

# Archaeology and World Heritage in Papua New Guinea

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## ABSTRACT

A decade ago, Herman Mandui asked ‘who will take responsibility for management of the Papua New Guinea’s cultural heritage?’. At a time when the nation is contemplating additions to its World Heritage portfolio, Herman’s question remains as urgent as ever. PNG currently has a single World Heritage property, the Kuk archaeological site near Mount Hagen. The nation is struggling to protect Kuk’s World Heritage values. Possible additions to PNG’s World Heritage portfolio that are being strongly supported by international players may face similar problems when foreign support dries up.

*Keywords:* World Heritage, cultural heritage management, rush to inscribe, upstream assistance, Kuk, Kokoda, Owen Stanley Ranges, Nakanai

Like most of my archaeological colleagues who have worked in Papua New Guinea (PNG), I spent a good deal of time with Herman, in the field in-country as well as abroad at conferences and the like. I enjoyed his company immensely, and was deeply saddened by his death. One thing that stands out in my memory of working with him in the field was his boundless capacity for taking the message of archaeology to the local people with whom we lived and worked. This skill in literal and conceptual translation is something we should all aspire to, as it is absolutely crucial to the continued progress of our discipline in places such as PNG (Lilley 2014).

Nowhere is this clearer than with World Heritage. PNG’s first and still only World Heritage Site is the Kuk Early Agricultural Site, the archaeological site made famous by decades of research led by Jack Golson (e.g. Golson and Hughes 1980). Expatriate researcher Tim Denham, who has done detailed work at Kuk (e.g. Denham 2006), prepared the World Heritage nomination dossier for the site (Denham 2012). However, his work was in significant part enabled by the ‘translational capacities’ of Herman’s teacher at the University of Papua New Guinea, John Muke. As Denham (2012: 99) puts it, ‘Dr. Muke’s involvement arose because he was an archaeologist from the Wahgi valley who was well known to the Kawelka community at Kuk; he was responsible for community consultations and formulation of a draft traditional management plan’. Muke continued in this key role when I did the in-country technical assessment of the dossier for the International Committee on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the independent statutory Advisory Body to UNESCO on cultural World Heritage. Like Herman, John Muke could

and very successfully did ‘walk both sides of the street’ in such contexts, being a professionally-trained archaeologist who could communicate in the vernacular (in Muke’s case at Kuk, it was the local *tok ples* rather than *tok pisin*).

The Kuk nomination had significant grassroots support and eventually surmounted a number of serious hurdles to be inscribed on the World Heritage List. Yet it has continued to be troubled owing to a lack of institutional capacity (Denham 2012: 101). One of the most significant dimensions of this problem has been with sustaining local engagement, which was almost entirely dependent on John Muke rather than being an integral element of the national government’s policies and processes supporting the nomination and subsequent management of the site. The national government is responsible for such things because it is states – i.e. national governments – that are signatories to the World Heritage Convention.

Two continuing developments suggest that matters may be changing for the better, albeit in a manner that is not without risk. The first, which Denham (2012: 101–102) contrasts favourably to the situation at Kuk, is the development of a nomination of the Kokoda Track and Owen Stanley Ranges north of Port Moresby. This property (as sites and places are called in World Heritage parlance) was placed on Papua New Guinea’s World Heritage Tentative List in 2006 as a mandatory precursor to a bid for full listing. It is what is called a ‘mixed’ site, namely one claiming both natural and cultural World Heritage values rather than one or the other. As Denham (2012: 102) notes, the area in question encompasses an extensive zone of high biodiversity, the iconic (particularly for Australians) WWII Kokoda Track, and archaeological sites around Kosipe dating back some 45,000 years or so (see Summerhayes *et al.* 2010; also Gosden 2010; Lilley 2010: 33–34). The bid for nomination is supported strongly through the ‘Kokoda

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Initiative,<sup>2</sup> officially described as:

an arrangement between the Australian and Papua New Guinean governments for the sustainable development of the Owen Stanley Ranges, Brown River catchment and Kokoda Track region and the protection of its special natural, cultural and historic values (Commonwealth of Australia 2015:7).

Community involvement is a central plank of the initiative. The original Tentative Listing (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5061/>) states that:

The Koiari and Orokaiva peoples, the traditional owners of the region, retain a subsistence economy augmented by income from a growing tourism industry. Communities strongly support the protection of the historical and natural values of the Track and proudly demonstrate their culture.

The Kokoda Initiative Annual Report for 2013–14 (Commonwealth of Australia 2015) details the current progress of community engagement programs, covering a number of impressive achievements in health, education, water, sanitation and infrastructure, income generation and other community development activities.

The PNG government appears to be very keen for the nomination to proceed. Ultimately, though, the initiative was an Australian idea rather than something that arose organically within PNG. In this respect it is like the other properties on PNG's Tentative List, in that it is largely driven from outside the country. Specifically, when the Kokoda Track was threatened by mining by an Australian company which had approval to proceed from the PNG government, the Australian government reacted by offering a very substantial financial package to support World Heritage Listing owing to the Track's iconic historical status in Australia (e.g. *Brisbane Times* 2007; *The Age* 2007). The PNG government initially continued to back the miners and local villagers temporarily closed the Track to trekkers in protest against possible nomination and in support of mining, or at least the perceived development benefits flowing from mining (e.g. Marshall 2008; Smiles 2008).

The same concern about outside interests arises in relation to another of PNG's Tentative Listings currently being actively developed for World Heritage nomination: the Nakanai Mountains in East New Britain. Like Kokoda and the Owen Stanley Ranges, the area was put on PNG's Tentative List in 2006, though in this instance as an element of

a multi-component property called The Sublime Karsts of Papua New Guinea. Although identified as a 'mixed' property, the Tentative Listing extolls only the natural values of the limestone karst environments it encompasses. The Tentative Listing makes no mention of cultural values and strongly downplays any human presence in all three components of the property, with the section on Nakanai stating it has 'only a very sparse human population, with only small villages.' Despite or more probably because of this dismissal of local landowners' interests, there is now a concerted effort to gauge community interests in the area, primarily in the form of an Australian Research Council 'Linkage Grant' to a group comprising researchers from James Cook University, the NGO Partners with Melanesians Inc and the consulting firm Archaeological and Heritage Management Solutions (AHMS; see [http://www.ahms.com.au/news/2014/Oct/AHMS\\_Receives\\_ARC\\_linkage\\_grant\\_with\\_JCU\\_and\\_Partners\\_with\\_Melanesians\\_Inc](http://www.ahms.com.au/news/2014/Oct/AHMS_Receives_ARC_linkage_grant_with_JCU_and_Partners_with_Melanesians_Inc)).

According to AHMS's website, which is almost identical to the granting agencies official online description and is quoted here for readers' ease of access:

This project aims to document and integrate the natural and cultural values of the Nakanai Caves...in preparation for a cultural landscape World Heritage nomination. The project's novel methodology incorporates community knowledge with archaeological and anthropological evidence to link natural and cultural values and define the landscape from local perspectives. Local input into the research will be prioritised. By emphasising local participation and management of World Heritage listing processes the project aims to address an identified gap in World Heritage methodologies.

This project allows for a subtle, nuanced definition of cultural landscapes under the World Heritage Convention. This project is ground-breaking and we are very proud to be involved.

A cultural landscape is a 'cultural' site rather than a 'natural' (i.e. landscape) site in the World Heritage framework. There are several kinds of cultural landscapes, but despite the 'landscape' tag they are assessed for the World Heritage system by ICOMOS. In recognition of the 'landscape' dimension, however, and uniquely at present in the World Heritage framework, cultural landscape assessments also receive input from the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Advisory Body to UNESCO on natural World Heritage. I have not enquired as to what sort of cultural landscape is envisaged for the nomination – there are several options, which can be combined to varying degrees – but it is entirely possible to have a mixed nomination that incorporates a cultural landscape as the cultural dimensions of the bid alongside a set of natural landscape values that are assessed separately. To my mind – and obviously those of the grantees as well

2 To declare my interest in the matter, I am part of the team led by GML Heritage which is developing the 'road map' for a possible nomination of Kokoda and the Owen Stanley Ranges, the confidential draft of which was under consideration by the Australian and PNG authorities at the time the present paper was written.

– using the ‘cultural landscape’ designation in this way is the best solution available at present to a problem that has been plaguing World Heritage for some time, namely the inadequate integration of nature and culture in World Heritage policies and procedures (Lilley 2013). Although the World Heritage Convention brings nature and culture together, in its implementation the two are routinely separated. The pitfalls of this approach have long been recognised but it is only since local community engagement became an official priority in World Heritage processes in the early 2000s that a concerted effort has been made to find ways to bring nature and culture together so that World Heritage considers ‘whole sites’, as IUCN’s Head of World Heritage Tim Badman puts it (pers. comm. 2014).

What has community engagement got to do with the integration of nature and culture? Many communities around the world – particularly by not exclusively non-Western communities – tend not to separate nature and culture in their approaches to heritage. As Phillips (2005: 26) puts it:

The World Heritage Convention...combines two ideas: cultural heritage and natural heritage, and in operating the convention two separate streams of activity have developed...Over the years, the sharp separation and differentiation of these two approaches has been found less and less helpful in understanding the world’s heritage and its needs for protection and management...the separation of the cultural and natural world – of people from nature – makes little sense. Indeed it makes it more difficult to achieve sustainable solutions to complex problems in the real world in which people and their environment interact in many ways.

The approach of the grantees to the issues in the Nakanai Mountains is laudable in many ways. Yet like the Kokoda project, it risks running into the same fundamental problem as the Kuk nomination: a lack of ongoing national government support. Even when there is strong grassroots backing, as there was at Kuk, which has now developed at Kokoda and anecdotally appears to be the case in Nakanai, international interests remain the driving force and the source of most, if not all, funding for the nomination. The cause is undoubtedly worthy, but the hard question remains: without genuine buy-in and resultant long-term financial and other support from the PNG national government, is the Nakanai project not setting up the nomination to fail in the long run, or at best limp along like Kuk? After the Linkage Grant ends, who will provide the necessary resources if the national government does not?

This brings us to the nub of the problem from a World Heritage perspective. Sites such as those in question here are being nominated in PNG and similar places around the world as part of an extended – and welcome – effort to broaden the World Heritage List. The idea is to move

away from an overwhelming bias towards European cultural sites so that the List is truly global geographically and more adequately reflects the world’s cultural and natural diversity (Jokilehto 2005). Non-Western approaches to heritage and its management are to be encouraged and accommodated to help bolster this change of direction. *Inter alia*, this includes encouraging and accommodating perspectives on heritage which do not separate nature and culture. As part of this effort, the category of cultural landscape was added to the types of World Heritage sites that could be listed.

It is all well and good to set such changes in train and to assist with their implementation, as was done at Kuk and is in progress with Kokoda and Nakanai. However, there is little public discussion of the long-term consequences of such actions in places which do not have the capacity to sustain World Heritage properties in the manner required by the World Heritage Convention and its Operational Guidelines. In the cases of Kuk and Nakanai, and probably large parts of the Owen Stanley Ranges if not the Kokoda Track, there is perhaps slightly less reason to be concerned about the fate of archaeological and other cultural values under such circumstances owing to the remoteness of such places, but there is not zero risk. Moreover, the natural values of areas such as Nakanai and the Owen Stanley Ranges are endangered by legal and illegal forestry and mining. World Heritage is under threat from such activities in developed economies such as Australia which have advanced World Heritage management regimes, so it is by no means exaggerating the situation to raise an alarm about the state of affairs in PNG or similar jurisdictions.

The difficulties faced by the World Heritage ‘system’ in addressing questions of capacity while at the same time dealing with the risks posed by mining and the like are being significantly exacerbated by what Meskell (2012) calls ‘the rush to inscribe’. For some years now, we have seen members of the World Heritage Committee, individuals who are elected as part of national delegations to the Committee, become increasingly inclined to challenge and overturn the advice of the professional heritage managers of the Advisory Bodies ICOMOS and IUCN. Such advice can reflect expert opinion that the properties in question do not exhibit the ‘Outstanding Universal Values’ required of World Heritage sites, but may also recommend rejection or deferral of a proposed listing owing to a lack of institutional heritage management capacity in the nominating country. The capacity to appropriately manage any successfully-listed property is mandatory, but in recent years the accommodation of non-Western management frameworks has seen the definition of what is deemed appropriate become more flexible (as was the case for instance with Kuk). The challenges posed by the World Heritage Committee increasingly seem to the experts in question to go well beyond such flexibility, however. Meskell (2012: 146) notes that in 2011, ‘the Committee overturned 22 of the

Advisory Body recommendations' and on that basis nominated some 25 sites from a total of 35 nominations.

Meskel (2012:148) detects various 'strategic political perspectives' at play, ostensible postcolonial 'democracy in action' being the main one (cf. James and Winter 2015). Yet she points out that:

There are good reasons, from this perspective [of the expert bodies], to be concerned about newly listed properties that lack adequate management plans or buffer zones at the time of inscription. Overturning deferrals and referrals by the Committee can have dire consequences.

She (2012:150) goes on to sketch such consequences in the example of the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape, about which she has written in detail elsewhere (e.g. Meskel 2011):

In 2003, ICOMOS recommended that the South African site be deferred. Their decision was overturned and Mapungubwe was inscribed without an integrated management plan or a complete buffer zone. Since then, South Africa has failed to secure the buffer zone, leaving a tract of exposed land adjacent to the property. This has enabled Coal of Africa to legally move in and begin construction of the Vele Colliery amidst protest that this threatens the World Heritage Site.

Recent history demonstrates that it is quite realistic to anticipate similar developments in PNG unless steps are taken to greatly reduce their probability. As Meskel (2012:150) notes, one way to do this is through 'upstreaming'. This is the World Heritage term for comprehensive early collaboration between the Advisory Bodies (ICOMOS and IUCN) and countries working on nominations of sites on their national Tentative Lists. At present there are 10 properties around the world included in an ICOMOS-IUCN Upstream Pilot Project that was initiated in 2008. The underlying proposition is to reduce the number of nominations having serious difficulties during the nomination process and the project may also help bridge the emerging gulf between the Advisory Bodies and the World Heritage Committee. The idea recognises the substantial challenges of developing a World Heritage dossier and aims to find ways to improve and strengthen the nomination process by considering innovative approaches and novel kinds of guidance for nominators before they start preparing an actual dossier.

No site in PNG is included in the official Pilot Project, but the Kuk experience makes it clear that it is certainly be worth considering similar forms of assistance for future nominations. The 'roadmap' being produced for the Kokoda and Owen Stanley Ranges initiative and the Linkage Grant for Nakanai are obviously attempts to go at least some of the way down this path. In the Kokoda

case, the 'private' dimension to which I refer primarily concerns the activities of private-sector consultants at this stage, though the private firm Coffey manages the Kokoda Initiative Development Program, while the Nakanai project involves the Partners with Melanesians NGO as well as private-sector consultants. Both projects involve senior members of the World Heritage Advisory Bodies (in the Kokoda case, Richard Mackay and me, and for Nakanai, Susan McIntyre-Tamwoy), but those individuals are not acting in those capacities and the projects are not in any sense official upstream advisory missions on the part of ICOMOS and IUCN. However configured, though, such 'private-public partnerships' (PPPs) may well be the way of the future.

I have recently discussed this matter elsewhere (Lafrenz and Lilley 2015:230–232). While they can be useful and even ground-breaking, PPPs as a phenomenon are not a silver bullet. Indeed, they can be disastrous. At the time of writing, the Third International Conference on Financing for Development had recently wrapped up in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Organised by the UN Financing for Development Office (<http://www.un.org/esa/ffd/index.html>), the meeting explored the use of PPPs to bolster development and reduce poverty. The *Guardian* newspaper took a close interest in the meeting and posted several insightful pieces. One (Evans 2015) asked 'Where are the concrete plans for action in the development finance deal?'. The writer noted that while there were several major positive outcomes, a number of key areas remained to be addressed, the two most relevant here being government commitment to long-term sustainability and the 'need to push for developed and emerging economy governments to take a much more global, long-term view in domestic policy decisions'. The other *Guardian* article (Romero 2015) argues that 'Private finance has a role to play in development, but placing it front and centre while ignoring its limitations and the experiences of the past is a mistake'. It specifies a number of failings, the most pertinent in the present context being that PPPs can restrict public sector capacity in developing countries.

Such analysis suggests that although the Kokoda Initiative and the Nakanai project may well be of great short-term value, we have to remember that World Heritage listing is 'forever'. Regardless of the value of short-term results, the outlook for the more distant future will not be positive unless care is taken by the proponents to ensure their support does not inadvertently constrain the capacity of the PNG national government to take a global view and recognise its long-term obligation to sustainably manage the places it nominates for World Heritage listing, and indeed PNG's other cultural and natural patrimony. Herman despaired of this. A decade ago (Mandui 2006:380–381) he wrote:

The 1965 National Cultural Property Preservation Act... is difficult to implement and enforce owing to a short-



age of personnel trained in cultural heritage and to the failure of government to review and amend heritage legislation to incorporate not only the participation of other cultural institutions in addition to the Museum but also of other government departments and agencies as well. The lack of such a whole-of-government network has seen the rape of the country's patrimony... In the end, the question thus remains: who will take responsibility for management of the Papua New Guinea's cultural heritage?

It is to be hoped that the PNG government's capacity to step up to Herman's challenge is not 'killed with kindness' by well-meaning and indeed much-needed external support.

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