

Heritage Management of WWII 'Conflict landscapes' in PNG: Issues related to ephemeral landscapes and multiple stakeholders in a developing nation context.

Matthew KELLY

Senior Archaeologist at EXTENT Heritage Advisors, Australia

The WW2 campaign in the South-West Pacific from 1942 to 1945 has played a significant role in the development of current Australian national identity as well as being the catalyst for national independence for Papua New Guinea (PNG).

The artefacts and sites remaining from the fighting along the Kokoda Track especially are the focus for both nations' efforts to manage heritage associated with the military activities in WW2.

The battle along the Kokoda Track has historical and commemorative importance that is recognised in Australia through its listing as a place of national heritage significance. For Papua New Guineans while no such listing exists it is nonetheless acknowledged as a place which helped forge their move to nationhood by bringing their disparate peoples together for a common purpose.

For Australians the sites along the Kokoda Track now rival Gallipoli, where the ANZAC myth was born, as a place which forged a unique Australian character. Both Gallipoli and the Kokoda Track are visited by thousands of Australians each year as acts of personal, familial and national commemoration.

PNG contains numerous places, battlefields and objects, in varying stages

of integrity associated with the Kokoda battles and other events of WW2. However none have, until recently, been the subject of systematic heritage survey or archaeological recording.

Since 2010 I have been lucky enough to direct projects undertaking the archaeological survey of three areas of PNG associated with significant WWII activity:

1. A battle field at Eora Creek on the Kokoda Track;
2. A rest and recreation area for troops outside Port Moresby known as Blamey's Garden (local name Namanatabu);
3. And an extensive military support landscape around Jacquinet Bay, on the south coast of New Britain.

All three sites are currently within properties on PNG's Tentative List for World Heritage nomination.

Our work at the first two sites has resulted in substantial management documents, shown here, which are anticipated to become model reports for a number of other significant sites along the 96km of the Kokoda Track. Our work on New Britain is designed to investigate and provide additional heritage information on the local cul-

tural values for an area where only the natural values are well documented.

The heritage management regime in PNG is largely focused on their extensive and rich indigenous archaeological and cultural heritage. Numerous archaeological and anthropological research projects have been undertaken over decades focussed on this to the exclusion of its colonial past. The responsibility for management of the country's heritage assets is the responsibility of the chronically underfunded National Museum of PNG.

In respect of WWII heritage the relevant legislation is the War Surplus Material Act of 1952 described by the preamble to legislation itself as an Act "to facilitate the collection of war surplus material and for other purposes".

It is a piece of legislation enacted in the years immediately after WWII by the then colonial power – Australia. It is a piece of legislation of its time and was never designed for heritage management.

Policing this legislation has proven difficult where no adequately funded Museum administrative arm previously existed to develop protocols and procedures to manage items of colonial or military heritage.

The PNG National Museum holds an extensive collection of objects in its store that relate to WWII – items big and small. Many of the larger pieces stand outside in the elements, with little effort at conservation, while the smaller pieces, that are under cover, are yet to even be catalogued.

Over the last 40 years numerous items of WWII heritage have been lost to PNG through circumvention of the legislation.

Even today as Australian trekkers walk the Kokoda Track one of the major is-



Bootless Bay artillery battery remains near Port Moresby, PNG

ssues identified by both the National Museum and trek operators themselves is the continuous removal of items, spent ammunition, equipment, and sometimes weapons, by the trekkers.

However things are gradually changing.

Our work at Eora Creek, 80km NE of the capital Port Moresby, was the result of a request from the PNG Dept. of Environment and Conservation in 2012, to develop a heritage management plan for the site, considering that the area has a high visitation rate from trekkers crossing the Kokoda Track.

The Eora Creek site extends primary rainforest in a wilderness area of the Kokoda Track. The 5 sq. Km site lies between 1400m and 2100m above sea level on the slopes of a steep river valley. Visibility can only be described as severely limited and many features lie beneath 700mm of leaf litter that has accumulated over the 70 years since the battle took place.

Japanese defensive revetments and bunkers here, constructed of local soft woods, have completely rotted away leaving some tell-tale features buried beneath the leaf litter.

The battle site also lies within the traditional hunting lands of the local villagers, the people of Alola, and so issues related to community access and use of the battlefield as a resource overlie other issues such as site access for out-

Remains of Fokker aircraft in grounds of the National Museum of PNG



siders, UXO still being present on the ground and Australian trekkers disturbing features and moving artefacts.

The site also lies within a still active local mythological landscape and some areas of the battlefield remain off-limits to the survey team. The oral histories we have recorded from the Alolans, have interestingly conflated some events of the war with local myth sites – evidence of the continually developing social landscape that contains the battlefield.

The work at Blamey's Garden was also initiated by the PNG Dept. of Environment and Conservation.

Part of the initiative here, recognising the importance of military tourism to the country, was to provide an interpreted WW2 site, closer to Port Moresby to which military tourists could travel in a day, without undergoing the trek across the Kokoda Track.

Blamey's Garden, in contrast to Eora Creek, lies on privately owned land in dry savannah hills south-east of Port Moresby.

Access is still problematic with a river crossing (with crocodiles perhaps)



Remains of former garden pathways at Namanatabu (Blamey's Garden)

and a hike up a mountain the only current means of access.

As at Eora Creek the site's natural resources are used to support the owner's family through hunting game and gardening.

Blamey' Garden site formed part of the landscape of support for the Allied defence of PNG.

Surrounding the Garden were hospitals, machinery workshops, transport units, fuel stores and airfields with associated accommodation – all supporting the Allied war effort.

The Garden was originally designed to provide an area of rest, reflection and recuperation for soldiers who had fought along the Kokoda Track and the north coast of PNG against the Japanese.

Today the features and artefacts, which comprise its archaeological remains, are disturbed, scattered and overgrown. Its original purpose is now largely forgotten.

Once realised, it was not substantial material remains that defined the garden but its plantings, views and pathways.

Its use is often misunderstood and it remains a difficult site to place within the narrative of the military operations on 1942-3.

Again, as at Eora, the site is part of an active mythological landscape and access to some areas is only permissible while the site custodian is present.

The spirit that dwells in the central lake of the site is very much an active presence and the attendance of the custodian is necessary to ensure visitors do not suffer from potential malicious intent of the lake spirit.

The work at Jacquinet Bay is part of a joint project, with James Cook University in Cairns, through an Australian

Government grant to review the cultural heritage significance of the area.

Jacquinet Bay lies within the poorest developed province of all of PNG with access to the region only by plane or 24 hour boat trip and then access to some of the sites through hikes in rainforest and sinkhole dotted limestone karst landscapes.

The WWII survey is largely concentrated on the coast where the efforts of both the Japanese and Allied Forces were focussed between 1942 and 1945. As at Eora Creek, the survey is undertaken through tropical rainforest with 100% canopy with limited visibility and complete ground cover of rotted vegetation making the identification of features difficult.

Many of these sites here are currently under threat from logging, palm oil plantations and road construction.

This development of basic infrastructure is undertaken, not by the local and National Governments of PNG, but by the logging and palm oil companies who are filling the funding gap in this under developed region at the expense of the adequate policing of PNG Environmental and Heritage legislation.

So for example the archaeological sites of three of the early 20th colonial coconut plantation houses have already been destroyed by development construction in the last 12 months. These three sites represented the most substantial European settlement structural complexes in the bay area and the threat to other local sites continues.

Jacquinet Bay was also the site of a large military airfield from 1944 onwards – still used for flights to the area. Both NZ, Australian and Japanese air force plane wrecks formed part of the



WW2 remains on the foreshore at Palmal Jacquinot Bay

remnant WWII material culture here. Collectors have over the last 30 years, however, paid local landowners for the wrecks and have subsequently removed the aircraft from the country, contra the 1952 Act, to refurbish them in the US or Australia.

Our work in PNG has produced two Conservation Management documents for Eora Creek and Blamey's Garden. They are based on the conservation approaches outlined in the Burra Charter; an Australian developed values based assessment process.

As a practical advance PNG has recently employed a Military heritage advisor at the National Museum whose brief includes the implementation of these Conservation Plans at their respective sites then the use of the approach as a model applied to more sites along the Kokoda Track and then other WWII sites in PNG.

We hope that these recent developments are the first stages in the creation of a viable heritage management regime in PNG. A regime that is happy to consider elements of its colonial past and 20th Century military events as worthy of conservation for future generations of Papua New Guineans.

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