

Understanding Cultural Landscapes

Cultural landscapes are all around us and are the result of the interaction of humans with their environment over many years.

Many cultural landscapes are valued by communities because they:

- show the evolution of settlement and societies
- hold myths, legends, spiritual and symbolic meanings
- are highly regarded for their beauty
- tell us about societies' use of natural resources, past events and sustainable landuse
- display landscape design and technology achievements.

Some cultural landscapes should be protected for future generations.

Cultural landscapes include:

i) **Designed landscapes**, those that are created intentionally such as gardens, parks, garden suburbs, city landscapes, ornamental lakes, water storages or campuses.

ii) **Evolved landscapes**, those that display a system of evolved landuse in their form and features. They may be 'relict' such as former mining or rural landscapes. They may be 'continuing' such as modern active farms, vineyards, plantations or mines.

iii) **Associative landscapes**, that are landscapes or landscape features that represent religious, artistic, sacred or other cultural associations to individuals or communities.

A cultural landscape may represent more than one of these three groups.



Image: Robin Crocker

Canberra is a famous example of a designed landscape that is significant for the way the design integrates natural hills and an artificial lake as major features. Mountains are connected by long vista spaces. Crossing the vistas is the national triangle dedicated for Australia's national and cultural institutions spatially set out in the landscape.



Image: NewFarmPark.com.au

New Farm Park, Brisbane is a public park and a typical designed landscape example. It is a special place for its trees including native figs, a large rose garden and is important to the local community as a recreation and fun place.



Image: Caroline Grant

A vineyard such as the Margaret River vineyard, WA is an example of a continuing evolved landscape.



Image: Stuart Read

Indigenous landscapes managed for hunting and fish farming are examples of evolved continuing landscapes along with numerous pastoral properties ongoing from the 19th Century.



Image: M Pearson, the Australian Heritage Photographic Library

Arltunga, NT, is one of numerous evolved relict mining landscapes scattered across Australia. The ruins tell a story of past mining in a remote area.



Image courtesy of Tilba Online - www.tilba.com.au

Threats to important cultural landscapes:

- Lack of identification and recognition of values.
- Large developments such as mining, forestry plantations, new infrastructure and urban expansion.
- Incremental detrimental large and small changes.
- Natural disasters such as floods, cyclones, bushfires, drought or other disaster.
- Man-made erosion and detrimental weeds.

Important cultural landscapes can be protected through:

- Local (Government) Environment Plans, zoning and other controls such as State and Territory Heritage listings
- National and Commonwealth Heritage listings
- World Heritage Inscription

How to record and protect a cultural landscape:

- Research the important stories associated with the region and identify the landscapes that best express the stories.
- Document features such as mountains, hills, rivers, topography, soils, skyline ridges, patches of forest, natural water courses.
- Note aesthetic qualities such vistas, quietness, natural sounds, birdlife, colour, particular forms and landscape patterns.
- Record how the landscape has been used, its sustainability and conservation needs.
- Talk to communities to ascertain meanings and stories associated with the landscape.
- Map and photograph the landscape.
- Note any threats to the landscape and devise management guidance.
- Publicise your findings and submit them to your Local Council or State Government Heritage Agency for protection.

The Gulaga-Tilba cultural landscape, NSW, started 95 million years ago when a volcano created a mountain and two subsidiary mountains. Weathering over millions of years, reduced the mountain peaks creating a fertile apron of soil that flowed from the high peak to the sea. Gulaga is a forested mountain and to the Yuin people Gulaga is a mother, who had two sons Barungaba who ran away to sea and Najanuga who remained nearby. The forested foothills were cleared by settlers, for dairying and two cheese factory villages, Central Tilba and Tilba Tilba. By the mid 20th century forest harvesting had commenced on Gulaga but Yuin Elders claimed Gulaga as a sacred site and logging was ceased. In 2006 Gulaga was handed back to the Yuin people in recognition of their living traditions.



Image: The Japanese Garden, Cowra

The Japanese Garden, holds associations for Japanese people as 234 Japanese World War II servicemen died in the 1944 breakout from the Cowra war prison. The garden, designed as a symbolic home for the spirits of the servicemen is linked by an avenue of cherry blossom trees to their cemetery to enable the spirits to move from the cemetery to the garden.

If you need help protecting a cultural landscape contact:

Australia ICOMOS website and the Burra Charter:

www.australia.icomos.org

The local branch of the National Trust of Australia:

www.nationaltrust.org.au

The local branch of the Australian Garden

History Society: **www.gardenhistorysociety.org.au**



This brochure is prepared by the Australia ICOMOS National Scientific Committee on Cultural Landscapes and Routes.
www.australia.icomos.org/get-involved/national-scientific-committees