

Recherche Bay Cultural Landscape

On 14 February 2003 I visited Recherche Bay and concluded that the area constitutes a landscape of national and international significance. Its destruction in the interests of short-term woodchipping would represent vandalism of significant Australian cultural heritage. Its chief values are as follows –

1. The vista for most of the harbour foreshore is little changed from that described by the French explorers in 1792-3 under D'Entrecasteaux, which they described with wonderment.
2. They had close and friendly relations with local Aboriginals whom they counted at 48 but from the context the total was greater than this. Their accounts and sketches represent one of the most important descriptions of Tasmanian society at contact.

For reasons (1) and (2), the area must be preserved.

3. Both Aborigines and French criss-crossed the area so its significance is much greater than the known surviving evidence as future discoveries may be made. This is a complex cultural landscape.
4. This is where many botanical type specimens were collected which still survive. They include Tasmania's floral emblem, the Bluegum (*Eucalyptus globulus*).
5. I visited the recently discovered garden laid out by de la Haie. It is some 8 m x 9 m. It must be preserved and excavated in part to determine its true nature. Phytolith analysis of the deposit may identify some of the introduced plants.
6. This area has associations with Lady Jane Franklin and botanist R.C. Gunn who searched unsuccessfully for the garden in 1838, but identified another garden plot. Gunn collected further plant specimens which also survive.
7. Diaries of de la Haie and Rossel have been located in Paris. These may provide further details of activities and observations, so destructive intervention would be premature.
8. At Bennetts Point, the D'Entrecasteaux expedition conducted experiments linked with others elsewhere, constituting the first survey of global magnetic intensity. This is of international significance.
9. The area also exhibits traces of later activities:
 - a) A convict period coal mine.
 - b) A large 21 m long stone construction at Bennetts Point. This area requires test excavation.
 - c) Huts at Bennetts Point already there by 1863.
 - d) Early twentieth century timber-getting – a timber trackway survives.

All these above activities were small-scale and involved selective cutting of timber. The environment remained in balance.

The entire area must be protected if any semblance of the pre-contact environment is to be preserved. Isolated reserves would not suffice because the total cultural features remain

unknown today. As the French President visits New Caledonia (and Australia) in 2003, it would be unfortunate if this was the year in which the landscape was obliterated.

Given the association of this area with Aboriginal and French contacts in 1892-3 and the scientific experiments undertaken here, this cultural landscape merits world heritage nomination.

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