



Recording Unmarked Graves in a Remote Aboriginal Community: The Challenge of Cultural Heritage Driving Sustainable Development

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the results of archaeological fieldwork conducted at the request of elders from Barunga, a remote Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory, Australia. The aim of the project was to use archaeological methods to help people from the community relocate and identify each person buried in the Barunga Graveyard and to develop a system where this information would not be forgotten. In the past, the location of burials and the identities of the buried have been known only through memory, as well as repeat visits to the graveyard. Overcrowding within the graveyard has made this practice difficult. To add to this problem, the vast majority of graves of Aboriginal people in remote Northern Territory communities are not recorded in any register. While there is a legislative requirement for a burial register to be kept in non-Aboriginal communities, this has not been a requirement for those within Aboriginal communities. Instead, families must rely on the memories of those in attendance at the burial, and in time the remembering generation also dies and the identities of people in these graves become more and more blurred. This makes it difficult to mourn properly, or to care for that person by caring for their grave. During our fieldwork, we located 175 graves, and we identified 85 individuals. Of those that could be identified, 29 were identified by an associated plaque or headstone, and 56 were identified through oral histories that were recorded during several field visits with elders from the community. Beyond the archaeological results of this research, we found there is an opportunity to build sustainable development in this community that would see local people employed to locate and identify currently unidentified burials. Drawing on comparative cases from other countries such as India, this study addresses the challenge identified by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) (2015) introducing cultural heritage into the sustainable development agenda. Retrieved February 19, 2020, from <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/culture-and-development/hangzhou-congress/introducing-cultural-heritage-into-the-sustainable-development-agenda/>), to identify the concrete actions needed to integrate cultural heritage conservation and promotion into the sustainable development debate.

Résumé: Cet article présente les résultats de recherches archéologiques de terrain ayant été conduites à la demande des Anciens de Barunga, une communauté aborigène reculée du Territoire du Nord en Australie. Le projet avait pour but d'utiliser les méthodes de l'archéologie afin d'aider les

Recording Unmarked Graves in a Remote Aboriginal Community

membres de la communauté à déplacer et identifier chaque personne enterrée dans le cimetière de Barunga, et à développer un système grâce auquel ces informations ne tomberaient pas dans l'oubli. Autrefois, l'emplacement des sépultures et l'identité des personnes ensevelies étaient connues uniquement de mémoire, et grâce aux visites répétées du cimetière. Cette pratique a été rendue difficile par le surpeuplement du cimetière. À ce problème est venu s'ajouter le fait que la grande majorité des tombes du peuple aborigène dans les communautés reculées du Territoire du Nord ne font l'objet d'aucun relevé dans un registre quelconque. Si une exigence législative impose la tenue d'un registre des enterrements dans les communautés non-aborigènes, ceci n'a pas été le cas pour ceux pratiqués au sein des communautés aborigènes. Les familles doivent à défaut se fier aux souvenirs de ceux qui étaient présents à l'enterrement. Avec le temps, la génération de ceux qui se souviennent meurt également et les identités des personnes dans ces tombes deviennent de plus en plus incertaines. Il devient alors difficile de faire le deuil d'une personne comme il se doit, ou de se souvenir d'elle en prenant soin de sa tombe. Au cours de nos travaux sur site, nous avons pu situer 175 sépultures et nous avons identifié 85 personnes. Parmi celles ayant pu être identifiées, 29 personnes l'ont été grâce à une plaque ou pierre tombale associée, et 56 l'ont été grâce à des anecdotes orales enregistrées au cours de plusieurs visites auprès des Anciens de la communauté. Au-delà des résultats archéologiques de cette recherche, nous avons découvert qu'il existe une possibilité de créer un développement durable au sein de cette communauté grâce à l'emploi des résidents locaux afin de localiser et d'identifier les sépultures qui n'ont pas encore été identifiées à ce jour. S'inspirant d'études de cas comparatives d'autres pays comme l'Inde, cette étude traite du défi identifié par l'UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (2015) *Introducing cultural heritage into the sustainable development agenda*. Retrieved February 19, 2020, from <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/culture-and-development/hangzhou-congress/introducing-cultural-heritage-into-the-sustainable-development-agenda/>) pour définir les actions concrètes qui sont nécessaires afin d'intégrer la conservation du patrimoine culturel et sa promotion au sein du débat relatif au développement durable.

Resumen: Este artículo presenta los resultados del trabajo de campo arqueológico realizado a pedido de los ancianos de Barunga, una comunidad aborigen remota en el Territorio del Norte, Australia. El objetivo del proyecto era utilizar los métodos de la arqueología para ayudar a las personas de la comunidad a reubicar e identificar a cada persona enterrada en el cementerio de Barunga, y desarrollar un sistema en el que esta

información no se olvide. En el pasado, la ubicación de los entierros y las identidades de los enterrados se conocían solo a través de la memoria, así como las visitas repetidas al cementerio. El hacinamiento dentro del cementerio ha dificultado esta práctica. Para aumentar este problema, la gran mayoría de las tumbas de los aborígenes en las comunidades remotas del Territorio del Norte no se registran en ningún registro. Si bien existe un requisito legislativo para que se lleve un registro de entierros en las comunidades no aborígenes, esto no ha sido un requisito para quienes pertenecen a las comunidades aborígenes. En cambio, las familias deben confiar en los recuerdos de los que asistieron al entierro y, con el tiempo, la generación que recuerda también muere y las identidades de las personas en estas tumbas se vuelven cada vez más borrosas. Esto hace que sea difícil llevar el duelo adecuadamente o cuidar a esa persona al cuidar su tumba. Durante nuestro trabajo de campo, localizamos 175 tumbas e identificamos a 85 personas. De las que pudieron ser identificadas, 29 fueron identificadas por una placa o lápida asociada, y 56 fueron identificadas a través de historias orales que se registraron durante varias visitas de campo con ancianos de la comunidad. Más allá de los resultados arqueológicos de esta investigación, descubrimos que existe una oportunidad para construir un desarrollo sostenible en esta comunidad que llevaría a que se empleara a la gente local para localizar e identificar los entierros actualmente no identificados. A partir de casos comparativos de otros países como India, este estudio aborda el desafío identificado por la UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (2015) *Introducing cultural heritage into the sustainable development agenda*. Retrieved February 19, 2020, from <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/culture-and-development/hangzhou-congress/introducing-cultural-heritage-into-the-sustainable-development-agenda/>), para identificar las acciones concretas necesarias para integrar la conservación y promoción del patrimonio cultural en el debate sobre el desarrollo sostenible.

KEY WORDS

Indigenous archaeology, Sustainable development, Community archaeology, Graveyards, Social justice

Cultural Heritage Driving Sustainable Development

There is little in the way of employment in remote Aboriginal communities in Australia's Northern Territory (NT) beyond "public and personal services" (i.e., employment at local grocery stores, schools, health clinics, the local council, or with ranger groups) (Blackwell et al., 2014:83). Business ventures are typically established outside of the community and headed by individuals or corporations with little or no relationship to community members. Likewise, private enterprise is scarce (Pearson & Helms, 2013) and usually limited to such endeavours as small-scale production of native produce, which tend to be made into foodstuffs, cosmetics, or medicinal lotions, typically through not-for-profit organisations [e.g., the *Banartjal Strongbala Wimun Grup* (Jawoyn Association, 2019)].

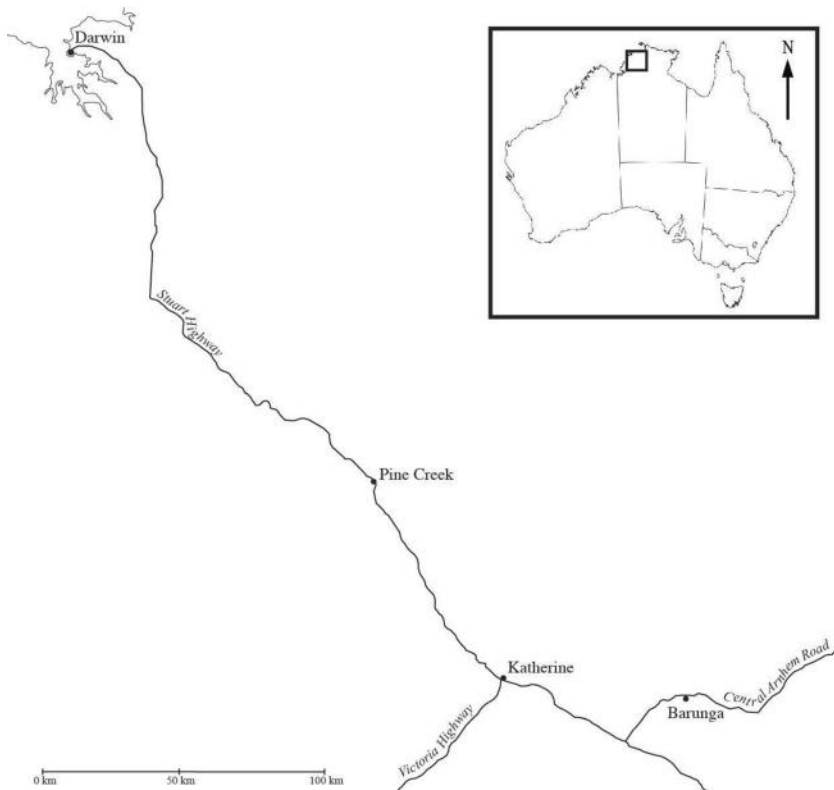


Figure 1. Barunga is around 400 km southeast of Darwin and 80 km southeast of Katherine in the NT. Map by Jordan Ralph

This paper presents the results of collaborative fieldwork and research between members of a Northern Territory Aboriginal community, and researchers from two institutions—Flinders University, Adelaide, and the Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar. Discussions that took place before, during and after archaeological fieldwork highlighted the need for new business ventures in remote communities [following the principles of sustainable development (UNESCO, 2015)] and identified a niche that can be filled by such a venture (i.e., recording unmarked graves in the Northern Territory at a commercial scale).

Our fieldwork involved the archaeological recording of the graveyard¹ in Barunga, a remote Aboriginal community of around 360 people located in Jawoyn Country, NT, approximately 400 km southeast of Darwin (Figure 1). We undertook fieldwork at the request of Guy Rankin, an Elder from the community, who was concerned that the specific location of burials in the Barunga Graveyard may be forgotten if this information is not recorded in a register. Burial registers are virtually non-existent in remote NT communities due to a legislative oversight where cemeteries in Aboriginal communities are not required to be registered and maintained in the same way as they are in non-Aboriginal communities in the NT. The problem is widespread and it affects many Aboriginal communities across the NT. The NT government attempted to correct this legislative oversight with a new Act of Parliament (i.e., by tabling the Burial and Cremation Bill 2019); however, public pressure due to concerns over inadequate consultation, which did not account for cultural protocols, meant that the Bill was abandoned in favour of a new approach. As a result of the existing legislation, there are likely to be thousands of unmarked and unidentified graves across the NT. Given this legislation has embedded and reinforced inequality on these matters, this is an example of structural racism. The lack of a burial register, coupled with the lack of headstones or identifying plaques at gravesites (as is normal practice in communities like Barunga) means the identities and locations of those buried in Aboriginal communities are forgotten over time—a scenario that is unacceptable to community Elders.

The purpose of this paper is two-fold. Firstly, we present the results of archaeological research that is grounded in ideas of engaged archaeology (e.g., Smith & Ralph, 2020), where members of the research community engaged the project from beginning to end. The agenda, objectives, direction and methods were continually shaped by community leaders and carried out by a combination of researchers, students and community participants. Secondly, we discuss one of the complementary results of the fieldwork—a pilot project in sustainable development—which arose through our collaboration rather than our interpretations of the data. In that sense, we found there is an opportunity to employ local people to



Figure 2. A typical grave at Barunga, around a decade after burial. After a while, it is difficult to distinguish the location of graves from other ground surfaces. Older graves are not maintained as often as new graves. Photograph: Jordan Ralph

undertake similar work at a commercial scale, which can help to build sustainable development in this region.

Memorialization Practices in Barunga and the Significance of this Study

In order to understand how so many graves could be unregistered and unidentified in the Northern Territory, we have to look at the ways in which traditional practices were rapidly replaced by contemporary practices



◀ **Figure 3.** Typical graves in the Barunga Graveyard. Family of the deceased generally decorate new burials with artificial flowers, which are sometimes maintained or replaced during return visits. Pictured (L-R): Wendy Willika and Rachael Kendino (Willika). Photograph: Jordan Ralph

through colonial entanglements. In pre- and early colonial Jawoyn Country, for example, people were once “buried” in hollow logs (called *lorrkon*), which were later placed into caves or rockshelters and left to look over the country.² This kind of burial was practiced in this region prior to the British invasion and colonization of Australia—and continued into the recent past. The last such burial of which we are aware took place in this region around two decades ago (pers. obs. Gary Jackson). This Jawoyn traditional practice was disrupted by British colonization in such a way that people are now buried closely together in graves in a small graveyard, often without an identifying marker (Figure 2), but occasionally with temporary markers, such as artificial flowers (Figure 3). The lack of burial registration has created a wealth of problems in communities such as Barunga. Knowledge of who is buried where is held only in the memories of family and of those present at the burial—memories that are fading as older generations forget or pass away.

There is a shared understanding among community members (Nell Brown, Jocelyn McCartney, Elizabeth Moreen, and Guy Rankin pers. -comm. 2018) that the Barunga Graveyard was first used in the late 1960s and that the first burial was of an older female community member, Laurie, who was Lamjerroc’s wife. Lamjerroc was a senior traditional law man, an important member of this community. Since that first burial, a number of others have taken place (we estimate around 200, though only 175 have been located to date). The first people buried in the Barunga Graveyard were wrapped in cloth or calico, while today people are buried in wooden coffins. Burial practices at Barunga include elements of both traditional Jawoyn practices, though members of the Barunga community have adopted elements of Christian funeral and burial practices (pers. obs.).

Community Elder Guy Rankin phoned Claire Smith and Gary Jackson in April 2018, asking for the graveyard to be recorded as part of their annual fieldwork at Barunga. He phoned on several other occasions to make sure that the work would be undertaken that year. This follows on from a 2013 request from other community elders to record the graveyard—while the initial work was carried out in 2013, the burial register needed updating and the Roper Gulf Regional Council had indicated its intent to help place headstones at each grave, in line with community wishes.

This project is significant to the Barunga community because virtually everyone has a family member lying in an unmarked grave in the local graveyard. Community members have expressed the need to be able to attend the graveyard to mourn their lost loved ones, out of both respect and as an observance of cultural practice. Being unable to securely identify the grave of a loved one makes it difficult to mourn properly, or to care for that person by caring for their grave. The effects of forgetting where a loved one is buried can be distressing—there is a fear that forgetting can be construed by others as a lack of concern for your family, and a fear that you might be forgotten yourself. It is part of the culture in this community that members of family groups are buried in particular associations and groupings. The information regarding who is buried where is a vital aspect of this cultural practice, so it can continue into the future. Neglecting this requirement will see this practice discontinue, or change shape, which could be considered culturally violent and disrespectful. Moreover, there is a functional dimension to the need to know where people are buried. In the past, bodies of deceased people have been exhumed in error when a new grave was being dug in the Barunga graveyard. Today, the grave sites are selected by family members, informed by consultation with the *Junggayi*, the senior traditional custodian. In 1998, during record floods in the region and in the neighbouring community of Beswick/Wugularr, a number of coffins rose to the surface. No one knew who was in them.

Structural Racism and the Situation in the Northern Territory

The failure to record the burials of Aboriginal people in remote communities is an NT-wide problem and the result of structural racism, which is identified by the Aspen Institute (2016) as:

A system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations and other norms work in various often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequity. It identifies dimensions of our history and culture that have allowed privileges associated with “whiteness” and disadvantages associated with “color” to endure and adapt over time. Structural racism is not something that a few people or institutions choose to practice. Instead it has been a feature of the social, economic and political systems in which we all exist.

Like the Northern Territory National Emergency Response—a race-based Australian Federal policy which sought to “fix” the perceived dysfunction in Aboriginal communities through strict measures (see Brown &

Recording Unmarked Graves in a Remote Aboriginal Community

Brown, 2007)—race-based discrimination is enacted through geography. While the graves of people in major towns must be registered, it has not been compulsory to record the location of graves of Aboriginal people in remote areas.

These problems are not only experienced in the NT, but are experienced throughout Australia—they are bound up with ongoing processes of colonisation. For example, in New South Wales, the overt refusal to allow Aboriginal people to bury their dead in town cemeteries prior to the 1950s saw Aboriginal communities establish burial places in missions or pastoral stations (e.g., Brown et al., 2002:152; Goodall, 2001:4; L'Oste-Brown & Godwin, 1995:1–2; NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, 2003:4). Those burial places often had to be left behind when people were relocated, or when the land was sold into private hands, which made it difficult for family to return to visit graves (Byrne, 2003:74; McIntyre-Tamwoy, 2010:40). As these graveyards were not gazetted, they did not appear on title deeds (Byrne, 2003:74) and farmers were often unaware there was an Aboriginal burial ground on their land (Byrne, 1998:22). Furthermore, stock, machinery, or wild animals would often destroy, erode, or expose burial places (Goodall, 2001:9; Littleton et al., 2013:38; Randolph et al., 1994:402; Rhodes, 1996:71; Sutton & Conyers, 2013:788) and over time grave decorations of glass, shell, stone, or white crosses marking graves become scattered or deteriorated, thus obscuring the exact location of graves or burial places (Ranson & Egloff, 1988:61). Very few of these burial places have an associated register, though when these records exist, they are often poorly annotated and do not always indicate the exact location of burial sites, the identities of those buried or their personal details (see Brown et al., 2002; Byrne, 2003:74; Haglund, 1976; McCoy, 2008:58; Rhodes, 1996; Vines, 1998:78). Further compounding this issue is the fact that existing graveyards in Aboriginal communities are often unmarked (NSW National Parks and Wildlife and Service, 2003:4; Smith et al., 2018a, b) and bush fires are a regular threat to wooden crosses (e.g. Rhodes, 1996:70), which are the marker of choice for many communities, meaning there is little physical and documentary evidence for the location and identities of burials.

It is important to consider how a situation has arisen where so many burials are taking place that are undocumented and “unregistered.” The answer to this question is three-fold. Firstly, while many Australians may take for granted the assumed right that various aspects of their lives will be documented by a government authority, such as birth, marriage, and death, these are instead privileges afforded to those who can navigate the complex bureaucracy and administrative language that these processes require. Aboriginal Australians, particularly those living in various parts of the Northern Territory where English is rarely a first language often find

navigating these government processes difficult, confusing, and exclusive. While the registration of birth and marriage is usually a responsibility of the individuals involved, deaths are registered by government agencies. The deaths of those in Aboriginal communities are certainly recorded by government agencies, but this is not the case for burials. There is no central repository of this information. Burials are registered through memory alone.

Secondly, while the local regional council is responsible for the management of cemeteries—in this case, Roper Gulf Regional Council (2008-present) and Nyirrangulung Mardruk Ngadberre Regional Council (1960s–2008)—neither of the councils have kept a register of burials that have taken place. This occurred because there was no legislative requirement to do so on Aboriginal Land, as opposed to in urban and rural centres.

Finally, we must remember that over the past century, cultural protocols have changed significantly. The prospect that a burial might need to be recorded was most likely outside the imagination of people living in Barunga. The idea that community members might have to remember and document something that was once culturally visible, obvious, and importantly, sacred (e.g., in a *lorrkon* placed in a rockshelter), was likely outside the imagination of those doing the burying. In this situation, times have changed, and cultural practices have changed. The emergence of Christian ways of doing and thinking, which have permeated communities such as Barunga, has impacted the way people are memorialized and how their remains are dealt with once they pass away.

Surveying the Barunga Graveyard

The primary aim of our investigation was to identify all of the graves in the Barunga Graveyard to allow for the correct placement of headstones at each grave—a venture that elders in the community are pursuing with the local council. The deliverable aims of our project were to:

1. Develop a numbering system for graves, which can be easily adopted by the Roper Gulf Regional Council (or whoever accepts responsibility for the management of the graveyard) for future administration of the graveyard.
2. Record the names and other biographical information of individuals buried in each grave, so that headstones and plaques can be erected in each plot.
3. Record archaeological information about each grave, to understand the myriad ways in which individuals are memorialized, including how people of particular clan groups and cultural backgrounds are

Recording Unmarked Graves in a Remote Aboriginal Community

memorialized, which can help with the future management of the graveyard.

4. Map the graveyard to understand the spatial arrangement of the burial plots and how these are arranged according to orientation (east vs west) and according to family groups. This was also intended to aid in the ongoing management of the graveyard.

The methods employed to identify people buried in unmarked graves in Barunga are as follows. Firstly, we numbered each grave with a small metal picket, which had been given a number. The method of identifying graves can be straightforward as they are typically “mounded” after burial, though for older graves the mounds have weathered and are often indiscernible from other patches of ground. The act of labeling each grave with a picket and number is vital, as the remainder of our work depended on the ability to tie our results back to a physical location in the graveyard. Much of this information is for our reference, so that we can easily follow what we have done, when and where. It also provides us with a georeference for the grave. In addition, this practice gives the local council the opportunity to place markers on the graves we have located and identified to ensure this knowledge survives.

Secondly, we used a total station to attain more accurate locations for each grave. During the survey, we mapped the boundary of the fence, the line of the roadside and car park within the graveyard grounds and we took one measurement for each grave—at what we believed to be the



Figure 4. Jocelyn McCartney talks with Flinders University researcher, Jordan Ralph. (L-R) Robert Jones, Sabrina Moreen, Nell Brown, Ester Bulumbara, Veronica Moreen, Antoinette Hennessy and Peter Birt, July 2013. Photograph: Claire Smith

“head” of the grave, as identified by community guides. The justification for this aspect of our work is so that we can provide an accurate illustration of the location of marked graves to the Roper Gulf Regional Council, who can use it for the future planning of new graves. There may still be graves in the clear sections of the plan, and those will need to be identified in the future using ground penetrating radar (following Lowe et al., 2014; Moffat et al., 2016; Randolph et al., 1994; Sutton & Conyers, 2013).

Finally, we visit the graveyard with community members, trying to identify who is buried in the unmarked graves. This is a complex process and one that has to be repeated many times with different community members (Figure 4). People will remember recent deaths within their family fairly clearly, but after a person has been dead for ten years or so, it becomes much more difficult to be sure that this person is in this exact grave, not the one next to it or over a little. We visit the graveyard with as many community members as possible, to try to access the full range of memories that exist within the community. On many occasions, one person’s memory will spark that of another. We also record who identified a particular person with a particular grave. If the same identification occurs a number of times, we feel secure in putting a name to a grave. This process of cross-checking is essential to the reliability of the data.

Identification of Burials so Far

A total of 175 graves were located during our survey of the Barunga graveyard in 2018 (Table 1). Of these, we have been able to identify the individuals buried in 83 of them though two of these were double graves (i.e., two people were buried in a single grave, with one marker/headstone). Therefore, we identified 85 individuals buried in 83 graves. Of the 83 identified graves, 28 had a plaque identifying the grave, including one double grave (i.e., 29 individuals were identified via plaques on headstones/grave markers). Furthermore, community members identified by memory a further 55 graves, including one double grave (i.e., 56 individuals were identified via oral history). This leaves the individuals buried in 92 graves at the

Table 1 Number of graves and individuals identified at the Barunga Graveyard

Total graves located	Number of graves securely identified (plaque/oral history)	Number of individuals identified (plaque/oral history)	Number of graves yet to be identified
175	83 (28/55)	85 (29/56)	92

Recording Unmarked Graves in a Remote Aboriginal Community

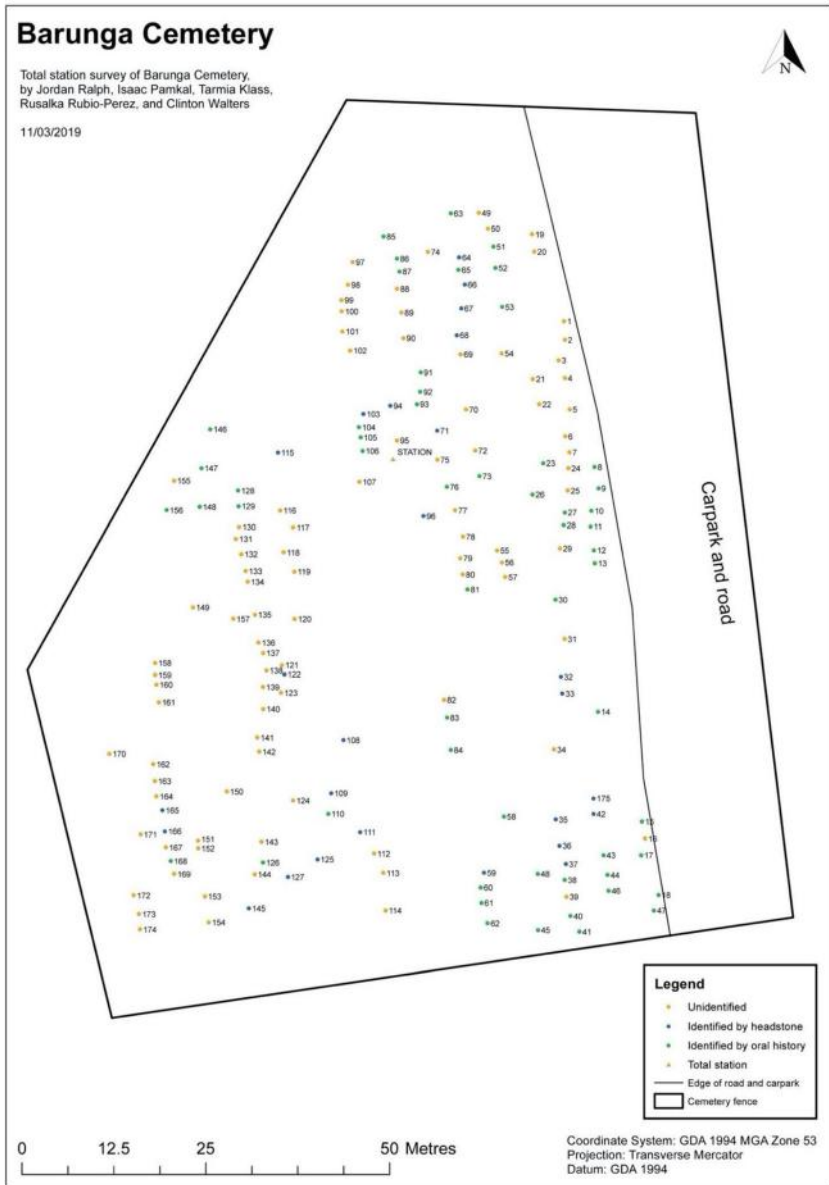


Figure 5. Map of Barunga graveyard

Barunga graveyard to be identified in the future. A plan of the Barunga Graveyard is presented in Figure 5.

The results presented here are subject to the following limitations. The identification of graves relies primarily on the collective memories of community members. Human memory is not always a reliable source of information, so the sooner we can record this information and cross-check it with other members of the community, the more accurate it will be.

There is still some confusion over certain graves. For example, sometimes more than one graves have been identified with a single individual. Discrepancies such as this will need to be resolved through further fact checking and wider community consultation. In addition, we note the pattern of family members being buried together, so people in unidentified graves are likely to be related to those in neighbouring graves.

So far, we have only dealt with that which we can see above the ground. Typically, this involves seeing where a mound or depression exists, thereby marking the presence of a burial. On occasion, this includes the presence of material culture or some other type of marker, such as a blank headstone. There could be many more graves than are visible to us as we walk through the site. These graves will need to be located through the use of a ground penetrating radar. Moreover, we are uncertain when the fence at the graveyard was erected. It is possible that some graves are located outside the current boundary, which were missed when the fence was erected. A GPR survey could help in this instance, although the area outside the graveyard is overgrown.

Even with a comprehensive multi-disciplinary approach that integrates oral histories, archival data and the latest technology, the occupants of a number of graves will never be identified. Too much time has passed and the contemporaries of those buried in these earlier graves have passed away themselves. Community consultation will be needed to determine a culturally appropriate manner for dealing with this issue.

This initial research has been undertaken within a constrained time frame. It is necessary to finalize the location and identification of unmarked graves in Barunga cemetery. The next stages need to be undertaken as soon as possible. In particular, gathering oral history data are an urgent matter as many of the people who hold this information are aging themselves. Whenever a person dies, the information they hold is lost forever.

The Wider Context

Burial and mortuary practices have been a key interest of archaeologists and a primary feature of archaeological investigations since the discipline emerged. In part, this is a result of colonial curiosities, but more recently it is a result of better collaborative relationships between academic archaeolo-

Recording Unmarked Graves in a Remote Aboriginal Community

gists and indigenous communities. In the beginning, British colonialism informed archaeological practices around the world. With respect to grave sites, the British had an extractive approach, most famously evidenced by the taking of the treasures of the tombs of the Egyptian pharaohs without considering how these sites have been understood by local people (Ikram, 2011). In India, the British expeditions used raids by indigenous communities such as the Nagas of northeastern India as a pretext for burning down indigenous villages, which includes their graves, grave goods and skeletal remains, which were often buried in homes or placed in granaries (Kunungo, 2011). For those goods that remained, the British administrators would relocate to museums in Britain and other countries in Europe (Kunungo, 2014, 2016). As a result, indigenous communities have little knowledge of the burial practices of their ancestors, and little material evidence from their previous generations' practices. With the advent of Christianity and other religious and social transformation, in addition to the loss of native languages, the lack of material evidence has created a situation where it is difficult to reconstruct the past—both for scholars from the region and members of the community.

The non-recording of gravesites and extractive archaeological practices have an impact on the understanding of the relationship between indigenous communities and their ancestors. For instance, in postcolonial countries like India, lands occupied by indigenous people are often considered “terra nullius,” and grave sites, cremation grounds, and ancestral sites are ignored in capitalist development projects, such as the takeover of land for dams, mining, or eco-tourism. The lack of an accessible survey of such sites creates a gap in public awareness such that the displacement of indigenous people from their traditional lands for the sake of the “larger good” does not seem at odds with the preservation of cultural heritage.

Australian archaeology has also been shaped by the legacy of British colonialism, and colonial and settler-colonial attitudes toward Aboriginal Australians. One example of early Australian archaeology that demonstrates a clear intersection between colonialism and mortuary archaeology is the 1948 American-Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land, led by anthropologist Charles Mountford and archaeologist Frank Setzler. During the “expedition,” many human remains were taken from their resting places in Arnhem Land in the name of scientific research (see May, 2009; May et al., 2005; Mountford, 1956, 1960). Given that interference with and the removal of human remains from their final resting places are, for many Arnhem Land societies, a culturally violent act, the consequences of such “archaeology” were significant to the local community. Many of the remains were taken and stored at the United States’ Smithsonian Museum in Washington DC, until they were eventually returned to the community of Gunbalanya, NT, in 2011. Indeed, archaeological work at the time of the

Mountford expedition was used to legitimize colonialism and perpetuated the myth that Aboriginal people had no connection to the land (Byrne, 2003:73; Langford, 1983).

While many studies of Aboriginal burials have helped to shape the approach taken in our work with regard to the methods we employed and the direction of our research, our work is motivated by the need to identify individuals buried in each grave—a pursuit that has not been a key feature of other investigations. For example, pre-contact Aboriginal mortuary and burial practices have been a fascination for many archaeologists for much of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (e.g. Basedow, 1913; Edwards, 2013; Elkin, 1936; Goodall, 2001; Littleton et al., 2013; Mathews, 1909; Wood, 1968). In more recent decades, there has been a number of archaeological and historical investigations of Aboriginal graveyards from the pre- and post-contact period (e.g., see individual chapters in Glaskin et al., 2008). The vast majority of recent research on Aboriginal burials has been undertaken with the view to locate “lost” graves or burial grounds and to understand the spatial arrangements of the above ground archaeological features (see Brown et al., 2002; Byrne, 1998; Haglund, 1976; L’Oste-Brown and Godwin, 1995; Meehan, 1971; Rhodes, 1996; Ward et al., 1989), or the sub-surface geophysical features (in lieu of above ground materials) (see Lowe et al., 2014; Moffat et al., 2016; Randolph et al., 1994; Sutton and Conyers, 2013). Instead, we have developed a methodology that can be employed by other archaeologists who are engaged with relocating and identifying recent unmarked burials, either in Australia or elsewhere—a methodology that, in this case at least, has implications for sustainable development.

Implications for Sustainable Development

This project is a pilot study with clear potential to form a sustainable development endeavour in the Northern Territory. The UNESCO Sustainable Development Goals came into effect in January 2016. Up to now, the focus of sustainable development has been on the environment, especially environmental degradation. However, cultural heritage could play a major role in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals. The work we have undertaken at Barunga directly addresses major challenges highlighted by UNESCO (2015):

- (1) To identify the measures needed to promote the safeguarding of the cultural heritage in the global development agenda, and



Figure 6. Rachael Kendino and Jasmine Willika identifying unmarked graves at the Barunga Graveyard, July 2018. Photograph: C. Smith

- (2) To identify the concrete actions that need to be taken in order to integrate cultural heritage conservation and promotion into the sustainable development debate.

Given this, there is an opportunity to develop a cohort of Aboriginal people who are trained in identifying and recording unmarked graves and in gathering oral history and archival information from communities about the occupants of these graves. With this in mind, we have established a research and training service, Grave Concerns, which aims to take advantage of this employment opportunity for Aboriginal people at Barunga. At the same time, we plan to train a cohort of Aboriginal people in local communities to record the graves, collect oral history and archival information and maintain a register of graves for their community. This will ensure long-term sustainability and local control for each community, without the need to employ consultants. However, there is major challenge here. We have been unable to identify funding sources to pay for people to do this work or even the travel costs of a recording team. Policy advisors in the Northern Territory government have expressed the view that this is not a problem that the government is responsible to solve. However, the communities themselves have little, or no, discretionary funding. Establish-

ing a service and training people is a first step, but this need to be followed by financial investment that allows the service to be used.

Our pilot study in this area has highlighted an area for sustainable development that could employ Aboriginal people in remote locations. Our research team encompasses both university and community people. It is built on long-term relationships of trust. Claire Smith and Gary Jackson have conducted research with the community since 1990 (see Smith, 1996, 2007, 2008), while Jordan Ralph has worked there since 2008 (e.g., Ralph & Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 2020). One member of the team, Jasmine Willika, (pictured in Figure 6) is a community member who is studying archaeology at Flinders University. Through her work, she hopes to keep cultural information safe for future generations. Jasmine Willika's success makes university a viable option for other community members. Another member of the team, Brandon Pamkal, has enrolled in studies at Flinders University. He has been working with the research team for the last four years, recording rock art and other archaeological sites.

In addition to the long-standing work with the Barunga community, we also hope to expand this project to India, which as we have suggested has a shared history of British colonial exploitation and archaeological extraction model, but where the academic disciplines of archaeology and social anthropology have not yet adopted the community-centered models that characterize the situation in Australia. Already the authors have consulted with members of the Bhil-Rathwa indigenous community based in the western Indian state of Gujarat and partnered with community organizations dedicated to documenting cultural heritage. One ancestral site was visited by the team. The plan is to continue with this research in both the western Indian state of Gujarat and the northeastern Indigenous region of Nagaland and develop a survey along the lines of Grave Concerns.

Ultimately, we hope to use the model of Grave Concerns, which was the result of collaborations between an international team of scholars and the Barunga people, to further sustainable development goals and social justice not only for different indigenous communities in Australia, but also around the world. Through the documentation and study of grave-sites or ancestral sites, we hope to make civil society, academics, and policy makers more aware of the importance of these locations for projects to conserve cultural heritage and memory. We also hope to promote equitable models of development beyond the "extraction" paradigm imported from colonial models of knowledge production. We believe the creation of such resources will offer people around the world the tools to record the graves themselves and to maintain a community register. This will provide long-term sustainability for the community. It will make sure that this never happens again.

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Notes

1. “Graveyard,” as opposed to “cemetery,” is used more commonly by people from Barunga. We have opted to follow that trend in this paper.
2. Burial and mortuary practices are typically secret in many Aboriginal communities in Australia. This level of information is acceptable to a public audience.

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