Title: Gidyea fire: a study of the transformation and maintenance of Aboriginal place properties on the Georgina River.


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ABSTRACT
In this thesis a platform of knowledge is provided for the development of enhanced Indigenous cultural heritage legislation by examining the specific nature of the cultural heritage of a Queensland Aboriginal group, the Dajarra Aboriginal community of Northwest Queensland for whom the Georgina River is a heartland in their cultural geography. The thesis was conducted during a period when the Queensland Government began to recognize demands for more effective Indigenous cultural heritage legislation. Queensland’s latest Aboriginal cultural heritage legislation, introduced in 2004, emerged from a history of legislation dominated by an archaeological model of cultural heritage. However, despite some improvements this new legislation has maintained a physically orientated model of cultural heritage. Therefore Queensland’s Indigenous societies, their places, place knowledge and certain types of place-specific behaviours continue to be exposed to imposed change.

The thesis examines the ‘lifeworld’, the ‘everyday’ experiences of place of the Dajarra community. A broad definition of culture and an interactive model of place, coupled with a phenomenological approach provide a theoretical framework to engage with and describe cultural heritage as Dajarra people themselves experience it. The cultural heritage of Dajarra people involves interactions with a diversity of places and various combinations of behavioural, knowledge and physical properties. All of the places examined were interrelated with other places to form both small and large-scale place complexes.

This dissertation reveals that the cultural heritage of an Aboriginal community lies not just in the physical environment but also in the diverse everyday people-environment interactions of that community. Effective cultural heritage legislation must be capable of encompassing this diversity. Cultural heritage is essentially dynamic, it is found in processes of change, it is found in ongoing people-environment interactions as well as those of the past. It is argued that Aboriginal people hold ‘active cultural heritage rights’; these are rights to interact with places and rights to control action in places. Ideal cultural heritage legislation would recognize these active rights and provide for Aboriginal control of them, that is, Aboriginal defined and controlled change. This study reveals that it is difficult to separate places in time and space from other places with which they are co-dependent or inextricably intertwined. Studies of Aboriginal people-environment interactions and legislative measures must respond to the broader place complexes within which individual places are embedded and within which the everyday experiences of place are had. It is shown that there is a range of ways that an Aboriginal cultural heritage community can be defined and a range of Aboriginal people that might have interests in
the cultural heritage of an area. Lastly, the thesis calls for the adoption of an interactive model of place as a foundation to cultural heritage studies and legislation in order to respond to the cultural heritage of Aboriginal people as they themselves experience it and wish to experience it.