



Plenary Session: Reconciliation and Working Together

In AAA we commenced our journey in reconciliation with our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) in 2018. We submitted our plan to Reconciliation Australia and had our proposal accepted. We have spent the years since then planning our implementation phase. As part of our RAP commitment, we planned a “Working Together” themed conference. At the conference we had hoped to bring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander collaborators, colleagues and friends to Darwin to help us celebrate our ongoing relationships, to reflect on our practice, ask some challenging questions, and to start to plan a shared future.

Although we cannot be in Darwin this year, it’s still important that we take these steps, so that that in 2022 we may celebrate coming through some difficult years in regard to heritage, research direction and activity, and other broader social issues.

In this first keynote session of our online conference in 2021, we have invited a number of eminent members of AAA to speak personally of their experiences in archaeology and what it has meant to “Work Together” over long periods. Matthew Spriggs and Lynette Russell review the early history of Aboriginal involvement in archaeology in Australia, commencing as far back as the 1830s. They argue that Aboriginal knowledge has been a part of archaeology in all stages of the history of the discipline. Paul Tacon takes up this theme in his review of 40 years of doing rock art research. Like Matthew and Lynette, Paul reflects on the early years of collaborative research in many parts of Australia, and how this collaboration has continued to the present day. Sharon Sullivan and Sharon Hodgetts also consider the importance of having archaeologists and Aboriginal Traditional Owners working together in achieving shared management goals for heritage. They review the long history of heritage management collaboration in NSW from the initial focus entirely on the archaeological value of sites, which ignored Aboriginal perspectives, to the current measures that are a vast improvement on the 1960s, but are not quite all the way there yet. Certainly there have been times of conflict in the past, when Traditional Owners and archaeologists have not always seen eye to eye on research and heritage goals and objectives. But in this session, we focus on the achievements made over the many long years of collaboration, and the positive results of reconciled methodologies and shared outcomes.

There From the Start: Aboriginal Involvement in the Early Development of Australian Archaeology

Matthew Spriggs, Australian National University

Lynette Russell, Monash University

Indigenous Australians were not mere observers of the creation by others of a 65,000-year story of their history that has become important in the modern story of our nation; they were involved in illuminating knowledge of Australia’s deep history from the start as early as the 1830s. This story has not been told up to now. By examining the extent of early Indigenous involvement in the development of Australian archaeology, a new ARC Strategic Research Initiative project expects to demonstrate that far from

archaeological research having been something simply imposed upon Aboriginal people, their intellectual property has been critical in all stages of its development. At a time when serious gaps are being identified in the ways the history of Australian archaeology has been presented, it is an urgent task to insert this hidden history of Aboriginal involvement in Australia's archaeology. Deconstructing the master narratives of the history of Australian archaeology can be expected to have significant ramifications for how the discipline is taught and practiced, and for the general public's appreciation of the role of Indigenous Australians in shaping the nation's history.

Reflections on Forty Years of Studying Rock Art with First Nations Colleagues

Paul Tacon, Griffith University

In 1981, I had the privilege of spending a few months in a then very new Kakadu National Park as part of a team excavating and studying rock art at a number of locations. We worked closely and collaboratively with a range of Traditional Owners. This led to an intensive rock art study with dozens of Traditional Owners and other community members in the mid to late 1980s for my PhD. Since then, while based at the Australian Museum (1991-2005) and then Griffith University (2005 ongoing), I have undertaken collaborative rock art research with appropriate community members across much of the Top End of the Northern Territory, parts of central Australia, the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, other areas of New South Wales and various locations in Queensland. I also have studied rock art across southeast Asia with both local archaeologists and Indigenous community members, especially in Sarawak, Malaysia. There has been much change in the past 40 years, especially in terms of the technology we use to record rock art, but a constant has been the need for collaborative approaches to rock art research – working together. In this presentation some of the lessons of the past 40 years are summarised. One of them is that: for Indigenous Australians, rock art heritage is considered a very important part of contemporary culture and identity rather than an archaeological artefact. Because of this, Traditional Owners, custodians and other community members seek not only to conserve and manage rock art in a tangible sense, and from both traditional and Western Science perspectives, but also to preserve and enhance their relationships to sites, landscapes, ancestors and the spirituality of places.

From Relics Towards Country: Aboriginal Heritage Protection in NSW

Sharon Sullivan, Bywater Farm, Argents Hill

Sharon Hodgetts, Wiradjuri-Wangaaypuwan Woman, Forestry Corporation NSW and University of New England

In 1969, New South Wales passed legislation aimed at protecting Aboriginal 'relics' throughout the state. Relics were Aboriginal sites and objects which showed physical evidence of the Aboriginal occupation of NSW. Under this act all such relics, regardless of land title, became the property of the Crown. Permits were required to excavate, damage or destroy relics, based on the recommendations of a statutory committee consisting of archaeologists and a representative of mining interests. The aim was to protect relics from illegal excavation or collection and from deliberate destruction or damage (unless approved by the Minister) in order to conserve the archaeological research value of this heritage. The Act was hailed as farsighted. Present day Aboriginal people were not mentioned in the legislation and they were given no role at all in its implementation. The legislation did not protect sites of importance to Aboriginal people, but rather sites of importance to archaeologists. Furthermore, the 1969 Act effectively overrode all Aboriginal rights and interests in the Aboriginal heritage of NSW. This talk outlines the slow and still incomplete actions taken towards remodelling the intent and spirit of this legislation, to give Aboriginal people control of their heritage.

Sharon Sullivan will discuss the early steps taken in the 1970s and 1980s by managers, archaeologists and Aboriginal Site Officers to involve Aboriginal people in the protection of their heritage despite the contrary intention of the Aboriginal Relics Act.

Sharon Hodgetts will discuss the recent examples of collaboration between Aboriginal Site officers and archaeologists which has developed from this earlier work. This work combines traditional knowledge, ethnography and archaeological research to conserve sites such as Calga Woman and contributes to ongoing reconciliation between archaeologists and Aboriginal people in NSW.