Identifying and Managing Cultural Landscapes

Connecting People to Place

WARNING: Text and images in this plan may distress some people. Aboriginal people are warned that this document contains images of deceased people.
Overview
Management Framework

• Management Structure

  RIMP
  Rottnest Island Management Plan

  CMP
  Whole of Island Heritage Management Plan

  Conserving
  • Conservation Management Plans
  • Conservation Management Strategies
  • Condition Reports

  Promoting
  • Interpretation Strategy
  • Interpretation Plans
  • Marketing Plans

  Supporting
  • Heritage Resource Management
  • Staffing Policies
  • Collection Management

• Strategic Management Document
A Myriad of Values Community Workshop
What we started with...

Vision 2034

- Financial pressures
- Sustainability
- Aging infrastructure
- Visitor capacity
- Marketing - Cultural heritage tourism
- 100 years+ of tourism
  100 years as Prison Island
- Reconciliation of diversity of values
- Social values sense of place
- Microcosm of WA / Australia history in one small accessible place
- 8 Conservation Plans (over 10 years old) Numerous studies, and reports
- Five State Registered Precincts
- Information and Records Management
- 16 Aboriginal Heritage Sites on Register
- Museum and Collections
- Approximately 150 places on Rottnest Island Heritage Inventory
- Pressure of development
- Natural Values - A Class Reserve Marine and Terrestrial
- Geological Values Pre-sea-level rise International significance
- Wetlands Migratory Birds
- Boating and Marine values - Sanctuary Zones

RIMP Mission
Challenge Traditional Approach

• Needed to provide “connections”
• Identify a platform to allow for equal emphasis of different values
• Not all values harmonious – how to respect diversity?
• Context with wider Island management objectives – tourism, development and financial viability
• Identify significance at local, State, National and international level
• A management plan for the Island that captures and integrates the values as a whole place.
Next Steps?

- Assistance
- Brief
- Grant
- Tender
Why Choose the Cultural Landscape Approach?

• Traditional approach although identifying a number of values did not provide platform for integrated management

• There was no mechanism to ensure a balanced approach to managing different objectives and conflict resolution

• However there was a common denominator for all the different management objectives, themes and values - the Island itself
Cultural landscapes are those where human interaction with natural systems has, over a long period, formed a distinctive landscape. These interactions arise from, and cause, cultural values to develop.

(Dr Jane Lennon)
Benefits of Cultural Landscape Approach

Aboriginal Occupation

7000 BCE 6000 BCE 5000 BCE 4000 BCE 3000 BCE 2000 BCE 1000 BCE CE 1000 CE 2000 CE

SEPARATION FROM MAINLAND

European Exploration

1600 1700 1800 1900 2000

Dutch Exploration French Exploration British Colonial Settlement Recreation Australian Defence Operations Sustainable Tourism

Aboriginal Penal Establishment
How to Assess Some of the More Intangible Values
Clive Gordon, Manager's Cottage and K1 and K2, c1970 (The Artist's Rottnest by Ted Snell, p 81)
Garden Lake date unknown, thought to be early twentieth century (RIA 2011.339)
Elise Blumann, Rottnest Lighthouse and Salt Lake 1947 (The Artist’s Rottnest by Ted Snell, p. 117)
Rottnest was legendary. Only thirteen miles from the coast, it could have been thirteen hundred miles away . . It had a reputation as the most relaxed and seductive place anywhere.

Regular visitors knew their Island lore and they could recite the name of every bay and inlet . . There was a status in knowing these things, in being seen as an old ‘Rotto’ hand.

(Robert Drewe, 2012)
But of all the spots on this earthly sphere
Where these dismal spirits are strong and near,
There is one more dreary than all the rest,—
’Tis the barren island of Rottenest.

John Boyle O’Reilly, 1866
All for the Land (Part I)

It is written “Go forth…multiply!”
the pen is mightier than the sword
Thus we shall re-write the law!
Trespassing across this land is now an offence…punishable by imprisonment
To Rottnest!

Thus reached out colonial claws
grasping Indigenous men around the throat with searing chains
marched across their ancestral homelands
Oh! The bitter sorrow and bloody pain
to never see lands or people again…

Graeme Dixon

[Dixon, Holocaust revisited : killing time: 55.]
Recognition of Diversity of Values

Naomi Grant-Mills, Wadjemup,
(Wadjemup Rottnest Island as Black Prison and White Playground by Glen Stasiuk)
‘Wadjemup: Black Prison, White Playground’
Director: Glen Stasiuk - BlackRussian Productions 2014
Rottnest or Wadjemup (?)

- Australia’s history can be termed via a three-fold transition;
  - (i) pre-colonial past,
  - (ii) colonial past,
  - (iii) ‘Postcolonial’ or ‘Postmodern’ and the basis of our ‘new world order’.

- Thus Australia was “Possessed, dispossessed, [and is now] repossessed.” This current ‘post-modern’ third-phase is where the ‘true’ accounts and alternative narratives of Australian (Aboriginal) history can be (re)written without fear of reprisal or mockery, and where finally the Government and its authorities can be open and honest about what happened at Wadjemup to foster a climate for the sharing of the truth, of black and white history. This ‘post-modern’ period has seen a “…quickening of interest in Aboriginal culture…[and] this national heritage should be protected ‘for all Australians.’” It is now time to utilize and position Wadjemup as a national focus for healing and reconciliation.
Rottnest or Wadjemup (?)

• “…(it) is very appropriate to remind people that you can’t dance on the history of our people and you can’t dance on justice and on the grave of justice, history and the truth…”

Kooralong Koora Nyitting Ngallak Noitj, Nidja Noongar Boodja

(From the beginning of time to the end, this is Noongar country)

• the Noongar nation recognises fourteen (14) Noongar tribal groups; Wajuk (Perth region), Amangu, Yuat, Balardung, Pinjarup, Wiilman, Wardandi, Kaniyang, Bibbulman, Minang, Goreng, Wadjari, Nyaki-Nyaki, and Kalaamaya, over an area estimated to be almost 3,000,000 hectares with 1600 kilometres of coastline along which there are dotted a few distinct islands.

• The largest of these islands are Garden, Carnac and Rottnest [Meeandip, Gnooroolmayup & Wadjemup] lying just off the coast of Fremantle, in the water known as Gage Roads [Derbarl Nara]

• Noongar legend (backed with Western Science), from the creation times, says that these islands once formed part of the mainland. Between 6,000 – 7,000 years ago…
Kooralong Koora Nyitting Ngallak Noitj, Nidja Noongar Boodja

(From the beginning of time to the end, this is Noongar country)

• The Noongar people would have known *Wadjemup* or *Wadjem* as a long limb of land projecting from the coast – with its highest peak being an obtainable hill.

• Some of the Traditional *Wadjuk Noongar* share the story of *Nytinny* when the islands from Garden to Rottnest were joined, forming one big island called *Biidjiigoordup* or *Biidjigurdu-Nguni* and when the *Derbal Yerrigan* (river) ran through in northerly direction east of this formation (still evident by the Perth canyon underwater).
Kooralung Koora Nyitting Ngallak Noitj, Nidja Noongar Boodja

(From the beginning of time to the end, this is Noongar country)

• The majestic and magnificent Rainbow Serpent – known to *Wadjuk Noongar* as the *Waugal* – is creator of the hills, rivers, ranges and water holes is the protector of Noongar, both its people and lore/law. *Yondock*, an ancestral crocodile has travelled down from the north, causing floods and disturbances and is now waiting in the ocean waters between *Wadjemup* (Rottnest Island) and *Walyalup* (Fremantle) to challenge the *Waugal* to a duel.
...the ocean is awash with rage as the Waugal and Yondock roll over the top of each other thrashing and biting creating a huge ocean trench the three islands (mentioned also above). As the battle ensues the Waugal overpowers the Yondock and bites off its tail and places the tail across the mouth of the river to prevent salt water from ever entering the fresh water of the river again (the former bar removed in colonial times, near where the WA Maritime Museum now stands). The body of Yondock remains as Meeandip (Garden Island) and to this day its body – minus tail – can be seen from the mainland sitting low in the water with its teeth and snout facing north, from whence it came...
First Visits by Europeans

• Many ships of Dutch, Portuguese, French and British origin were to visit the shores of the West Australian coastline between the 17th and 19th Centuries. What is most probable is that a Dutchman was the first white man to land upon the coast of what is now known as Perth, Fremantle and the Island of Rottnest. But it was not, as most people believe, Vlamingh or one of his crew that ‘discovered’ this coastal region and Rottnest; for it was a member of the crew of the ship *Waeckende Boey*.

• In December 1696 anchored off Rottnest Island within sight of the coastline None of Vlamingh’s description of the island is derogatory. In fact he regarded the island as being like a ‘terrestrial paradise’. After penning this somewhat varied description he finally labeled the island, “Rats’ Nest” (originally written as Rottenest which was to become the more anglicized ‘Rottnest’). Interestingly it would be more than a hundred years before the ‘wood rats’ that Vlamingh so eloquently described would be correctly identified as marsupials, and ultimately labeled Quokkas.
Noongar / Aboriginal Resistance

• There is no doubting that early in the ‘birth’ of the Swan River Colony there was an apparent peaceful co-existence between Noongar and British colonizers. However, as with most periods of inception, once the notion that the colonizers were not going to leave and would be permanent residents in the Swan River territory (including the Fremantle, Perth, Guildford and York regions), and the livelihood and cultural protocols of the Noongar would be endangered, there was no option left but aggressive resistance.

• According to Prentis, “The resistance was at its height, over the whole length of south-eastern Australia and the south-west of Western Australia, in the 1830s and 1840s, when the frontier was being extended very rapidly everywhere.”
This was the beginning of tight legislative and bureaucratic control of Aboriginal people in Western Australia. Subsequent policies would emphasize:

- Targeting of Aboriginal resistance to colonization through removal from homelands (sometimes in chains);
- Forcing compliance of Aboriginal people with colonial government directions;
- **Opening of Aboriginal prison on Rottnest Island**;
- Enactment of rationing (food and blankets) as a way of regulating Aboriginal freedom of movement;
- Prevention of Aboriginal access to European towns and properties;
- Use of Aboriginal people as (unpaid) labour;
- Removal of Aboriginal children.
Need for a Prison for Aboriginal Inmates

• This was to also have an adverse affect on the Noongar within the colonies of Western Australia as now there was the need for further gaols, courts, police stations and police. Stricter laws were now in place due to the increase in penal labour, and the British system of justice was already bewildering to the Noongar, not to mention prejudiced against them, with little or no regard to their own cultural laws and practices. According to Carter, “The number of Aboriginal people appearing before the courts increased markedly in the 1840s…” and no doubt into the following decade.

• An article in the *Perth Gazette* explained that the marked increase to the courts by the local Noongar was because “…the courts were used as a tool by the British for domination rather than justice…”
Need for a Prison for Aboriginal Inmates

• Once the resistance of the Noongar (particularly Bindjareb, Wadjik and Ballardong tribal groups) was broken the next stage of controlling the Noongar nation (and then respectively other Aboriginal tribes throughout the state) was via aggressive and institutionalized imprisonment. It is striking how this frontline, so much in evidence between 1840 and 1890 in the colonies, is the instigator of the policies and politics of the early 20th Century that regretfully is an evident stigma of Aboriginal and white relations today.

• The Noongar and all of the Aboriginal population throughout Western Australia were now subject to two legal systems; the British legal system, which the Aboriginal did not comprehend nor respect, as well as traditional law. Over the next one hundred years many Noongar men and tribal groups from within Western Australia who were deemed to have broken British law would be chained and transported to a new prison on Rottnest Island…
Rottnest Island Prison Establishment

- The Native Prison established on the island of Rottnest/Wadjemup was the final tool that the colonists utilized to quash any of the remaining elements of resistance by the Noongar population. The settlers felt that one of the (if not the) major barriers to the continued prosperity that the colony was then enjoying was “…the resistance of the Noongar.” Once the colonists had quelled the violent resistance movement of the Noongar the next phase of complete domination of “…a strong and proud culture spiritually incarcerated into the shackles of a dominant bondage…”

- Historically the imprisonment of Aboriginal people has gone hand in hand with the process of colonization. Prisons, along with other institutions of forced confinement such as reserves, missions and secured hospitals, have served to incarcerate and institutionalize Aboriginal people for over two hundred years.
Rottnest Island Prison Establishment

- About a decade after the foundation of the Swan River Colony, in 1838, the Rottnest Island Prison was established and served as a place of both punishment and exclusion of Aboriginal people. Before this, however, the Roundhouse at Fremantle was established to detain and hold prisoners.

- In August of 1839 Governor John Hutt gave Government approval and proclaimed Rottnest Island as an official prison territory for natives. In the words of Hutt; “...a prison with no walls but surrounding ocean.” The prisoners already on the island, and the new arrivals were immediately put to work erecting cottages for themselves on the island, collecting salt from the lakes, cutting fire wood, growing grain and vegetables, and fishing and hunting.

- Hutt had two major stated reasons for placing Aboriginal prisoners on Rottnest. Firstly he believed that the island would give prisoners a degree of freedom and thus they would suffer less, and secondly the prisoners would be trained in farming and building procedures so that they could fit better into European society upon their release.
“I do not like Rottnest, it makes me ill… I have been two winters here, I came in the steamer. I had a chain around my neck all the way down.” I am cold in winter, my blanket is no good, it is old. I do not know when I am going back but I shall be very glad to go. I expect to go by and by. “ [Johnny Widgie-Widgie]

[Green and Moon, Far From Home: Aboriginal Prisoners of Rottnest Island 1838-1931: 28.]

Like the reign of terror that predominated in the settlement of the Swan River Colony, and subsequent extinguishment of Noongar resistance, the expanding ‘frontier’ of the north, which included the pastoral, mining and pearling industries, also included annihilation of the Aboriginal tribes who did not adhere to the new ways of the European. This death by parties of police and colonists continued in the Kimberley into the early twentieth century and the utilization of Rottnest Island prison as a tool of dispossession affected the northern tribes like it did their southern counterparts.
In 1838 six Aboriginal prisoners were sent to Rottnest Island and in 1839 to 1931 (except for the period 1849-1855) there were some 3,700 Aboriginal men and boys from all over the state whom were imprisoned during the life of the establishment. It is estimated that as many as 369 Aboriginal prisoners may have been buried in unmarked graves on the island.

According to Green explains there existed three main causes of death on Rottnest Island:

(i) Introduced disease – the main cause of death was (early) things like whooping cough, then more predominately Influenza and measles. [79 prisoners dies in a matter of months in one horrific period]

(ii) Accidents – For instance several men drowned at The Basin

(iii) Executions - five Aboriginal prisoners executed over the history of the Rottnest Island Prison establishment

During its near one-hundred year existence the establishment had changed from Governor Hutt’s vision of a training institution to a prison with “…a record of death, horror and despair unequalled by any other Aboriginal prison in the Australian colonies.” The largest Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Site in Australia.
• The former gaol – known to the Aboriginal prisoners as the Quod – was the place where hundreds of Aboriginal men (and some boys) took their last phlegm ridden painful breaths, the place where Aboriginal prisoners were forced to huddle together in the freezing cold of the winter and lay in drenched sweat in the heat of the summer. The place where once proud Aboriginal warriors and lore-men vomited, pissed and shat – lying in their own urine and excrement – before being transported to their final resting place in the prison establishment’s hospital, which often doubled as a morgue. Inconceivably, this place of horror was converted into visitor accommodation – the current Rottnest Island Resort Lodge…
Towards Healing and Reconciliation on Wadjemup

• “We are what we do together.” [Gerald Postema]
• For Gerald Postema, the past has a ‘moral presence’, the past is the very substance of our individual memory, and we need memory to make sense of our place in the world. Furthermore, ‘the hopes, aims, projects and values we hold as a community’ are a product of our collective memory: ‘We are what we do together’. This poignant statement by Postema powerfully relates the importance that memory – and thus memorial – has for the public conscience. This highlights the importance of a significant and symbolic memorial site on Rottnest Island.
Towards Healing and Reconciliation on Wadjemup

• Our national memory, and certainly our local memory (for people living in Perth, Fremantle, York and the Swan River) is intertwined with a culture of violence and dispossession. Not just from a ‘native’ experience but one also related to the convicts and the settlers attempting to find a ‘new world’ in which to (co)exist. In fact, while it is argued that the nation needs to progressively move forward, it is also counter-argued that this cannot occur until the past, and its horrific treatment of the first nation people, is addressed and deconstructed more directly, and with Indigenous people central to the discussion and debate.

• In many ways Rottnest Island is a perfect case-study for the debate and mis-interpretation that history has manifested within our nation. It is well over twenty years since the evidence of Aboriginal skeletal remains of former prisoners became a public issue and open for debate. Larissa Behrendt (2008) questions “What history means, how we interpret it, and the role it plays in shaping our national identity have been central and controversial debates during the past decade.”
Towards Healing and Reconciliation on Wadjemup

• The lack of questioning the morality of using the island as a playground without acknowledging its past is confusing and insulting for many in the Aboriginal community. Questions need to be asked and answered, exposing the hidden history of places, such as Rottnest Island, or the site of the Pinjarra & Forrest River massacres, the execution of Noongar leader Midgeriggodgoo, and the killing of his son and Noongar resistance fighter Yagan. The burial of this truth is best summarised by Henry Reynolds, who proclaims in his powerful and thought-provoking text Why Weren't we Told?:

“I am asked these questions by many people, over many years, in all parts of Australia…Why didn’t we know? Why were we never told? …Why do so many people ask the same questions of themselves, of me, of their education, their heritage, of the whole of Australian society?”

[Reynolds, Henry. Why Weren't We Told?: a personal search for the truth about our history, 1991: 1.]
Towards Healing and Reconciliation on Wadjemup

• Museums and cultural centres will play an integral role in the re-positioning of Aboriginal history and the re-emergence of Aboriginal cultural autonomy in public spaces, now and in the future.

• However, Aboriginal people do not necessarily agree that this museum-based reconciliation will necessarily be effective without deep involvement of Aboriginal people themselves.

• Wadjemup remains a place of guilt. It is a contradiction in terms. Sinclair-Jones calls it “An Island in Denial.” Hibberd claims that Wadjemup “…is a space of amnesia right now and it’s very powerfully potentially a place of coming to understanding not only the history but the significance of its space of that site as the largest Aboriginal deaths in custody site in Australia but also the fact that right now it is this space of total forgetting and the way in which people are behaving on that island.”
Towards Healing and Reconciliation on Wadjemup

• Prominent Noongar leader and Elder Ken Colbung is quoted as claiming *Wadjemup* as “…a place of Aboriginal dreamtime long before it became a prison.” As a voice of conciliation he implored the “…people of Western Australia to learn the truth of Rottnest…”

• Bin-Barker says that *Wadjemup* is “…the very essence of our unity as an oneness because we are all connected to that one sacred place. It’s the sacred common ground…for all of us.”

• The peak body of the Noongar nation, the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council, claims that *Wadjemup* could be THE hub of reconciliation, “…considering that it’s got a really amazing reach and significance across the state…being a site or an ‘epicentre’ – let’s call it - for proper reconciliation.”

• This is also a significant concept and model for Robben Island which has, in the words of South African Minister Z Pallo Jordan, transformed from “…a place of isolation, hardship, degradation and human atrocities to a place representing resistance, resilience and the triumph of the human spirit over hardship and that enshrines values of nation building, human rights and national reconciliation.”
Towards Healing and Reconciliation on Wadjemup

• *Wadjemup* is a metaphor for the nation. Until recently, official Australian history has attempted to cover up the abuse and repression towards Aboriginal people post the invasion in 1788. For me, NO place has attempted to cover it up as much as Rottnest Island. NO other place in the nation has dealt with its Aboriginal and Colonial history as badly as the State, and its respective authorities, has dealt with ‘Rotto’, from my perspective. However, it could be the epi-center of understanding colonial history, of respecting cultural knowledge, of manifesting healing and millennium conciliation. The colonial atrocities are in the walls of the former Quod, below the soil of the burial site, in the buildings that still stand, while culture and healing are evident in the mystical sunsets that set over the Noongar ‘heaven’ known as *Kurranup*. It is intact. It is both physical and spiritual, tangible and intangible. Rottnest’s history should be a major focus in Australian history. It should be taught in every classroom across the state, nay nation. This history should be preserved, nurtured and documented thus allowing us – the collective nation – to learn, to reconcile, and to heal.
A place to reflect

Wadjemup Burial Ground provides the opportunity to pay respect and reflect on past wrongdoings.

The past is present, scattered around the island. You can see the imprint of hard labour suffered by the Aboriginal men in island structures. We shall remember and recognise those men not only in memory but also in the present, by paying respect to them every time we visit Wadjemup.

(Rev Peter - Wadjemup Elder, 2012)

There are those in the Aboriginal community who know that this is a painful but shared past which belongs not only to Aboriginal people, but to all the people of Western Australia and the nation as a whole. Aboriginal suffering has the potential to be a catalyst for genuine reconciliation and healing.

(Gotait Silas - Wadjemup Elder, 2013)

May their pain and suffering never be forgotten and may their strength and courage be instilled in future generations.

(Trish Ryder - Noongar descendant, 2012)

Kevin Bynder’s artist interpretation of Wadjemup, painted while working as part of the IES project team.
“History isn’t was. History is.
No matter how much we wipe our feet at the front door, we track history through the house. Leaving its muddy footprints all over the carpet.”

[Phillip Adams]
Future Management

www.ria.wa.gov.au

RIMP  Rottnest Island Management Plan

Supporting Plans:
CLMP  Cultural Landscape Management Plan
RAP   Reconciliation Action Plan
BMS   Boating Management Strategy
TMS   Terrestrial Management Strategy