NOTICE OF GENERAL MEETING

The seventh General Meeting of the Society for 1981 will be held in the Museum Education Building, North Terrace, Adelaide at

8.00PM MONDAY, 28 SEPTEMBER, 1981

AGENDA

1. Apologies.

2. Minutes of Previous General Meeting.
   Minutes of the previous General Meeting, held Monday, 24 August, 1981 to be confirmed. A copy of these minutes is attached.

3. New Members.
   No new members have been elected to the Society:

4. Papers and Journals.
   Papers and Journals from other Societies and Organizations will be tabled at the meeting.

5. Business.

6. FILM
   Members and Friends of the Society have been invited by the Aboriginal Task Force, to a private screening of the unedited version of the Film dealing with sacred grounds of the Kimberley's Western Australia, entitled:-

   ON SACRED GROUND

   This film, banned in Western Australia and outside Australia, was commissioned by the Aboriginal Affairs Department and produced by Film Australia.

7. Supper.

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Address to the Society's General Meeting held Monday, 24 August, 1981.

PRESERVING SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S ABORIGINAL HERITAGE

ROSEMARY BUCHAN

Introduction

As with all heritage, whether natural or cultural, the responsibility for preserving Aboriginal heritage lies with the entire community. At an official level, this responsibility is assumed by governments through legislation, but such legislation cannot be effectively implemented without the co-operation of the general public, whether they be special interest groups such as this Society, or whether they be landowners, tourists, bushwalkers, or anyone who is likely to come into contact with an Aboriginal site.

This talk discusses the ways in which Aboriginal heritage can be preserved in South Australia, beginning with a consideration of the aims of cultural resource preservation, then moving on to look at how these aims are incorporated into relevant legislation in South Australia, and into the implementation of this legislation. Finally, I want to briefly talk about the ways in which other groups within the community can assist in the preservation process.

Heritage Conservation Aims

It is generally accepted by those professionally involved in the preservation of heritage resources, that preservation can be equated with management. In other words, the process involves the manipulation of a group of resources, for example, a species of plant or animal, or as in this case, Aboriginal sites and items, to ensure the survival of that group into the future. It is obvious that in order to achieve this aim, it is not necessary to ensure the survival of each individual member of a group. The process then becomes one of making choices about which individual members of the group should be preserved to ensure the survival of the group as a whole. There is an important difference in this respect, however, between natural and cultural resources, and that is that cultural resources are non-renewable. If an Aboriginal site is destroyed, it cannot be replaced (unlike, for example, a kangaroo), so that the total resource is permanently diminished. This means that the choices of which Aboriginal sites should be preserved need to be made very carefully, according to well defined criteria, and within the framework of an extensive knowledge of the nature of Aboriginal sites in general so that the relative importance of sites can be determined. In the absence of an existing wide knowledge of Aboriginal sites (which is the case in South Australia) all sites must be protected initially so that they are not destroyed before they can be identified and assessed.

There must also be provision for the permanent protection of those sites which have been selected for preservation. This selection process is based on three major criteria which are practised by most site protection agencies in Australia. These are the significance of sites to living Aborigines; the scientific importance of sites; and their value for development for public education and recreation.

 Legislation in South Australia and its Implementation

In 1965, the Aboriginal and Historic Relics Preservation Act was introduced to afford protection to both Aboriginal and European heritage. This was administered by the Aboriginal and Historic Relics Unit which was originally attached to the South Australian Museum, and later to the Department for the Environment.

Several years ago, the government decided to replace this legislation with two separate Acts, and in 1978 the South Australian Heritage Act was introduced to deal with European heritage, and a Heritage Unit within the Environment Department was set up to administer it. The complementary legislation, the Aboriginal Heritage Act was assented to in 1979, but has not yet been proclaimed, so that the 1965 legislation is still used to protect Aboriginal heritage.
In 1980, the Heritage Unit amalgamated with the Aboriginal and Historic Relics Unit, so that both Acts could be under one administration. With recent reorganisation associated with the formation of the new Department of Environment and Planning, this administration is now known as the Heritage Conservation Branch of the Department, and contains within it, the Aboriginal Heritage Section and the European Heritage Section to implement the two Acts.

Since the Aboriginal Heritage Act of 1979 is expected to be proclaimed before the end of the year, it will be more relevant to summarise this legislation, rather than the 1965 Act. The major provisions of the Aboriginal Heritage Act of 1979 are:

- The establishment of an Aboriginal Heritage Committee to advise the Minister on matters relating to the Act;
- The establishment of an Aboriginal Heritage Fund for use in administering the Act;
- Requirements for the Minister to initiate searches for and keep a record of Aboriginal sites and items;
- A prohibition on excavating for, or collecting items of the Aboriginal heritage without the written consent of the Minister;
- A prohibition on damaging or destroying important Aboriginal sites and items without the written consent of the Minister;
- Provision for the establishment of protected areas over important sites and for the Minister to place whatever conditions regarding access to or use of protected areas he considers necessary for the protection of the sites.

In order to implement the legislation, the Aboriginal Heritage Section of the Heritage Conservation Branch of the Department of Environment and Planning will undertake a number of activities:

1. **Identification of the Resource**
   The location and recording of Aboriginal sites will be the major thrust of the Section over the next several years, since before effective management can proceed, more information is required about the type and distribution of sites in South Australia. Site surveys will be implemented under two major programmes:
   - The sacred sites programme which will deal with sites of significance to living Aborigines, and
   - The archaeological sites survey programme which will focus on prehistoric sites.

Research projects to provide more information on South Australian prehistory and Aboriginal culture will also be initiated.

2. **Storage and Retrieval of Information on Sites**
   The Section already maintains a site register where any information on all known Aboriginal sites in the State is stored in a readily accessible form. The maintenance of the site register requires considerable effort in reviewing, assessing and updating information, and monitoring access to it to ensure the security of restricted information. The main use of the register is as a management tool in site protection (for example, providing information on sites in areas to be developed), and to facilitate research by providing basic data on sites. Access to the register is restricted to people with a genuine reason for wanting the information (e.g., research, survey work, Aboriginal communities). A section of the register is kept locked for information on sites (mainly sacred sites) which cannot be disseminated without the consent of the depositor.

3. **The Identification and Assessment of Sites for Declaration as Protected Areas**
   This programme also involves a full time commitment to identify, investigate, record and document in detail those sites which warrant special protection as protected areas and to prepare recommendations for their declaration and management. Selection will be according to the three criteria mentioned above. After declaration, there will be an on-going involvement in managing protected areas to ensure their continued preservation.
4. The Assessment of Areas to be Developed
A major part of the Section's work involves the monitoring of development proposals such as mining, public works and housing projects so that important sites can be protected before development proceeds. This involves assessing the impact of the development on Aboriginal sites in the area and making recommendations for their protection, if necessary. This may include detailed recording of sites, sample collection or excavation before they are destroyed, or in some cases, a recommendation that the site should not be destroyed. Where there is insufficient information in the register on the area in question, the developing authority may be requested to employ a qualified archaeologist or anthropologist to conduct a survey to identify and assess sites.

5. Physical Protection
In some cases, work has to be done directly to sites to ensure their protection. This may include the installation of protective fences and screens, erection of interpretative signs, and the provision of facilities for visitors to minimise damage to sites. Conservation measures may also be undertaken on some sites.

6. Public Information and Interpretation
The success of any site protection programme depends upon the public being made aware of the richness and complexity of Aboriginal culture and of the necessity to preserve it. The Aboriginal Heritage Section attempts to do this in a number of ways. Sites which demonstrate certain aspects of Aboriginal culture will be opened to the public and information provided on them. Informative literature and displays are being produced for use by the general public and staff of the Section give talks and lectures to interested groups. The Section is particularly involved in working with schools, both in the classroom, and in conducting groups of children and teachers on visits to sites.

7. The Employment and Training of Aborigines
The Section has a commitment in this field and at present employs three Aboriginal Rangers. More trainees are anticipated soon. The rangers will be located in their community, and will work with their own sites to record, police and maintain them. An important part of their work will be to liaise with the public to provide information on sites, give talks, and conduct groups on site visits.

How the Public Can Help
Clearly all members of the public can help by developing an understanding of Aboriginal culture and its value, and by observing a few simple rules when visiting Aboriginal sites, such as not chalking in engravings and paintings to obtain better photographs, not writing initials on painting sites; in short, not damaging Aboriginal material in any way. Parents can help by imparting to children positive attitudes towards Aborigines and Aboriginal culture and this process can be enhanced by the introduction of relevant courses in schools by people with some experience in the field.

The Section relies on all members of the public to provide information on Aboriginal sites they discover and on landowners to help protect sites on their property. Much valuable assistance has been provided in this way in the past.

Interested groups such as this Society can make a valuable contribution to the site protection process, particularly over the next few years, when the Section intends to concentrate much of its efforts on site survey. This group can assist as it has in the past, in the location and recording of Aboriginal sites in the field. I look forward to many years of co-operation between the Society and the Heritage Conservation Branch.

Rosemary A. Buchan,
Head,
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Department of Environment and Planning.

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