Understanding Cultural Routes

Cultural routes make up the connective web of the world’s heritage, tying regions, countries and global cultures together. They are the result of humans travelling across the environment, exchanging ideas and goods over long distances and for many years.

Cultural route refers to the whole route, which has a worth over and above the sum of its elements, together with a dynamic quality, through which it gains its cultural significance. A cultural route consists of the following elements:

- **Context** – the relationship between a historic cultural route and its natural environment and landscape setting
- **Content** – both the tangible, physical elements and the intangible aspects which give sense and meaning to a historic route
- **Cross-cultural significance** – the connection of peoples and the sharing of ideas which gives a historic route a greater depth of significance
- **Dynamic quality** – the spatial dimensions and historic depth of repeated journeys back and forth combine to create a distinctive cultural route.

Information on cultural routes case studies can be found at:

For information on how to identify, manage and interpret cultural routes consult the Australia ICOMOS International Scientific Committee at:

Further information on cultural routes is available at:
- The ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on Cultural Routes (CIIC) [http://www.icomos-ciic.org/INDEX_engl.htm](http://www.icomos-ciic.org/INDEX_engl.htm)
- The ICOMOS Charter on Cultural Routes [http://www.international.icomos.org/charters/culturalroutes_e.pdf](http://www.international.icomos.org/charters/culturalroutes_e.pdf)

If you need help protecting a cultural route contact:

[www.australia.icomos.org](http://www.australia.icomos.org)
Many cultural routes are valued by communities because they:

- connect us to other places, people and ideas
- illustrate the movement of people and the exchange of ideas
- hold myths, legends and meanings, both spiritual and symbolic
- are highly regarded for their continuity of use
- tell us about societies’ use and exchanges of resources, technologies and beliefs

How can communities protect these cultural routes that are important to them? How can communities and governments protect those past landscape imprints of routes and journeys for future generations?

- Local (government) environment plans, zoning and other controls such as state and territory heritage listings
- National and Commonwealth heritage listings
- World Heritage Inscription

Cultural routes can be important locally, for a state/territory/province, nationally and internationally. Cultural routes relate to all aspects of Australia’s diverse land and seascapes, as well as its myriad identities. Themes which recognise this diversity include:

- Tracing the natural evolution of Australia
- Peopling Australia
- Developing local, regional and national economies
- Governing
- Tragic Conflict and/or Resolution/Reconciliation
- Developing Australia’s cultural life.

A cultural route may represent more than one of these thematic groups.

How to record and protect a cultural route:

- Understand how and why communities value cultural routes by working with them to document meanings, stories and intangible aspects associated with the route
- Research the important stories associated with the region and identify the cultural routes that best express the stories
- Document the relationship between the cultural route and the natural environment and the wider landscape setting
- Record how the route has been used over time, its sustainability, benefits to the local community and conservation needs

Recording a cultural route means working with communities along the route to understand the meanings and stories and other intangible aspects of the route.

It includes documenting the physical elements such as roads, bridges, railways, watering points and wells. The variety of associated elements will depend on the type of route. For instance, elements associated with the construction and use of the Overland Telegraph Line and the railway line are the buildings and sites of the telegraph repeater stations and the railway settlers’ cottages.