Managing Meaning at an Ancient Site in the 21st Century: the Gummingurru Aboriginal Stone Arrangement on the Darling Downs, Southern Queensland

Anne Ross
University of Queensland

ABSTRACT
Aboriginal stone arrangements occur throughout Australia and are of ritual importance to Aboriginal peoples. Stone arrangements are part of the dynamic context within which Aboriginal peoples lived in the late Holocene, where constant renegotiation of social alliances required an increasing reliance on ceremonial places with ritual importance. This is the past social context for the Gummingurru Aboriginal stone arrangement site complex on the Darling Downs, Queensland. In the late 19th century Gummingurru was a highly significant men’s initiation site but by the early 20th century most of the traditional custodians of the site had been removed to the government-run Aboriginal mission of Cherbourg. Since 2000, traditional custodians have returned to the site and have given the place and its cultural landscape a new meaning. No longer used for initiation, Gummingurru now has contemporary value as a site of learning and reconciliation for all Australians. Today Gummingurru has been given a new meaning and occupies a new place in Aboriginal society and political networking.

Key words: tradition, meaning, stone arrangement, bora

INTRODUCTION
Aboriginal stone arrangements occur throughout Australia and many are associated with ritual activities (Black 1944; Bowdler 1999, 2005). Despite the significance of ceremonial stone arrangements to Aboriginal people, there has been little archaeological research undertaken into the ritual importance of such sites. Although stone arrangement sites have been reported in archaeological literature over many decades (eg. Black 1944; Brayshaw 1978; David et al. 2004; Flood 1980:143-155; McBryde 1974:31-66; McIntyre-Tamwoy and Harrison 2004; O’Connor et al. 2007; Veitch et al. n.d.), these recordings have tended to be descriptive, and the arrangements have been portrayed as ‘static’ – records of past ceremonial activities that, once made, remain as unchanging symbols of particular meaning (McIntyre-Tamwoy and Harrison 2004).

Exceptions to this are the work of David et al. (2004), McIntyre-Tamwoy and Harrison (2004) and Veitch et al. (n.d.). David et al. employ archaeological and ethnohistorical data to document the temporal depth of historically recorded rituals associated with stone arrangement sites from the western Torres Strait. McIntyre-Tamwoy and Harrison (2004) similarly use archaeological data and ethnohistorical evidence to link stone arrangement sites from Cape York to turtle increase ceremonies that have continued from the distant past into the present. Veitch et al. (n.d.) report on the Gurdagagai stone arrangements of the Newman area in Western Australia and document techniques they developed to date the contexts for individual stones in the arrangements. They found that placement and reloca-
tion of the stones that form the arrangements occurred over a 3000 year period, demonstrating regular and ongoing maintenance of the site from the distant past to the present.

These studies demonstrate that stone arrangements have been linked to ceremonial behaviour from traditional times into the present, and that - far from being static - these places continue to be part of important ritual and maintenance practice right up to the present.

This is the interpretation brought to the Gummingurru Aboriginal stone arrangement site complex on the Darling Downs of southern Queensland. After decades of separation from Gummingurru, traditional custodians re-established contact with the site in 2000. Since then, through a ‘resurrection’ of management practices and maintenance traditions that include re-discovery and revealing of buried stones, the custodians have given the site and its cultural landscape a new meaning that reflects the 21st century context of its current social and political location. Now with a focus on teaching and education, the Gummingurru site is occupying a place in Aboriginal society that is paradoxically both the same as, yet different from, its ‘original’ and ‘traditional’ focus. In this paper, written in close collaboration with members of the Gummingurru Aboriginal Land Trust, and especially the Trust’s Secretary, Jarowair custodian Brian Tobane, I discuss the evolution of meaning and understanding of the Gummingurru site and its increasing significance as a place of reconciliation in 21st century Queensland.

THE GUMMINGURRU ABORIGINAL STONE ARRANGEMENT

The Gummingurru Aboriginal stone arrangement site lies north of Toowoomba, close to the township of Meringandan on the Darling Downs, in inland southern Queensland (Fig 1) in the locality now known as Cawdor. The country is the traditional home of the Jarowair Aboriginal people, who are one of the many Aboriginal groups associated with the Bunya Mountains (or Boobarran Ngummin) and the (usually) triennial feasts and ceremonies held there in pre-contact times (Jerome 2002; Morwood 1986, 1987; Rowlings-Jensen 2004; Sullivan 1977). The Gummingurru site is one of a series of ceremonial and associated places in the cultural landscape that is the social catchment of the Bunya Mountains. Other places include Maidenwell Rock Shelter (Morwood 1986), Gatton Rock Art site (or Challawong) (Morwood 1986, 1992), and the Kogan stone arrangement (Bartholomai and Breeden 1961) (see Fig. 1), and various other Dreaming tracks, increase sites, pathways, burials, ochre and stone quarries, art sites, and occupation sites (Rowlings-Jensen 2004:31; Thompson 2004:8; Brian Tobane, pers. comm. 2005).
The Gummingurru stone arrangement is itself part of a localised cultural landscape that, according to Aboriginal custodians and local residents, also includes men’s and women’s campsites, art sites, scarred trees, and at least one ochre quarry. It is situated on one of the main routes used historically by Aboriginal peoples to travel between the southeast Queensland coast and the Bunya Mountains (Gilbert 1992; Petrie 1904:16; Thompson 2004). Before European settlement of the area in 1877 (Gilbert 1992:36), Aboriginal peoples travelling to the Bunya Mountains from the areas subsequently named Moreton Bay, the Gold Coast, the Brisbane and Lockyer valleys, and the Darling Downs would come to the Gummingurru stone arrangement to participate in initiation ceremonies (what Sutton 1985 [cited in Bowdler 2005:132] calls ‘man-making ceremonies’) to ensure that young men were able to take part in the major social activities that were associated with the Bunya feasts (Petrie 1904: 19-23). These events were generally restricted to initiated men. While Petrie (1904:19-23) describes both men and women being present at corroborees, actual participation in activities such as corroborees (i.e. traditional dance and song), marriage ceremonies and alliance-making activities seems to have been largely restricted to men, (Gaiarbau in Winterbotham 1959:63-65; Jarowair traditional custodians, pers. comm. 2003; Jerome 2002; Morwood 1986; Petrie 1904:16-23; Rowlings-Jensen 2004:30; Sullivan 1977:38-43; cf Bowdler 1999, 2005:139-141).

Whilst at Gummingurru, people camped at gender segregated occupation sites close to watercourses in close proximity to the stone arrangement site, and women and children were forbidden to come close to the initiation grounds (Paddy Jerome and Brian Tobane, Jarowair traditional custodians, pers. comm. 2001). In the late 19th century the site was still being used for ceremony and male initiation (Gilbert 1992), but by the early 20th century most of the traditional custodians had been removed to Cherbourg, Palm Island, and other Aboriginal settlements throughout Queensland. The site has probably not been used for its ‘original’ purpose since about 1890 (Thompson 2004).

The first European settler in the Cawdor area was James Benjamin Jinks, who in 1871 settled the property on which the Gummingurru site is located. He passed the property to his sons and grandsons (Gilbert 1992). Jinks’s great-great-grandson, Ben Gilbert, took up the land in 1948 and in 1960 he reported the stone arrangement to the Queensland Museum, which oversaw its first professional recording in that year (Bartholomai and Breeden 1961; Gilbert 1992). Bartholomai and Breeden documented the site in considerable detail. Comprised of basalt rocks eroded from the natural cap rock, large rocks are used in situ to form the base for large stone accumulations in the form of mounds of rock and concentric circles. Smaller rocks have been used to create smaller and more figurative motifs, including single circles, pathways and mounds (Bartholomai and Breeden 1961:234), the latter features interpreted variously as animals and totems (see below).

Bartholomai and Breeden (1961) describe two other stone arrangements near the Gummingurru site: Kogan and Oakey (see Fig. 1). Gummingurru is the largest and most complex of these isolated stone arrangements – the most easterly such stone arrangements recorded in southern Queensland. Bora grounds to the east of the Darling Downs are all earthen ring arrangements that do not include figurative motifs (Satterthwait and Heather 1987).

INTERPRETING THE PLACE – EURO-AUSTRALIAN PERSPECTIVES

Up until the mid 20th century, although a significant Bora site was known to have been in the area, most settlers thought it was an earthen arrangement like most of the other Boras of the region (Gilbert 1992; cf. Gaiarbau cited in Winterbotham 1959:71-76). Although Gilbert was aware of stories of Bora grounds on or near the property his grandfather owned, he had always assumed that these were earthen rings, as are all the other Bora grounds in the Bunya Mountains catchment (Gilbert 1992) and in this part of Australia generally (Bowdler...
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The heavily grassed paddock with the basalt rocks protruding through the grass was not recognised as being of any interest, and stones from the northern edge of the site were regularly removed from the paddock to be used to help support fence posts that could not be dug into the ground because of the presence of shallow cap rock. So by the time anyone recognised the site, most Aboriginal people had long been removed, and parts of the site had been disturbed. Consequently, there is little specific remembered knowledge about the site held by Aboriginal peoples.

Knowledge about the use of the Gummingurru site and interpretation of its motifs comes from Gilbert (1992). Gilbert is regarded by many, including the current Jarowair traditional custodians, as having knowledge about the site because of his relationship with knowledgeable Aboriginal people who lived in the area from the time Gilbert's great grandfather farmed the land in the 1920s to the present (Gilbert is still alive and lives with his family on the neighbouring property). Gilbert himself documents his childhood memories of listening to 'an old blackfellow who used to occasionally visit [great] grandad' (Gilbert 1992:36).

As Gilbert grew older he became a close friend and classificatory brother of Bunda, a Jarowair man who remained in the vicinity of Gummingurru even when others were removed to Cherbourg in the 1950s and 1960s. Bunda was the maternal uncle of Brian Tobane, the traditional custodian who currently lives on the site and manages it on a daily basis. According to Tobane (pers. comm. 2006), once the stone arrangement was re-discovered by Gilbert in the late 1950s, Bunda passed on to Gilbert much of his (Bunda's) knowledge about the interpretation and meaning of those stone arrangements visible at that time (the more westerly motifs), and it is these interpretations and explanations that underpin current Jarowair understandings of the site (see below).

In his published account of the site, Gilbert described stone circles, 'waterhole' designs, outlines of animals and other features. This information came to Gilbert from Bunda and was further supported by Gilbert's library research into the symbols found in stone arrangements from Central Australia and Victoria (Gilbert 1992:43). The motifs identified by Bunda and passed on to Gilbert include:

- a turtle (or tortoise) which has emerged from a waterhole leaving wet footprints of his short journey (figs 2a and 2b);
- a large carpet snake with a belly from which the newly-born men emerge after initiation (fig 2c);
- an emu (fig 2d);
- a bunya nut (that points towards the Bunya Mountains, which can be seen from the site) (fig 2e); and
- numerous rings - both open single circles (interpreted as 'cutting rings' and associated with small quartzite flakes), concentric circles, and large complex mounds with rings and spokes (fig 2f).

Gilbert draws the following conclusion about the site:

What I had discovered (I consider) is a sacred ground drawing marking the points of importance in the tribal area, which depict the story of creation as the occupying tribes believed it occurred (Gilbert 1992:43).

These interpretations, made by Gilbert but based on the information given to him by Bunda, have been passed on to the Jarowair traditional custodians who have adopted Gilbert's interpretations, because they are perceived as coming originally from Bunda. The custodians have now extended the interpretations to suit their own understandings of the place, as I discuss below.
Fig 2. Stone arrangements identified by Bunda and shown to Gilbert in the 1950s and 1960s. These arrangements survive today. (Photographs by A. Ross).

INTERPRETING THE PLACE – ABORIGINAL PERSPECTIVES

Jarowair ownership

In 1966, after its recording and recognition first by the Queensland Museum and then by the University of Queensland, the Gummingurrup site was protected by the Rosalie Shire Council and then by other government agencies, until its later registration as an 'Aboriginal Site' under Queensland's first Aboriginal site protection legislation, the Aboriginal Relics Preser-
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All 'Aboriginal Sites' were transferred to the category of 'Designated Landscape Area' (DLA) when the Aboriginal Relics Act was repealed and replaced by the Cultural Record (Landscapes Queensland and Queensland Estate) Act 1987. As a consequence, although the site was legally part of Gilbert's property throughout this period, it was effectively managed by various government agencies from 1966 (Thompson 2004).

By 2000, Gilbert's land had been subdivided and two new property owners owned the land on which the site is located, although it was still protected by the DLA gazettal. In 2000, that portion of the DLA situated on Tony Huntly's property (which is the part of the site where most of the stone arrangements occur) was transferred to the Gummingurru Trust (T. Huntley, pers. comm. 2001). The Trust, 'an affiliation of Yarowwair [Jarowair], Warra, Giagal, Jagara and Wakka Wakka peoples' (Brian Tobane, pers. comm. to Bruce Thompson 2004:1), was established in 2000 under the provisions of the Queensland Aboriginal Land Act 1991 to manage this portion of the site. Membership of the Trust includes senior men from those language groups who, historically, were most closely associated with the Bunya Mountains, and hence with the Gummingurru site. Jarowair custodians, lead by Paddy Jerome, Brian Tobane and Tommy Daniels, currently form the management team, as they are the descendants of Bunda.

In September 2003 that portion of Tony Huntly's property on which the stone arrangement occur was purchased by the Indigenous Land Corporation (ILC) (a national organisation funded by the Commonwealth under the provisions of the Native Title Act 1993 to buy land for Aboriginal peoples whose connection to traditional lands has been extinguished by subsequent land acquisition). The ILC developed a program for hand-back, with that program including the need for the Gummingurru Trust to demonstrate it could take care of the site and ensure a capacity to pay the rent and rates on the property (Matthew Brown and Pat Fraser, ILC co-ordinators, pers. comm. 2006). It was at the time of land purchase in 2003 that traditional custodians occupied the site (renting the homestead constructed on the site in the 1980s) and became actively involved in the management and interpretation of the site, commissioning a Management Plan (Thompson 2004).

Until 2000, the site had always been known as either the Meringandan Stone Arrangement or the Cawdor Stone Arrangement, named after the local town (Meringandan) or the immediate locality (Cawdor). In 2000, with the hand-back of management of a portion of the site to the Gummingurru Trust, Paddy Jerome (senior traditional custodian for the area) decided to rename the place 'Gummingurru' after his grandfather, Gumminjuddi, a man with 'very deep spiritual ties to the Darling Downs area' (Jerome 2002:4). This renaming of the site was supported by the members of the Trust, who recognise Paddy Jerome as having the right to speak for this country. In many ways, renaming the site by Aboriginal custodians has acted to recreate a cultural place from a geographically described space (Carter 1987:xxiv).

In 2002 Jerome described Gummingurru as follows:

This ground is part of a whole area around the Bunya Mountains that is deeply spiritual. It is one of the places that point to the mountains and you can see the mountains from there. We are resurrecting this (Jerome 2002:4).

This 'resurrecting' of Gummingurru has been an ongoing process since renaming in 2000. At the same time, the Trust began to seek information about the site and enlisted the assistance of a variety of specialists including Ben Gilbert, planning staff of Toowoomba City Council, research and land management staff of the Condamine Alliance, archaeologists from the Queensland Environmental Protection Agency, native title advisors from the South Queensland Representative Body Aboriginal Corporation, and researchers from the University of Queensland, Gatton.

Using the original map of the site recorded by Gilbert, Bartholomai and Breeden
members of the Gummingurru Trust, and particularly Brian Tobane, have spent the years since occupying the site in clearing grass (assisted admirably in this task by the recent drought and by young people employed by Skill Share and Green Corps), rediscovering stones buried in the soil and vegetation, and interpreting the motifs at the site in light of Bunda's knowledge given to Gilbert, and their own expectations and understanding of the place.

To the traditional custodians, this site has always had very high significance because it is a place where their ancestors were initiated and where young people learned about their culture and its law, and because of its connection with the Bunya Mountains. The significance afforded this place by the traditional custodians is supported by its registration, first as an ‘Aboriginal Site’ and later as a DLA — categories of specific protection for places of ‘special significance’ (s.17 Cultural Record (Landscapes Queensland and Queensland Estate) Act 1987). Over the past few years this place has taken on an added significance that extends its ‘traditional’ heritage values; Gummingurru is now one of few surviving known sites on the journey from the coast to the Bunya Mountains, and it is the largest and most complex of the surviving known ceremonial places on the Darling Downs. Furthermore, it is now a location being ‘resurrected’ as a place of learning (Jerome 2002) — this time for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, youths and adults. Today, learning about Aboriginal culture through site visits and relevant activities at the Gummingurru site is seen by the members of the Trust as a significant reconciliation activity to be shared by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people on the Darling Downs together.

To achieve their goals of managing the site, interpreting it to the wider public, and demonstrating to the ILC that they have both the ability and the financial opportunity to manage (and therefore own) the land, the members of the Gummingurru Trust have embarked on a series of projects to first understand and interpret the site on their own terms, to clear the site and make the motifs easier to see, and to build educational amenities to facilitate school and other community visits.

Jarowair interpretations

Jarowair interpretations of Gummingurru are based on a variety of sources of information, including information from Bunda (via Gilbert), published accounts, and their own oral traditions, passed down to surviving members of the Jarowair whilst they were at Cherbourg (Paddy Jerome, Brian Tobane and Tommy Daniels, pers. comm. 2000 – 2006). One of the principles upon which Jarowair interpretations are based is that initiation ceremonies gave young men both physical and symbolic reminders of the responsibilities of their adulthood in the form of allocated totems (known as yuris or yurees in this part of Queensland — Bruce Rigsby, Anthropologist, pers. comm. 1999). According to yuri law, each person is assigned certain plants and/or animals throughout their lives, depending upon kin and clan ties, marriage alliances and other social connections. Yuris impose a number of rights and responsibilities on their owners, ranging from marriage rights, through rights to control access to certain resources for food or other use, to responsibilities to manage the habitats of assigned yuris (Cook and Armstrong 1998).

According to Gaiarbau (also known as Willie MacKenzie and as Gidba), a Jinibara man from the Bunya Mountains region neighbouring the Jarowair, who was interviewed by Winterbotham in the 1950s (Winterbotham 1959), Bora ceremonies undertaken throughout this region not only gave young men their characteristic cicatrices (Winterbotham 1959:76), but also allocated certain yuris and tracts of land or water to the new initiates and educated them in the responsibilities for yuris and habitats they would have as they grew in years and in responsibility for country. Gaiarbau told Winterbotham of the land and totems he was given at his Bora ceremony (Winterbotham 1959:39), and these may be similar to some of
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the yuri designs attributed by Bunda to the motifs at Gummingurru.

Such understandings of the educational role for Bora grounds are not uncommon. In his archaeological research with Aboriginal elders in Kowanyama, north Queensland, Bruno David (pers. comm. 2007) reports that Bora grounds were 'repeatedly and explicitly identified as places where youths are educated'. Furthermore, David (2006) argues, marking places with symbols, such as artistic motifs and other figurative devices, 'writes the landscape with socially, culturally, and politically ordered symbolism' (David 2006:135). This allows people to negotiate the cultural meanings of a place and to mark social and territorial identity through the associated use of ritual. Consequently, the social meaning and educational role ascribed to Gummingurru by Gilbert, as handed down to him by Bunda and supported by Gaiarbau's testimony to Winterbotham (1959), is not at all unlikely.

It was Ben Gilbert who passed on information to the Gummingurru Trust from Bunda regarding the specific interpretation of the motifs as animals. Gilbert also passed on Bunda's knowledge that these animals relate to Aboriginal yuris. The current custodians are convinced of this, partly because of their reification of Gilbert's knowledge, handed down from one of their ancestors, and partly because this interpretation is supported by Gaiarbau's statements to Winterbotham (1959).

Consequently, much of Brian Tobane's recent work at the site has involved revealing the buried figurative motifs at the site which the custodians believe are the yuris of those who came to the site for initiation and/or are images associated with teaching young people about their responsibilities towards managing the natural resources of the landscape (Adrian Beattie, traditional custodian, pers. comm. to Bruce Thompson 2004:8).

As mentioned above, Brian Tobane now spends much of his time on the site revealing yuri images that have been partially or completely buried by slope wash and other geomorphic agents in operation since the site was last actively managed.

The figures that occur on the western part of the property comprise large stones on cap rock or on shallow soils. These are the figures originally interpreted to Gilbert by Bunda. Apart from having the grass cleared away from them to make them easier to see, these figures have been little affected by the Trust's recent activities.

Most of the Trust's activities have occurred at the eastern end of the site, where there was only one large stone arrangement, in the form of concentric circles, clearly visible before ILC purchase (pers. obs. 2001). On this part of the site there is a great deal of seemingly natural stone outcrop in relatively deep soils. It is in this part of the site that 'buried' figures are being revealed as a result of the 'resurrection' activities of the Trust, and especially Brian Tobane.

In revealing the figurative motifs at the eastern end of Gummingurru, Tobane does not move stones, but rather 'lifts' the stones buried in the surface soil and ground cover, bringing them up to the surface (Figure 3a). Tobane then marks out patterns that he observes in the alignment of the stones using stakes to mark the position of lifted stones, and/or lime, poured onto the ground to connect the stones, to help visitors to see what he sees (fig 3b; see also figs 4c and 4d).

The traditional custodians have identified a range of figures in the stones in this way, and these figures include:

- a fish (fig 4a) – this figure has become less obvious as more buried stones have been raised (fig 4b);
- a kangaroo (fig 4c);
- an anthropomorphic figure (fig 4d);
- an owl;
- patterns that reflect star constellations; and
- numerous rings in addition to those known to Bunda and Gilbert (see fig 3b).
Fig 3a Fig 3b
Fig. 3. Brian Tobane lifting stones and using markers to identify newly discovered designs. Photographs by A. Ross

Fig 4a Fig 4b
Fig 4c Fig 4d
Fig 4. Newly discovered stone arrangements. (Photographs by A. Ross).

Completely new motifs have also been added to the edges of the site. Taking advantage of the construction of a services trench in October 2006, Tobane collected rocks removed from the trench and created a series of circles and other shapes, which he argued were his legacy at the site - his chance to leave his own mark for the future (figs 5a and 5b). In this action Tobane ensures that the site remains part of the living, as opposed to static, heritage of the
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Aboriginal community (cf. Byrne 2005; Carter 1987; Ellis 1994; McIntyre-Tamwoy and Harrison 2004).

Fig 5a Fig 5b

Fig 5. New stone arrangements created by Tobane.(Photographs by A. Ross)

Jarowair management

Now that original and new motifs have been identified and the significance of the site established, the Gummingurru Trust has commenced a program of management for the site that emphasises education and cultural awareness training for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. The primary philosophy of the Trust is that the Gummingurru site is a place of learning and reconciliation with the objective of teaching young people about Aboriginal culture and the advantages of working together. The Trust has developed an education and interpretation centre at the site and in May 2006 commenced its program of site visits for primary school children in the region. ‘They [the members of the Trust] believe that this would be of great benefit to Aboriginal people of all ages to help them reconnect with their culture, and to non-Aboriginal people to help in the process of reconciliation’ (Thompson 2004:1).

As part of the development of activities to achieve their management and education goals, members of the Trust have worked closely with students and staff from the University of Queensland, Gatton. From 2001 to 2004 (inclusive), students developed significance assessments for the site, a conservation and management plan (Thompson 2004), and an interpretation plan. In 2005, students developed teaching packages for primary schools to use during visits to Gummingurru, while in 2006 and 2007 students developed interpretive materials, designed for inclusion in the Visitors’ Interpretation Centre that was completed in April 2006 under a grant from the Condamine Alliance (a Regional Body established under the Commonwealth government’s Natural Heritage Trust scheme, responsible for funding community initiatives that will achieve sustainable natural and cultural resource management in the Murray-Darling Basin). Working closely with the traditional custodians, the University students of 2005 - 2007 have designed teaching exercises for different age-ranges of primary school children, teachers’ kits that explain the exercises and contextualise activities, posters, games and other on-site activities, all within the framework of Education Queensland’s Social Studies Syllabus. These exercises are designed to meet the Gummingurru Trust’s goals of demonstrating their strong connection to this place, and providing reconciliation opportunities and Aboriginal cultural awareness training for all peoples living on the Darling Downs today.

In May 2006 the Trust commenced its program of site visits for primary school children in the region. The activities the children participate in include:

- a journey through the site with a traditional custodian, viewing the original motifs, those resurrected, and the new features;
opportunities to view and handle stone artefacts found in the vicinity of the stone
arrangements;
• grinding ochre on large grinding stones, some of which may be 'archaeological' arte-
  facts, while others are modern replicas;
• making ground edge axes by rubbing stones on grindstones;
• using clay to make yuri figures; and
• playing especially designed games that communicate important information about the
  site in ways young children can comprehend.

DISCUSSION

That Aboriginal people feel a strong attachment to country generally is well demonstrated
in anthropological and cultural heritage literature (Altman 2003; Bradley 1998, 2001;
Bradley et al. 2002; Byrne and Nugent 2004; Godwin and Weiner 2006; Greer 1996, 1999;
Head 2000; Memmott and Trigger 1998; Rose 1996; Walsh 1990; Walsh and Mitchell
2002). This attachment to country is often expressed via communication with a country that
is imbued with 'sentient beings' that take the form of creator ancestors and spirits of 'old
people' who constantly demand respect and involvement in a negotiated management of the
places they occupy (Bradley 2001:297; Godwin and Weiner 2006; Greer 1996, 1999; Lewis

It is also clear from anthropological literature that negotiation with sentient landscapes,
and particularly places that are highly significant and highly spiritual, is an ongoing and
evolving process that requires constant 'resurrection' and renewal (Bradley 2001:300; God­
heritage management planning, although 'the current interest and involvement in the man­
gement of cultural heritage places and values is undoubtedly undertaken within current
legal and technical parameters, [to Aboriginal custodians] it is a
contemporary
manifesta­
tion of
traditional
practices and conventions of cultural custodianship' that is important in
heritage management (emphasis added).

Notions of the evolution of tradition and the application of traditional ways in the 21st
century, albeit in a modified form that allows for the 'transformative effects' (Merlan
1998:73) of traditional practice to meet the requirements of the modern world, may be chal­
 lenging for those for whom tradition is deemed to be static and unchanging (David 2006;
Hobsbawm 1983). This was very much the case in the Yorta Yorta decision, and the con­
cerns of anthropologists regarding the now-famous (or perhaps infamous) claim by Justice
Olney (1998) that 'The tide of history has indeed washed away any real acknowledgement
of their traditional laws and any real observance of their traditional customs' are well docu­
mented (for a summary, see Buchan 2002; Neate 2004; Weiner 2002).

The 'transformative effects' of interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal
Australians have certainly affected both the survival of Aboriginal traditions and the nature
of the expression of 'traditions' in recent times. Yet it is clear that, without evolving, tradi­
tion becomes meaningless. All traditions change to suit the changing needs of society (Hob­
sbawm 1983; Nabokov 2002; Perkins 2001). Even in the past, Aboriginal people have
negotiated and renegotiated social and cultural activities to ensure the ongoing maintenance
of social and political alliances (David 2006). Such changes are particularly obvious in
trade networks (Gould and Saggars 1985; Jones and White 1988; McBryde 1984a, 1984b;
McKenzie 1983; Mulvaney 2001; Paton 1994; Ross et al. 2003) but may also be visible in
the maintenance of ceremonial sites such as Bora grounds.

The significance of Aboriginal Bora grounds in Aboriginal ritual life in historical times
has been well documented by Bowdler (1999, 2005). Bowdler notes that, throughout south­
eastern Australia, the functions and roles of Bora grounds in Aboriginal social and ceremo­
nial life are similar. Throughout their range, Bora grounds are associated with initiation cer­
emonies, and although the form of initiation may vary from region to region and even site to site, the essential role of the Bora ceremony is constant everywhere – young people are introduced to the knowledge of the community into which they have been accepted (Bowdler 2005:137). Initiation through Bora ceremonies is associated with teaching, knowledge exchange, and identity-making (Bowdler 2005; Jarowair traditional custodians, pers. comm. 2004; O’Connor 1991, 1997; Sutton 1985 cited in Bowdler 2005). Historically, on the Darling Downs, education of youth and performance of initiation ceremonies were a significant part of the Bunya festivals (Bowdler 2005:139; Jerome 2002) and included opportunities for both material and non-material exchange, including knowledge exchange (Bowdler 2005:141).

Knowledge exchange in this way was a vital part of the ceremonial and initiation functions of Gummingurru (Gilbert 1992) and is a vital component of linking people to country anywhere (Bradley 2001; Povinelli 1993; Rose 1996; Tamisari 1998). In negotiating with country, Aboriginal people give meaning to particular places and actions at those places, and in this way create a bond between the actions of past ancestors and creators, and people in the present. This is very much what happens at Gummingurru.

At Gummingurru there are a number of possible triggers for the changed emphasis in the meaning we see at this place today, the most obvious being the removal of traditional custodians from the area and the consequent removal of the physical intensity of original site use. But has the essence of the meaning of Gummingurru changed as a consequence of traditional custodians’ physical and temporal distance? To argue that change away from past behaviours is in some way a change away from the true meaning of a place simply privileges the past over the present (Byrne 2005; David 2006) and encourages a perception of a culture that must be ‘static’ to be ‘traditional’ (Hobsbawm 1983; McIntyre-Tamwoy and Harrison 2004; Mearns 1994).

I would argue that the meaning of Gummingurru has not changed, but that the new management is a modification or evolution of the meanings and consequent actions that applied in pre-contact times. The significance of Gummingurru to Aboriginal traditional custodians, and people’s attachment to this place, have not been ‘thinned’ (Merlan 1998, 2000) as a consequence of the custodians’ physical removal from the area in the 1930s and 1940s. On the contrary, the revival of interest in the cultural traditions associated with this site has increased with the renewed focus of custodial responsibility given to the custodians of this site and the associated sites in the related cultural landscape. This is not an ‘intensified effort to recognise and validate Aboriginal culture’ (Merlan 2000:20). Because traditional stories of Gummingurru are not remembered, and there is no pretence that they are, the emphasis of current interpretation is not past-oriented. Instead, interpretation is based on oral histories handed down from a traditional custodian (Bunda) via a local white resident (Gilbert), and on past documentation of the site and its use (Gaiarbau via Winterbotham 1959), and a set of new stories about the site based on its new uses. As a consequence, the emphasis of site management and knowledge maintenance is on closing the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal knowledge and building a framework for the reconciliation of differences. At Gummingurru, knowledge is shared between members of the Aboriginal community, and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, with that knowledge being about the ongoing, evolving meaning of the site and its cultural landscape from the past into the present. This is the ‘continuing confirmation and reformulation of meaning’ identified by Merlan (2000:21), and the reshaping of knowledge and meaning articulated by Povinelli (1993:683) and Tamisari (1998:252, Tamisari and Wallace 2006). Knowledge and meaning are therefore not static and can evolve as the nature of the attachment to place evolves: ‘[t]he past can lie in the future if, down the road, an Aboriginal person rediscovers its name and meaning through physical or Dreaming interaction with the site’ (Povinelli 1993:684; see also Merlan 2000). This is the ‘resurrection’ of Gummingurru described by Jerome (2002), in which past uses of the place and actions associated with the place in its
wider landscape setting re-emerge in the present in a modern context (Merlan 1998:147-180; Povinelli 1993:696).

Merlan (1998) refers to this idea of adaptive tradition to meet the requirements and expectations of ‘the other’ as mimesis, an imitative behaviour that grafts elements of the modern world onto earlier more traditional forms of behaviour. Merlan argues that changed and modified traditions that result from mimesis cannot be deemed to represent continuity with the past, but I would disagree, at least with respect to Gummingurru. At Gummingurru, much of the understanding of the detail of the site comes from the knowledge passed to the surviving traditional custodians by Ben Gilbert (and initially to Gilbert by Bunda), yet all the older members of the Trust (Brian Tobane, Tommy Daniels, and especially Paddy Jerome) retain memories of a place of significance and learning characterised by stone arrangements and ceremonial activities – memories passed to them by their parents whilst these now old men were boys at Cherbourg (Paddy Jerome, Brian Tobane and Tommy Daniels, pers. comm. 2000-2006). Although these memories are dim (Brian Tobane, for example, was a young boy when he and his family were removed to Cherbourg), their resurrection since 2000 is based on a solid foundation of knowledge of both modern and ancient traditions. Gilbert has supplied the map of the place drawn by Bartholomai and Breeden (1961); he passed on stories of 19th century use of the area told to him by his great grandfather; and he provided knowledge about the interpretation of motifs given to him by Bunda; but the memories of the important function of the site for identity-making, alliance formation and learning, and the links between this site and the Bunya Mountains, come from the traditional custodians themselves. In this way, mimesis at Gummingurru may occur in the explanation of the particular, but cannot explain the overall nature of the importance of the meanings being resurrected for the site.

At Gummingurru, resurrection occurs both symbolically, with the regaining of association with the place and its renaming, and physically, with the re-finding of buried motifs through the ‘lifting’ of buried ‘hidden’ stones. Through both the symbolic and the physical re-engagement with the place, new meanings and new interpretations of the images are possible, and these new meanings and interpretations may be different from those given to the images in the past. In relation to Yolngu culture in northeast Arnhem Land, Tamisari (1998:259) argues that ‘knowledge is released from inside to outside by rendering images visible, accessible and thus experienceable’ (emphasis added). Knowledge at Gummingurru is similarly released through revealing the hidden motifs that are the physical manifestation of knowledge. The interpretations of newly raised motifs at Gummingurru are an integral part of re-making knowledge visible (literally) at this place that has always, as part of its traditional functions, been about knowledge sharing and meaning making.

In many ways, the 21st century use of Gummingurru is a perfect illustration of the paradox illustrated by Mearns (1994:263): ‘in order to maintain tradition they [Aboriginal peoples] must reinterpret that tradition, thus introducing change to maintain continuity’. At Gummingurru, for the site to maintain its position in society and for the traditional custodians to retain their continuity of connection to the place, its meaning must evolve and inform new generations of visitors to the place, and thereby link the site to its modern cultural landscape – a landscape that includes non-Aboriginal neighbours. But does the new activity at Gummingurru constitute an abandonment of tradition altogether?

Zimmerman (2006) and McDonald (2006) have both emphasised that there are many ways in which the past (and particularly artistic expression in the past) can be interpreted, and that the existence of a single ‘true’ or ‘correct’ interpretation of sites that is ‘traditional’, is an invalid concept. The notion of multi-vocal interpretations of place is not new to anthropology (Basso 1996; Bradley 2001; Bradley et al. 2002; Cronon 1995; Feit 1987; Head 2000; Merculieff 1994; Nabokov 2002; Pratt 1994; Scott 1996; Spence 1999), but it is relatively foreign in archaeology (Byrne 2005; Ellis 1994; Ross et al. 2003; Zimmerman 2006):
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To understand that there are different ways of knowing the past may be difficult for archaeologists who are intensely focused on knowing the past through material remains and their contexts. Any other way seems less powerful, and most archaeologists are fully aware of the problems associated with oral history, written documentation, and lore (Zimmerman 2006: 47).

It is, therefore, unsurprising that a 21st century re-interpretation of a site like Gummingurru should result in a modification of tradition to ensure the maintenance of attachment to a place that continues to have relevance in the modern world.

Gummingurru is not the only stone arrangement site in which ongoing negotiation with the place and its creators occurs. Veitch et al. (n.d.) argue that the Gurdadaguji stone arrangement site in the Pilbara region, Western Australia, also demonstrates this concept of constant and changing negotiation with place over time. Veitch et al. used OSL (optically stimulated luminescence) dating techniques to date the soil 'casts' that have accumulated around the placed stones at this site. Their results suggest that the Gurdadaguji site was first created around 3000 years ago, but since that time stones have been regularly moved and re-placed, demonstrating ongoing maintenance of the site during a period of massive social change in many parts of pre-colonial Australia, including the arid west (Gibbs and Veth 2002). The importance of ritual and ceremony at these times is said to have been 'to maintain old relationships and forge new alliances and kin relations' (Veitch et al. n.d.:10; emphasis added).

Times of social change, such as occurred in the mid-late Holocene (eg. Lourandos 1997; Lourandos and Ross 1994) and at contact (Reynolds 1987a, 1987b, 2001), are times when the re-negotiation of alliances is needed, and ceremonial sites and opportunities for aggregation (such as occurred at the triennial Bunya feasts and associated ceremonies) facilitate these processes (Gibbs and Veth 2002:14; Veitch et al. n.d.:11). This is the 'dynamic context', identified by Veitch et al. (n.d.; see also David 2006), within which peoples lived in the late Holocene, where constant re-negotiation of social alliances required an increasing reliance on ceremonial places of ritual importance.

This is the same process that is occurring at Gummingurru now. Jarowair peoples were removed from the Gummingurru site in the late 18th century and ceremonial activity at Gummingurru was forbidden. In the 1930s and 1940s, Jarowair people were removed from the area completely, to Cherbourg and other missions, where many aspects of cultural traditions were unable to be maintained, apart from some general remembrance of rights and responsibilities towards country and memories of significant places.

Now that Jarowair custodians have been able to return to country, new negotiations with that country must begin. This is the 'resurrection' described by Jerome (2002). The stones are being 'lifted' to make the site 'visible' again, both physically and symbolically; the site is being renewed, and new alliances are being forged - not just with Aboriginal neighbours but also with local councils, government departments, Universities and schools. In this sense the 'tradition' of Gummingurru is retained, albeit in a modified and modern form. The site is understood among regional Aboriginal populations as having always been a place of identity-making, youth education and alliance formation. And in indigenous terms it still is. The only difference is that all these activities are being conducted in the 21st century and so have a 21st century look.

CONCLUSION

Gummingurru is an ancient place with a 21st century future. It is a place with which traditional custodians have a close and intimate connection. Although the original connection has been severed by 19th and 20th century government acts to remove people from traditional lands, the spirit of responsibility to the land, to this place, and to the education of
future generations has survived, perhaps even more strongly than it did in pre-contact times as the aspirations for education are now much more widely constituted. The Gummingurru site is a vital part of both past and modern Jarowair identity. Its current interpretation and management is just another layer of interpretive management and alliance forming behaviour; activities that have been part of this site for possibly thousands of years.

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ENDNOTES

1. A grant from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Studies will support a formal archaeological assessment of the surrounding landscape during 2008.
2. A Bora is a ceremonial ground where young people are initiated into adulthood. In coastal and hinterland parts of eastern Australia, most Bora grounds comprise two or occasionally three earthen rings (Satterthwait and Heather 1987). Further inland, Boras tend to be stone circles (for a full description of Boras and their place in Aboriginal society, see BowdleI 1999, 2005).
3. There are many issues associated with acts of naming and renaming places (Bradley 2001; Bradley et al. 2002; Carter 1987). While the renaming of Gummingurru could contribute to debates on the politics of renaming places, given the vast geographical extent of members of the Trust, this is beyond the scope of the current paper.
4. There are three University of Queensland campuses: St Lucia, Ipswich and Gatton. The Gatton campus is the most westerly and lies approximately 60km east of Gummingurru.
5. The size of the site makes accurate mapping difficult. Bartholomai and Breeden’s map is a poor representation of the site. A grant from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies will support the preparation of a new and more accurate map of the site, using an electronic distance measurement (EDM) device, in 2008.

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