



Rock art management in Kuku-yalanji country

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SUMMARY

Rock art sites are part of Indigenous Australia's living culture and are embedded in a complex web of cultural meaning which transects landscape, identity and *Dreaming*. The western management frameworks have a tendency of separating and museumising these sites from their broader cultural construct. This paper highlights how successful management by the traditional owners, creating culturally safe processes can result in the use of rock art sites in a manner which benefits the primary stakeholders who are the traditional owners of the cultural landscape and at the same time deliver opportunities for tourism. The results lie in both internal and external stakeholder benefits as well as increased conservation outcomes. This work critically investigates and proposes new directions for rock art sites through examples from Cape York, Queensland, Australia. A case study of the sites situated in Kuku-yalanji country and managed by the Jarramali Rock Art Tours to contrast other site management practices offering differing perceptions for stakeholders for a sustainable direction in conservation, tourism and cultural sustainability. This work also highlights the prioritisation of community involvement in the decision-making processes and elder consultation into the management strategies. We hope this paper opens critical discussions on how changing perceptions of rock art management can recognise the continuation and contemporaneous relevance of knowledge that prioritises education and the strengthening of cultural bonds to land through the medium of rock art.

Keywords: rock art, Kuku-yalanji, Cape York, Jarramali, site management

RIASSUNTO

I siti di arte rupestre fanno parte della cultura vivente dell'Australia indigena e sono incorporati in una complessa rete di significato culturale che interseca paesaggio, identità e sogno. I sistemi di gestione occidentali hanno la tendenza a musealizzare e separare e questi siti dal loro più ampio contesto culturale. Questo documento evidenzia come una gestione di successo da parte dei proprietari tradizionali, la creazione di procedure culturalmente sicure possa portare alla fruizione dei siti di arte rupestre in un modo che avvantaggia le principali parti interessate: i proprietari tradizionali del paesaggio culturale, e allo stesso tempo offrono opportunità per il turismo. I risultati risiedono nei benefici sia interni che esterni per le parti interessate, nonché nell'aumento dei risultati in termini di conservazione. Questo lavoro indaga criticamente e propone nuove direzioni per i siti di arte rupestre attraverso esempi da Cape York (Queensland, Australia). Un caso di studio sono i siti situati nel territorio di Kuku-yalanji e gestiti dal Jarramali Rock Art Tours in contrasto ad altre pratiche di gestione del sito, che offrono prospettive diverse per i soggetti coinvolti orientate alla sostenibilità nella conservazione, nel turismo e alla sostenibilità culturale. Questo lavoro evidenzia anche la priorità del coinvolgimento della comunità nei processi decisionali e della consultazione degli anziani nelle strategie di gestione. Ci auguriamo che questo articolo apra discussioni critiche su come i cambiamenti di percezione nella gestione dell'arte rupestre possano riconoscere la perpetuazione e la contemporanea rilevanza di una conoscenza che dà priorità all'educazione e al rafforzamento dei legami culturali con la terra attraverso l'arte rupestre.

Parole chiave: arte rupestre, Kuku-yalanji, Cape York, Jarramali, Gestione dei siti

INTRODUCTION

The majority of rock art sites have management structures embedded in a western framework which lend themselves to management that museumises rock art sites rather than presenting them as aspects of living culture. Within the Australian context many rock art sites benefit from a level of continuity or connection to contemporary Indigenous communities, thus creating an invaluable cultural resource. It is becoming increasingly apparent, that indigenous participation in the management, research and interpretation of sites has many benefits as well as challenges for all the stakeholders involved (GIORGI and TAÇON 2019). This paper proposes new directions for rock art sites through the case study of the sites situated in Kuku-yalanji country (see Figure 1 and 2) and managed by the Jarramali Rock Art Tours to contrast other site management

practices offering differing perceptions for stakeholders for a sustainable direction in conservation, tourism and cultural sustainability. This is contrasted and compared to rock art site use and management at Split Rock and Carnarvon Gorge to highlight different approaches and community involvement.

Past rock art management analysis based on the increasing pressures of mining and tourism has been largely covered by Cole (2016) and Cole and Buhrich (2012) and more generally by Deacon (2006) Franklin (2003, 2011), and Mulvaney (2011), and Trezise and Roughsey (1975), this research mainly focuses on the 'insider' perspective and the associated case study. Whilst there is agreement on the need to protect cultural heritage and identity and include the Indigenous voice, some aspects of the site management and legislation are not conducive to encouraging Indigenous

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community participation. This being the case, new measures need to be developed to facilitate cultural use, and management of country. This work critically investigates and proposes new directions for rock art sites through these examples from Queensland.

LOCATION OF CASE STUDY

This main case study focus is of the site situated in Kuku-yalanji *country* and managed by the Jarramali Rock Art Tours, Cape York, Queensland, Australia (see Figure 2). The primary rock art site being that called 'Magnificent'. Early archaeological research on the area was carried out by Flood (1983), Morwood and Hobbs (1995) Rosenfeld (1981) and Trezise (1969). As part of what is designated as Quinkan country it sits under the Australian Heritage Estate and listed by UNESCO as being among the top 10 rock art sites in the world.

NOT JUST THE ROCK ART

Though the focus is on rock art it must be understood that for the Indigenous community several factors and interlinked and need to be taken into consideration. The '*insider's*' view, being that of the Kuku-yalanji, requires the inclusion of the various landscape features associated with the rock art as they have sacred aspects. Many of the animals, plants and trees are totems and therefore tie into the rock art and important aspects of environmental conservation. As a part of living culture rock art also transects community considerations and thus community consultation. The intimate and complex relationships involving people, country, spirits, and the *Dreaming* all contribute to the meaning of rock art (BRADY, BRADLEY 2016, p. 84). The risk is that the western management frameworks have a tendency of separating and museumising these rock art sites from their broader cultural construct. Rock art site management needs to be sensitive to the complexities of representing cultural spaces.

CONTINUATION OF CULTURE

Interacting and sharing with Aboriginal custodians whose knowledge extend rock art interpretation, allows us to gain further insights into contemporary perceptions and the continuum of the cultural base the rock art stems from. Rock art sites are part of Indigenous Australia's living culture and are embedded in a complex web of cultural meaning which transects landscape, identity and *Dreaming*. An example of living culture would be the creation of contemporary rock art in proximity to the known rock art sites (TAÇON 1992) and the cultural engagement at the sites of Kuku-yalanji elders and cross generational teaching (see Figure 3 and 4). Superimpositions also reflect the continuation of culture and its evolving nature. The passing down stories through storytelling and dance, culture, law, tradition are all aspects of living culture that are ties to the graphic expressions on the rock art sites.

Another expression of the continuation of culture are the cases of contact rock art in the area. One of the famous contact art pieces is the painted figure of a six-

meter horse, at Giant Horse rock shelter, which has generated a number of possible interpretations for the possible expeditions this horse could be associated with. Contact art was an expression trying to make sense of the new exposures to facets of colonial contact such as the new animals they encountered.

SUCCESSFUL ROCK ART MANAGEMENT WORKING WITHIN THE CURRENT LEGISLATION

Permission is at the core of successful rock art management. Successful management by the traditional owners creating culturally safe processes can result in the use of rock art sites in a manner which benefits the primary stakeholders who are the traditional caretakers of the sites. Agreements allow for community to be informed and create and maintain workable parameters for site use. These agreements have to sit within The Native Title, The Land Trust, and within the parameters of the western legislation, landowners having the ownership of the subdivision of land on a 99yr lease. Since 2015, new rules gave Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities the option to convert some of their communal lands into freehold land to facilitate investment and ability to sell. Development permit need to be acquired for the '*material change of use*' of the land, such as nature-based tourism.

To protect the rock art, as the area is not designated as National Park, the East Quinkan and West Quinkan Reserves were established. The area is owned by the Aboriginal Land Trusts (under the *Australian Government's Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006*) operated by Aboriginal people offering freehold title land. The minimum date of the rock art is around 15,000 years old but likely extends much further, regionally up to 25000 years old (COLE and WATCHMAN 2005).

As a recognition of the importance of Indigenous involvement in site management the Queensland sacred sites and cultural heritage are protected under the *Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003*, which recognises Aboriginal people as the 'primary guardians, keepers and knowledge holders of Aboriginal cultural heritage'. Though cultural sensitivity and cultural requirements to site access and management are recognised (e.g., ICOMOS 1999, Burra charter 2013) they are not always at the fore of tourism management frameworks.

The North Queensland Land Council (NQLC) is the recognised Native Title Representative Body for this region, assisting with native title consent determinations. The Queensland Government is responsible for managing unallocated state land. (Indigenous Land Operations).

Internationally they sit under the UNESCO Convention and the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expression (2005) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (2007) and the guidelines for World Heritage sites (UNESCO 2001).

The ICOMOS International Cultural Tourism Charter (ICTC), for example, provides broad guidelines for conservation applicable to cultural tourism develop-

ment (ICOMOS 2002 n, DEACON 2006, p. 386). Those developing rock art tourism 'products' in the past have focused on the commodification, pricing, promotion and other income-generating factors influenced by a wide range of interests and agendas (DEACON 2006, p. 379).

Rock art management (according to ICOMOS 2002) would include impact assessment; protection of paintings against dust and water; graffiti removal; signage; reporting; management of research; management of landscape setting; engagement with local communities; development of protocols for private land owners; integration of rock art site management with wildlife and environmental; procedures for management of disasters, fire and waste; access routes and paths; information nodes for visitors; integration of product with regional and national tourism bodies; identification and documentation. Achieving this with limited government funding can be a considerable challenge.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS

Much of the land with rock art in the Laura region is multi-tenured and therefore various models are needed for their management and protection (COLE 2016, p. 206). With support from Traditional Owners, the state is also converting existing national parks, to jointly managed national parks CYPAL (Cape York Peninsula Aboriginal Land). In national park CYPAL areas, with Aboriginal freehold as the underlying tenure development is regulated by the management principles of national parks, which incorporate joint management arrangements with Traditional Owners. Challenges lie in the mining interests in the area creating pressures for both the government direction and for Traditional Owner management. Highlighting the success of the Laura region, on the East Quinkan Reserve, Aboriginal community have resisted mining activities and it highlights the community commitment to protecting cultural lands (COLE 2016, p. 206; Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation 2012). The Queensland government's approval of mining exploration in Quinkan rock art regions, including within a supposedly protected area (the DLA) is a major risk. Mining activity is excluded within 500 metres of the Declared Landscape Area (DLA 002) boundary; however, the majority of the area only has protection under the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act, which permits mining activity within 100 meters of a cultural site (Laura River Dreaming 2013, p. 11). The economic pressures of mining opportunities and the risk to heritage and the environment are important factors for the area (COLE and BUHRICH 2012; MULVANEY 2011).

COMPARISONS OF 3 SITES

In comparing the case study of the sites situated in Kuku-yanlanji *country* namely the 'Magnificent' site (see Figure 1) and managed by the Jarramali Rock Art Tours and contrasted to other site management practices, being the Split rock site and Carnarvon Gorge in the Central Queensland Highlands. These comparisons contrast use, management and outcomes.

1. Split rock

The carpark for the Split Rock site is approximately 12 km south of Laura on the Peninsula Development Road (see Figure 2). Here it is possible to see examples of painted and engraved Indigenous rock art close to the carpark. The Laura area is well known for its rock art however most of the sites require guides so Split Rock is seen as an easily locatable site that can be accessed at any time so long as the road isn't closed which is sometimes the case during the wet season. The easy trail from the carpark, 30 minutes return, is basic and well maintained with some sections with rock steps suitable for most fitness levels. The main gallery areas of rock art have interpretive signage and like many Indigenous cultural sites there are some signed areas that are restricted from public access at the request of traditional owners. It is possible to view rock art images such as anthropomorphs, dingos, and flying foxes at the site.

Due to security issues concerning the facilities at the site and the honesty payment box being robbed, security at the Split Rock site has been upgraded to include cameras, a new steel-frame door and reinforced padlocks (MOUNTER 2017). Even without these issues the honesty box was not very successful with a low percentage of participation in paying the entrance fee of \$5. This fee has recently increased to a \$30 entry fee, children over 12 years cost \$15.

Split Rock sits under a different reserve to the 'Magnificent' site. The QRCC (Quinkan Regional Cultural Centre) provides guided tours to Split Rock, Mushroom Rock, Giant Horse and the Quinkan Galleries providing casual and seasonal employment for three to four people. The QRCC is entrusted with maintaining the sites. Split Rock is a tenured site which differs from the Land Trust of many other areas/sites.

The signage at Split Rock is effectively conceived and included Indigenous community consultation in its creation. The challenges of the management of this site lie in the politics between the different clans and site damage. Graffiti has also been an issue over the years with some removal activity taking place in the 1990's. For sites both manned and unmanned visitor books can assist in obtaining feedback from visitors and provide an outlet for expression (FRANKLIN 2011). They have been considered effective in reducing graffiti. For maximum effectiveness visitor books require maintenance, storage and analysis. Graffiti and site damage can also occur at unmanned sites that have easy access. At this stage it appears that these have been removed from the site.

2. Carnarvon Gorge

In contrast Carnarvon Gorge, in the central Queensland Highlands, is a National Parks which, as high-profile Category 'A' Environmentally Significant areas (DERM 2001), enjoys widespread public recognition of its values and the need to protect them. This is primarily Bidjara and Karingbal *country*. Due to the high volume of visitors the extensive rock art sites have suf-

ferred from damage such as graffiti. Upgrades to the camera monitoring have assisted to some extent as does the use and maintenance of visitor books at the sites (FRANKLIN 2011). The park is a ranger maintained and monitored area but suffers from a lack of coverage due to its size and the resources available to the rangers.

Though consultation is high on the management plan's priorities it falls short in regard to aspects of interpretative signage as indicated by Bidjara feedback (GIORGI and TAÇON 2019). A number of guides operate in the gorge, but it is rare that these are Indigenous guides.

The damage to an important site called Baloon cave due to the existence of a synthetic material walkway (REPLAS Enduroplank recycled plastic products) which burst into flames during the 2018 fire season, highlighting the need for more Indigenous involvement in the management of the park. Several of the community were physically sick after the event due to the distress involved. The rock art in Carnarvon Gorge has been viewed by community elders as "our University" (GIORGI and TAÇON 2019, p.1 91) and therefore its care should be tied to community.

3. 'Magnificent' site

The 'Magnificent' site has more than 450 rock art motifs painted on the underside of a rock shelter, covering everything from Kuku-Yalanji spirits (see Figure 5) to fertility symbols, totems, fish and turtles. This is an example of the successful management of a rock art site in that it is self-managed and benefited from community consultation in the design of the management plan, the concept of the access and site use. Elders were taken on *country* to reconnect with the sites see first-hand what was being proposed. The site management includes the intergenerational mentoring of new Indigenous tour guides (see Figure 4). Environmental considerations and collaborations have resulted in extensive work carried out on *country* by organisations such as the Queensland Museum within the Bioblitz programme. There are also the various intergenerational knowledge exchanges with the enriching experiences of bringing groups of young community members and at-risk youth on *country* to strengthen their cultural connections (see Figure 6). There have also been extensions to this of language camps.

The Jarramali Rock Art Tours is a successful Aboriginal owned and operated tour guide company that shares the history and culture of pristine and culturally meaningful rock art sites in Far North Queensland. Jarramali Rock Art Tours has already been recognised as one of Australia's premier Indigenous Experiences by Tourism Australia. As the Owner and operator, Johnny Murison, stated: "This will help us to leverage the fame of the 'Magnificent' rock art site, allowing us to continue investment in the maintenance of the ancient site and expand employment and training opportunities of traditional owners".

Due to its remoteness and tour guide accompanied visits graffiti is not an issue. The same is reflected in the lack of damage to the infrastructure by visitors. As it is guided there is no need for a visitor book, but

feedback is recorded in other ways. Johnny Murison is the only person who brings visitors here, and his maximum group size is only ten visitors. Access is in his large 4WD truck or helicopter. Locating this rock art would be a challenge for an outsider.

DISCUSSION

Insider's view

As recounted by the owner of Jarramali Rock Art Tours "The Kuku-Yalanji people who lived here probably cooked some of those fish [seen in the rock art] (see Figure 7) in this very rock shelter. You can see the charcoal evidence that they had fires here". Researchers have also found mussel shells and bones from animals like kangaroos, possums, bats, and flying foxes at these sites.

The intimate connection of the guide to this site enriches the visitor experience and ensures the site is prioritised over economic benefits (see Figure 7 and 8). The visitor is ensured a culturally safe experience and benefits from a deeper understanding of the site within the landscape (see Figure 10). The tours include 'bush tucker' knowledge and plant and animal information. Not only does the visitor experience the art but appreciates it within the wider Indigenous knowledge framework, which is a much more enriching experience than self-guided signed interactions such as at Split Rock and most of the visitor interactions in Carnarvon Gorge.

The experience of the guided 'Magnificent' site ensures safe cultural practice for the visitor and the guide. Safe cultural practice can include restrictions on who can visit different areas, and various protocols such as the throwing of sand or pebbles into water nearby, calling out to the spirits that inhabit the site for permission to approach, and as described by Cole (2016, p.196). This includes the level of interpretation of some figures (see Figure 9).

Wydra (2018) discusses *mnemonic* or collective memory as a cultural strength that is being reclaimed, in this case through rock art interaction. This strength has been largely lost through the Western patterns of learning, education and a shift to relying on the digital archiving of personal and collective experiences (WYDRA 2018, p. 28) thus creating challenges for mnemonic transfer of memory through the generations. This emphasises the importance of rock art expressions of culture and memory, a theme aptly expressed by Fargo (2019) about contemporary Pintupi art from Western Australia: '[It] does not "represent" the Dreaming but recalls it'. By viewing the rock art in context, the culturally associated viewer has triggered recall of individual or community embedded myths, symbolic behaviours, initiations or connections to country.

The site also hosts at risk youth creating an opportunity for healing, confidence and cultural appreciation. The practical youth education programmes undertaken by the Jarramali Rock Art Tours also incorporate the natural sciences sphere of 'bush tucker' and the environment and could sit within the STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Maths) framework of learning with the Art and Indigenous elements added

to form STEAIM (GIORGI and HARDING 2021) education to embed Indigenous knowledge practices within the sciences and art practice and enable attraction of associated grants to propel these practices across different community platforms.

The intergenerational knowledge exchanges include the training of new young guides. Johnny Murison extends his cultural inheritances through sharing the rock art traditions and their associated meanings, their stories and through ties to place. A broader inclusive narrative is explored through connecting community and the wider public to this heritage. Memories as expressed in the rock art reinforce identity and highlight the improved potential of the role of rock art in sharing identity and stories and creating spaces for visitors to learn. As such Murison is manifesting the Principles for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO 2003) in that he is transferring knowledge, skills and meaning. This also transects the ICOMOS Cultural Tourism Charter (ICOMOS, 2002) which recognises the need for Traditional custodians to manage their sites.

The disruption and loss of cultural knowledge (e.g., GIBSON 1992, PEDERSON and WOORUNMURRA 1995, MORPHY 2012, BRADY and BRADLEY 2016) can be offset by the reuse of rock art imagery, within the tourism industry, in a way that does not further disempower communities or appropriates imagery without Indigenous agency (GIORGI and HARDING 2021, p. 74). Given that rock art is part of cultural identity and spirituality and part of the knowledge systems and Laws of the community there is an increasing need for them to be recognised as relevant in many aspects of site of management and significance. The relevance of rock art sites within Indigenous communities is important in re-establishing cultural pride, identity and knowledge systems (TAÇON *et al.* 2016; BRADY 2009, p. 47). Brady and Bradley (2016, p. 84) have put forward that rock art should not be considered a 'thing' but a 'happening' whose 'meaning is negotiated and apprehended through people's participation and engagement with it'. This counters the old tropes of rock art as being from the past and not having contemporary relevance. For Indigenous communities, such as the Kuku-Yalanji people, the rock art is reflecting the past present and future outside Western perceptions of time

Rock art can function to 'unite people, to reaffirm/reinforce identity, to transmit cultural knowledge, as inspiration for modern and contemporary artists' (BRADY and TAÇON 2016, p. 6). Taking the etic (outsider's) and an emic (insider's) perspective together in assessing rock art management can provide insights. This renegotiation of rock art management reinforces the process of 'when members of a community assert control over their own lives and culture, politically, socially and artistically, they go beyond oppression' (LOFT 2005, p. 66).

Rock art management is a tool in the battle to reclaim and create further substantive discussions around cultural identity. In short, the transference of cultural memory is achieved through the contemporary utilisation of rock art with elder and community involvement and activating that memory through the rock

art, as well as other cultural processes such as dance and song. Both international and Australian cultural organisations are increasing their systems of inclusion of Indigenous voices in the maintenance and development of cultural identity through heritage involvement and expression. The contradiction between the Australian Government's emphasis on Indigenous rock art and national identity in tourism campaigns and their inability to support these projected ideals with more robust funding strategies is evident in some of the rock art management outcomes around the country.

Conclusion

This case study highlights the prioritisation of community involvement in the decision-making processes and elder consultation into the management strategies to ensure outcomes that are culturally safe for the delivery and participants of these rock art experiences. These strategies counter the old tropes of the muse-umisation of rock art and deliver on emic directions and management of sites by their traditional custodians. Whilst not all sites benefit from the same management approach it is essential to look at the successful elements of contemporary site management as models for the future.

Given that some sites do not benefit from Traditional Custodian management and that legislation is not always conducive to encouraging community participation, new measures need to be developed to facilitate cultural use and to prioritise the management of sites by their cultural custodians such as with the 'Magnificent' site.

We hope this paper opens critical discussions on how changing perceptions of rock art management can recognise the continuation and contemporaneous relevance of knowledge that prioritises education and the strengthening of cultural bonds to land through the medium of rock art. The different narratives gleaned through an Indigenous lens, in this case the in Kuku-Yalanji one, are invaluable to current and future rock art management.

Some of the case studies highlighted are projects that are successfully assisting in the intergenerational transference of knowledge and cultural connection to future generations within and external to the concerned communities. The case studies also examine the successful jointly managed projects that enable various individuals and institutions to work together towards constructive outcomes. The results lie in both internal and external stakeholder benefits as well as increased conservation outcomes

"Tourism is a way of coming back on country and providing meaningful employment for my people" Johnny Murison.

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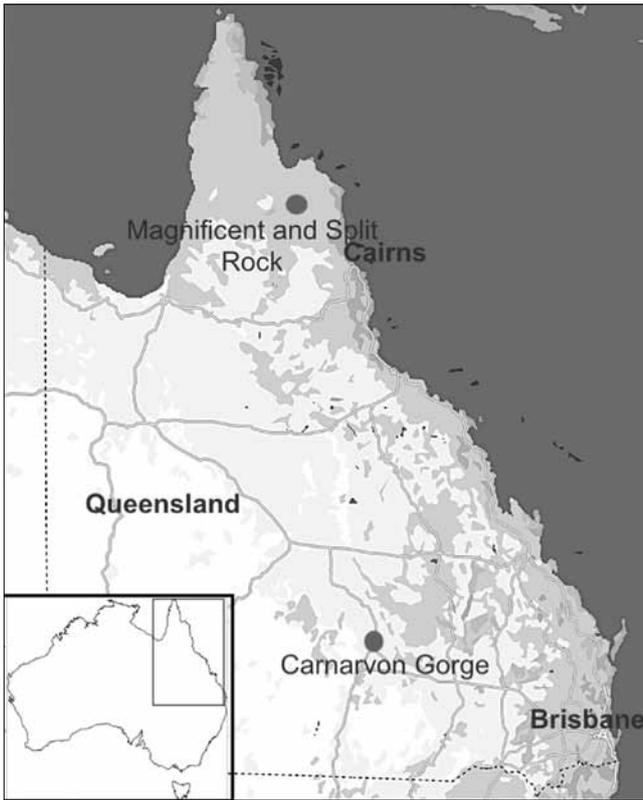


Fig. 1 - The rock art case studies in Queensland. Adapted from Google Maps 2021.



Fig. 2 - 'Magnificent' and Split Rock sites, East and West Quinkan Reserves in red outline. Adapted from Google Maps (2021 data, Landsat/Copernicus).



Fig. 3 - Elder visit and consultation. Photo, Johnny Murison.



Fig. 4 - Training young tour guides, cross generational mentoring. Photo, Johnny Murison.



Fig. 5 - Medicine man 'Magnificent' site. Photo, Johnny Murison.



Fig. 6 - At risk youth being brought on country. Photo, Johnny Murison.



Fig. 7 - Johnny Murison's office. Photo, Johnny Murison.



Fig. 8 - Rainbow Serpent gallery. Photo, Johnny Murison.



Fig. 9 - Medicine man. Photo, Johnny Murison.



Fig. 10 - Johnny Murison at 'Magnificent'. Photo, Johnny Murison.