

PART 2

Commentaries
and Vignettes

Managing Values Other than Outstanding
Universal Value – A case study from
K'gari (Fraser Island World Heritage Area),
Queensland, Australia

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Introduction

Fraser Island, also known by its Aboriginal name of K'gari¹, is the world's largest sand island. Its high dunes support a range of vegetation communities, with the dense rainforests on coastal dunes just one of the many unique communities on the island. The perched lakes are supplied with freshwater from the world's largest unconfined aquifer on a sand island (UNESCO 2012). The biological, hydrological, geological and geomorphological processes that formed the island continue to the present, making this an ongoing living natural landscape. These and other features of K'gari are what led to the inscription of this place on the World Heritage List in 1992.

The Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of K'gari is recognised by the World Heritage Committee as:

- the incomparable size of the sand island and its diverse range of features of exceptional beauty (Criterion vii);
- the ongoing geological and geomorphic processes of island formation that can be seen in a variety of landforms that continue to change; and the ongoing development of podzol soils on the high dunes (Criterion viii);
- the ongoing biological processes of rainforest succession on high dunes; the biological complexity of the floral communities of the island; and the dynamic relationship between biological processes and geomorphological processes (Criterion ix) (UNESCO 2012).

Although cultural values of the island were known at the time K'gari was inscribed onto the World Heritage List, their significance was not considered worthy of recognition. As a consequence, Fraser Island World Heritage Area is listed solely for its natural OUV. Nevertheless, since 1992 the cultural values of K'gari, and especially the Butchulla Aboriginal heritage values, have been increasingly documented and the significance of the cultural heritage of the island is now undisputed (Fraser Island World Heritage Area Scientific Advisory Committee (FIWHA SAC) 2004).

So why have the criteria for listing Fraser



Figure 1: Sunset from Fraser Island western beach. (Source: Anne Ross)

Island not been updated? The fact is that changing the criteria is a difficult task, requiring a virtual re-nomination of the property. There is usually little political will to re-list because of the uncertainty that a place will be re-inscribed at all, following the extensive review that re-nomination requires. As a consequence, although the Aboriginal cultural values of K'gari are extensive, and some would argue on par with those of other properties in Australia that *are* listed for cultural values (Carter 2010), there is no opportunity at present to incorporate cultural heritage in the Outstanding Universal Value of the Fraser Island World Heritage Area.

Given the strength of the Butchulla cultural values of K'gari, it is nonetheless important to evaluate the mechanisms that have been used to incorporate these values into World Heritage Area management frameworks. That is the focus of this paper.

Butchulla values of K'gari

Butchulla Traditional Owners identify both tangible components of heritage, in the form of campsites, scarred trees and shell middens (FIWHA SAC 2004), and intangible heritage, as seen in story places and landscape features that are part of Butchulla knowledge of K'gari as a cultural place (Malcolm [Mackie] Burns, Butchulla Traditional Owner, pers. comm. February 2014; Sandra Page, Butchulla Traditional Owner, pers. comm. February 2014).

Recent research has demonstrated that Butchulla cultural values encompass components of the natural landscape: several of K'gari's lakes are associated with Dreaming stories (Burns & Page, pers. comm. 2014); Takky Wooroo (Indian Head) is a place remembered as a massacre site by many Butchulla people (Weisse 2014); and some lakes and dunes hold Dreaming Law and traditionally had gender-restricted access (Burns & Page pers. comm. 2014).

In this sense, K'gari could be inscribed on the World heritage List under two cultural criteria:

- criterion iii (bearing testimony to a cultural tradition which is living still) and
- criterion v (an outstanding example of human settlement or land-use which is representative of culture that is vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change) (UNESCO 2012)



Figure 2: Lake McKenzie. (Source: Anne Ross)

Butchulla cultural values are also incorporated into many natural phenomena, particularly in relation to dingoes (*Canis lupus dingo*). Dingoes on K'gari are the purest form of this species anywhere in Australia. Dingoes were brought to Australia by people some 3500 years ago (White & O'Connell 1982). As a consequence, dingoes have long had a close association with humans (Rose 2000). On K'gari, many Butchulla have memories of their people's close ties to the dingo, which was an animal with special meaning in Butchulla cosmology (Phoenix-O'Brien 2002). Yet management of K'gari dingoes requires that these animals be constructed as 'natural' and 'wild' (Hytten & Burns 2007) and management, consequently, aims to distance these dogs from all humans on K'gari, including Butchulla people.

With the management of K'gari seemingly locked into the confines of the natural listing criteria (Carter 2010), it could be difficult for Butchulla people's voices to be heard. In this regard, the cultural values of K'gari could be likened to Tweed and Sutherland's (2007) distinction between 'heritage by designation', or that heritage recognised by authorities charged with registration and management of heritage places, and 'heritage by appropriation', which is that heritage recognised by the everyday users of heritage.

Managing beyond OUV

The Fraser Island World Heritage Area is managed by the Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage Protection and the Queensland Department of National Parks, Recreation, Sport and Racing. Day-to-day matters are the responsibility of the managers and staff of the Fraser Island Great Sandy National Park. Managers are formally advised by three advisory committees:

- the Fraser Island World Heritage Area Scientific Advisory Committee (FIWHA SAC);
- the Fraser Island World Heritage Area Community Advisory Committee (FIWHA CAC); and
- the Fraser Island World Heritage Area Indigenous Advisory Committee (FIWHA IAC).

There are two cultural heritage representatives on the SAC, and the entire IAC comprises representatives of the various families that constitute the Butchulla Traditional Owners. These committees meet at least twice a year independently of the other committees, and once a year in a combined meeting, to discuss matters of relevance across the range of World Heritage management issues.

These committees help ensure that a range of heritage values relating to K'gari management are reviewed and, where deemed appropriate, taken into account by managers. Most recently, Butchulla concerns regarding the proposed management of Takky Wooroo were aired at a combined Advisory Committee meeting and managers responded by agreeing to seek further information from Butchulla knowledge holders before proceeding. Unfortunately Butchulla concerns regarding dingo management have not been so successfully raised (Ross et al 2011: 133-135). Nevertheless, the important observation to be made is that these three advisory committees have an opportunity to ensure that the full range of values of K'gari are able to be considered as valid elements for incorporation into management planning for this World Heritage place.



Figure 3: Members of FIWHA SAC discussing a recent burn on Fraser Island.
(Source: Anne Ross)

Conclusion

K'gari (Fraser Island) is a World Heritage Area of exceptional natural beauty, but cultural values, especially Butchulla Aboriginal heritage values, are also part of the make-up of the place. Although recognition of such cultural values may never be able to be included in the formal listing of the Fraser Island World Heritage Area, management structures put in place to give voice to Butchulla people are vital to the management of values beyond those formally recognised by UNESCO. It is therefore imperative that such management structures are continued into the future, with appropriate levels of government funding and support.

References

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Endnotes

- 1 Out of respect for the wishes of Butchulla Traditional Owners, I use the term K'gari throughout this paper, unless 'Fraser Island' is the official nomenclature.