SUSTAINING INDIGENOUS CULTURAL TOURISM
ABORIGINAL PATHWAYS, CULTURAL CENTRES AND DWELLINGS
IN THE QUEENSLAND WET TROPICS

By Tim O’Rourke and Paul Memmott
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ABSTRACT

Much of the attraction of Indigenous cultural tourism is underpinned by traditional built environments and cultural landscapes, both internationally and, perhaps to a lesser extent, in Australia. Traditional Aboriginal camps and dwellings are represented in several categories of Indigenous cultural tourism in Australia, where they feature prominently in both theme parks and interpretive centres. Within the Wet Tropics region, this scoping study describes and critically assesses Indigenous enterprises that integrate knowledge of traditional Aboriginal dwellings, camps and building technologies and associated environmental knowledge into cultural tours and experiences for tourists. An underlying goal of this study and future research is to determine the role of tourism in the conservation of Aboriginal cultural knowledge.

The first part of the study examines literature on Indigenous tourism, drawn predominantly from Australian sources, to establish categories of cultural tourism, the rationale for Aboriginal engagement in the industry, and to explore the multivalent concept of sustainability and Aboriginal cultural tourism. A survey of existing Indigenous tourism enterprises throughout the Wet Tropics region provides a general overview of the types of product on offer and the techniques used to represent cultural knowledge. At the time of writing there were at least seven tours conducted by Aboriginal guides through Indigenous landscapes. At least two of these tours used reconstructed dwellings, set in natural landscapes, as features along a guided path. Tjapukai Cultural Park also featured traditional Djabugay dwellings, sometimes in reconstructed village scenes, which were re-built from time to time. However in these venues, the structures were often disconnected with Aboriginal landscapes and lacked any environmental or wider cultural context.

The major focus of the study is on the Dyirbal language group, from the southern part of the region, and cultural tourism that displays aspects of their unique rainforest-based culture. Previous ethnographic research on Dyirbal traditional built environments and dwellings (mija) combined with an investigation of existing and proposed tourist ventures inform this section of the study.

A key finding in this project is that the process of building the Dyirbal mija, rather than the completed mija itself, better serves the both parties engaged in the cultural tourism encounter (i.e. the Wet Tropics tourists and the Indigenous tourism enterprise personnel). This experience could occur in a variety of different landscapes through the management of customary campsites using traditional management practices and resources. Within protected areas, a program to monitor and assess environmental change and sustainability of the practice of traditional Aboriginal technologies could not only perform an important conservation function, but also comprise part of a tourism enterprise.

The scoping study identifies an undeveloped Aboriginal product that invites both testing and research action. The construction of traditional Dyirbal dwellings as a tourism product requires a feasibility study that attempts to resolve a range of issues outlined herein, including site location, land tenure and access rights and evaluation of sustainability.

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SUMMARY

Objectives of Study
This scoping study seeks to provide an overview of current Indigenous cultural tourism in the Wet Tropics region of north-eastern Australia, and examines both the opportunities and impediments for Aboriginal operated tours in the mosaic of rural landscapes and protected areas that make up this region. In particular, the study aims to describe and assess enterprises that integrate knowledge of traditional Dyirbal dwellings, camps and building technologies and associated environmental knowledge (ethno-architecture) into cultural tours and experiences. The effect of Indigenous tourism on the conservation of culturally specific knowledge is examined for the Dyirbal language group, whose distinctive classical rainforest culture, although disrupted by the British colonial invasion during the 1860s, was maintained in a modified form into the early decades of the 20th century.

Methodology
The scoping study combines a review of literature on Aboriginal tourism in Australia, ethnographic research in the study area and fieldwork that examined existing and proposed enterprises in the Wet Tropics region. The national Indigenous tourism literature was initially analysed in order to examine (1) categories of Indigenous cultural tourism, (2) the benefits of Indigenous cultural tourism for Aboriginal people, and (3) the cultural and economic sustainability of Indigenous cultural tourism. The study draws on research, by both authors, with the Dyirbal language group and, in particular, fieldwork that recorded the reconstruction of traditional dwellings (mija). Fieldwork for the scoping study investigated tourism enterprises within the region. The existing use of traditional dwellings was critically examined for the various Indigenous tourism products in the Wet Tropics generally and in the Dyirbal area in particular. Investigation was also carried out of traditional campsites locations in the eastern Dyirbal area, to examine their potential contribution to cultural tourism enterprises.

Key Findings
Traditional Aboriginal camps and dwellings are commonly represented in several categories of Indigenous cultural tourism in Australia. They feature prominently in both theme parks and interpretive centres. However in both venues, the structures are often disconnected with Aboriginal landscapes and lack any environmental or wider cultural context.

At the time of writing, there were at least seven tours conducted by Aboriginal guides through Indigenous landscapes in the Wet Tropics Region. At least two of these tours use reconstructed dwellings, set in natural landscapes, as features along a guided path.

Research into ethno-architecture in the Wet Tropics finds that an interplay of seasonal conditions, social obligations, economy and geography determined patterns of settlement and that the wide variety of materials used for building reflects the pre-contact biodiversity of the region. Dwellings required regular maintenance and forms responded dynamically to changing household demography and seasonal conditions. Aboriginal dwellings reconstructed for tourist displays provide for only a limited interpretation of ethno-architecture and its relationship to cultural traditions. Reconstructed dwellings can represent technologies and, to a lesser extent, relationships between the environment and building traditions.

The process of building the Dyirbal mija, rather than the completed mija itself, better serves both parties engaged in the cultural tourism encounter (the tourists and the Indigenous personnel). This experience could occur in locations that utilise customary campsites, encouraging the use of traditional resources and land management practices. Despite gross changes in the landscapes of the study region, long-term environmental conservation could aim to model and reproduce Aboriginal settlement patterns as a part of strategies for the conservation of biodiversity. Within protected areas, a programme to monitor and assess environmental change and sustainability of the practice of traditional Aboriginal technologies could not only perform an important conservation function, but also comprise part of a tourism enterprise.

The following positive aspects have been identified for Dyirbal people engaged in the reconstruction of this ethno-architecture.

- An opportunity for older Dyirbal people to pass on knowledge of their language and material culture to younger generations;
- An interest amongst the younger participants, in learning about the range of traditional dwellings and associated resources;
- Payment for reproducing elements of material culture (which in turn encourages participation and the frequency of the practice);
Assisting current Native Title claims through a better understanding of campsite focused ethno-architecture throughout the Dyirbal cultural landscape; and

The recognition and use of traditional knowledge as a foundation for tourism enterprises.

Observed and potential obstacles impediments and problems to the operation of cultural tours that were reported for the Dyirbal language group are as follows:

• The sporadic and on-call nature of work for Aboriginal guides, who may not be able to plan ahead for family or community engagements;
• Limited access to transport (from their residences) to ensure that guides reach the tourism venue or setting;
• The disincentive for guides being paid on Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) wages, rather than salaries proportionate to the commercial value of the work;
• The lack of skills and relevant training amongst certain Aboriginal guides and rangers to adeptly communicate with tourists in a variety of cross-cultural contexts and value systems;
• The potential for community disputes over which particular people may have Native Title rights in the sites of tourism ventures, and therefore the ultimate rights to conduct the tours over the country; and
• The large extent of traditional country in the Wet Tropics, which falls within freehold title, National Park, State Forest and other land tenures, that is currently inaccessible to Aboriginal people for use in tourism ventures.

Future Actions

The scoping study identifies an underdeveloped Aboriginal product that invites both testing and research action. The construction of traditional Dyirbal dwellings as an interactive tourism product requires a feasibility study that attempts to resolve the following components of such an enterprise;

• Working with a group of Dyirbalngan, identify appropriate locations to establish initially one or two campsites suitable for building dwellings. The campsites could be located so that they could form part of an overnight trek along a traditional walking pad;
• Investigate the possible use of *mija* as a transient shelter on an overnight trek;
• Investigate and negotiate possible arrangements for access to State Forests and National Parks, given the likelihood of appropriate sites falling within these boundaries; and
• Design a program to evaluate the project for its cultural and economic sustainability that can also monitor the effect of the project on local biodiversity.

The authors have the in-principle support of a number of Traditional Owners to proceed with this type of project. As well as the Traditional Owners, key participants in such a proposal would include a rainforest ecologist.

Further general recommendations arising from this study for Indigenous cultural tourism in the Wet Tropics region are as follows:

• The need for short TAFE training courses for Indigenous personnel on interacting and communicating with international tourists from a variety of cultural backgrounds.
• The need for an Indigenous tourism Business Mentor to assist in support, planning, feasibility and management of both new and established sustainable tourism enterprises in the region.
Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Research with Aboriginal people on their traditional built environments in the Wet Tropics region of northeastern Australia forms the background to this scoping study on Indigenous cultural tourism (Memmott 1991, 1997, 2005; O’Rourke 2002, 2003). The study seeks to provide an overview of current Indigenous cultural tourism in the region, and examines both the opportunities and impediments for Aboriginal operated tours in the mosaic of rural landscapes and protected areas that make up the Wet Tropics region. In particular, the study is concerned with the use of ethno-architectural elements of Dyirbal\(^1\) knowledge and material culture in small-scale Aboriginal tourism ventures. The Dyirbal language group is made up of a number of sub-groups (Jirrbal, Gulngay, Girramay, Mamu, Ngadjan and others) whose members tend to identify as tribes, and whose traditional country covers the southern part of the Wet Tropics; from Cardwell in the south, west to Ravenshoe and Herberton, and north to Innisfail (see Figure 1).

*Figure 1: Wet tropics region - original extent of rainforest at time of colonisation and distribution of Aboriginal language and dialect groups*

\(^1\) Orthography for Aboriginal words follows Dixon 1972.

3 Ethno-architecture has a similar etymology to ethnoscience, which developed (in the 1950s) as a method of ethnographic research that emphasised an emic perspective of Indigenous or folk knowledge and classificatory systems. The authors use ethnoarchitecture to represent the built form within an Indigenous environment that is constructed by locals to support traditional patterns of spatial behaviour. People participating in the design and building process are the ethnoarchitects.
The term ‘Dyirbal’ is itself an academic construct, first used by the linguist Bob Dixon (1972) to identify this collective of tribal groups as a single linguistic unit. However like several of the cultural and social generalisations in this scoping study, this term Dyirbal is used for working convenience. The Dyirbal group of tribes tend to identify as rainforest people, as do their northern neighbours, the Yidinyi, Djabugay and Kuku Yalanji. There was a pre-contact tradition of social interaction between the contiguous tribes that make up these language groups. Because of cultural homogeneity, the region has been categorised as a ‘culture area’ by anthropologists (e.g. Harris 1978; Peterson 1976); the distinctive cultural traits of the traditional rainforest groups distinguishing them from Aboriginal societies on the rest of the continent.

This cultural distinctiveness is used in the promotion of the Wet Tropics region as an international and national tourism destination. Indigenous connection to the rainforest environments augments the attractiveness of the region as an ecotourist destination, perhaps, even if indirectly, lending further legitimacy to its ‘natural’ heritage values. Aboriginal cultural heritage, packaged as a tourism product, also adds another potential layer of experience to the region’s varied tourist attractions. At the time of writing there was widespread interest in exploiting Aboriginal culture in tourism ventures across the Wet Tropics. The enthusiasm of the tourism industry for Indigenous cultural tourism was balanced by ongoing discussion by government and industry about participation in tourism ventures within Aboriginal communities and organisations.

Aim and Scope of the Study

This scoping study is firstly concerned with Aboriginal knowledge and traditions that trace their origins to societies at the threshold of colonisation or what is also labelled ‘classical’ Aboriginal culture (see Memmott & Go-Sam 1999; Sutton 1998). The study stems from a particular interest (based on the authors’ previous and current research) in the traditional camps and dwellings, or ethnoarchitecture, of the Jirrbal, Gulngay and Girramay people (the dialect groups who are known collectively as Dyirbal speakers). Aboriginal built environments are interconnected with a number of other categories of Aboriginal knowledge that potentially form the basis for interpretive walks and Indigenous cultural tours, for example ethnogeography, ethnobotany, ethnozoology, religious and ritual knowledge.

A major research question in the study of Indigenous cultural tourism is the extent to which aspects of culture on display are affected by different types of tourism enterprises. Does tourism accelerate cultural change with negative consequences for the providers (for example exacerbating a loss of Indigenous knowledge), or alternatively, can Aboriginal tourism enterprises be designed to conserve4 elements of culture?

Various and contested interpretations of culture (indigenous, academic and industry) and associated recent debates on cultural change, tradition and indigenous identity, complicate and broaden the scope of this question5. Furthermore, the relatively complex relationship between tourism and Indigenous cultures (see Hinch & Butler 1996, p. 4, for example of tourism as a new form of colonialism) obscures unambiguous observations on the effects of tourism. The authors of this scoping study recognise that ‘in practice, it is important to recognise that all domains of Aboriginal life and the diverse impacts of tourism are neither discrete nor easily separated from one another, even for analytical purposes’ (Altman & Finlayson 1992, p. 3).

Despite a long history of touristic curiosity in Aboriginal culture, many Aboriginal groups (see discussion on Malanda) find that engaging with tourism is a novel activity. An increasing interest in cultural tourism since the 1970s by the Commonwealth and State governments has encouraged the promotion of tourism as a business for Aboriginal people. Furthermore, the expansion of the industry, its numbers and increased penetration to the most remote parts of the continent, has meant that most Aboriginal communities are exposed to tourists. Any attempt to analyse the relationship of tourism to culture needs to account for the variety of historical experiences and diversity of Aboriginal cultures in relation to the different emphases of tourism demand. An effective method by which to begin examination of the culture and tourism nexus is at the local level, case by case, consulting the individual providers of cultural content and their aspirations, and acknowledging contexts specific to place and historical circumstance.

The principal aim of the current study is to describe and assess enterprises that integrate knowledge of traditional Aboriginal dwellings, camps and building technologies and associated environmental knowledge into cultural tours and experiences. The transmission of this form of traditional Aboriginal knowledge is currently fragile, partly because of assimilation and decades of cultural depreciation, alienation from traditional landscapes, and the loss of a generation of Elders with experience of Aboriginal society at the threshold of colonisation. Particularly relevant to tourism, the distinctive building tradition of the Dyirbalngan has become symbolic of their rainforest cultural heritage and exemplifies, if only in one dimension, their interaction with the environments of the Wet Tropics. The scoping study is the introduction to a larger project which aims to explore

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4 Here the authors follow the Burra Charter’s definition of ‘conservation’; which includes preservation and restoration as well as rebuilding.

5 For examples of the debate on the relationship between contemporary indigenous identity and traditions in the discipline of anthropology, see Hanson (1989); Linnekin & Poyer (1990); Thomas (1997).
the conditions that generate cultural tourism enterprises ‘where indigenous peoples have navigated these identity-displaying border zones to their advantage’ (Adams 2003, p. 571).

Research Methods

This scoping study is based on fieldwork in the Wet Tropics Region and a review of (predominantly) Australian literature on indigenous cultural tourism. Indigenous tourism literature is initially analysed in order to examine (1) categories of Indigenous cultural tourism, (2) the benefits of Indigenous cultural tourism for Aboriginal people, (3) the cultural and economic sustainability of Indigenous cultural tourism. Drawing initially from Altman (1993), the following categories of Indigenous tourism products were identified: (1) manufacture and sale of Aboriginal art and material culture; (2) cultural tours; (3) Aboriginal small-scale enterprises providing distinct Aboriginal services, and; (4) cultural centres (which include interpretive centres, keeping places, and cultural theme parks). The study uses this framework to analyse, firstly Indigenous tourism enterprises in the Wet Tropics regions and secondly, specific ventures that involve Dyirbal people.

Both authors conducted research with Dyirbalgan prior to this study. One of the authors (O’Rourke) worked with Jirrbal and Girramay people for over two years recording data on their customary camps and traditional dwellings. This scoping study draws on this prior and ongoing research. Additional research in the field for this particular project consisted of site recording, participation in Indigenous cultural tourism enterprises as an observer, and discussions of operational and proposed ventures with Aboriginal people involved in such enterprises.

The Traditional Campsites and Dwellings of the Dyirbal tribes

A distinctive rainforest cultural system evolved amongst the Aborigines of north-eastern Australia, and although disrupted by the British invasion from the 1860s, continued in a modified form into the early decades of this century. The rainforest area extended along or near the coast for 325 km, and inland for distances up to 60 km. The Dyirbal language group occupied a section towards the south, whilst neighbouring groups were the Yidinydyi, Dyaabuganydyi and Kuku-Yalanji to the north.

Many of the distinct natural and cultural features of the region relate to the diverse terrain (coastal plains, plateaus at 300 m and 600 m, ranges up to 1,600 m high) and periods of intense, high rainfall (mean annual fall varies from 1,200 mm to over 4,000 mm). In contrast to the coast, cold winters occur on the elevated tablelands, ground frosts common in exposed areas. The climatic factors, combined with the tendency to occupy base camps for extended periods, necessitated warmer, more enduring structures than in most other parts of the continent. A dominant seasonal pattern was the occupation of thatched domes in large annual base camps during wet seasons (December to March) and ongoing, albeit less intense occupation, for dry seasons when a more mobile lifestyle prevailed amongst active adults. Base campsites were located in clearings, near watercourses, camp demography altering with economic, social and religious requirements. At certain Dyirbalgan camps, these clearings accommodated periodic social events with 200 or more people in attendance.

Rainforest dome structures required sufficient strength to withstand heavy rain and strong winds (see figure 2). Available cladding materials were the leaves of Calamus palm (lawyer cane), Fan Palm (Licuala ramsayi), Cycad Palm, Wild Banana (Musa spp), as well as Blady Grass (Imperata cylindrica), Melaleuca bark or a combination of these. Bunches of palm leaves were thatched stem-down in overlapping layers each tied to the frame with lawyer vines. Grass thatch was effective against the heaviest storms, and each horizontal layer, up to 200 mm thick, was tied with a cane tension ring for weather restraint.

Figure 2: Malanbara Yidinyji camp in the upper Mulgrave River Valley, adjacent to Mt Bellenden Ker

Photo by A.A. White, Source: The Queenslander, 2/4/1904
Domes of height 1 m to 1.5 m were common in the more temporary dry season camps, but in the base camps they were often at head-height to facilitate ease of internal movement and diurnal activity. This adaptation to the sedentary lifestyle was dissimilar to many other areas of the continent where shelters were used for sleeping and storage only and hence were considerably lower. Nevertheless ongoing research on Aboriginal ethno-architecture is revealing more examples of semi-sedentary villages, mainly in places of abundant resources, but often in inclement locations as well (Memmott 2005).

A range of larger-span dome types was employed in the rainforest base camps including circular-based domes of up to seven metres diameter. Size varied according to number of occupants. Several polygynous families could be housed under one roof, numbering up to 30 or more. Each of a man's wives and their respective children occupied a separate domiciliary space within the main shelter, with a warming and cooking fire. Other groups housed in large domes were single men undergoing initiation. The presence of multiple domiciliary groups under a large single structure facilitated social interaction during constant wet periods, and was in contrast to the continental norm of one such group per dwelling. Large-span dome types were constructed for several domiciliary groups who intended to combine as one household for a time. However, if such groups arrived in a camp at intervals, the interconnected or intersecting dome cluster would more likely arise, being a series of units each added incrementally.

Figure 3 shows a Dyirbal couple constructing a frame for shelter. The form is that of a ‘bi-dome’ or two half domes over an oval plan. The creation of more complex dome forms is possible using the pliable cane in different geometrical patterns. A wide range of barks and palm fronds were used to clad the framework, the preferred materials being Calamus Palm fronds, Fan Palm fronds (Licuala ramsayi), Blady Grass (Imperata cylindrica), Melaleuca bark or a combination of these.

Figure 3: A Dyirbal couple constructing a frame for a shelter on the Evelyn Tableland, c.1890

Source: John Oxley Library
Chapter 2

ABORIGINAL CULTURAL TOURISM

In this more general part of our report we discuss: (1) categories of Indigenous cultural tourism, (2) the benefits of Indigenous cultural tourism for Aboriginal people, and (3) Indigenous cultural tourism in relation to cultural and economic sustainability. We draw widely from across the Australian findings on these matters, with occasional reference to the international literature.

Indigenous Cultural Tourism

Australian Literature Sources

There is an extensive and growing discussion of Indigenous cultural tourism within Australia and internationally, reflecting the growth of this sector of the tourism industry and its relevance to Aboriginal peoples. Most of the literature is generated by non-indigenous commentators (Hinch & Butler 1996), so much so that Altman (1988) has noted a general lack of consultation with Aboriginal people about their involvement in the tourism industry. Ryan and Huynon (2002, p.635) have also identified the Aboriginal perspective as a significant omission within the tourism literature, along with ‘the voice of the tourist’. The development of Indigenous agencies, specific programs and Indigenous employees within tourism organisations, suggests that Aboriginal people may increase their participation in this discussion.

For definitions, histories, and comparative case studies of Aboriginal cultural tourism, the current study draws extensively on publications by Jon Altman and Julie Finlayson (Altman 1988, 1989; Altman & Finlayson 1989; Finlayson 1991). The Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR), directed by Altman, has been at the forefront of research into both the economic and social analysis of Aboriginal cultural tourism in Australia. Grounded in anthropology, the research by Altman and Finlayson makes extensive use of case studies of Aboriginal tourism ventures. Most of their studies were in remote communities, with the notable exception of Finlayson (1991), whereas the region that is the focus of this latter study is more rural than remote, being well connected to infrastructure and transport nodes.

Overview of Indigenous Cultural Tourism in Australia

Indigenous cultural tourism can be broadly defined as the commodification of elements of Aboriginal culture for sale as products in tourism markets. In a review of Aboriginal involvement in the tourism industry, Altman (1993) identified four product categories that are specifically culture-based:

1. Manufacture and sale of Aboriginal art and material culture; a large and important part of the current industry that is not addressed in the current study (also see Altman 1989).
2. Cultural tours which tend to focus on the interpretation of landscapes, rock art and ethnobotany.
3. Aboriginal small-scale enterprises providing a distinct Aboriginal service, such as arts and crafts outlets or dance troupes.
4. Cultural centres of which there are numerous examples around Australia, with a growing number under Aboriginal ownership. In recent years cultural centres have become a major, and highly visible, public interface between tourism and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. Memmott (1997a) in his analysis of Indigenous identity and contemporary architecture discussed the origins of Aboriginal cultural centres6.

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6 The concept of ‘Aboriginal museums’ in Australia was generated and elaborated in the post-assimilation political era of Aboriginal Affairs. This era commenced in the late 1960s but did not gain momentum until the early 1970s when the Whitlam Labour Government formally recognised Aboriginal culture as a positive aspect of the national heritage and identity. ‘Cultural retention’ replaced ‘assimilation’ as a Commonwealth Government Aboriginal policy, and the Aboriginal Arts Council was established to foster and bring Aboriginal art and performance into the public view. The advent of ‘Aboriginal museums’ embraced several ideologies, in addition to that of supporting Aboriginal culture. One was the idea of returning art and museum objects in public collections to the control and keeping of the cultural group which originally produced them. The return of such items led to the concept of the ‘keeping place’, which in its simplest form may be a lockable shed. Hence the concept of displaying cultural objects to the public, although this may well be a central function. A third equally important function may be that of a Cultural Centre which aims to provide opportunities for local Aboriginal people to actively practice and retain in an appropriate environment their cultural traditions such as dance, story-telling, painting, sculpture, oral history and genealogical recording (Memmott 1997a, p.43).
Cultural centres vary in type and are perhaps best described in sub-categories that include interpretive centres, keeping places, and cultural theme parks. This list is not exclusive and the types are not always clearly defined but they vary significantly in their scale and relation to the tourist industry. We shall briefly describe each in turn.

**Cultural ‘Keeping Places’**

Cultural ‘keeping places’ tend to be community based, and frequently, small-scale buildings for the safe storage of local cultural material, particularly historical artefacts and photographs. There has been an expansion of keeping places in rural and remote communities, partly due to the increasing repatriation of museum collections back to Indigenous groups. They act much like local museums and the community may choose to place some of the material from the keeping place on display to the public. Even as fee-charging public museums, these centres would rarely attain financial self-sufficiency (NTTC 1994) and require funding for capital works and maintenance. (Restitution of Indigenous material culture has parallels in North America; see Mauzé 2003.)

**Interpretive or Cultural Centres**

Interpretive or cultural centres tend to be purpose built for tourism but may have an ancillary community function. Medium in scale, they often represent both pre-contact and contemporary Indigenous culture and, frequently, have a close association with Aboriginal land, national parks or natural landscape attractions. The interpretive centre can serve as a venue for organising guided tours and a retail outlet for local Aboriginal arts and crafts. Control of these centres allows Aboriginal people to control representations of their identity to the tourists and general public. In a number of Australian examples, the architectural quality of the centre is used to promote the cultural experience - particularly the Uluru-Kata Tjuta Cultural Centre in Central Australia and the Brambuk Aboriginal Cultural Centre in the Grampians. An extensive commentary on the significance of Indigenous cultural centres exists in the anthropological literature. (For North American examples see Clifford 1997; Erikson 2003; Mauzé 2003)

**Cultural Theme Parks**

Cultural theme parks combine a variety of recreational experiences and entertainment based on Indigenous culture. Activities in a theme park are likely to include dancing and musical theatre, didgeridoo performance, recitals of Aboriginal social histories and language, spear and boomerang throwing, and fire making. The emphasis is often on a theatrical reinterpretation of culture, sometimes employing hologram projections. Theme parks feature displays of artefacts, dioramas of pre-contact camps and traditional dwellings and displays of bush tucker. The type invariably includes a retail outlet for Aboriginal arts and crafts, books, and souvenirs, and restaurants and food outlets. Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park is the most successful contemporary example in Australia, employing a record number of local Aboriginal people from the Cairns region (see Freeman 1999, 2000; Henry 2000) (see Figures 4 to 7).

**Figure 4: The Tjapukai Cultural Park near Cairns with rainforest-clad mountains in background in 1996**

![Photo by Paul Memmott](image)
Altman (1993) listed two additional product categories, elsewhere labelled as ‘diversified Indigenous tourism’ (Hinch & Butler 1996, p. 10), which do not feature Aboriginal culture as a part of the tourism attraction:

(i) Small-scale enterprises providing mainstream services, e.g. roadhouse facilities, ecotourism ventures or the use of Aboriginal land for accommodation.
(ii) Aboriginal participation as investors in relatively large infrastructure developments such as hotels, e.g. the Gagudju Crocodile Hotel at Kakadu and the Pajinka Wilderness Lodge at Cape York. In the USA, Native American ownership of casinos is another example of this form of Indigenous tourism.

While the categories listed above are useful for the analysis of Aboriginal enterprises, many Aboriginal tourism ventures include a mix of products. Although the focus of the current scoping study is on the use of Aboriginal knowledge and building traditions in cultural tours, traditional dwellings commonly feature in the various types of cultural centres. Community organisations often need to arrange their products around a building that functions as a ticketing office, with the added potential to serve as an interpretation centre and a gallery for local Aboriginal artists and craftspeople. Communities, particularly in remote or rural locations, usually need to offer a range of products to attract sufficient tourist numbers to maintain a viable enterprise.

Control of Tourism Products

The extent of Aboriginal control over the product is, of course, integral to the discussion of Indigenous cultural tourism. This ranges from full Indigenous ownership, to joint ventures, and to employment of Indigenous people as content providers. Hinch and Butler (1996) discuss the aspect of control as a determining factor in the definition of Indigenous cultural tourism.

Levels of ownership will depend on the type and scale of enterprise, tenure and the expectations of Aboriginal participants. Expertise is frequently required that is not available within Indigenous communities or family run ventures and non-indigenous involvement may be essential or desirable. This study, and the literature in general, identifies successful examples of partnerships between Indigenous ventures and the mainstream industry. In some cases however, Aboriginal control of enterprises may be a fundamental premise of the enterprise (Finlayson 1991).

The current study has included cultural tours, typically small in scale, and likely to be either 100% Aboriginal-owned or part of a joint venture. In this category of tourism product, Indigenous people are likely to control the cultural content of the tour. Given that this document is a scoping study, the authors have chosen not to examine business and management structures in detail. These tasks remain to be done for specific proposed or potential projects.

Demand for Indigenous Cultural Tourism

The study assumes that there is a demand for Indigenous cultural tourism in the Wet Tropics region; the figures on interview responses quoted by the industry tend to be high (Morse 2000, Freeman 2000) although there appears to be less qualitative research on tourist demand. While several existing (and relatively successful) enterprises cater for indigenous cultural tourism in the region, the study assumes that there is scope in the tourism market for further small-scale enterprises, based on cultural tours that involve different groups of Aboriginal people operating in their traditional countries. This is substantiated by more general studies.

For example, a recent research paper by Tourism Queensland (2004) based on a survey of tourist visitation incorporating Indigenous culture, indicates an increasing demand especially by international visitors to experience aspects of Indigenous culture, in particular with the view of meeting Indigenous Australians during their stay in Australia. The research found that cultural tours which were conducted by an Aboriginal guide were seen to have ‘added value’ in that Indigenous guides were perceived to have more knowledge concerning the local environment, history and mythological stories (or sacred histories) about the location being visited. (see also NTTC 1994). Five types of tourist groups were also identified in this research as expressing particular interest in incorporating Indigenous cultural experiences as part of their holiday experience. These groups included international visitors, people interested in learning about Australian Indigenous cultures, young people, adventurous people and those who were interested in the reconciliation process (Tourism Queensland 2004).

A number of Aboriginal people within the Wet Tropics are already engaged in tourism enterprises and many more are discussing opportunities to exploit their culture in the highly prominent regional industry.

Altman (1988) notes that, in the Northern Territory, Aboriginal cultural tourism is generally ancillary to environmental tourism. As is the case in the Northern Territory, the natural environment is the primary tourist

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8 Although now somewhat out of date, Altman (1988) provides a summary of the history of Indigenous tourism and the associated reports on tourism demand.
attraction in the Wet Tropics and the region is widely promoted for its scenic beauty, and in particular the Great Barrier Reef and remnant areas of rainforest. Tourism Queensland’s (2004) research on the Indigenous Tourism Market reports on the relationship between Indigenous tourism and landscape attractions, stating that ‘Visiting natural landscapes with rare and impressive scenery is an important element of an Aboriginal holiday experience’.

The Benefits of Indigenous Cultural Tourism

While acknowledging obvious benefits of Indigenous cultural tourism to the regional and national economies, this section of the report reviews the possible benefits of tourism for Aboriginal people in the Wet Tropics. For each of the varied reasons that can be found to support the development of tourism enterprises by Aboriginal people, it is perhaps possible to provide counter arguments that accentuate the negative effects of tourism. Although there are common national themes in the rationale for tourism enterprises, the diversity of Aboriginal histories and cultures requires specific, local assessments of each of the following potential reasons for promoting Aboriginal tourism:

- Economic opportunities for Indigenous groups,
- Promotion of self-determination,
- Cross-cultural exchange,
- Preservation of traditional cultures, and
- Natural resource management.

We shall consider each of these reasons in turn.

Economic Opportunities of Indigenous Groups

Both governments and Aboriginal people view tourism as a potential source of employment and economic growth for communities. Common to minority Indigenous groups in other countries, Hinch and Butler (1996:4-5) maintain that ‘Western-based economic rationale underlies much of the argument to use tourism as a mechanism for finding solutions to challenges facing indigenous peoples’. Government impetus for Indigenous tourism dates back at least several decades (see Altman 1993 & 1988 for a history of Commonwealth Government involvement) and was partly catalysed by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in 1991.9

From an Indigenous perspective, employment opportunities feature as a prime motive to engage with the industry. Mapunda’s (2001) research in South Australia on Aboriginal tourism enterprises recorded that the primary motivation for tourism was employment ahead of profit. Informal interviews in this study indicate that the quality of employment is a driving factor in the desire to form a tourism business. In the community of Jumbun, located in the study area on the Murray River (see Figure 1), the work options at the time of writing were often little more than three days per week on the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) or seasonal agricultural labour (for example banana packing or harvesting). In one example, a Jumbun resident discussed his deep interest in visiting all of the story places (or sacred sites) of which he had learnt since childhood and passing on that knowledge to the community, acknowledging that cultural tours provided a means to this vocation.

However Altman (1993) warns that financial returns from tourism enterprises may be so low or inequitably distributed that they might undermine any incentive to participate in such enterprises; and furthermore he notes the likelihood that tourism will only provide supplements rather than financial independence. In an area such as the Wet Tropics, where affluent tourists are numerous and highly visible, there can be a perception that tourism translates directly into instantaneous, profitable reward.

The Promotion of Self-determination

Hinch and Butler (1996) suggest that cultural tourism can promote self-determination.11 However the promotion of self-determination would largely depend on the extent of Aboriginal control and the success of the venture; failed ventures could well undermine efforts to institute greater self-determination for Aboriginal groups. It is more likely that the promotion of self-determination would be limited in many cases to partial economic independence and the development of some business and governance skills.

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9 Various recommendations covered the promotion of Aboriginal museums and cultural centres, equitable participation by Aboriginal people in major tourist projects, joint management and heritage control of National Parks, and general support for Aboriginal enterprises (RCIADIC Rieds 56, 314, 203 respectively).

10 The Australian Government’s equivalent of a work-for-the-dole scheme that has been operating in Indigenous Australian communities since the late 1970s.

11 Another subject of numerous recommendations in the RCIADIC.
Cross-Cultural Exchanges

A convincing argument can be made for Indigenous tourism on the grounds that it can promote cross-cultural awareness and understanding, and ameliorate stereotypical views of Indigenous communities. This rationale depends on the type of tourism encounter, who controls it, and its cultural content. The portrayal of classical Aboriginal culture carries the potential to stereotype Aboriginal people as ‘primitive’ and as people of the past, rather than as a vital and viable social component of a contemporary multi-cultural Australia. Although wary of the stereotypical tendencies, the cross-cultural exchange potential of tourism is supported by Finlayson (1991, p.70) who wrote:

Undoubtedly there is a role for Aboriginal communities in Eastern Australia to educate the wider society about Aboriginal experiences in Australian history. The framework of cultural tourism seems eminently suited to such a purpose.

While a proportion of tourists seek deeper more intimate levels of cross-cultural exchange, the desired levels of contact need to match Aboriginal expectations of the exchange. A recent paper by Parsons (n.d.) divides the Indigenous cultural tourism experience into categories based on degrees of intimacy. He explains: ‘within ranges along this continuum, various types of tourism enterprises, defined by their core business, may be distinguished in terms of exhibiting low, medium and high levels of intimacy.’ At the lowest level, no direct face-to-face exchange takes place; for example this may be the purchase of Aboriginal art through a broker or the purchase of Aboriginal investment equity in accommodation. A medium level of intimacy involves a face-to-face encounter, but one that emphasises commercial transactions rather than cultural exchange. At high levels of intimacy, the tourist would experience extended face-to-face encounters with opportunities for unstructured interaction, dialogue and exchange. Examples include guided tours in small groups on Aboriginal land or accommodation packages in small Aboriginal outstations.

Aboriginal preferences for engaging in types of tourism enterprises with their varying levels of personal involvement, will vary considerably across social, spatial and historical divides. Altman (1988) has noted preference amongst many Aboriginal groups and individuals for the arts and crafts industries because the income provided comes without contact with tourists. Only certain personality types will cope with the intensive social interaction that is required on cultural tours, for example bush food tours, and camping, ‘which many Aboriginal people are unwilling or unable to undertake’ (Altman & Finlayson 1992, p.2).

The types of enterprises that cater for the high levels of intimacy are the focus of this scoping study. Preferences for direct contact with Aboriginal people and, in particular, Aboriginal interpretations of Indigenous landscapes, are high on the list of tourist surveys, although the literature on tourism demand acknowledges that this tends to be a niche market (NTTC 1994; see also Ryan & Huyton 2000). The authors note that this type of experience has the greatest potential to challenge the tourist’s perceptions and attitudes of Indigenous cultures (see Davies 2001).

Preservation of Elements of Traditional Culture

Literature that reviews the effects of tourism on Indigenous cultures describes a spectrum of impacts from a destructive role to one of cultural preservation and recovery12. Altman (1988, p. 33) states that ‘the weight of evidence gathered by anthropologists in overseas contexts suggests that tourism is as likely to destroy, as to preserve indigenous cultures.’ Some of his case studies in Aboriginal Australia suggest that tourism can result in coerced cultural change within communities, although these examples tend to be in remote locations. He notes a resistance of the Mutitjulu community at Uluru to modify their cultural practice or material culture for tourism requirements whereas, in other places people have been more willing to adapt their culture and material culture for tourists (Altman 1988).

A more general criticism in the Australian context is that the tourism industry can promote the homogenisation of Aboriginal culture at the expense of diverse cultural forms across the continent. This tendency is clearly evident in much of the promotional material for Indigenous Cultural Tourism. The question is whether current advertising trends, observable in the marketing of Indigenous Cultural Tourism, directly influence Indigenous representations of their culture, particularly those groups seeking to enter the industry with new products. In contrast to general promotional material, regional cultural diversity is emphasised in some of the recent tourism literature (Fourmile 1996; NTTC 1994; Tourism Queensland 2004).

In a more positive light, Julie Finlayson, who has reported on case studies of Aboriginal tourism in both remote and rural Australia, suggests that tourism can contribute to a revival of traditional cultural practices particularly where ‘colonial settlement ruthlessly suppressed many forms of cultural expression’ (1991, p. 70). The relationship of tourism to cultural revival is evident in other countries, particularly where indigenous peoples form minorities (see Harkin 2003).

12 This debate has developed to a stage where tourism can be seen as one of the many contemporary (and inevitable) influences on Indigenous cultures; see Adams 2003:568, referring to Picard, ‘rather than asking the question whether a given culture has become polluted or enhanced by tourism, a more salient question is how tourism has contributed to the shaping of a given culture’. 
Hinch and Butler (1996) maintain, perhaps tenuously in the Australian context, that tourism contributes to cultural survival\footnote{It is important to separate ‘cultural survival’ from the preservation of cultural heritage. Contemporary Aboriginal people, in both urban and remote communities, maintain strong Indigenous identities and distinctive cultural practices that are not at risk of extinction.} through the economic advantage that accrues from successful enterprise. The cultural benefit of profitable tourism ventures would depend on how such funds are invested to maintain or re-establish cultural heritage. In the USA, the funds flowing from Native American owned casinos have permitted substantial investment in cultural museums (Harkin 2003). However, creating a museum is not necessarily a form or indication of cultural survival. At worst, surpluses of cash in a community can result in substance abuse and family violence (Memmott et al. 2001).

What is clear is that the effect of tourism on a particular group will be specific rather than general: it will be determined by that group’s location, contact history, contemporary cultural identity and social status, and the current state of social and economic problems. Just as an influx of tourism may have the potential to adversely affect cultural continuity in remote locations (by accelerating the loss of Indigenous knowledge and traditions), it may well serve to stimulate interest in Aboriginal history, identity and culture in rural and urban areas.

**Protected Area Resource Management**

An indirect benefit of cultural tourism is perhaps to be found in the potentially symbiotic relationship of Aboriginal interpretive tours to the management of Indigenous landscapes. We suggest here that interpretive cultural tours ideally require landscapes that are managed following customary Aboriginal practices, and that tourism may be one means of encouraging such Indigenous management of cultural landscapes and biodiversity. This observation is relevant to places where Aboriginal people have tenure over their country or have acquired Native Title, and also where groups have maintained a connection to protected or semi-protected landscapes such as national parks and state forests. In some regions, tourism may provide the means for younger generations of Traditional Owners to visit and observe their country. This is particularly the case in those communities and rural areas where regular access to country has been limited due to either lack of transport or formal prohibitive tenures that have prevented entry.

This relationship could be further explored by examining Aboriginal peoples motives for engaging in tourism and investigating the potential of combining the dual roles of Aboriginal tour guide and ranger (this may be a partial solution to seasonal fluctuations in tourism work. It is also possible that Aboriginal methods of landscape management or ‘caring for country’ are potential attractions in their own right, particularly for tourism focused on biological diversity and Indigenous relationships to landscapes\footnote{For information on Indigenous peoples’ relationship with their landscape see Ross (1996).} (see Altman 2003, Muloin et al. 2001, Parsons n.d.).

**Indigenous Cultural Tourism and Sustainability**

The relationship of the semantically nebulous term ‘sustainable’ to Aboriginal cultural tourism is not so clear cut. We must be careful to differentiate between economic sustainability, environmental sustainability and cultural sustainability. Tourism itself is considered by some to be an inherently unsustainable industry. Altman and Finlayson (1992, p.7) conclude that to be sustainable, Indigenous tourism requires a balance between the following variables: ‘commercial success, resilience of cultural integrity and social cohesion, and the maintenance of the physical environment.’

Considering the last of these variables, the concept of sustainability is closely associated with the conservation of natural heritage resources and biodiversity. The role of Aboriginal people in shaping and maintaining much of the continent’s ecosystems has been belatedly recognised, although the extent of influence in different land systems is debated (Altman 2003, Ross 1996). In the Wet Tropics, Aboriginal economies, camp sites and ceremonial grounds, and associated fire regimes contributed to the mosaic of vegetation types that were encountered by the first British settlers to the region in the late 19th Century (Bowman 2000; Lane & McDonald 2000).

Indeed the entire region can be regarded as an Aboriginal cultural landscape (Memmott & Long 2002). Although Aboriginal cultural attributes were not enumerated as criteria in the World Heritage listing of the Wet Tropics, ‘many, if not all, of the so-called natural values of the Wet Tropics have associated [Indigenous] cultural values’ (Smyth & Beeron 2001, p. 2). It can be argued that to exclude traditional Aboriginal resource management practices, where they remain in collective memory, in any ongoing plan for natural resource management, is to fail to conserve biodiversity. This study suggests that certain types of cultural tourism in the Wet Tropics can be integrated into a larger project that simultaneously aims to manage local natural resources, preserve the venue for tourism, and provide full-time employment. To achieve full-time employment for Indigenous Traditional Owners is often untenable from tourism alone, due to the seasonal fluctuations in tourism demand.
As noted above, the effects of tourism on cultural sustainability are more contentious and disputed. Perhaps a more consistent criticism of tourism is its potential effect on the social cohesion of local Aboriginal groups. Both the literature and the findings of the current authors, note that social tensions can arise in communities that host tourism enterprises. Although the effect on social cohesion may depend on the structure of the venture, for example whether we consider community or family-run enterprises, both types have the potential to generate tensions and division.

For community-run ventures, social friction may readily arise where there is a division of opinion on the benefits of tourism (e.g. see Altman 1988; Malapunda 2000). Where Aboriginal people have control over land tenure, one family group may want to exploit the potential tourist trade while other groups may wish to exclude tourists from their custodial lands (e.g. see Memmott & McDougall 2004). Jealousies and factional fighting over control can be further exacerbated where ventures become quite successful (Finlayson 1991), while kinship allegiance has the potential to complicate employment equity. Existing tourism enterprises, or even the potential for a venture, can ignite Native Title disputes between contiguous Aboriginal groups where land is an integral part of the product\(^{15}\).

**Sustaining the Business Side of Aboriginal-Run Enterprises**

One only has to look at the number of struggling and failed mainstream ventures to see that the tourism industry is often not a means to gratuitous reward. Ventures require capital, business plans, managers, management structures, and reliable, articulate, and gregarious workers trained in interaction with groups of people from many different cultures. It is also a fickle industry, vulnerable to destabilising events well beyond the control of any one enterprise. For example the recession during the 2002/03 season in North Queensland, largely attributed to concerns about terrorism and an Asian influenza epidemic.

**Indigenous Dwellings in Cultural Tourism**

Traditional Aboriginal camps and dwellings are commonly represented in several categories of Indigenous cultural tourism in Australia. They feature prominently in both theme parks and interpretive centres. However in both venues, the structures are often disconnected with Aboriginal landscapes and lack any environmental or wider cultural context.

![Figure 5: Rainforest village reconstructed at the Tjapukai Cultural Park, 1996*](image)

*Note the contrast in size, complexity and setting when compared to the previous photographs of actual camps*
Figure 6: Presentation by an Aboriginal man at the Tjapukai Cultural Park, 1996, to a seated audience with a rainforest dome at the rear used as a talking point on material culture

Photo by Paul Memmott

Figure 7: A dome-shaped dwelling or bayu in Tjapukai Cultural Park, 2002

Photo by Tim O’Rourke
Chapter 3

THE WET TROPICS REGION

The Wet Tropics in Queensland is extensively and effectively promoted as a region for nature-based tourism: the region consistently attracts the fourth highest number of international travelers to Australia (BTR 1999). Natural attractions include the Great Barrier Reef and associated islands, and the rainforest environments of the Wet Tropics region. Cairns also serves as a node for tours to the regions to the immediate west and north and to Cape York Peninsula. A working assumption of this study is that the region attracts a demographically diverse range of tourists, both domestic and international.

The Wet Tropics geomorphology, its varied ecosystems, biological diversity endemism, the aesthetic values of its varied landscapes and conservation status, were all recognised in the listing of this region on the World Heritage Register in 1988. However the region’s cultural heritage values were not listed, despite a strong desire by rainforest Aboriginal people for cultural recognition (Lane & McDonald 2000). Research had been initiated to include Aboriginal cultural heritage with the existing criteria (by the Rainforest CRC)24, supported by the Wet Tropics Management Authority (WTMA).

Overview of Indigenous Cultural Tourism in the Wider Wet Tropics

Examples of Indigenous cultural tourism in the Wet Tropics are readily identified in three of the product categories previously defined. Note that this brief overview does not include Dyirbal tourism enterprises which are described later in this report.

The Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Industry

The distinctive material culture of the Aboriginal societies in the Wet Tropics captured the interest of the colonial public as early as the 1890s, an era that saw the development of photography. Trade in the Aboriginal artefacts, from the north to southern cities, was promoted by one professional photographer from Cairns (A. Atkinson), whose postcards showed Aborigines in their ‘native’ state, with shields, spears and dilly bags on prominent display. Traditional rainforest material culture has been further exploited by international ethnographic collectors during this period: well-documented examples include Eric Mjöberg (1918) and Carl Lumholtz (1889). At the time of writing, ethnographic items such as the rainforest shields, remaining from the classical Aboriginal culture, fetched record prices in fine art auction houses.

Contemporary Aboriginal Art in the Wet Tropics region does not have the same high profile as it does in the Northern Territory and Western Australia, although artists from the region were represented in the recent exhibition at the Queensland Art Gallery, titled Story Place Indigenous Art of Cape York and the Rainforest (Queensland Art Gallery 2003). There are numerous commercial outlets for Aboriginal arts and crafts in Cairns, although the provenance of much of this merchandise is unlikely to be local. However the domestic and tourism markets for Aboriginal arts and crafts are well recognised in the region and various Aboriginal-controlled enterprises have been established to exploit this interest. For example, Yarrabah Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Cultural Centre, opened in 2002, provides a local community workshop, with a focus on ceramic art and local arts and crafts are sold at the adjacent Menmuny Museum (see Figure 8).

24 Unfortunately funding ceased to this CRC during the writing of this report.
Cultural Centres in the Wet Tropics

All three types of cultural centres are represented in the Wet Tropics: they include small community keeping places and museums (e.g. Menmuny Museum at Yarrabah), interpretation centres (e.g. Nganyaji Interpretive Centre at Ravenshoe), and one large cultural theme park (Tjapukai Cultural Park, just north of Cairns).

However there were some historical antecedents to this more recent post-assimilation era trend. Popular in the 1930s, ‘The Malanda Jungle’ on the Atherton Tableland was one of the first tourist ventures to directly exploit local Aboriginal culture. It was established in 1928 by James English, one of the pioneer settlers of the Malanda district, and comprised a guided tour with performances by local Ngadjan men, conducted in 26 acres of remnant rainforest. The Malanda Jungle displayed a range of natural and cultural history exhibits that included aviaries, penned marsupials, and exotics ferns, as well as boomerang and spear throwing, and tree climbing exhibitions by Ngadjanji (English 1994). The Jungle housed a large collection of Aboriginal artefacts and a Ngadjan village was constructed in a clearing within the rainforest.

Cultural Tours

Since the late 1980s, cultural tours have increased in popularity amongst tourists to Australia (Altman 1988) demonstrating different business models of enterprise and experiences. This type of product is active in the Wet Tropics, and given the region’s landscapes, would appear to be a category undergoing expansion.

In the most informal arrangement, individual guides can be hired through to local tourist information centres. For example in Malanda, a local Ngadjanji man, Ernie Raymont, was available to conduct tours of a small remnant of rainforest on the edge of town, behind the local information Centre. This functions as a local history museum with a section devoted to the Ngadjanji, the local Aboriginal people.

At the time of writing, several Aboriginal families were operating cultural tours in the Wet Tropics north of Cairns. ‘Native Guide Safari Tours’, run by Hazel Douglas, was based out of Port Douglas. It offered a full-day tour that included transport from both Cairns and Port Douglas to traditional Kuku Yalanji rainforest country in the Daintree National Park, starting at Mossman Gorge in the south and ending at Cape Tribulation. Promotion for the tour offered personal account by Hazel Douglas of Aboriginal story places, history, bush tucker and medicines.

From the Aboriginal Community of Wujal Wujal, ‘Walker Family Tours’ ran a similar type of enterprise, based on a two-hour guided walk to Bloomfield Falls that featured Kuku Yalanji history, bush medicine and bush tucker, and a ‘sacred site of great cultural significance’. Operating as a family business, the enterprise developed from a local bush-tucker walk into a successful tour venture, with assistance from the Aboriginal agency, the Balkanu Cape York Development Corporation.

Kuku Yalanji Dreamtime Tours, probably the best known of cultural tours in the region, is one of the few enduring tourism ventures to be community based. Located in Mossman Gorge, approximately one hour north of Cairns, large numbers of tourists visit the Daintree National Park for sightseeing, walking and swimming. The Mossman Gorge Aboriginal community is located at the entrance to the National Park, on the only road in and out of the popular recreational section of the park. The Dreamtime Tour is conducted on a walking track circuit in an area of the National Park set aside specifically for that use.
Promotion for the tour emphasises the Kuku Yalanji relationship to the environment, and the lack of distinction between culture and nature in the Aboriginal cosmology. The website offered the following experiences:

- Walk deep into the heart of the rainforest,
- Learn about traditional bush tucker and medicine,
- Hear retelling of Dreamtime legends,
- Enjoy billy tea and freshly baked damper, and
- Browse through our gift shop and art gallery.

(Bamanga Bubu Ngadimunku Inc. 2004).

Kuku Yalanji Dreamtime Tours is discussed in the Indigenous Cultural Tourism literature (Altman & Finlayson 1992; Finlayson 1991) and one of the authors participated in the guided walk as a tourist. The tour featured ethnobotanical information, hunting stories, an area for body paint-up with natural pigments, and a sacred tree with a story attached. Two traditional dwellings, each clad in a different material, had been constructed in small clearings along the walking track. There were general comments about Kuku Yalanji culture although the information was not expansive. The guide kept up a banter which was informative but at the same time anecdotal, often personal and humorous. After the walking tour, tea and damper were served, providing further opportunity to engage in discussion with the guide. Three to four of the group of 19 tourists expressed a strong desire to learn more about Aboriginal culture from Aboriginal people and not ‘Sydney tour guides’. Sustained questions from the tourists to the guide did appear to create some discomfort for the guide, despite his relatively gregarious nature.

**Summary of EthnoArchitecture as a Tourism Product in the Wet Tropics**

It can be seen from the above that traditional dwellings are built as displays in cultural centres and occasionally on the paths used in cultural tours. Currently in the Wet Tropics Region, there are at least seven tours conducted by Aboriginal guides through Indigenous landscapes. At least two of these tours use reconstructed dwellings, set in natural landscapes, as props along a guided path. Tjapukai Cultural Park also features at least two traditional Djabugay dwellings in a reconstructed camp scene. Yet this quantitative assessment of the use of ethnoarchitecture is from the southern part of the Wet Tropics which is within the Dyirbal territories. These case studies will be considered in Chapter 4.
Chapter 4

DYIRBAL TOURISM PRODUCTS

Introduction
This part of the scoping study explores aspects of Dyirbal culture that can be utilised for Indigenous tourism enterprises, in particular cultural tours, including knowledge of traditional dwellings and camps. After a discussion of fieldwork that investigated ethno-architecture and associated knowledge, the chapter gives a brief summary of existing and proposed tourism enterprises that involve Dyirbal people within the south of the Wet Tropics region. The conclusion to this chapter enumerates the impediments and obstacles to the establishment and maintenance of an Indigenous cultural tourism enterprise, with specific reference to the Dyirbal ventures.

The Aboriginal people who have contributed to this study mostly reside in the community of Jumbun on the Murray River (near Tully) and identify as members of the Girramay, Jirrbal or Gulngay groups. The study area encompasses the traditional countries of these tribal or dialect groups, with the Tully and Murray River catchments forming the geographical focus of their territory. These catchments flow into a wide floodplain (Bellenden Plains) on the coast, draining the forested escarpments of the Cardwell Range to the west, south and north.

Despite the relatively late colonisation of the area, the contact period has been disruptive and, at times, violent for the Aboriginal cultures in the region. The linguist, Bob Dixon suggests that the ten written records of Dyirbal dialects possibly represent only half the pre-contact number of dialects in the region (1990). In spite of the pervasive effect of the settler culture, and the widespread destruction of Indigenous landscapes, Dyirbal people have been remarkably resilient in sustaining many aspects of their culture. During the early part of the 20th Century a number of family groups of Dyirbal language speakers retreated to the country around the village of Murray Upper. Living in self-constructed dwellings in customary camps along this part of the Murray River, people supplemented their traditional economy with seasonal labour for the local immigrant settlers. Although movements and settlement patterns were irrevocably altered, these camps helped to sustain a degree of cultural continuity and integrity. Of particular relevance to the current research project was the maintenance of material culture and language.

These Murray River camps lasted into the early 1970s when the Aboriginal people living in the district moved to a new settlement named Jumbun, established on freehold land which, prior to purchase by the State Government, had been a cattle property. The turn-off to Jumbun from the Bruce Highway is roughly halfway between Tully and Cardwell. Once one drives up this road and passes through Jumbun, (less than 10km), the road terminates at Murray Falls (in the Murray Falls State Forest), a spectacular natural feature on the headwaters of the Murray River, and both an Aboriginal story place and tourist attraction situated in a state forest at the foothills of the Cardwell Range. A large camping area adjacent to the falls is managed by the Department of Natural Resources. While relatively remote from the larger tourist centres of the Wet Tropics region, in season, Murray Falls attracts a reasonably constant flow of tourists, all of whom must pass through Jumbun.

Dyirbal Cultural Knowledge
The study is interested in the relationship of the traditional Dyirbal built environment to current and future tourism projects in this part of the Wet Tropics. The traditional dwelling, or mija in Jirrbal and Girramay, has a long association with representations of Dyirbal identity and is a regular feature of Aboriginal cultural tourism. Other elements of this traditional built environment include customary campsites, bora grounds (prun or buya in Jirrbal/Girramay) and the network of paths that connected these different locations. This ethno-architectural and ethno-geographic knowledge is specific to particular places and to the environmental qualities of those places. Cultural tours that exploit this place-specific knowledge (for example economic uses of the land systems, the stories attached to the landscape and the histories of occupation) provide fertile ground for outsiders seeking alternative ways of viewing the Wet Tropics.

Previous research into Jirrbal and Girramay traditional dwellings by one of the authors (Memmott) provides a background to language and material culture. Additional research into customary campsites and traditional walking tracks has been carried out by the second author (O’Rourke) as part of his doctoral program. Part of this latter work occurred during the scoping study. This earlier fieldwork, in 2001, had identified a number of elder Jirrbalngan and Girramaygan, who had lived in traditional dwellings or mija at various times in their lives having grown up in Murray Upper district, between Cardwell and Tully. Their experience of traditional camps varied according to their age, the contact histories of their families and their own biographies. But despite the
seemingly long interlude between the early contact period and the 21st Century, these Elders were knowledgeable of their traditional built environments. These Elders were all keen to see their knowledge of *mija* use and construction preserved for teaching younger generations of their people (also see Pedley 1992:9-19). Several Elders were fluent in Girramay and Jirrbal and had worked with Bob Dixon on their language. Dixon (1983, p. 67), writing about his fieldwork, which began in 1963, explained the cultural continuity in the district:

That the Aborigines did survive to maintain a viable community in Murray Upper today is a tribute to their tenacity and resistance. It is also partly due to the backwoods situation. Most of the forest had not been cleared, especially on the mountain slopes, and there was still plenty of food around. Indeed, for many families, this was only supplanted by the white man’s bread and beef as late as 1950. One group of Jirrbalngan lived a traditional nomadic life around the upper reaches of the Tully River until about 1940 – three-quarters of a century after the start of white settlement.

Prior to the formation of the community of Jumbun in the 1970s, Girramaygan and Jirrbalngan families continued to occupy camps at sites on the upper Murray River. As a source of transient labour for the local farms, the camps were apparently tolerated by the settlers. The camps contained self-constructed dwellings frequently built of bush materials; in part due to the shortage of industrial building materials, such as corrugated steel. Although the material and sociospatial structure of these camps would have been affected by cultural change, the relative autonomy of the camps helped to conserve elements of traditional culture (O’Rourke 2003).

Within Jumbun and Murray Upper, demonstrations of material culture for educational purposes (see Pedley 1992) and for tourism during the 1990s have helped to maintain some of the traditional knowledge and skills associated with building *mija*. This has led to transfer between generations of some traditional building knowledge, however these exercises lack the social context of the customary camps and were often removed from Aboriginal landscapes.

**Results of a Mija Construction Project**

Seven *mija* were constructed at five locations during fieldwork. Three groups of Dyirbalngan participants (Girramaygan and Jirrbalngan) including six Elders were involved in the in situ reconstructions with the Elders acting as builders and instructors.

Figure 9 shows the Girramay Elder Jack Muriata and his sons, Clarence and Samuel, thatch the framework for a *mija* using fronds on the lawyer cane, *Calamus moti*, in October 2002.

*Figure 9: This mija was constructed in riparian rainforest along Deep Creek, close to Bilyana*

Information recorded during the fieldwork included material selection and collection techniques, Jirrbal and Girramay names for resources, construction methods, and construction sequence and duration. Four different cladding materials and the associated building technologies were documented during the project. Each *mija* was a variation on a type of dome-shaped form. Notes were taken on customary uses of dwellings and campsites based on discussions of the contextual background of the *mija* with the participants. Several Elders, who were unable to attend building projects, were also interviewed; the discussion being directed toward the results of the reconstruction projects.

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25 The construction process was recorded on digital photographs, 35mm colour slide film and digital video. Drawings were made of the completed *mija* and all but one were revisited and photographed after periods of 10 days to 4 weeks.
Research Difficulties

The project was partly restricted by the lack of suitable building sites near to Jumbun, which could provide the required resources. Extensive clearing has erased the majority of the Aboriginal landscapes on the coastal plain and the widespread freehold tenure of this area limited access to traditional campsites and remnant sources of construction materials. Five of the seven mija required trips from the building site to remnant vegetation to gather construction materials including melaleuca bark, blady grass (*Imperata cylindrica*) and fan palm fronds (*Licuala ramsayi*).

The task of describing the properties of classical camps is difficult due to the length of contact time, cultural change, and the limitations of the early ethnographic studies in Dyirbalngan country. While the eldest participants in the study were able to describe aspects of the camps built by their parents and grandparents in the early part of 20th Century, it is difficult to gauge the effects of colonisation on the sociospatial properties of traditional camps in the district. Several Aboriginal campsites on the Murray River were occupied in the 1960s and the names of the camps and bora grounds along the Murray River (between Murray Falls and the highway) are part of the collective knowledge and stories of places and people.

Benefits of the *Mija* Construction Project to the Participants

The participants appeared to enjoy the project and were notably pleased with their work; each of the groups was interested in extending the project. One group, after having built four mija, suggested new locations and a project to build a yabun or semi-permanent camp of large wet season dwellings. All of the younger participants were taught and practiced traditional building technologies.

A number of factors appear to have influenced the relative success of the fieldwork including:

- A general desire of Dyirbal people to pass on knowledge, evident in an interest in recording and transmitting knowledge of language and material culture;
- An interest amongst the younger participants, in learning about the range of traditional dwellings and associated resources;
- Payment for involvement in the research;
- The potential relationship between the projects and current Native Title claims (this connection was suggested by legal officers from regional Land Councils who were working with some of the research participants at the time of the projects); and
- Recognition by members of the Aboriginal community that opportunities exist in the area of Indigenous cultural tourism and that projects which utilise traditional knowledge provide a foundation for potential enterprises.

The Girramay and Jirrbal Elders were eager to teach cultural knowledge to their families and community and the in situ building projects provided a forum for the transfer of traditional information and techniques (see Figure 10). The *mija* was thatched with *jaguru*, fronds from the fan palm, *Licuala ramsayi*, which was collected from another location. *Licuala* palms form the distinctive fan palm forests of the wet tropics, of which only 5% of the original vegetation type remains.

At the time of the fieldwork, the Jirrbal language was taught in Jumbun as part of a regional language program. The practice of traditional technologies may help to preserve related elements of the language, under threat from neglect.

*Figure 10: The completed mija built by Girramay elder Jack Muriata and his sons*
**Preliminary Findings on Customary Campsites**

During the course of the scoping study, three field trips investigated customary campsites. The investigation focused on the Murray River and Davidson Creek, where locations were visited and recorded under the guidance of Girramay and Jirrbal Elders. On the Murray River, the data collected included a sequence of campsites and associated oral histories of those sites. This work is far from complete, hindered by the limits of time, the effects of environmental change, land tenure and access rights, and the memory of the Jirrbal and Girramay Elders. The findings, however, are significant to the scoping study and can be linked to the future of Aboriginal tourism in the region.

Prior to the 1970s, a large proportion of both Girramay and Jirrbal people lived in self-constructed dwellings in camps that appear to be strongly associated with pre-contact settlement. The history of these Aboriginal camps and movement between places of residence is a significant feature of Jirrbal and Girramay oral histories. Elders invariably recount their biographies with reference to place of residence and the demography of that place.

Extensive clearing of the Murray River district (and the upper Tully River) did not occur until the 1940s. Prior to clearing, Aboriginal people maintained their landscapes through seasonal burning practices. The most prominent feature of this landscape was the pattern of pockets, or grassland clearings, adjacent to rainforest. Aerial photographs of the region in 1937 clearly show this pattern of blady grass (*Imperata cylindrica*) pockets adjacent to the Murray River and Tully Rivers and other watercourses in the district. Several Elders were able to identify and name the majority of the pockets along the Murray River, all of which were associated with campsites or different types of bora ground. The reports of the first European explorers to the region clearly demonstrate the link between the pockets in the Wet Tropics and Aboriginal camps and bora grounds (e.g. see Savage 1989).

A range of factors influenced Aboriginal post-contact settlement patterns in addition to the agrarian expansion of the settlers. For example in the first half of the twentieth century, the fear of Native Police dispersals and government-sanctioned removals (see history of Hull River Mission which has recently been commemorated by a monument) drove people to more remote areas. The post-contact movements of Aboriginal people within the district, and subsequent experiences and memories of particular locations, will inevitably be discontinuous with the pre-contact settlement patterns. However, good relations between some settlers and the Girramay and Jirrbal allowed people to retain their connections to some of the customary camps and a number of these locations are prominent in local Aboriginal histories. Good relations between settlers, the supply of work and European foodstuffs, may have tended to make these camps more sedentary than prior to colonisation.

In the last 50 years, land clearing in the lower Murray and Tully River catchments, firstly for cattle followed by the more extensive clearing and levelling for cane farming, has altered the landscapes to an extent that the pattern of Girramay and Jirrbal campsites and ceremonial grounds are largely unrecognisable from aerial photographs. In uncleared areas, the absence of Aboriginal fire regimes has also altered the pattern of pockets, with the successions of rainforest vegetation types over grasslands.

Despite the freehold tenure of many of the campsites recorded on the Murray and Tully River catchments, the campsites could well be protected for their cultural heritage values. Most of the recorded camps contain burials of people related to Jirrbal and Girramay families. It appears that little has been done to protect even the burial sites at many locations and, given the prohibited entry to many customary camp locations, it seems that some of the current land holders are clearly against protecting even small areas that are highly significant to Girramay and Jirrbal people.

Far from a homogenous market, part of the demand for Indigenous tourism is seeking more intimate contact with and knowledge of Indigenous people experiences outside of museum and theme park dioramas. Aboriginal built environments emphasise relationships to specific places and landscapes. Traditional dwellings were highly dependant on their environmental context, which would determine the duration of camps and longevity of structures and the types of materials used for construction. Where possible, the reconstruction of traditional dwellings at the sites of customary camps is likely to be a better method for preserving traditional knowledge and replicating traditional forms of landscape management. The relationships of campsite and dwelling type to place and environment are likely to be more informative to tourists. There also remains additional scope for using historical data in virtual models of traditional settlement patterns and environmental use.

However, this raises one further problem, specific to small-scale tourism ventures run by Jumbun people and other Aboriginal groups in the Wet Tropics region, which deserves comment. In this region, unfavourable land tenure can be a substantial impediment for Aboriginal people wanting to establish enterprises. In the Dyirbal study area, extensive areas of freehold land and limited rights of access for Aboriginal people to State forests and National Parks curtail the potential of tourism activities, including camp construction and the procuring of customary building materials. This is in contrast to parts of the Northern Territory that have experienced a more substantial land rights regime, where many significant tourist attractions occur on Aboriginal land, and where Traditional Owners can secure access fees. An exception in the Wet Tropics is the case of Kuku Yalanji Dreamtime Tours; this enterprise has successfully negotiated with the Queensland Government, exclusive access to part of the Mossman George National Park.
**Dyirbal Tourism Products**

Dyirbalngan are well placed to exploit cultural tourism because of their strong links to country and a resilient material culture, combined with the tourism traffic through the region. Recognising this potential, a number of enterprises and attractions had been recently established or were in planning or construction stage at the time of writing. The following section of the study describes eight of these Dyirbal tourism products.

**The Nganyaji Interpretive Centre, Ravenshoe**

Opened in September 2002, the Nganyaji Interpretive Centre is a relatively modest building located at the rear of the larger Ravenshoe Visitor Centre (opened 1996) at the southern entrance to the town (see Figure 11). Construction of the Nganyaji Interpretive Centre building and exhibition was funded through the Queensland Government Heritage Trails Network and operational costs were being met by the Herbert Shire Council. The two separate buildings are connected by a short walkway and, at the time of writing, the Nganyaji Interpretive Centre could only be entered through the Visitor Centre which was staffed by local non-Aboriginal volunteers. The Nganyaji Interpretive Centre was built with an alternative entrance, with the intention that local Jirrbal people would charge admission to the building and provide additional information in Jirrbal history and culture.

Since opening, the centre had not been staffed by local Jirrbal people and consequently admission was free of charge. At the time of writing, a small section of the centre was devoted to photos of contemporary Jirrbal people. Part of the museum dealt with contact history, while the remainder of the exhibition displayed items of material culture, including an audiovisual record of traditional crafts and representations of various Jirrbal myths and sacred histories.

![Figure 11: Nganyaji Cultural Centre at Ravenshoe, 2004](Photo by Tim O'Rourke)

**Hull River Mission Interpretive Centre**

The Hull River Mission Interpretive Centre at South Mission Beach, opened in 2003 to commemorate Aboriginal people who resided at the mission settlement, between 1914 and 1918, not far from the site (see Figure 12). Funded through the Queensland Government Heritage Trails Network, an abstract interpretation of a mija, forms a partial cover over a series of plaques. These relate the history of the settlement and individual stories of mission inmates and their descendants, telling something of the contact history in the early twentieth century. Although modest in scale, and perhaps more a monument than an interpretive centre, the short biographies contained on the plaques are confronting and affective.
Echo Creek, a tributary of the Tully River, drains a steep section of the eastern escarpment of the Cardwell range. Located between the Tully and the Murray Rivers, a traditional Aboriginal walking pad (or pathway) followed Echo Creek, connecting Girramay, Jirrbal (Jubunbarra subdivision) and Gulgay people on the coastal plain with the tableland Jirrbal (Gambilbarra subdivision). A network of these walking tracks covered the Wet Tropics Region prior to European colonisation, reflecting the customary movement pattern of people that also enabled social and economic exchange between distant groups.

Echo Creek walking track was re-established as a part of a general program to promote hiking and trekking in the Wet Tropics (now marketed as ‘trails of adventure’). Many of the traditional Aboriginal tracks were used by explorers, miners and settlers to colonise the region and are subsequently documented in colonial histories as well as Aboriginal oral histories. Echo Creek track, for example, was used by European settlers to reach the Culpa Creek goldmines at the top of the range. Understandably, these routes, where they are known, form a useful infrastructure for a contemporary hiking network, with the added attraction of Aboriginal heritage value, and often, colonial heritage content. Several walking trails within the Wet Tropics are currently promoted as traditional Aboriginal pathways.

Gugubarabi is an Aboriginal owned company that was established by a senior Jirrbal man (E.G.) as a cultural tourism enterprise. It was primarily for the benefit of a number of Jubunbarra (coastal Jirrbal) people, however, it was envisaged that other people (not necessarily of Indigenous origin) could be employed by or join the company at the Boards’ discretion. The Gugubarabi enterprise developed around the Echo Creek walking track (operational in 2002), and a cultural centre, the King Ranch Cultural Theatre which was completed in 2003. Both facilities received financial aid through the Queensland Heritage Trails Network, funded by both the Queensland and Commonwealth Governments. Cardwell Shire Council applied for and administered a grant from the Queensland Heritage Trails Network. Local Council support for the scheme also included the allocation of a site on Council land for the Cultural Theatre building and signage to the venue.

The heritage trails website promotes the Echo Creek Walking Trail and the Tully Valley & King Ranch Cultural Theatre:

Join Jirrbal guides for a half-day walk along a forest track following a traditional Aboriginal trading route over the coastal range to the Tablelands. The guides identify rainforest species and their traditional uses as bush tucker. At the nearby El Rancho del Rey, the King Ranch Cultural Theatre will incorporate gallery and performance space with a fascinating collection of artefacts from the local Jirrbal people. The Jirrbal people have developed this walk as a business for their community and a way to share their cultural heritage. (Queensland Heritage Trails Network 2004)

Aboriginal workers employed on the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) cleared the path along Echo Creek; the original route of the walking pad was overgrown, it probably ceased to be used regularly early in the 20th century. The majority of those involved in re-establishing the track were to have an ongoing role as rangers or tour guides on the path.

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26 Personal communication to T.O’R local historian Dorothy Jones, Tully, 2003.
Figure 13 shows the Gugubarabi rangers standing in front of a *mija* they constructed with the help of several elders from Jumbun in 2002. The *mija* was built in a small clearing beside the walking track to Echo Falls.

*Figure 13: Gugubarabi rangers*

![Photo by Tim O’Rourke](image)

The first section of the walk was located on private property, formally part of the extensive King Ranch cattle station that was subdivided in the 1970s. The walking track, located at the end of an unsealed road, would be difficult to find without local knowledge of the area; there was no designated parking or signage identifying the location at the time of writing. Several kilometres along the track, the land tenure changes to State Forest.

The track follows the creek, which is lined with riparian rainforest, to Echo Creek Falls; the round trip making for a comfortable day’s walk. Occasionally the path diverges from the creek bank, traversing several types of rainforest along the route. Waterfalls and swimming holes are common along the watercourse that is also the location of two sacred sites or Story Places, these being shared with the public. There are plans to re-establish the traditional track to the top of the range although this would extend the duration of the walk to more than one day and cover steep terrain. The traditional track runs to Culpa Creek and the Tully River on the tableland, linking various ceremonial grounds and associated campsites.

A botanist (with a history of work with Aboriginal people in the Wet Tropics) was employed to identify plants along the walk that were matched with Jirrbal and Girramay dialect names and traditional uses. Over 120 species were identified along the track and marked with numbered tags. Aboriginal guides had constructed two traditional dwellings or *mija* in a clearing adjacent to the track. An Elder from Jumbun had helped with the construction of the first *mija*, thatched with the fronds of the climbing palm or lawyer cane, *Calamus moti* (*mija* in Jirrbal and Girramay). At least three of the four guides (excluding E.G.) had direct experience of customary dwellings, but opted for advice from an Elder with recognised expertise in *mija* building. A tripod for eel smoking, another distinctive element of rainforest material culture, was also constructed in the clearing. (Note that once built, a *mija* requires regular maintenance, particularly when thatched with palm fronds and uninhabited.)

According to E.G., there were two key marketable experiences on the Gugubarabi tour; firstly educational and secondly, recreational. E.G. has a history in the education sector and has a background in teacher training that included cross-cultural seminars. He also has extensive knowledge of Dyirbal culture both through his experience of growing up and working in the district and his ongoing collation of historical data. This background influences the range and content of products offered by Gugubarabi. In addition, the El Rancho del Rey personnel have a history of promoting cultural workshops for corporate as well as tourist groups and also schools and institutions.

*Operation*

The structure and management of the business developed under the guidance of a business consultant with experience of business development and marketing in the tourism sector. The consultant worked closely with Gugubarabi, to develop a feasible business plan and marketing strategy and maintained an ongoing relationship with the enterprise, providing administration services and marketing. The consultant, through his own tourism business in Townsville, also acted as a booking agent for Gugubarabi tours.

Gugubarabi benefited from a close relationship with a local, non-indigenous tourism venture, El Rancho del Rey. Based in the original King Ranch buildings, El Rancho Del Rey offered accommodation, particularly catering for tour groups and the small-scale conference market. The resort linked to a range of local tourist activities including the Gugubarabi guided walk along Echo Creek that was promoted in El Rancho Del Rey’s
advertising material, including its website. On one occasion El Rancho del Ray had been used for accommodation by the participants in an international television program, the ‘Survivor’ series\(^{29}\), and this featured prominently in the promotional material.

The King Ranch Cultural Theatre was built on the road to El Rancho Del Rey, only a short walk (less than 1 km) from the main guesthouse, probably designed to be used by both Gugubarabi and, independently, by guests at El Rancho Del Rey. Much of the material for the Cultural Theatre comes from E.G.’s private collection (the researcher visited the building prior to completion). For Gugubarabi, it provided a reliable booking agent with marketing reach and a supply of tour groups. The cultural workshops offered by Gugubarabi were well suited to corporate and institutional tourism. Although not exactly a joint venture in contractual terms, the symbiotic relationship was mutually beneficial (although it may well have had problems that were not identified by the researchers), providing an additional product to a range of activities offered by El Rancho Del Rey. The Gugubarabi enterprise was abruptly curtailed in late 2003 with the sale of the property that included El Rancho Del Rey.

**Evaluative Comments on the First Stage of Gugubarabi**

At the time of writing, Gugubarabi (with a proposed name change) was being restructured to take advantage of a new proposal to use a different part of the old King Ranch for tourist accommodation.

Observed and potential problems to the operation of Gugubarabi included:

- The sporadic and on-call nature of work frustrated some of the guides, who could not safely plan ahead for family or community engagements;
- The guides required transport (from residences in either Jumbun or Tully) to reach the walking track or El Rancho del Rey to meet the tourists, and only one guide in four owned a car (which itself was ill-suited to the unsealed road to the track);
- Guides were being paid on CDEP wages, rather than salaries proportionate to the commercial value of the work; and
- Considerable community disputes occurred over which people had Native Title rights in the Echo Creek country, and therefore the ultimate rights to conduct the tours over the country (this led to three of the four guides resigning).

Although the Echo Creek walk functioned much like a typical cultural tour, the entrepreneurial background of the principal Traditional Owner extended the type of tourism product on offer by Gugubarabi. His experience and personality enabled the enterprise to include seminars and cultural workshops that could be tailored to differing types of tourist groups, providing the heterogenous market with valuable combination of extensive knowledge and flexibility.

**Misty Mountain Walking Trails**

Misty Mountains walking trails consists of over 130 km of tracks that exploit a large, contiguous tract of rainforest on the escarpments between the coastal plain and the Evelyn Tableland, in an area between Tully, Ravenshoe and Innisfail. The tracks follow a combination of traditional Aboriginal walking pads and forestry tracks, some new linking sections may have also been established. The walking tracks were constructed under a partnership between the shires of Eacham, Herberton, Cardwell and Johnstone, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS), Traditional Owners, and volunteers from Conservation Volunteers Australia. The project was funded through the Queensland Government Heritage Trails Network. Predominantly, but not exclusively, local Aboriginal people were employed to establish the trails under the guidance of QPWS who administered the project.

Jirrabal and Mamu Aboriginal people are the Traditional Owners of the Misty Mountains. Several of the Misty Mountain walking tracks follow the ridgelines traditionally used by the Traditional Owners to connect ‘yabulmbara’, the coastal plain, to ‘gambilbara’, the rocky country of the tablelands.

Misty Mountains is another example of great potential for the Dyirbal people, but also one of thwarted opportunity. At the time of writing, Aboriginal participation in Misty Mountains had been limited to employment as labourers and fees to a few Traditional Owners for cultural information, used to promote the network of tracks. This was despite ongoing attempts through a representative body, Guringun, to establish a training program that may lead to accredited rangers working in Misty Mountains, possibly as tour guides. Despite the potential for collaborative training programs, the scarcity of positions for rangers ultimately frustrates and discourages this type of employment.

\(^{29}\) This popular program type, two series of which were filmed in the Wet Tropics, raised the international profile of the region, and perhaps also stimulated tourism interest in the subsistence aspect of traditional Aboriginal economies.
Murray River Walking tracks
As mentioned previously a large camping area is situated next to the Murray River Falls. The only road to this tourist attraction passes through the community of Jumbun (a similar geographic relation as found at the entrance to Mossman Gorge). At the camping site a walking track that leads to the top of the falls includes signs that display Girramay and Jirrbal cultural information, mostly ethno-botanical description. The falls and numerous landscape features in the surrounding area are story places for the Girramay and Jirrbal people.

There are two traditional walking tracks that traverse the Cardwell Range to the Tableland near to Jumbun: one follows the (middle) Murray River and ascends the range adjacent to Murray Falls; another follows the North Murray River. Both lead to the country around Kirrama Station, which was under Aboriginal ownership at the time of writing. The North Murray track was used as a stock route from the early 1950s, a means of bringing tableland cattle to coastal markets. Typical of most of the rivers and creeks that descend the range, the course of the North Murray features numerous waterfalls and waterholes, lined in riparian rainforest. Some members of the community are planning to exploit the North Murray track for Aboriginal cultural tourism. In July 2004, the Jumbun community, funded through CDEP, had purchased horses and its members were constructing stables adjacent to unused cattle yards. The plan was for Aboriginal guides to conduct horseback tours along the North Murray track, a proposal that required the use of State Forest land and was apparently sanctioned by the Queensland Department of Natural Resources.

Mumbay
Mumbay is a site on the Murray River, on Jumbun land, used by the community for meetings and recreation. One side of the river is cleared while the opposite bank is rainforest, with a short walking path. A clearing at the beginning of the path is used for regularly constructing *mija* (traditional dwellings) for display to tourists. The walking track through the rainforest has been used in the past for interpretive walks and at the time of writing, the community planned to re-establish guided tours at Mumbay as part of a general interest in cultural tourism enterprise. In an attempt to add to this existing attraction, a net was being constructed for boomerang throwing on the cleared bank of the river.

Jumbun Cultural Keeping Place
A modest cultural keeping place building, adjacent to the community hall at Jumbun, was planned for construction in late 2004. The display and storage of artefacts, repatriated from a public museum, was the main purpose of the building although some members of the community saw the building as an integral part of a tourism enterprise for Jumbun. The plan for operating the keeping place was roughly modelled on the Nganyaji Interpretive Centre in Ravenshoe and the Menmumy Museum at Yarrabah. The community of Jumbun hoped that the keeping place would attract passing tourists and provide a focal point for other planned tourist activities.

Davey (Buckaroo) Lawrence Centre
Opened in 2004, the Davey (Buckaroo) Lawrence Centre is located in Cardwell, adjacent to the offices of Girringun. The Girringun Elders and Reference Group represents the native title and cultural heritage rights and interests over land and waters for the Dyrbal, Waragamay, Nyawaigi, Bandjin, Warungu and Girramay peoples, who are six of the traditional owner groups of the southern Wet Tropics region. The centre combines education, training and a keeping place. The latter is a relatively small component of the Centre, with training and education being the main purpose of the building. Arts Queensland and the Department of Employment and Training provided funds for the keeping place component of the building. A *mija* was constructed in the keeping place as part of a display of artefacts, lent by museum collections.
Chapter 5

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This scoping study examined the connection between cultural tourism and the conservation of specific forms of Indigenous knowledge, in particular Aboriginal building traditions and settlement patterns or ethno-architecture. Across the Wet Tropics region in general, the study found that Indigenous groups and individuals were actively engaged in a variety of types of enterprise, frequently under their own volition, and to varying degrees of success. In short, Aboriginal people encountered in the study were optimistic about cultural tourism enterprises, seeing the benefits as both financial and vocational. For some, the preservation and transmission of cultural knowledge was a motivating factor for engagement with tourists.

The study, drawing on Altman (1993), established categories of Indigenous tourism based on the product. Of the categories, Aboriginal led tours through traditional country were most likely to replicate and relay place-based knowledge associated with ethno-architecture and contact histories.

Fieldwork with Traditional Owners from the Dyirbal language group, particularly those from the community of Jumbun, revealed extensive cultural and historical knowledge of ethno-architecture, settlement patterns and Aboriginal geography. The incentive to use and transfer this knowledge, from elders to younger generations, relies on the activities of individuals within the community, requests from researchers (such as the authors) and documentary makers, educators (mostly for school demonstrations) and tourism. Of these reasons, at the time of writing, tourism was the most visible and viable rationale for future conservation of ethno-architectural knowledge. After examining the uses of ethno-architectural knowledge within existing tourism enterprises, in the Wet Tropics Region in general and with the Dyirbal group in particular, the study makes the following conclusions.

The Potential Role of Customary Camps and Dwellings in Cultural Tourism

Compared with more sedentary house-based cultures, Dyirbal mija are ephemeral structures (more so if unoccupied) that rely on knowledge that is locally specific, and must respond to the mosaic of landscapes that make up a region. Given the authors’ research experience, we would suggest that the building process rather than the completed mija, better serves both parties engaged in the cultural tourism encounter (i.e. the Wet Tropics tourists and the Indigenous tourism enterprise personnel). This experience would not be an everyday attraction, but could occur in a variety of different landscapes through the management of customary campsites using traditional management practices and resources. Despite gross changes in the landscapes of the study region, long-term environmental conservation could aim to model and reproduce Aboriginal settlement patterns as a part of strategies for the conservation of biodiversity. The scale and extent of pre-contact Aboriginal effects on the Wet Tropics environments may be a topic of conjecture, but within protected areas, a program to monitor and assess environmental change and sustainability of the practice of traditional Aboriginal technologies could not only perform an important conservation function, but also comprise a part of a tourism enterprise.

Where possible, the reconstruction of traditional dwellings at the sites of customary camps is likely to be the most appropriate method of preserving traditional knowledge and replicating traditional forms of landscape management. The relationships of campsite and dwelling type to a place and its encompassing environment are likely to be more informative to tourists seeking didactic experiences. While the market for this type of tourism may be limited, we suggest that the reconstruction of traditional dwellings (and perhaps their use as shelters on overnight walking tours) could attract those categories of tourist who wish to engage with Aboriginal people and their knowledge in experiences of more intimate contact.

From the authors’ fieldwork experiences, the following positive aspects have been identified for contemporary Dyirbal people engaged in the reconstruction of this ethno-architecture:

- An opportunity for older Dyirbal people to pass on knowledge of their language and material culture to younger generations;
- An interest amongst the younger participants, in learning about the range of traditional dwellings and associated resources;
- Payment for reproducing elements of material culture (which in turn encourages participation and the frequency of the practice);
- The potential relationship between campsite focused ethno-architecture throughout the Dyirbal cultural landscape and current Native Title claims; and
- The recognition and use of traditional knowledge as a foundation for tourism enterprises.
Furthermore, Dyirbalngan have a wealth of knowledge of their traditional country, its historical transformation, and many aspects of their culture that could be used for tourism enterprises. The representation of the diversity of Dyirbal culture can be augmented through the use of archival material (for example national and international museum collections of Dyirbal culture and academic records held in the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies). This type of material, together with contemporary practices and lifestyles, can provide content for interpretive centres and keeping places that indicates the context for reconstructions of material culture.

**Impediments and Obstacles to Indigenous Cultural Tourism**

There are numerous impediments and challenges to the establishment of a small-scale tourism business regardless of the product on offer. In addition to a viable product, an array of skills and expertise are required to develop and sustain a self-supporting business. The scoping study identified a general deficit in this area and, despite the primary focus on product and cultural sustainability, recorded additional employment and training challenges for small-scale Aboriginal tourism enterprises within the region. Proximity to infrastructure and services can also affect the viability of enterprises, with establishment and servicing costs higher in remote locations (see Felan Consulting 2004). Problems and potential difficulties identified in the survey of enterprises in the Wet Tropics with the operation of cultural tours and those particular to the Dyirbal language group are as follows:

- The sporadic and on-call nature of work for Aboriginal guides, who may not be able to plan ahead for family or community engagements;
- Limited access to transport (from their residences) to ensure that guides reach the tourism venue or setting;
- The inappropriateness of guides being paid on CDEP wages, rather than salaries proportionate to the commercial value of the work;
- The shortage of experienced Aboriginal Guides, particularly those with communication skills required for a variety of cross-cultural contexts and value systems;
- The shortage of business and administrative skills;
- The potential for community disputes over which particular people have Native Title rights in the sites of tourism ventures, and therefore the ultimate rights to conduct the tours over the country; and
- The availability of suitable accessible land for camp construction and the procuring of customary building materials, given the extent of freehold landholdings, altered landscapes and restrictions on Aboriginal access to and use of resources in State forests and national parks.

**Future Actions**

The scoping study identifies an undeveloped Aboriginal product that invites both testing and research action. The in situ construction of traditional Dyirbal dwellings as a tourism product requires a feasibility study that attempts to resolve the following components of a future enterprise:

- Working with a group of Dyirbalngan, identify appropriate locations to establish initially one or two campsites suitable for building dwellings. The campsites could be located so that they could form part of an overnight trek along a traditional walking pad.
- Investigate the possible use of *mija* as a transient shelter on an overnight trek.
- Investigate and negotiate possible arrangements for access to State forests and national parks, given the likelihood of appropriate sites falling within these boundaries.
- Design a program to evaluate the project for its cultural and economic sustainability as well as to monitor the effect of the project on the conservation values of the location.

The authors have the in-principle support of a number of Traditional Owners to proceed with this type of project. As well as the Traditional Owners, key participants in such a proposal would include a rainforest ecologist.

Further general recommendations arising from this study for Indigenous cultural tourism in the Wet Tropics region are as follows:

- The need for short TAFE training courses for Indigenous personnel on interacting and communicating with international tourists from a variety of cultural backgrounds.
- The need for an Indigenous tourism business mentor for the Wet Tropics to assist in support, planning, feasibility and management of both new and established sustainable tourism enterprises in the region.
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