

Cheetup National Heritage Area

Cultural Heritage Management Plan
Phase I: Cultural Burn & Cultural Assessment

The Place

Cheetup meaning “place of the birds” is a large granite dome with a cave system, located in Cape Le Grand National Park, about 55 kilometres east of Esperance in Western Australia.

The site has been listed on the national register of Heritage Places based on its cultural and archaeological significance.



Archaeological Investigations

- A cave within this massive dome underwent archaeological investigation in the 1970s, and revealed human occupation here extending back **13,000 years before present**. During the excavation, the team recovered the remains of a **partially cremated infant, wrapped in seaweed and placed in a shallow pit with nodules of red ochre**. This infant lived during a different geological era – the Late Pleistocene, some 12,800 years before present.
- Also, during this excavation, seeds of the bayou (zamia, cycad) palm were recovered, in a shallow pit that was lined with balga (*Xanthorrhoea*, grass tree) leaves. This was a **zamia seed roasting pit**. The seeds are toxic if eaten straight up, but you can leach out the toxins through soaking in water or roasting. So, the presence of these seeds in a roasting pit in this ancient cave deposit, demonstrates the knowledge of how to remove these toxins and use this plentiful seed, full of carbs and protein, for snacking, or making cakes with, has existed for at least 13,000 years.





Cheetup Cultural Heritage Management Plan

This project is funding provided by the Australian Government's *Heritage Grants Program*. The Department of Industry, Innovation and Science is responsible for administering the program on behalf of the Department of the Environment and Energy.

Project Stages

This project will develop and deliver a cultural plan for the National Heritage listed place – Cheetup Cave; led by the Esperance Tjaltjraak Elders and Cultural Rangers. The staged approach will involve (1) cultural survey and assessment; **(2)** On-Country workshops; **(3)** cultural ranger cadetship in cultural place management within national parks; **(4)** the development of a community-based cultural plan; and **(5)** the development of an integrated cultural heritage management plan.

The plan will detail the aspirations of the Traditional Owners for culturally-appropriate access, management and use of this place. The cultural plan will then go through a formal process of integration with the existing national park management plan (Cape le Grand) through direct partnership with DBCA; that will focus on environmental management protocols (e.g. Dieback) combined with visitor management (e.g. trails and signage).



Stage 1 Cultural Assessment

Stage 1 of this project was integrated with a cultural burning program in collaboration with DBCA.

The intent was to explore aspects of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) related to biodiversity management, and managing this landscape from the threat of high-intensity wildfire due to massive fuel loads.

At the same time, the cultural burning provides windows of visibility to assist the archaeological survey of the granite dome and surrounding areas.



Cultural Burning

This is a cultural practice to maintain biodiversity through cool-season, patch burning that promotes new growth, controls fuel loads, and provides for a mosaic of habitat for plants and animals.

The cultural burning knowledge is trans-generational knowledge, knowledge of knowing Country. Embedded as part of traditional management practices within the broader principles of caring for country. This project was developed after many years of working with agencies and partners to advocate the critical need to re-instate TEK systems into land management.

The opportunity for Elders to direct and control the cultural burning program, while working with and spending time with youth and cultural rangers, is part of the holistic, community-based methods for sustainable biodiversity management that operates at the highest levels of science; cultural science.





Cultural Survey

While we walked around in small groups, we surveyed in small burn scar patches, and recorded newly exposed cultural features and artifacts. We took GPS points linked to photo points on an interactive recording form on hardy field tablets.

Such was the density and diversity of cultural features in this small area, newly exposed in the fire patches, the team were only able to record a sample of the cultural features and sites.

The team recorded and mapped many lizard traps, ochre quarries, stone arrangements, gnamma holes, cultural plants, stone artifact scatters, grinding stones and formal quarries.

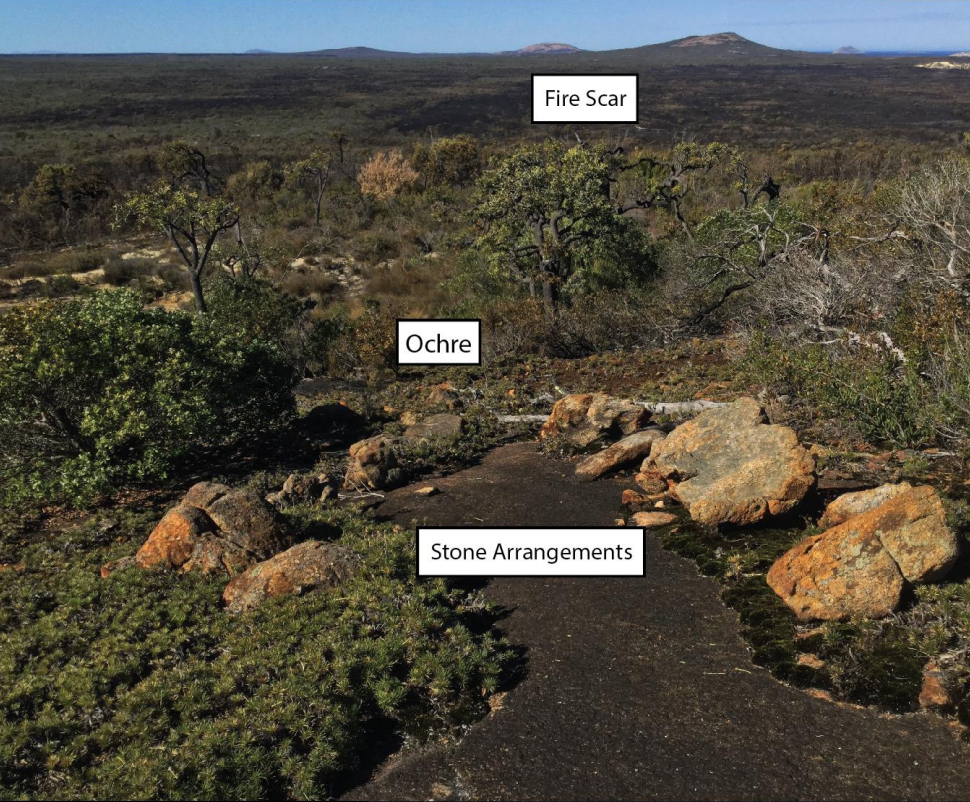
We all started to see how this place was used and managed, and structured – a whole host of different activity areas.







Cultural Landscape



- The team burned around important cultural features; such as this stone arrangement complex adjacent to an orange/red ochre quarry on one side of the granite dome.
- The need to co-manage this special place from a cultural and a national park point of view, demands an integrated approach and the development of management systems that can deal with different demands. Such an approach must link the safeguarding of the cultural heritage with the environmental protection of the area, and the methods of managing public use of the national park and heritage values.

