

# Mount Drysdale (Billagoe) cultural landscape case study

Preparing your heritage property for the impacts of climate change



Mount Drysdale (Billagoe) is listed on the NSW State Heritage Register for both its Aboriginal cultural values and historic values. Part of the property is an Aboriginal Place declared under the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974.

## Site history and heritage

Located on the traditional lands of the Ngemba-Ngiyampaa-Wangaaybuwan-Wayilwan people north of Cobar in central western New South Wales, Mount Drysdale (Billagoe) became part of the Tindarey pastoral lease in 1885. Oral histories recount tales of conflict between pastoralists and Aboriginal people, including a massacre at Mount Drysdale.

Alluvial gold was first found at Mount Billagoe in 1887 and later, in 1892, a reef was discovered by David Drysdale, after whom the hill was named. Evidence of historic gold mining, in the form of several historical mines and the archaeological ruins of an associated village, survives on the property. Established in 1893, the village once boasted three hotels, a large store, a post office and a school.

The mountain is a part of a creation story that links Mount Drysdale and nearby Mount Billagoe to other important Aboriginal places (such as Byrock Rockholes and the Brewarrina Fish Traps) along the journey of the Dreamtime ancestor Baiame. It is at Mount Drysdale that Baiame stopped to look at his work and to rest. There are numerous archaeological sites that attest to the Aboriginal use of this area.



## Challenges

The Mount Drysdale (Billagoe) cultural landscape is increasingly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, such as increasing temperatures and changes to seasonal rainfall.

Changes in expected storm intensity are also likely to have a negative impact on the Aboriginal sites and European ruins in the landscape. Rainfall on the exposed chimneys and other masonry ruins, archaeological deposits and mine shafts, all currently unprotected, will exacerbate the ongoing deterioration.

An increase in the number of hot days over 35°C and an increased risk of bushfire weather in spring and summer may reduce the viability of cultural tourism enterprises in the region by shortening the peak season.

## Current management, future opportunities

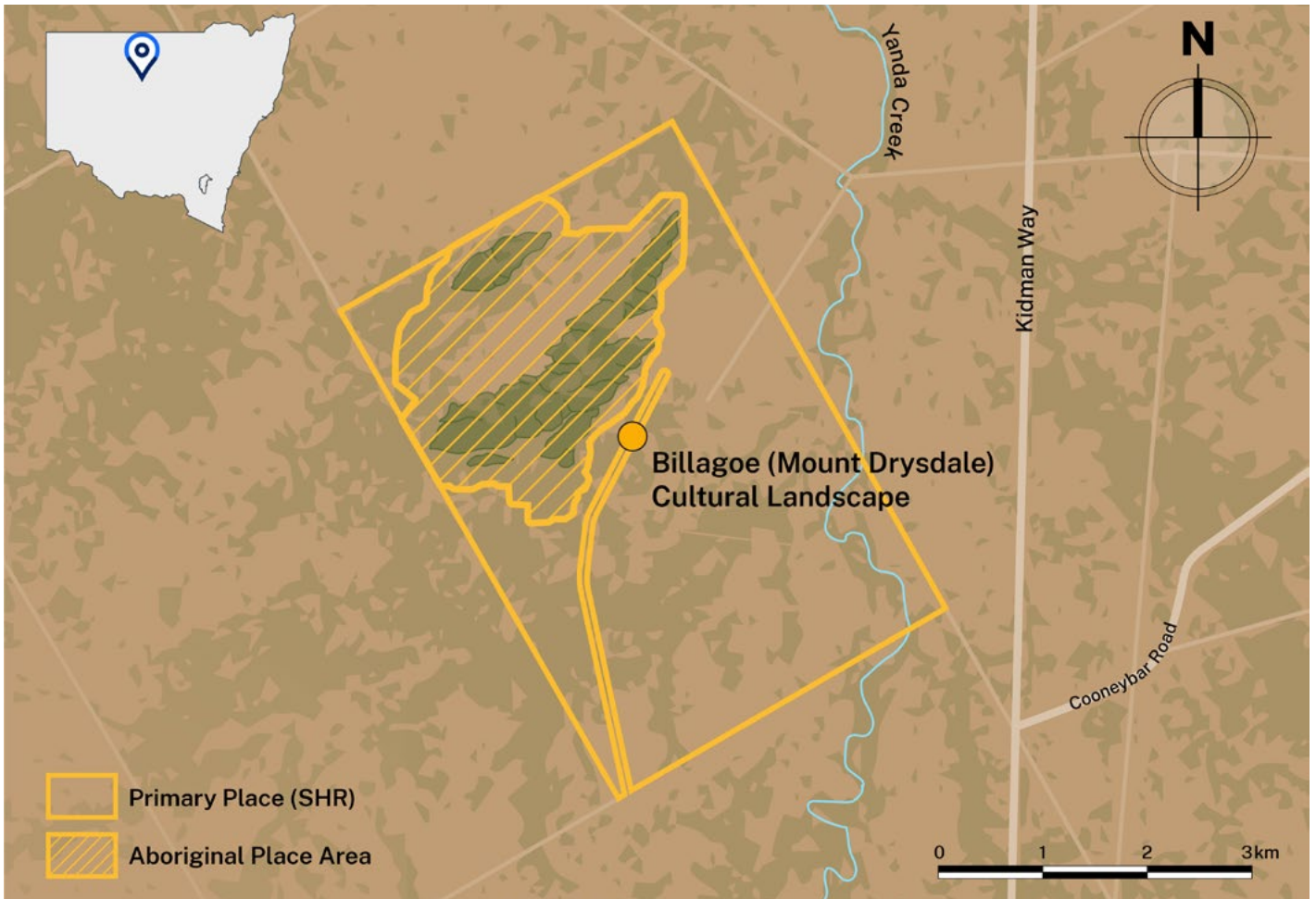
Mount Drysdale (Billagoe) is privately owned, with the Aboriginal cultural heritage values currently managed in consultation with the Ngemba-Ngiyampaa-Wangaaybuwan-Wayilwan people.

Any future management opportunities would need to be developed in consultation with the current owners, Aboriginal stakeholders, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Rural

Fire Service. Such opportunities could include:

- Development of a formal plan of management that considers actions to mitigate the future impacts of climate change such as regular maintenance
- Development of an interpretation plan to capture and present key stories that may become more difficult to read in the landscape as ruins decay
- Detailed recording of sites, including photographic recording, to enable monitoring of changes over time
- Development of a fire management plan which incorporates the protection of the cultural features of the place, including fuel reduction to reduce bush fire risk
- Growing sustainable cultural tourism in the region to help promote and support conservation and protection of the landscape as pressure on the local agricultural sector increases.





## Lessons

- The rate of decay of cultural landscapes consisting of archaeological sites, structural ruins and moveable heritage exposed to the elements may increase dramatically due to changes in storm intensity and rainfall patterns.
- Monitoring climate impacts and changes to heritage places requires detailed baseline information on site distribution and condition.
- Salvage\* of sites or archaeological deposits may be required where loss of sites is inevitable.
- Documents such as conservation management plans and maintenance plans must address likely impacts of climate change on the place so as to better guide decisions about prioritising conservation budgets and actions to maintain heritage values in a changing climate.

\*Approval may be required under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* and *Heritage Act 1977*.

## References

Department of Planning and Environment (2017) *Far West regional plan 2036*, Department of Planning and Environment, NSW Government.

Office of Environment and Heritage Adapt NSW (2014) *Far West climate change snapshot*, Office of Environment and Heritage, NSW Government.

Cover photo: Exposed remains of a building at Mount Drysdale (D. Jessop, 2006). Page 2: Cottage, Mount Drysdale (D. Jessop, 2006) and Boiler from Eldorado Mine, Mount Drysdale (D. Jessop, 2006).

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