

The Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park and World Heritage Listing? Fobif Statement 2004:

We believe that the unique experience provided by this park is the sense it gives of the devastation of the past and the gradual and inspiring recovery of the landscape. Visitors who see the very rare ancient trees, the rich understorey and the regrowth on mining sites can appreciate this remarkable phenomenon, not as a thing of the past, but as a reality now. We agree with this observation from the Heritage Action Plan for the Park:

‘The current forest setting is not an interpretive problem, but rather an interpretive bonus for the Park. It highlights the transience of mining, demonstrates the severe environmental impact that can result from inadequate environmental constraint, and illustrates some of the resilience of Australia’s native vegetation.’

We do not support a heritage listing which would imply a freezing of the landscape, with overriding value given to mining relics.

The heritage value of the recovering forest, and all it implies about natural values and the heritage of Aboriginal management, should have at least equal emphasis in any listing. The presence of numerous endangered species in this environment makes such an emphasis even more important.

For us, the Park is representative of change, and that is what a heritage listing should emphasise. In our opinion the Park clearly qualifies for National Heritage listing under criteria a (outstanding importance in Australia’s natural or cultural history), c (potential to yield information about cultural or natural history) and d (it demonstrates the principal characteristics of a class of Australia’s natural and cultural environments). In particular it is unique as a living example of the conflict of our natural and cultural heritages.

We note that ‘The World Heritage Bureau has recommended greater recognition of the continuum of, and interactions between, culture and nature with respect to the implementation of the World Heritage Convention.’

The *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (1999) note:

‘Cultural landscapes are illustrative of the evolution of human society and settlement over time, under the influence of the physical constraints and/or opportunities presented by their natural environment and of successive social, economic and cultural forces, both internal and external.’

All this suggests an emphasis on change, not preservation of relics. As Jane Lennon has put it:

‘Interpretation of the gold rush era has tended to focus on the heydays of the 1850s yet the traces of that era that we see in the landscape to-day are not the same as the rapid environmental chaos that followed then—150 years later the landscape has mellowed and taken on a new cultural identity that awaits deciphering by the discerning tourist. How will this be done? How can the landscape speak for itself?’

Lennon calls for ‘a new approach to the teaching of history’ and emphasises the importance of ‘continuity.’ We fully support this approach. In particular, we argue that emphasis on the value of the recovering forest, and the need to protect its recovery, should feature strongly in any heritage listing.