

YURANIGHS ABORIGINAL GRAVE HISTORIC SITE
PLAN OF MANAGEMENT

NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service

July 1999

This plan of management was adopted by the Minister for the Environment on 2nd July 1999.

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FOREWORD

Yuranighs Aboriginal Grave Historic Site is located on the central western slopes of NSW approximately 3 km southeast of Molong between Orange and Wellington. It has an area of 1.2 hectares and access is gained off the road from Molong to Boree which runs south from the Mitchell Highway near Molong.

The historic site contains the burial place of Yuranigh, an Aboriginal man who accompanied Thomas Mitchell on his final expedition to Queensland in 1845-1846. It is marked by a European grave and headstone and four Aboriginal carved trees.

The site is unique in containing an association of European and Aboriginal burial practices. It has high historic, archaeological and social significance.

The plan of management provides for the general protection of the historic site, particularly the conservation of the carved trees, restoration of the site's open woodland character, and for the provision of public access. A car park will be provided and the site will be interpreted.

Bob Debus
Minister for the Environment

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1. INTRODUCTION

The National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1974, requires that a plan of management be prepared for each historic site. A plan of management is a legal document that outlines how the area will be managed in the years ahead.

The procedures for the adoption of a plan of management are specified in the Act and involve five stages:

- * The Director-General gives notice that a plan of management has been prepared.
- * The plan is placed on public exhibition for at least one month and any person may comment on it.
- * The plan and copies of all representations are referred to the National Parks and Wildlife Advisory Council for consideration.
- * The Director-General submits the plan, together with the recommendations of the Advisory Council, to the Minister.
- * The Minister may adopt the plan after considering the recommendations of the Advisory Council or may refer the plan back to the Director-General and Council for further consideration.

Once a plan has been adopted by the Minister, no operations may be undertaken within the historic site except in accordance with the plan.

A plan of management for Yuranighs Aboriginal Grave Historic Site was placed on public exhibition from 18th April until 14th July 1997. The exhibition of the plan attracted 10 submissions which raised 7 issues. All comments received were referred to the National Parks and Wildlife Advisory Council for its consideration and advice. The comments and suggestions of the Advisory Council were in turn considered by the Minister when adopting this plan.

For additional information or enquires on the management of Yuranighs Aboriginal Grave Historic Site, please contact the Service's Bathurst District Office at Level 2, 203-209 Russell Street, Bathurst or by phone on (02) 6332 9488.

2. MANAGEMENT CONTEXT

2.1 HISTORIC SITES IN NEW SOUTH WALES

The National Parks and Wildlife Service has as its primary responsibility the conservation of the natural and cultural resources of New South Wales pursuant to the National Parks and Wildlife Act, 1974, together with the provision of opportunities for appropriate use of areas for which it is responsible.

Historic sites are areas reserved under the Act which are 'sites of buildings, objects, monuments or events of national significance or areas in which relics, or Aboriginal places, of special significance are situated'. Such areas are vested in the Director-General and are managed by the Service.

Service policies on historic sites are based on the Australian ICOMOS 'Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance' (the Burra Charter, 1981). This is a set of principles adopted by the Committee of Australian ICOMOS (International Conference of Monuments and Sites) to guide the conservation and care of cultural heritage items.

2.2 YURANIGHS ABORIGINAL GRAVE HISTORIC SITE

2.2.1 Location, Reservation and Regional Setting

Yuranighs Aboriginal Grave Historic Site is located on the central western slopes of NSW approximately 3 km south-east of Molong. Molong lies on the Highway between Orange and Wellington (see Map, page 3).

The site has an area of 1.2 hectares. It was acquired by the National Parks and Wildlife Service and reserved as a historic site in 1974.

As well as extensive use for grazing and cropping, the Central West Region is a significant tourist destination. Most visitors come from Sydney and Canberra. Attractions within the district managed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service are Hill End Historic Site, Conimbla and Weddin Mountains National Parks. Other important outdoor destinations include Burrendong State Recreation Area, Wyangla State Recreation Area, limestone caves and a number of historic towns.

2.2.2 Importance of Yuranighs Aboriginal Grave Historic Site

Yuranighs Aboriginal Grave Historic Site is of state-wide cultural significance:

Historic significance: The historic site demonstrates the achievements of an Aborigine who accompanied a notable early explorer, Thomas Mitchell, and who provided invaluable assistance to his expedition.

Aboriginal peoples' place in history has often been overlooked or denigrated, both at the time that early settlement and exploration were taking place and in subsequent decades and centuries. Yuranigh's impressive accomplishments and his important role were, however, both acknowledged in his lifetime and commemorated after his death. This is unusual and led to a unique association of traditional Aboriginal and European burial practices. No comparable place is known.

Archaeological Significance: The historic site contains four carved trees, three living and one dead.

Carved trees are trees with patterns or figures carved into the bark or wood, mostly with linear and geometric forms. They were associated with two types of Aboriginal sites - burials and initiation places. The carved trees found at burial sites often numbered two or more, with as many as seven being recorded around a burial mound. The design was normally executed so that the carved surface faced the grave. The most common carving technique was the removal of a section of the outer bark in the shape of an oval or a rectangle. This was followed by the incision of the design into the sapwood.

No information is available from the people who carved designs on trees as to their meaning or significance. It appears, however, that burial trees were a way of identifying the social and kin relations of the dead person, who in most cases seems to have been an important, high status person.

Carved trees were once quite widespread throughout Australia, although concentrated in New South Wales and south-eastern Queensland. Today they are uncommon because of the vulnerability of trees to clearing, fire and natural deterioration. Living carved trees, in particular, are extremely rare. There are fewer than twenty examples of carved trees surviving in the central part of eastern NSW.

Yuranighs grave is therefore an excellent example of carved trees associated with a burial because it has a relatively large number of surviving specimens in good condition.

Social Significance: The historic site is significant to the contemporary Aboriginal community. The Orange Local Aboriginal Land Council consider the site important because it is a burial place, because of the carved trees and because it commemorates the achievements of an important person in Aboriginal history.

Educational Value: The site is known to the local community and is often visited by school and university groups. It has the potential to be an important site for education about the contribution of Aboriginal people to Australian history and about Aboriginal culture.

3. OBJECTIVES OF MANAGEMENT

3.1 GENERAL OBJECTIVES FOR HISTORIC SITES

The following general objectives relate to the management of historic sites in New South Wales:

- * conservation of features of cultural significance;
- * provision of opportunities for public access and the interpretation of the site as an educational resource; and
- * provision of opportunities for historic, archaeological and architectural research.

Other use of an historic site is only permitted where it does not detract from its cultural significance.

3.2 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES FOR YURANIGHS ABORIGINAL GRAVE HISTORIC SITE

In addition to the above general objectives, the management of Yuranighs Aboriginal Grave Historic Site will be subject to the following specific objectives:

- * conservation of the grave and carved trees;
- * restoration of the site's surroundings;
- * provision for public access; and
- * promotion of public understanding and appreciation of the site.

3.3 OVERALL STRATEGY

The primary consideration in management of the historic site will be conservation of its cultural values and features. Conservation work and regular inspection and maintenance will be undertaken.

Public understanding and appreciation will be promoted by interpretation of the site.

The active participation of the Orange Local Aboriginal Land Council in all aspects of management will be encouraged.

4. POLICIES AND FRAMEWORK FOR MANAGEMENT

This chapter contains the policies and framework for the management of Yuranighs Aboriginal Grave Historic Site together with relevant background information. Policies are summarised under the following section headings:

- 4.1 Cultural Heritage
- 4.2 Use of the Area

The policies established in this plan of management will provide the framework for management consistent with anticipated resources available to the Service and with anticipated community trends, for the next five to ten years.

The actions identified are those immediate proposals which are to be undertaken in the foreseeable future. Other management actions may be developed over the life span of this plan consistent with the policies set out in the plan.

4.1 CULTURAL HERITAGE

4.1.1 History

Yuranigh was a member of the Wiradjuri tribe. He and two other Aboriginal people accompanied Thomas Mitchell on his final expedition to Queensland in 1845-1846. There were twenty nine Europeans in the party, most of whom were convicts. The expedition departed from Boree south of Molong, on December 15th, 1845.

Within three weeks of their departure from Boree, Yuranigh had obtained Mitchell's commendation. He was referred to in Mitchell's journal as 'the most useful native' because he tracked down three cattle which had strayed from the party and returned them to the camp. The journal contains more than ninety references to the aid provided by Yuranigh on this journey. Yuranigh seems to have played an important role by keeping track of Aboriginal groups who were following the progress of the exploring party, finding water, honey and other foods and imparting his knowledge of the bush to the explorers.

Mitchell wrote of Yuranigh:

'He has been my guide, companion, counsellor and friend on the most eventful occasions during this journey of discovery. His intelligence and judgement rendered him so necessary to me that he was ever at my elbow whether on foot or horseback. Confidence in him was never misplaced. He knew well the character of all the white men of the party, nothing escaped his penetrating eye and quick ear.'

Yuranigh returned to Sydney with Mitchell in 1846 and apparently decided to live in the town. He left soon after, however, and became a stockman on a cattle station in the north of the state. Later he returned to Boree and died on or about the 29th April 1850. Some reports say that he died of a cold; his health having been adversely affected by the trials of the expedition with Mitchell.

Yuranigh was buried near Gamboola homestead. Following the tradition of the Wiradjuri people a number of the surrounding trees were carved.

Mitchell was advised of Yuranigh's death in 1852 and arranged for a European headstone to be erected and a fence to be built around the grave and carved trees.

Mr W R Glasson owned the land in the early 1950s and brought Yuranigh's Grave back into public notice. He erected a fence around the grave in the 1950s to protect it and later donated the land to Cabonne Shire Council to manage. In July 1950 Mr Glasson read a paper before the Royal Geographic Society of Australasia and subsequently had his presentation printed as a monograph entitled "Yuranigh" which was subsequently reprinted in 1990 by his daughter-in-law.

Over the years the character of the site has changed substantially from its original open woodland to cleared pasture with scattered trees.

4.1.2 Description of Site, Graves and Carved Trees

The historic site is set amongst a cluster of yellow box on the south-west slope of a small rise. The surrounding land has largely been cleared for agricultural purposes.

The site contains the grave of Yuranigh, the grave of an unknown Aboriginal, and four Aboriginal carved trees. The graves and each of the living trees have been fenced. The original fence erected by Mitchell and a picket fence erected around Yuranigh's grave in 1908 no longer exist.

Yuranigh's grave is marked by a concrete slab and a marble headstone which is a replica of the inscribed sandstone headstone commissioned by Mitchell in 1852. The original sandstone headstone was removed in 1908 as it had fallen and was weathering. It was subsequently recovered and is now set into the concrete slab on top of the grave.

The inscription on the sandstone slab reads:

`To Native Courage Honesty and Fidelity. Yuranigh who accompanied the expedition of discovery into tropical Australia in 1846 lies buried here according to the rites of his countrymen and this spot was dedicated and enclosed by the Governor General's authority in 1852.'

The other grave is east of Yuranigh's grave and marked by a small rock pile. It contains remains of an unknown Aboriginal person returned from a museum in Melbourne in 1996. The museum records only indicated that the remains came from the Orange area. The Orange Local Aboriginal Land Council requested that the remains be buried on the historic site because there was no other suitable burial site available.

The carved trees are described below. The carvings appear to have been made with a metal axe.

- Tree 1 is located 30 m to the south-west of the grave. Bark regrowth covered the scar until 1976 when it was cut back (see section 4.1.3). The cutting revealed a 1 m by 0.38 m panel covered with interconnecting diamond shapes, each with a central slit. The grooves are up to 4 cm deep and the carving faces north-east.
- Tree 2, the dead tree, is located about 33 m north of the grave. It has an oval shaped scar 1.5 m by 0.7 m in size and a maximum depth of 6 cm. The carved design consists of an ovate spiral, with a series of three 's' shapes on one side. The carving faces south.
- Tree 3 is located 10 m south-east of the grave. Cutting back in 1976 exposed an area of about 0.8 m long and carvings up to 3 cm deep. The design consists of long wavy lines or 's' shapes and the carvings face north.
- Tree 4 is located 35 m to the north-east of the grave. It has a linear scar 0.5 m long on its southern side, suggesting re-growth of bark over a scar. The design cannot be discerned because of the regrowth.

Tree 2, the dead tree, has been lopped, capped with concrete and set on a concrete base. A shelter consisting of a sheet of iron supported by four poles was placed over the dead carved tree. This shelter was replaced in 1994 with a larger shelter comprising four corner posts and a bark covered iron roof. The former shelter was too small and did not protect the grave from the weather.

It appears that there was a fifth carved tree at the site in 1852 as it is shown on a plan of this time. A recording made of the site by Sullivan and Mayfair (undated) indicates that there was a stump near tree number four which may have been the original carved tree or perhaps a fifth tree.

4.1.3 Previous Work and Conservation Needs

Etheridge recorded the dead tree in the early 1900s (in *The Dendroglyphs or 'Carved Trees' of New South Wales*). He made no note of the other three trees as bark regrowth had covered the carvings.

The site was recorded by Service officers in about 1975/76. Abrasion of the lower section of the dead tree by sheep and cattle was noted. The condition of the dead tree does not appear to have changed a great deal since then.

In 1976, following the advice of a tree surgeon, the living trees were treated for insect pests, bark regrowth on trees number 1 and 3 was removed and the carvings were treated with oil. No attempt was made to uncover any carving on tree number 4. The reason for this has not been recorded.

A shelter and barriers were erected by the Service in 1994 to protect the sites.

Regular inspection and maintenance are necessary to ensure the continued health of the trees, conservation of the grave and public appreciation of the importance of the site. Options for assisted regeneration of the site, and of neighbouring land within the visual catchment of the site south to Yuranighs Road, to create the open woodland which probably existed in the mid nineteenth century will be investigated.

Fencing of the perimeter of the site is necessary to exclude cattle and to allow revegetation by native grasses and trees. Establishment of trees will ensure that the carved trees are not the only target for insect and animal activity and will improve the open woodland character of the site.

The carved stump currently set on a concrete base is proposed to be left as is and regularly monitored for moisture impacting upon the tree. If moisture from the concrete base is shown to be damaging the carved stump, alternative means of conserving the stump *in situ* will be assessed.

The Noxious Weeds Act 1993 took effect from 1st July 1993. The Act places an obligation upon public authorities to control noxious weeds on land that it occupies to the extent necessary to prevent such weeds spreading to adjoining lands. Other weeds may be of concern because they have the potential to have detrimental effects on ecological values and can spread to and from neighbouring land.

A Weed Management Plan has been prepared which details weed control and monitoring programs and methods for the whole district, but a survey is needed to identify weeds present in Yuranighs Aboriginal Grave Historic Site and determine control programs needed in the park.

Policies

- * The cultural significance of the historic site will be conserved.
- * The Orange Local Aboriginal Land Council will be consulted and encouraged to take a more active role in the management and interpretation of the site.
- * The regrowth of bark over the carvings will be monitored. Regrowth will be cut back by a qualified tree surgeon if it can be done without adversely affecting the health of the trees.
- * Barriers will be maintained around the graves and carved trees to prevent damage and touching by animals and people.
- * The grass will be slashed and weeds will be controlled as necessary.

Actions

- * Liaison will be undertaken with the Orange Local Aboriginal Land Council to determine the extent to which the Council wishes to participate in site management. A written agreement will be prepared outlining liaison, monitoring, works and maintenance procedures, if the Council wishes to be actively involved.
- * A fence will be constructed around the perimeter of the site.
- * The dead tree will be monitored for moisture damage.
- * An annual inspection of the carved trees will be undertaken by a tree surgeon and any necessary pest control, removal of regrowth and other treatment will be carried out.
- * Weeds will be removed and the site will be revegetated with native grasses and trees native to the area.
- * Options to assist regeneration of the site and visual catchment to an open woodland will be investigated.
- * The site will be regularly inspected to determine its condition and any necessary maintenance work will be carried out.

4.2 USE OF THE AREA

The historic site is known to the local community and educational organisations but receives little visitation from tourists.

Access is via an unsealed track which is impassable in wet weather. There is no clearly defined area for car parking. Upgrading and formalisation of vehicle access and parking are needed.

Interpretation is needed to promote public appreciation of the importance of the site and to fulfil its potential for education about the role of Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal people in Australian history.

Policies

- * Subject to conservation of the site's cultural significance, public access will be permitted and the site will be promoted.
- * Picnicking will be permitted on the site but no facilities will be provided.
- * The site will be interpreted to encourage public understanding and appreciation.

- * Interpretive material will be reviewed to include:
 - Yuranigh's important role in Mitchell's expedition and the importance of Aboriginal guides generally in the exploration of Australia;
 - Yuranigh's commemoration by the Wiradjuri people following his death;
 - the significance of the carved trees; and
 - historical and contemporary information about the Wiradjuri people.

- * The site may be promoted by such means as brochures, traffic signs, visits supervised by the Orange Local Aboriginal Land Council, promotion through local tourist organisations and liaison with schools.

- * The Orange Local Aboriginal Land Council will be consulted regarding promotion and interpretive material and will be involved in promotion and interpretation if they wish.

- * The Service will seek to employ Aboriginal people under the Australian Government's Contract Employment Scheme for Aboriginal People in construction of public facilities.

Actions

- * A car park will be constructed on the historic site.

- * The access track to the site will be upgraded.

- * A cattle grid will be placed at the junction of Yuranighs Road and the site in consultation with the neighbouring landowner.

- * An interpretation plan will be prepared for the site.

- * Promotional activities will be discussed with the Orange Local Aboriginal Land Council and Cabonne Council.

- * Directional signage will be placed on the highway at Yuranighs Road.

5. PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

This plan of management is part of a system of management developed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service. The system includes the National Parks and Wildlife Act, management policies, established conservation and recreation philosophies and operational planning at corporate, regional and district levels.

The implementation of this plan will be undertaken within the annual programs of the Service's Bathurst District. Priorities, determined in the context of district and regional operational planning, will be subject to the availability of necessary staff and funds and to any special requirements of the Director-General or Minister.

District programs are subject to ongoing review, within which, works and other activities carried out in Yuranighs Aboriginal Grave Historic Site are evaluated in relation to the objectives laid out in this plan.

The environmental impact of all development proposals will continue to be assessed at all stages of the development and any necessary investigations will be undertaken in accordance with established environmental assessment procedures.

Section 81 of the Act requires that this plan shall be carried out and given effect to, and that no operations shall be undertaken in relation to the historic site unless they are in accordance with the plan. However, if after adequate investigation, operations not included in the plan are found to be justified, this plan may be amended in accordance with section 76(6) of the Act.

As a guide to the orderly implementation of this plan, relative priorities for identified activities are summarised below:

| Activities | Priority | Plan reference |
|---|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Liaise with Orange Local Aboriginal Land Council concerning its participation in management | High | 4.1 |
| Construct perimeter fence | High | 4.1 |
| Monitor dead tree | High | 4.1 |
| Annually inspect trees and treat as required | High | 4.1 |
| Prepare interpretation plan | High | 4.2 |

| Activities (continued) | Priority | Plan reference |
|--|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Investigate options for assisted regeneration | Medium | 4.1 |
| Undertake weed removal | Medium | 4.1 |
| Undertake tree and native grass revegetation | Medium | 4.1 |
| Investigate former and present fence lines | Medium | 4.1 |
| Construct car park, upgrade access track and provide cattle grid | Medium | 4.2 |
| Discuss promotion with land council | Medium | 4.2 |
| Provide directional signage on highway | Low | 4.2 |

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