report of the project some of their stories were collected in an appendix. It also includes lists of significant places and themes and sites for potential art works. Wollongong Council commissioned a further brief report translating the conclusions of the report (as it related to its LGA) into briefs for local artists to undertake works. The involvement of the local people provided opportunities for people to learn from one another about the escarpment and what it signifies to people.

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Obtaining the interest and confidence of those people is the first challenge, but there should also be a clearly defined process to follow.

Seek out associated people

Arrange a meeting to discuss the project

Explain the purpose of the project. Seek their support. Don't do the project if they don't support it

Ask for help

Follow up quickly on any suggestions

Devise a means of accepting and using any contributions offered and agree on any tasks to be carried out and deadlines to be met.

Meet again to discuss progress, share suggestions and obtain feedback

Prepare draft proposal – obtain agreement

Discuss implementation and with members of group/associated people

Devise (involving the group/associated people) a way of evaluating the finished product

Consider:

Have associated people been identified?

Are opportunities provided for associated people to participate in the planning, setting of priorities and delivery of interpretation?

Have opportunities to interpret, commemorate or celebrate significant associations between people and place been identified?

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INGREDIENT 2 HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE & SITE ANALYSIS

Understand the item and convey its significance

The aim of heritage interpretation is to convey significance. The significance of some items may be obvious because of their use or characteristics; but the significance of many items is not readily apparent, and should be explained by interpretation media; e.g. through explanatory materials, publications, and activities, subject to cultural protocols. All aspects of cultural and natural significance should be investigated. The significance of an item may change as the result of its continuing history; and the understanding of significance may change as a result of newly discovered information.

Applying ingredient 2

Understanding significance requires knowledge of all the aspects of the item that contribute to significance:

- The fabric (material) of the item (including objects)
- Its use and history of use
- The setting, including views
- Associations of people (past and present) with the place and the meanings of the place to people
- Related places and related objects

If all aspects of significance have not been investigated in the CMP, then further research may be needed, e.g. with associated people.

Many items have several values and in consequence, strategies need to be developed to ensure that all values (all aspects of significance) are considered over time. (See ingredients 5 & 6).

Activities or events not directly related to the formal presentation of significance (such as a ghost tour) can be used as a means of encouraging visitors to explore a place when they might not otherwise do so. However, these tangential ways of conveying significance should be only a part of the strategy to interpret an item.

Undertake an analysis of the item – a site or object survey. Understand the way the fabric of the item relates to its significance and to stories of use and change. Prepare a list of facilities and other resources and likely issues such as safety for visitors.

Consider:

Is the significance of the item readily understood?

Is interpretation needed for this item?

Are there themes or aspects of significance that haven't been adequately researched? For example historical themes, associations and meanings, or related items and objects?

Is more information needed about the importance of some aspects?

Is access for interpretation appropriate, having regard to meanings?

If access to the item is likely to be part of its interpretation: are there any parts of the item whose significance or conditions mean that visitation should be restricted or not allowed?

Understanding all values and understanding the audience - Royal National Park

The significance of Royal National Park is multi-faceted: its importance as a highly popular natural area, and its role in the national park movement are well known. It is also significant as a place that attracts a wide range of people and groups, including many overseas-born Australians and their families. The NPWS has commissioned research to improve understanding of the cultural associations and meanings of the park to visitors. Two publications have been produced: *A Multicultural Landscape*, by Martin Thomas, which focuses on the significance of Royal National Park to Sydney's Macedonian community; and *Moving Landscapes: National Parks and the Vietnamese Experience*, by Mandy Thomas, in which Vietnamese Australians speak of what nature meant to them in Vietnam, their experience of the Australian bush and their thoughts about the conservation ethic.

The NPWS plan to commission further research to improve understanding of the meaning and use of national parks, and to translate this understanding into interpretation of parks and reserves and related aspects of management.

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INGREDIENT 3 RECORDS AND RESEARCH

Use existing records of the item, research additional information, and make these publicly available (subject to security and cultural protocols)

Thorough research is at the heart of best practice interpretation. Interpretation should be based on the most accurate historical research and analysis available and on their faithful representation in all interpretive media and programs. This basis should be clearly documented in interpretation planning.

Records and research about an item are a major source for interpretation. Compiling an inventory of resources, including a schedule of records and a comprehensive bibliography, with advice about the location of material, is essential to the ongoing interpretation of an item. If this is not done, there is a risk that important understandings of the item will be overlooked.

Access to some records or research (intellectual property) may be restricted for cultural reasons, or for the security of the item itself. Information about the location of Aboriginal items may be restricted. Information about ownership of some heritage items should only be included in reports or public documents with the consent of the acknowledged owners or custodians

Applying ingredient 3

Ideally, a thoroughly researched schedule of records and research will be prepared as part of the conservation management plan, and the owners /custodians of a place will lodge the reports and records associated with conservation in a secure place. The lodgment of a records and research schedule, and copies of conservation records may be integrated with interpretation planning, if it has not already been undertaken as part of the conservation management plan.

The basis of any interpretation project is high quality data about the records and historical research, including oral history. Used with skill, historical records, such as diaries, sketches and photographs, provide a tangible link between the past and the present. Historians who have been involved in documenting the item should be consulted, if possible. Research for conservation management plans may be inadequate for interpretation. More research may be needed, especially about its associations with people. Records made before and during changes to an item or its context will become sources for future interpretation.

Original records need secure, protective storage, as well as copies for research and analysis.

Consider

Has a records and research schedule been compiled and lodged in a library or other secure place?

Have other likely sources of information (not researched) been identified?

Is information about the item readily available, (subject to cultural protocols and security)?

Is information about how people used the place available? What are the priorities for further research? Are primary sources available?

Researching inspirational landscape –the Illawarra escarpment

In 2003, as part of a preliminary study of the cultural significance of the Escarpment, heritage consultants investigated the escarpment as a source of Inspiration. The consultants were familiar with some of the many art works created about the escarpment, and the use of these works in exhibitions, and one of the team lived near the escarpment. Acting on the notion that art, in all its forms, is one of the ways people express the meaning of landscapes (a traditional form of 'interpretation'), the consultants compiled a catalogue of creative works related to the escarpment. They include paintings, sketches, engravings, photographs, sculpture and public art, literature, music and multi media. The catalogue includes a huge volume of work including poetry, novels, sculpture, music and songs, and also rock engravings, stencils, and paintings by Indigenous people. It helps understanding of the meaning of the escarpments, to past and present communities, and also provides the basis for ongoing interpretation, through publications and exhibitions.

Research into the creative works related to heritage items is a valuable resource for ongoing interpretation, and can be updated or maintained on a regular basis. Such projects could be undertaken by local communities as input to heritage studies, or as projects involving community development and the arts.

Compiling photographs – Wollongong City Library on-line data base and CD

Provenancing building materials

A company recycling industrial building for apartments has included information about the history and the significance of the heritage items on its website and in other publications about its developments.

INTERPRETING HERITAGE PLACES AND ITEMS: GUIDELINES

INGREDIENT 4 AUDIENCES

Explore, respect and respond to the identified audience

Audience research and feedback is essential for relevant and effective interpretation. This involves identifying the expectations, preconceptions, physical requirements, cultural, demographic and behavioural characteristics of the audience, planning to meet their needs, and respecting their cultural values. The audience may include users of the item, workers, regular visitors, passers by and those who visit the place because of its heritage values. Another audience can be those at a distance from the item. Evaluating the audience response to interpretation, and the effectiveness of interpretation, is a regular part of management of an item that is permanently or regularly open to visitors.

Applying ingredient 4

One of the first steps in planning interpretation (other than conservation works) is to identify the audience; i.e. the people to whom the significance of the item is to be conveyed, and the people who might be likely to visit, or want to learn about it.

The audience may include the people associated with the item as well as the people who use it or work at the place/item etc or visit occasionally.

Understanding the audience affects all aspects of interpretation. It will inform the choice of media for interpretation as well as their content.

It may be necessary to devise a strategy for providing interpretation to a range of audiences, and a variety of media may be needed to convey significance and characteristics in a meaningful way. Local governments, area health services and tourism organisations hold data about local communities and visitors which can be helpful in determining the likely audience, and in assisting in presenting heritage in a way that attracts the visitors targeted.

The ongoing life and management of the item may provide opportunities for interpretation for specific audiences. Similarly, information revealed during works to a place may provide additional opportunities for interpretation.

Consider:

Have the likely audiences been identified and their demographic, psychographic and behavioural characteristics assessed?

Have the interpretation approaches been matched with the needs of the audiences?

Example:

Interpretation for workers, Sydney Harbour Federation Trust

The SHFT manages seven key sites on Sydney Harbour, formerly used by the Department of Defence. In 2004 the Trust ran workshops for workers at its sites to provide basis training in heritage conservation so that they would understand the values of the sites, and the reasoning behind their management.

Example:

Monitoring the needs of the audience, eg National park or nature reserve; perhaps a NPWS Discovery tour, or a license to a tour operator. Bridge Climb.

Example:

Interpretation of former **rural landscape within new residential** areas in the fringe of Sydney (or elsewhere if a worthy example can be found!). Audience is local new residents.

INTERPRETING HERITAGE PLACES AND ITEMS: GUIDELINES

INGREDIENT 5 THEMES

Make reasoned choices about themes, stories and strategies.

The significance of many places is multi-faceted, and it is often impracticable to communicate every facet. To identify themes and stories for interpretation, and strategies for communicating them, research needs to include the characteristics of the item, existing interpretation media, the audience, the potential media, and serendipitous opportunities for enhancing understanding. Not all themes and stories are necessarily appropriate or relevant to the identified audience, and reasoned choices need to be made following investigation and consultation. The themes and stories that relate the fabric/physical characteristics of the item to the audience, and that link cultural with natural values are often appropriate. Over time, opportunities to explore and develop further stories or aspects of significance may arise, for example, by linking with current events.

Some heritage items are associated with more than one cultural group, and may have a variety of meanings, some of which may appear to be conflicting. It is desirable to interpret all such meanings rather than present the values of one group and exclude others. Another approach is to acknowledge the 'bias' or point of view of an interpretation. Skill and experience in interpretation, combined with the involvement of associated people is need in these circumstances

Applying ingredient 5

When approaching interpretation of a theme which may be complex or controversial, care should be taken to deal with such issues in an inclusive, objective and open manner. Involve people who have a detailed knowledge of the themes in considering potential approaches.

For an item which is accessible to visitors on a regular basis, the choice of themes for interpretation involves a detailed understanding of its characteristics, history, people and its context, and especially its 'people stories'. The major themes chosen might not be identical with those in the CMP; but the reasoning needs to be included.

To some extent, the theme of Aboriginal ownership and occupation of land is a theme for all items – it is the beginning of the story of the item and how it came to be as it is now.

For landscapes, such as rural areas and national parks, Aboriginal ownership is always a theme and should be acknowledged in all publications. Other themes might include dispossession, maintaining and reaffirming traditions. Non-Aboriginal occupation of the land it also a theme for consideration.

When choosing the themes, consider opportunities to link the place with other places and objects, and to link cultural and natural values.

100 significant objects of the Riverina

2003 the Museum of the Riverina at Wagga Wagga, working with other museums in the region, began a project to improve the information about some of the key objects in collections. The aim was to tell some of the stories of the region through objects and their relationship with people and places and historical themes. Objects were selected for detailed research, which was undertaken by museum volunteers with guidance from museum curators. The information collected is to be used in a variety of ways, to connect people with the region's heritage.

Shops and shopping - What's in store

For many heritage items, their use is central to their significance; and retaining the use is the preferred method of protecting their heritage values. In the late 1990s, the NSW Heritage Office commissioned a thematic survey of shopping in NSW, including documentary research, research of collections and a survey of significant shops. The Powerhouse Museum has also researched retailing in NSW and collaborated with the Heritage Office to publish a history of retailing in Australia, including vignettes about shops and their proprietors (some spanning three generations) and with advice about protecting Australians retail heritage and advice about recording, when change occurs.

Example: linking Aboriginal and natural values: eg A guide to Wiradjuri Places of Wagga Wagga, Wagga Wagga City Council and Wagga Wagga Local Aboriginal Land Council [in HO library]. Mention that the heritage study on which this was based, was undertaken by 'other Aboriginal people with interests', with many other people and organizations involved. It could also illustrate *Collaboration*.

Traditional owners interpreting country – Kakadu National Park and managing visitors.

Based on ABC Radio program *Awaye*, 27th August 2004. Kakadu is owned by Traditional owners and leased back into Australian government in a joint management agreement. Traditional owners live on their country. Parts of the park are available to visitors, interpreted mostly for their natural values. Cultural tourism is developing slowly, in accordance with each particular clan group, and the knowledge holders within that clan.

Traditional owners want to share connections with country with visitors, so that visitors appreciated the meaning of the land to people and not only its natural and scenic values. Each clan group, and the knowledge holders within the clan, determine what parts of their country may be available to visitors, and what knowledge and lore will be shared with visitors. The clans are working with tour operators to plan the interpretation approach with Aboriginal people meeting with the visitors.

INTERPRETING HERITAGE PLACES AND ITEMS: GUIDELINES

Consider:

Have the themes, stories and people associated with the item been identified?

Is the reasoning for the choice of interpretation media and messages explained in the plan?

Are controversial issues presented, acknowledging different facets?

INTERPRETING HERITAGE PLACES AND ITEMS: GUIDELINES

INGREDIENT 6 ENGAGING THE AUDIENCE

Stimulate thought and dialogue, provoke response and enhance understanding

Interpretive media are designed to reveal meanings and encourage audience response by adding value and human interest to the presentation of information. A worthwhile visitor experience is an important objective for heritage interpretation and provides physical, intellectual and emotive or spiritual access to items' significance. Communicating significance is not limited to providing information; it also involves the responsibility of enabling the audience to appreciate the related circumstances and values that have made the item the way it is.

Applying ingredient 6

A worthwhile visitor experience is an important objective whenever people are invited to visit a heritage item. Revealing significance involves allowing the audience to experience heritage and to engage with related themes, stories and issues through intellectual, physical and emotive/spiritual access

As some items have many meanings, and may generate a variety of responses, care needs to be taken in presenting sufficient options for the interpretation of the item to be understood by the widest and most varied audience.

One strategy for revealing meanings is to link the item with a subject of topical interest, such as a news item, finding a common theme between the item and the story. Similarly, activities at an item can provide an opportunity for people to experience the item and learn something about it.

Consider:

Has a range of interpretive options been considered?

Have topical issues been included?

Do the media chosen respect the meaning of the place to people?

Approaching interpretation through popular culture

In 2004 the migration of Albatrosses presented as a race, in which birds fitted with tracking devices fly a course from Australia to South Africa. Information known about individual birds was described in terms of their form, and high profile people sponsored and punted on particular birds. This analogy provided a vehicle for describing the life and habits of Albatrosses and drew attention to their conservation needs. The tracking of the birds also provided scientific data to assist conservation

Provide an opportunity for people to explore - Tumberumba

The Pioneer Women's Hut at Tumberumba has an extensive collection of domestic items (textiles, kitchen equipment, 'make-do' furniture and fittings, pattern books, recipe books, and oral histories etc). Every item has a detailed provenance, and the collection is exceptionally well documented and has been researched by local volunteers.

It is interpreted in a manner which responds directly to the needs of the visitors. It is entirely managed by volunteers who are trained NOT to guide visitors through the collection, but only to respond to their questions. This approach was developed after observing the way in which visitors interacted and reminisced. There are no barriers or prohibitions, and the collection can be handled freely. It is an interesting example of subtle and passive interpretation.

Example:

Interpreting national parks through the recent history – fires at Royal NP

NPWS ran guided tours of the Royal after the 1994 bushfires, when the fire damaged areas were beginning to recover, but were closed to visitors, but recovering. Guided tours provided an opportunity to interpret the impacts of the fire.

INTERPRETING HERITAGE PLACES AND ITEMS: GUIDELINES

INGREDIENT 7 CONTEXT

Research the physical, historical, spiritual and contemporary context of the item, including related items, and respect local amenity and culture.

Context is often an important aspect of significance. This may have changed over time, and explanation of an earlier context – physical, historical, or spiritual – may be needed to explain a present situation. Relationships between places and objects may not be immediately obvious and may require research. Values often extend beyond the physical boundaries of items. How an item represents or reflects other places or objects may be an important aspect of its significance, and interpretation in conjunction with related items may be appropriate.

Local amenity and character should not be compromised or obscured by interpretation media or associated new works. The presentation of a place, and any accompanying facilities and their use, should not overwhelm or displace local culture.

Applying ingredient 7

The boundary of a heritage item relates to many factors, and it is common for its values to extend beyond those boundaries. This is true for all types of items, natural and cultural.

For heritage items that are landmarks in the landscape, it may be practicable to provide interpretation at a distance, from a lookout or the opposite side of a bay. Similarly, another type of publication or exhibition (e.g. about a type of place or a locality) may provide interpretation.

Protecting the physical context (setting) of an item and interpreting that necessity may be vital for its survival.

The protection of the physical context of an item may require agreement with neighbours or planning controls.

Consider:

Is the context of the item included in its interpretation plan?

Are there opportunities to interpret the item away from its setting?

Are there opportunities to collaborate with others to interpret heritage in the context of an area or with similar items?

Are the heritage values in the setting of a place (beyond its boundaries) recognised and protected?

Aboriginal interpretation of a region - Bataluk Cultural Trail, East Gippsland, Victoria

The development of the Butaluk Cultural Trail was a joint initiative of five Aboriginal organisations and two local councils in East Gippsland; and was supported by other government and private organisations. A fold-out brochure (two A2 sized pages) was produced. It introduced the landscape, aspects of Koori history and culture; dreamtime stories and traditional lifestyles; European invasion and settlement; and present day lifestyles. The brochure shows a map of Gippsland with ten places to visit and learn more about Aboriginal heritage; including guided tours, and gardens with Koori plant trails. The brochure also provides a map of known killings of Aboriginals by Europeans (massacre sites). Advice about where to learn more about Koori heritage and culture is included.

Opening a private garden and respecting local amenity

Australia's Open Garden Scheme has successfully involved local communities in valuing and interpreting gardens by opening groups which display particular styles or characteristics. The values are then reinforced through volunteer guides, owner written notes, radio interviews, and stories in local newspapers. For example, the gardens at Bickleigh Vale (a small bush development near Melbourne where noted garden designer Edna Walling lived and worked) were open over a weekend, and attracted thousands of visitors. The involvement of the entire community prevented neighbourhood friction over parking, numbers of people, privacy etc, and also enhanced the heritage value of the area.

Town layout and its context - Adelaide

The town layout for the City of Adelaide is listed in the Register of the National Estate as well as the State Heritage Register and City Council list. The City Council has prepared a brochure about the designed for visitors and residents. A brief history of Adelaide, from Tandanya - Aboriginal Adelaide - to the present, has been published by the State History Centre. It includes Colonel Light's plan and Wakefield's scheme for settlement of South Australia, of which the plan was a part. It includes 'places to find', directs readers to some of Adelaide's distinctive features, its plan, its British foundations, its buildings, parks, and cultural diversity. A chronology and sources for further information are provided. In combination with other interpretation, these two publications interpret the city of Adelaide's layout and its context.

INTERPRETING HERITAGE PLACES AND ITEMS: GUIDELINES

INGREDIENT 8 AUTHENTICITY, AMBIENCE AND SUSTAINABILITY

Develop interpretation methods and media which sustain the significance of the items, its character and authenticity

Interpretation should respond to each particular situation, and should transmit meanings directly and indirectly without compromising heritage values. Introduced material (media) should not interfere with or change the item or its context, or put it at risk. When new structures or works are introduced (e.g. to reduce weathering) they should be reversible without damage or risk to significant fabric. Access, to part or whole of a place may need to be limited because of fragility or security, or its meaning to its cultural custodians. For other places or objects, visitation may sustain their ongoing care by providing a source of income. Risk management is a part of interpretation planning.

Applying ingredient 8

Care is needed in planning media/works introduced to an item to help people understand its significance, and find their way around. Every change, temporary or permanent has the potential to change the way people experience a place. The placement of signs and the facilities needed for visitors (for safety or amenity) are examples.

When new structures are introduced, for example to reduce weathering to an important feature, they should be reversible –i.e. able to be removed without damage to the significant fabric.

When commissioning artworks, it is vital for the interpretation objective to be clear and for the artist to accept it.

Specialist advice is always useful in planning for visitors in a way that minimises impacts on the significance and ambience of the item. Sometimes the needs of the visitor prompt changes to the place and how it functions. For example, the historical way of approaching a place may be replaced by another route that provides greater convenience. When such changes are considered, options and *unintended effects* should always be investigated.

Some methods may be as simple as re-opening a closed entrance, or redirecting traffic, or using colour as an interpretive tool.

Consider:

Is the interpretation appropriate to the values and characteristics of the item?

Is access for interpretation appropriate, and under what circumstances?

If access to the item is provided, are people able to experience its environmental character and qualities, with minimal impact on ambience, amenity or sustainability of the item?

Are the interpretation media (such as signs or displays) reversible, with no impact on significant fabric?

Will the media under consideration present the item / component / feature in an appropriate way, without distortion or adverse impact?

Old Government House Parramatta

For over twenty years, the established method of showing people around the house was to enter via a back door. In a review of interpretation, the National Trust has changed its approach and now directs visitors around the front of the building to enter by the front door. This ensures that they can appreciate the position of the house and its relationship with Parramatta, as well as entering the house at a point designed for public entry and from which it is easy to understand its layout and function.

Example:

Walking in wilderness areas – Nadgee Nature Reserve & Howe wilderness area

NSW NPWS (part of DEC) and Parks Service Victoria have adopted complementary policies for allowing bushwalkers in the large wilderness that 'crosses' their common boundary.

NSW NPWS has a limit to the number of permits for people to walk in Nadgee NR. Both to protect and sustain its natural condition and to maintain the ambience of the wilderness. The Christmas-New Year holiday time is popular with bushwalkers and the two agencies advise one another about bookings etc.

Example:

Lark Quarry, Winton Queensland

Canopy over the footprints of dinosaurs, protecting the site, providing the opportunity to see it, and designed to minimise impacts on the natural rock formations and the vegetation, applying skills needed to achieve a harmonious design.

INTERPRETING HERITAGE PLACES AND ITEMS: GUIDELINES

INGREDIENT 9 CONSERVATION PLANNING AND WORKS

Integrate interpretation in conservation planning, and in all stages of a conservation project

Planning for interpretation should start at the beginning of a conservation project and then be integrated into each stage: in investigations leading to the preparation of a conservation management plan, and before, during and after completion of works.

Conservation Management Plans (CMPs) and Plans of Management (the primary management documents for public open space, such as national parks) include a policy for interpretation of the item, integrated with other policies about the care of the fabric, the use and activities at the places, and research about it.

(See NSW Heritage Office, *Conservation Management Documents*)

For state heritage items undergoing change, and requiring heritage approval, information about interpretation is likely to be required with the documents supporting the applications, and as a condition of approval.

Privately owned houses are an exception; opportunities for their interpretation are available at other times linked with other places, e.g. through publications, walking tours, or open days.

Interpretation is not confined to an end product of a construction process – such as signs along a walking track or explaining the former use of a recycled building. Opportunities for communicating significance by presentation are also likely in each stage and activity of a conservation project: in investigations leading to a report (such as a conservation management plan); prior to or during works; and in the ongoing management. Activities and events (large and small) have a key role, especially in retaining the links between people and places.

Applying ingredient 9

Interpretation linked with investigations

Interpretation can be integrated in to investigations undertaken as input to a CMP. The opportunities need to be matched with potential audiences: for example, the historian and architect could give a talk about their discoveries to a local history group; or an open day could be a means of finding people associated with a place as well as interpretation to the local community.

Interpretation before and during works

An obvious opportunity for interpretation occurs when major changes are happening (e.g. to improve facilities or to change use). At these times, an item may change substantially, and access can provide an opportunity to appreciate it before the change occurs, to see how it functioned in a meaningful way. After works are completed, it is often difficult to imagine the past (even using photos or a well-informed guide); so providing the opportunity for people to experience the last days of a significant use is very important.

Interpretation using temporary structures - Sydney Opera House

The Opera house is undergoing major works to solve conservation and functional issues. One component is the renovation of the stage door between the concert hall and the opera theatre. During the work a temporary stage door was needed – in the area where performers and others involved in productions enter the building. Initially, standard portable units were proposed, but the on-site project manager suggested another approach. He recognised that many staff members had a long association with the Opera house and that the present stage door had many meanings for them and for others. They were accustomed to the present furniture and had stories to tell about stage door life. The project manager suggested a temporary structure combining the original fittings and furniture with materials to be used in the new stage door. This approach provided a transition between the old and the new for people using the stage door. They could adjust to the new fitout and space whilst continuing to use the original furniture. Three walls of the structure were constructed from translucent materials with overlaid with images derived from the architect Joern Utzon's early sketches. Instead of being a temporary eyesore to be tolerated, the approach and interpretation has been appreciated by both staff and visitors.

Interpretation during works – St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney

When major works were underway at St Mary's Cathedral, the priest overseeing the project and the on-site project manager collaborated to make the works accessible to people who might want to visit. The completion of the towers attracted interest far beyond the people of the diocese. The towers had been unfinished for over seventy years, and as large-scale stone construction is rare in Sydney, the builders and the cathedral's custodians recognised the public nature of the project, which was supported by both private contribution and public funds. The construction workers were kept up to date with progress and were encouraged to interact with visitors and to bring family and friends to visit. Every Friday, the on-site project manager arranged for interested professionals – architects, engineers, builders and conservation practitioners – to visit the building and to learn about the works. On Saturdays, members of a nominated parish were invited to visit, and were able to see work on the towers, and were also given the opportunity to see other parts of the building.

N.B. The same approach can be applied to the regeneration of bushland and development of walking tracks or other works in natural areas.

INTERPRETING HERITAGE PLACES AND ITEMS: GUIDELINES

Safety may be a concern for access; but the safety needs of the visitor are the same as those of the worker, and provided appropriate footwear and other safety measures are followed, access can be practicable, although numbers of people may be limited and always with a guide. Temporary signs and photocopied handouts can be used to help interpret the item.

For access during periods of change, the audiences targeted may be special interest groups, with clear limitations on numbers and the extent of access. Remember, providing a worthwhile visitor experience is the primary objective.

Access during works can help create an identity for a new use (which will develop its own meanings and role within the community). If archaeological excavation is warranted, - if it's of interest to archaeologists - it's likely to be of interest to the community, and possibly more so, because the community is not as familiar with archaeological material, and may be more attached to the place. The archaeological finds provide opportunities for display, at the time of excavation and later, e.g. in a building on the site.

Billboards securing the site can be used to interpret significance using images and text, as well as to anticipate the new development.

Interpretation at the completion of a conservation project

The care of the fabric of an item, natural or cultural, can affect people's perception and appreciation of an item and its significance.

For most places that warrant the preparation of an Interpretation Plan, it is likely that several media (matched with audiences) will be needed. For places visited by many people, the media used are likely to include providing opportunities for access (subject to security, cultural protocols and risks to the fabric), images and signs, activities and event, and publications, but are not limited to these. Each item presents its own opportunities.

Providing interpretation before, during or after works does not mitigate or justify the removal or other adverse impacts on significant fabric. For example, constructing access to a magnificent view doesn't necessarily justify the visual or physical impact on the landform, vegetation, habitat or other values.

Consider:

For an item where major changes are likely, are there opportunities for limited access (e.g. though guided tours) prior to works, or during works?

Is there a procedure for keeping workers and visitors informed about what's happening and why and also about new discoveries?

Example:

Archaeological excavations

Message – if the site is sufficiently important to excavate then it is likely to be of interest to the community, and there it is necessary to plan for interpretation, and for interpreting major unexpected discoveries.

INTERPRETING HERITAGE PLACES AND ITEMS: GUIDELINES

INGREDIENT 10 MAINTENANCE, EVALUATION AND REVIEW

Include interpretation in the ongoing management of an item; provide for regular maintenance, evaluation and review

Maintenance, refurbishment and review of interpretive media is part of ongoing heritage management. Maintenance includes such actions as the repair or replacement of weathered or damaged signs, or reprinting brochures.

Review involves the assessment of the interpretation media and content using visitor and peer group feedback and any new research and understandings about the item or interpretive technique. It involves changes to the media or the preparation of new media. A review may involve the revision of the interpretation plan, or the preparation of a new plan, especially for items where heritage interpretation is a major use.

For places that attract visitors, review of the impacts of interpretation is essential to ensure that aspects of significance are not eroded or lost. For a display, the review should include assessment of a display's physical condition, its tone, the quality of the information, and the inclusion of new information as it becomes available.

A formal, documented review of the interpretation plan, its programs and media should be undertaken at regular intervals, usually in conjunction with the review of the item's Conservation Plan. This will ensure that any new information about the significance of the item is available for inclusion in its updated interpretation

Ongoing management includes a strategy for events, activities and temporary displays; and interpretation, commemoration and celebration of associations between people and the item.

Applying ingredient 10

Interpretation is part of the management of an item, and it is often desirable to allocate responsibility for it to a particular person (or position).

Involving volunteers and other interested people in the management activities is a well-established practice for many natural areas, especially in scientific studies and in bush regeneration. Works to cultural items can also provide opportunities for presenting information about the items. For example repairs to timber, paintwork, drains, paths, tree surgery, road re-surfacing, cleaning, flower arranging, etc should all be considered as worthy of interpretation and an opportunity to communicate significance.

Heritage interpretation should be included in State of the Environment reporting, and should include both cultural and natural items.

Temporary signs - Lanyon

The much maligned 'signs on sticks' can be an effective means of providing affordable temporary interpretation. For example, at Lanyon homestead, where there are seasonal dangers for visitors, temporary signs, often hand-written in felt tipped pen on cardboard (to suggest their temporary status) and attached to wooden tomato stakes, were an effective means of warning and informing visitors about snakes, swooping magpies, falling Bunya Bunya cones and lambing ewes. The message was often enhanced by a light hearted drawing—specifically to attract the attention of children.

Involving children in day to day maintenance – Mugga Mugga, ACT

The ACT Cultural Facilities Corporation use their members newsletter, and local newspaper and radio to advertise holiday activities for children. In April 2000, a holiday activity at Mugga-Mugga (a former shepherd's cottage on the outskirts of Canberra) was whitewashing the fence; a task which needs to be undertaken on a regular basis (approximately every 4 years) both for aesthetic and timber protection reasons.

The process of whitewashing was explained, and the techniques demonstrated. Brushes were supplied and everyone who wished to participate was able to do so and to see an immediate result.

This activity provided an opportunity for those involved to have time to appreciate the landscape setting and the sights and sounds of the place in a more meaningful way than can be provided by either a guided or self-guided tour. The activity focused on the need for ongoing repairs and maintenance, and the necessity for self-sufficiency in the early days of settlement. It also gave the participants a sense of ownership of both the activity and consequently of Mugga-Mugga.

Continuing the associations between people and land- National Parks

The significant association between people who once owned and lived in areas now in national parks can be continued and revived through events and activities. [e.g. Kanangra Boyd NP, where NPWS provides the opportunity for former residents to return to an area now inaccessible by road.]

Presentation during works 'What's going on here?'

When works are being undertaken at Vacluse House, the Historic Houses Trust places temporary signs nearby explaining the work: why it is being undertaken and a brief summary of the conservation approach, and the link with significance. The displays is headed "What's going on here?"

INTERPRETING HERITAGE PLACES AND ITEMS: GUIDELINES

Consider:

Is interpretation included and budgeted for in the ongoing management of the item?

Is the need for maintenance, or refurbishment of introduced materials (such as signs displays or brochures) recognised and budgeted for by management?

*Is there a strategy or plan for review and ongoing interpretation?
Have opportunities for continuing or commemorating the associations between people and the item been considered?*

INGREDIENT 11 SKILLS & KNOWLEDGE

Involve people with relevant skills, knowledge and experience

People knowledgeable about the item, and people with expertise and experience in interpretation, historical research and analysis or skills in the preparation of conservation management plan, should be involved in planning for, or participating in, interpretation. This includes people associated with the place. Historians who have been involved in documenting the item should be consulted, if possible. As interpretation is now a requirement of heritage management, inclusion of experienced interpretation practitioners, from the beginning, will help to ensure that the ingredients of best practice interpretation are embedded in the project, and its ongoing management. A multi-disciplinary team provides opportunities for mutual learning and skill sharing.

People with specialist skills and experience have a major role in interpretation. They are often able to find solutions quickly and to understand problems that other, less-experienced, people may avoid, or find very challenging. Interpretation specialists should always be included in projects where visits are a regular function of the management of the item.

Applying ingredient 11

In planning for interpretation, keep a list of the people who have prepared reports or provided other services, such as building maintenance or curators.

As well as providing advice or services, these people may be able to help with training so that managers and others working at a place, including volunteers, can better understand what's involved with interpretation, and when to ask for help.

Basic training in the care of records, in conservation housekeeping is likely to be needed for people managing and maintaining heritage buildings and collections.

Consider:

Are experienced interpretation practitioners involved?

Are other people who have a detailed knowledge of the item involved, or given the opportunity to contribute?

Guiding skills for volunteers – Cook's River, Marrickville

The Cook's River, in the southern suburbs of Sydney, has been the subject of environmental concern and remedial projects for many years. State and local governments have worked to improve the condition of the river and to make it more accessible, and in recent years interpretation projects (directed at people using the river and public land alongside) have been undertaken.

In 2002 the Marrickville Council engaged the training organization, Terra Cordis, to train local volunteers in compiling and communicating information and in delivering a presentation about the river, its history and its conservation. The volunteers wanted to help others understand and appreciate the river, both informally and through guided tours and events. The participants received certificates in guiding, in compliance with Australian standards in guiding. A wide range of people took part including council staff, local environmentalists, members of the Gould league, the canoe club and other local organisations.

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INGREDIENT 12 COLLABORATION

Collaborate with organisations and the local community

Community, professional and government organisations have skills, resources, understandings and interests which can make a valuable contribution to interpretation. Collaborations provide opportunities to link lines of research, and to develop partnerships and collaborative projects, and to learn more about heritage and interpretation. Collaborations can develop their own synergy, leading to further opportunities for heritage interpretation or related action, as well as greater appreciation and understanding of heritage.

Applying the ingredient

Collaborations take many forms and are usually based on common goals or interest. Meet with organisations that may have similar interests and discuss the opportunities for collaboration in interpretation. Many collaborations are serendipitous, so networking may reveal opportunities. Keep in touch with people and organisations that own or manage related heritage items or objects, perhaps there are opportunities to support one another, e.g. through providing images, or obtaining clearance for them, or by providing support for grant applications, as well as in joint projects for interpretation.

For formal collaborations, such as research or planning, design or production of interpretation media, a written agreement (such as a MOU) is needed, with each party appointing a person to run their part of the project. It should include unforeseen tasks and a means of deciding how they will be done. It's useful to write down expectations and to review these when the project is finished.

When jointly planning or producing media (such as a publication) the parties collaborating need to check that they have all the skills needed; the list of stages and tasks in a project (available from the NSW Heritage Office) can be used as a check list.

If arranging publicity for a collaborative project, make sure all parties are mentioned, not just the ones that are in the photo: the people/organisation that initiated the project should be acknowledged as well as the people who prepared the end product.

Consider:

Are there opportunities to involve the wider community?

Are there particular people who may have specialist or family interest in the project?

Have all the relevant people been consulted?

Is there an agreed approach to the interpretation?

Nimmitabel visitor guide

The town of Nimmitabel, on the great dividing range is close to several national parks including Wadbilliga and South-East Forests. In 2002-3 the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Services combined with the Nimmitabel Advancement Group to create a Visitors' guide, combining advice about the town, the region and its national parks. Working collaboratively, a series of interpretive signs was erected in the town using information from the historical society. The NPWS used its mapping skills resources to create a well-designed fold out brochure combining a clear and detailed the region and showing walking trails, picnic and camping areas. Information about things to do and places to stay were included. The map of the town showed heritage sites and buildings, leaving visitors to find their own route.

The visitor guide is suitable for both locals and visitors and is handed out by all the local businesses.

Potential example:

Hay barns at Maitland A project of the Maitland City Council Heritage Group – and Maitland Gallery.

Study of barns, location, construction, use, owners feeding in to publication of a book and an exhibition at the Maitland Gallery. Exhibition of photographs of the barns. Study included hay barns, dairy buildings; historical research in historical images and references (including detailed plans for dairy buildings). Measured Drawings of surviving barns. Group plan to apply the same approach to other aspects of local heritage, also including an exhibition.

Jointly funded by Maitland City Council and the NSW Heritage Office's Heritage Assistance Scheme.

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12 SOURCES OF INFORMATION

References for heritage conservation:

Ask First: a guide to respecting Indigenous heritage places and values, Australian Heritage Commission 2002

Australian Natural Heritage Charter for the conservation of places of natural heritage significance, Second edition

Australia ICOMOS Charter for places of cultural significance (The Burra Charter), 1999

The Illustrated Burra Charter: good practice for heritage places, 2004

Significance: a guide to assessing the significance of cultural heritage objects and collections, Heritage Collections Council, Commonwealth of Australia, 2001

References for heritage interpretation

Selected Interpretation Documents

The list attached comprises:

Plans and reports

Advice about interpretation

Recommended Reading (for non-specialists)

Plans and Reports

Furnace, Fire and Forge Heritage Trail: Integrated presentation of the Industrial heritage of Lithgow LGA

A clear and concise plan which contains good examples of visitor experience selection criteria, and a checklist chart of interpretation strategies.

Maitland Riverside Walk

Maitland City Council, prepared under the NSW Heritage Incentives Program

Report of an imaginative project, excellent documentation, and illustrated with good photographs.

'Merrigong: A Cultural Map of the Illawarra Escarpment, A Report to the Illawarra Region of Councils,' Wollongong, 1999, Sally Gray & Associates

In this project, research focused on the need to collect information about the meanings of the Illawarra escarpment (Merrigong) to the local community through workshops and interviews, supplemented with documentary research. From the stories collected, a small number of sites were identified to commemorate these associations and meanings through public art projects. [A second stage involved the preparation of briefs for artists and undertaking the art works.] Funded by the Australia Council and Illawarra Region of Councils. Innovative integration of cultural heritage practice with a public art project

Merrigong Project, An Environmental Art Project for the Illawarra Escarpment and Artists Briefs.

(second stage of Merrigong project)

Illawarra Region of Councils, Consultant: Sue Bessell

Middle and Georges Heads, Model Interpretation Plan and Application

Sydney Harbour National Park August 1999 Anne Bickford Helen Brayshaw Helen Proudfoot

This is a comprehensive and highly detailed, staged interpretation plan which provides a model for large areas of open space with multiple natural and cultural values. It includes detailed research about early contact between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and practical means of interpretation. It follows a clear sequence, and includes a useful flow chart describing the processes for Defining, Developing, Delivering, Evaluation, and Support.

Port Arthur Historic Site Interpretation Plan Phase A Preliminary Report and Discussion Paper

Mitchell, Nethery Associates December 1995

A preliminary overview report dealing with a site which has been interpreted in various ways over a long period of time. It provides a framework for review, discussion of current media and themes, and suggestions for new approaches.

INTERPRETING HERITAGE PLACES AND ITEMS: GUIDELINES

Port Arthur Historic Site Interpretation Plan

Mitchell, Nethery Associates June 1996

A highly detailed, imaginative and comprehensive plan containing extremely useful implementation advice

Queens Wharf, Morpeth

Maitland City Council Final Report, NSW Heritage Office

Heritage Incentives Program 2002-2004

A well documented record and report of a project undertaken through the NSW Heritage Office's Incentives program. It describes the rationale, the methods, the costings, and the outcomes.

A Guide to Wiradjuri Places of Wagga Wagga

Wagga Wagga Local Aboriginal Land Council

Wagga Wagga City Council 2003

Prepared as part of the Aboriginal heritage study for Wagga Wagga and involving local based Aboriginal people. Jointly funded by Heritage Incentives Program and Wagga Wagga City Council.

Wentworth Main Shaft Mine Site, Lucknow

Kylie Winkworth for Orange City Council 2001

An example of an interpretation plan for which there was no written brief. The consultant therefore prepared the interpretation using a logical and sequential methodology. The plan contains all elements needed for the interpretation of the site, including indicative costings.

Thornton Park – Heritage Interpretation Plan

Mitchell, Nethery Associates 1996

A 3 stage interpretation plan for a large organisation (Department of Defence). It comprises Concept Development, Media Guidelines and Indicative Design Concepts.

Vanadi Site, Balmain

Heritage Interpretation Strategy (draft)

Godden Mackay Logan

March 2000

Prepared as part of the conditions for consent (condition 53 issued by the Land and Environment Court), this is an interesting example of a proposal which targets both residents and visitors at a privately developed site with important community associations.

Walsh Bay Redevelopment Precinct Interpretation Plan November 1999

Tropman and Tropman Architects, OHM Consultants, HPA Architects and Peddle Thorp and Walker

A detailed and comprehensive overview of an extensive project.

Walsh Bay Redevelopment Precinct: Heritage interpretation Status Report

June 2003

Prepared by HPA Ltd and Tropman and Tropman Architects

Walsh Bay Redevelopment Pier2/3 Breezeway Interpretation Centre

July 2003 Prepared by HPA Pty LTD and Tropman and Tropman Architects

The above two plans are examples of the complex processes involved in conceiving, developing, delivering, and managing a long running and project for reuse of a large industrial complex.

Walsh Bay Waterfront Renewal: Information for Residents as part of the Owners Manual

Tasman Storey, Project Director HPA

An excellent example of an easily read document for owners. It details the history behind the development, why this site is important, what was done and why

Woolloomooloo Bay Finger Wharf Interpretation Plan Stage One Concept Development

Mitchell, Nethery Associates

Heritage Presentation 27 April 1999

INTERPRETING HERITAGE PLACES AND ITEMS: GUIDELINES

Follows sequence of context, analysis, media planning. A good list of outcomes is provided – as a result of the proposed interpretation users should “know” “think” “feel” “understand” and “act”.

Advice about interpretation

The following list includes useful manuals for both practical action in the field and also for understanding the issues for interpretive planning.

Visitor Interpretation Manual

Department of Conservation and Land Management
Western Australia 1996

Cultural Planning: A Handbook for NSW Local Government

Third Draft October 2003

Interpretation of Cultural Heritage Sites

Christine O'Brien for NPWS 1998

Best Practice in Park Interpretation

Prepared for Department of Natural Resources and Environment, Victoria, by Earthlines consortium, Victoria 1999

Interpretation Of Cultural Heritage Sites

Christine O'Brien for NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service

Interpretation Planning Guidelines

Sarah Murphy, National Trust of Australia, (WA)

Interpreting Historic Gardens for the Visiting Public

Karen Olsen: 1996 Fellowship Report for the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust of Australia

Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, Planning Workbook, March 2001

Websites

www.heritage.nsw.gov.au

www.ntwa.com.au

www.interpretationaustralia.asn.au

www.interpretscotland.org.uk

www.heritageinterp.com

www.heritageinterpretation.org.uk

www.interpcan.ca

www.historians.prg.au

www.icomos.org.au

www.ahc.gov.au

www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au

Recommended reading

The following list is for general, non-specialist readers seeking information about heritage interpretation.

Successful Tourism at Heritage Places: A Guide for Tourism Operators Heritage Managers and Communities

Australian Heritage Commission 2001

Interpretation of Historic Sites

William Alderson and Shirley Payne Low

American Association for State and Local History, 1980

Meaning, Method and Madness, Heritage Interpretation in the 1990s

Heritage Environment, Volume 11, Number 4, November 1995

Interpretation Planning Guidelines

Sarah Murphy

National Trust of Australia (WA)

INTERPRETING HERITAGE PLACES AND ITEMS: GUIDELINES

Environmental Interpretation – A Practical Guide for People with Big Ideas and Small Budgets

Sam Ham

Looking After Heritage Places: The Basics of Heritage Planning for Managers, Landowners and Administrators

Michael Pearson and Sharon Sullivan

Melbourne University Press 1995

The Illustrated Burra Charter: good practice for heritage places

Meredith Walker and Peter Marquis Kyle

Australia ICOMOS 2004

Previous Possessions, New Obligations: Policies for Museums in Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

Museums Australia Inc. 2000,

A key document about museum practice and artifacts and draft revised version in preparation:
'Continuing cultures, ongoing responsibilities: A comprehensive policy document and guidelines for Australian museums working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage'

Indigenous Kinship with the Natural World in New South Wales

Deborah Rose, Diana James, Christine Watson et al

National Parks and Wildlife Service NSW, 2003

Mapping Attachment: a spatial approach to Aboriginal post-contact heritage

Denis Byrne and Maria Nugent

Department of Environment and Conservation (NSW) and Heritage Council of NSW, 2004

Shared Landscapes: archaeology of attachment and the pastoral industry in New South Wales, Studies in the Cultural Construction of Open Space

Rodney Harrison

Department of Environment and Conservation (NSW) and Heritage Council of NSW, 2004