

CASE STUDY 2

King Leopold National Park and Bunuba People, Western Australia



INDUSTRY: National parks and community

THE PROJECT:

This cultural mapping project aimed to develop a new visitor information sheet for King Leopold National Park management that, if approved, could become a template for visitor information sheets in other parks.

THE BACKGROUND:

Cultural Mapping undertook this project by facilitating participation of local Indigenous elders in what was effectively a cultural mapping process, as the National Park was their traditional lands. Jennifer's request to engage the Indigenous elders as advisors to both her and the project was initially embraced by the Department of Environment and Conservation, Kimberley division.

OBJECTIVES:

To visit the National Park with a senior traditional owner of that area to see places of interest that he felt would be a valuable addition to the new visitor information sheet.

THE ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN:

Local Bunuba Indigenous elder George Brooking escorted Jennifer into the National Park to show her his country and its many cultural treasures, and to identify the important features of the park. George was to advise what cultural information he felt was important to share with visitors to the park, and which could be included on the new visitor information sheet.

From the outset, George was very keen to show the Jennifer the 'elephant' that lay within the park. Jennifer and George had discussed ways of engaging visitors to inspire them to learn about the environment within the park. The idea of a type of 'treasure hunt' was conceived, so that visitors could search the park for key cultural features listed on the information sheet. Indigenous people generally have a superb sense of fun about them, and George really liked this idea.

During the time spent in the park, George would identify the landscape and cultural assets and the information sheet would show the visitors what to find, thus creating an enjoyable method of cultural transmission and learning. One of the things that George wanted to include on the new visitor information sheet was a landscape feature that resembled an elephant.

CHALLENGES:

The choice of the elephant later became an issue of hot debate when the final draft of the visitor information sheet was provided to the Department. The consultant, Jennifer, was asked 'what does an elephant have to do with Aboriginal people?'

An outcome of the prior consultation with Park management was an agreement that a new way of engaging visitors was required. George had argued that the elephant was a key landmark of the Park, and in his view it was a feature that could be easily identified by the visitors in their 'treasure hunt'.

In this situation the staff who were to sign off on the concept that was developed in the Park with George were several thousands of kilometres away, and the final document that was viewed all those miles away could have just been seen as a piece of paper with suggestions on it, not as a cultural mapping process undertaken with a genuine custodian of that land. One can see how this might happen, when distance between the traditional custodians and the decision makers is so great.

George was very excited to be involved in the development of the new visitor information sheet and was proud to point out the things he felt were important and might be of interest to tourists to go on a type of treasure hunt. George was disappointed when those suggestions were omitted, Aboriginal people have wonderful insight into their traditional lands as well as a great sense of fun and adventure, the idea of a treasure hunt appealed greatly to George to engage visitors to better understand the land.

OUTCOMES:

The text suggesting that the visitor look for this ‘treasure’ was consequently removed from the sheet, as was the quote from another senior elder about the Quoll, another landscape feature of the Park.

For more information about the Jandamarra and Bunuba people see this website.

<http://www.jandamarra.com.au/>



1. Entrance to the park. 2. George showed me where Jandamarra was killed. 3. Park lodgings and ranger office. 4. Where Jandamarra hid. 5. Kookaburra. 6. Windjana. 7. George shows us the caves where Jandamarra hid. 8. Visitor Information Sheet. 9. Natural features in the park. 10. Elder George Brooking visit his traditional land. 11. George enroute to the park.