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Abstract: In order to begin to understand Indigenous peoples and/or issues, it is imperative that all people recognise the diversity of Indigenous peoples. With over 500 different clan groups, it is obvious that we are not a homogenised people. Taking this into account, the obligations and responsibilities that were and indeed still are, inherent in Indigenous lifestyles etc are also diverse; there can be no one model, no one shoe fits all approach'. In order to respect and enhance Indigenous cultures, a range of knowledge and principles should be understood and adhered to. Working with Indigenous peoples, more often than not, is a very rewarding experience, but there is a 'but'!!!

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Recreational Professionals:

The Question: In order to respect and enhance Indigenous cultures, what sort of knowledge and principles should a recreational professional have and adhere to when working with Indigenous peoples?

Introduction

In order to begin to understand Indigenous peoples and/or issues, it is imperative that all people recognise the diversity of Indigenous peoples. With over 500 different clan groups, it is obvious that we are not a homogenised people. Taking this into account, the obligations and responsibilities that were and indeed still are, inherent in Indigenous lifestyles etc are also diverse; there can be no one model, no one shoe fits all approach....

In order to respect and enhance Indigenous cultures, a range of knowledge and principles should be understood and adhered to. Working with Indigenous peoples, more often than not, is a very rewarding experience, but there is a 'but'!!!

Overview

Non-Indigenous people must take the trouble to look at Indigenous cultures from Indigenous perspectives, not through their own cultural looking glass. To be blinkered in their approach to Indigenous peoples and or issues is to miss the many facets of cultural connection that are associated with lifestyles etc.

Whilst many so called historians, and people from various research disciplines such as anthropologists and archaeologists have attempted to define who we are and what we do, they have in many instances completely missed the boat. 'Going walkabout' for example did not mean that we wandered aimlessly through country...there were certain things that had to be undertaken in order for 'walking about' to be a successful enterprise.

Walking about meant caring for country. The responsibilities and obligations placed upon peoples meant that perceived 'wanderings' were a misconception. Indigenous peoples duty of care for country was, and is still, spiritually motivated. Being spiritually motivated did not mean that the days and nights were just endless hours of work and so forth however. Many hours of both contained activities designed to relieve the daily rituals of hunting and gathering and survival. It should also be taken into account that the cultural activities such as hunting and gathering were in themselves, pastimes designed to educate and stimulate mind, body and soul. In other words, education and recreation for example went hand in hand; outside of secret and sacred business, they did not exist in isolation.

In other words, for the most part, education and recreation were one. Ceremonies undertaken after hunting and gathering for example were sometimes designed to ridicule, in a fun way, the antics or adventures of one or more of the group. Mishaps whilst hunting kangaroo would find their way into ceremonies that whilst looking at the fun side of the instance, also were educational...the hunter may have inadvertently stood on a snake, cried out in shock, when all around were quite and composed. The lesson here is that all must be quite in order to successfully hunt kangaroo...no kangaroo for dinner!

Children were not isolated from ceremonies such as this. The very survival of Indigenous peoples relied on the education of the young, in all its forms. Many recreational activities were related to story-telling. This was a guide to ways of life and behaviour, inherent in laws, customs, cultures and legends. Stories telling of how the emu in the sky came to be, whilst recreational, also informed listeners of the appropriate time to seek out the emu for eggs. The cultural practice of fire-stick farming was also recreational, with little children chasing small lizards and rodents attempting to escape from the burning grass. Children were not allowed to venture away from the company of adults alone. Laws were provided that ensured adults would always be with children. Stories relating to mythical beings that could snatch children away from families were also educational, in that the children were too scared to move to far away from adult eyes; they were scared witless!

The use of a specific part of country was not a decision made in any ad-hoc manner. Every part of country had a connection with spiritual beings, ancestors, who created these areas for certain reasons; to utilise them for other things would have been tantamount to breaking law. Each part of country had its own story, sometimes scary, sometimes funny, but the spiritual connection should not be undertaken lightly.

Traditional hunting and gathering activities then were not only a matter for survival, but were used to provide comical and humorous relief from day to day activities, with all participating in one way, shape, or form. Invasion has taken away many of these traditional activities, with many no longer undertaken on such a large scale, or as frequently wished. Cultural connectiveness is not as solid as one would have envisaged BC.

The loss of lands, and the dispossession of peoples from spiritual connectiveness has seen the decline of many traditional recreational practices spoken of earlier. The advent of National Parks, reserves, wilderness areas etc, have further isolated people from undertaking certain recreational activities. Areas of country utilised in specific ceremonies are now out of the reach of Indigenous peoples.

According to the 1967 Referendum (where government asked the Australian people if they should legislate for Indigenous peoples), Indigenous peoples would be allowed to carry out traditional cultural practices. This of course was not factual. The cultural practice of initiations (boys and girls) in the majority of cases, is not allowed anymore...child abuse charges and jail await those who do so.

In contemporary times there are peoples whose job it is to teach recreational activities to others. Perhaps these recreational professionals should ask themselves some questions relating to how approaches to recreation are indeed still directed at education of people. I would ask these people the question of how they look at their respective approaches to recreation...Do they see recreation as educational or education as recreational? Can they differentiate between the two?

Recreational professionals somewhere along the way, will have interaction with Indigenous peoples. This could be through the actual workplace, where both are employed as tour guides for example. This provides the perfect opportunity for an education during workplace activities associated with recreation. This further means

that there is a certain amount of knowledge that recreational professionals should aspire to obtain in order to respect and enhance Indigenous cultures.

Terminology

Most people, and I include many Indigenous peoples here, allude or refer to Indigenous peoples as Aboriginal, Aborigines, Koories, Noongahs etc, whilst just as many refer to us as Indigenous. The obvious reference, and most preferred would be to the language group name ie. Wiradjuri, Yorta Yorta. If I were a tour guide, I would add the local name to my repertoire. I have often perceived a person using such as more educated and more professional in outlook, in cultural terms, than those who have not taken the time. Here, it is most important not to use the word 'our' when referring to Indigenous peoples...they do not belong to you!

Respect

It is vital that all recreational professionals have a sound knowledge base of the sites that they are incorporating into recreational activities. Rock art, grinding grooves, shell middens etc are all sites of significance to Indigenous peoples. Those in the field of recreation should always strive for the protection and preservation of such areas and interpret sites in accordance with the wishes of local communities. This means having knowledge of the impacts of overuse, touching or standing on, can have on a site. This does not mean touching art with a long stick in order to stress some vital point in the way ochre was used for example, or putting a hand inside a hand stencil on a cave wall to emphasise the size of a hand!

I have witnessed recreationists walking all over stone artefacts without the slightest idea that they were doing so...no words of warning from the lips of the tour guide were forthcoming, because this person was not aware that artefacts were there!

Interpretation

It is imperative to the future of the recreational tourism market, that Indigenous cultural history be interpreted in an ethical and appropriate manner. To explain a site in a credible way to the uninitiated tourist for example, adds credibility to the talk and adds further to recreational enhancement, and education about the site itself. To do so shows a sign of respect, not only to the art itself, but to the artist, the story they relate and to the wisdom and experience of generations of artists gone before.

It is not ethical for a man to enter a place that is considered a woman's place. Women's business has no room for men and the other side of the coin should also be adhered to. It is not ethical for a man to interpret women's business either. It is permissible to speak of the differences between the two, but any detailed secret and or sacred business must be forthcoming from those who have this knowledge, and are endorsed by the community as being an owner of that knowledge. To this end, it is always advisable to have both male and female community members play a role in the interpretation of an area, and the sites that it may contain.

Working Together

It is not impossible to develop an understanding of Indigenous cultures. The hard part is initially making the effort! Most people that I have spoken to in relation to recreation and Indigenous issues, wanted to know more but were afraid to ask, they thought they end up offending someone. There is a lesson here. Most Indigenous

peoples will be thankful that you have asked a question. In most cases, they will give you a direct answer, in other cases a more brief answer will be given...this will depend on what information you are seeking. Most Indigenous peoples will work with others, if they can see that the benefits to them and their respective communities can be well established, that your credentials are sound, that your intentions are honest, that your dealings with them are open, and that interaction with them and their cultural heritage is based on education and respect.

Copyright and Privacy Issues

There may be instances where Indigenous fellow workers advise you of certain ways to do things, or to utilise certain things ie, medicinal plants. This information can be used but must be resourced. A recreational professional must be just that; professional. Information coming from a fellow worker needs to be included in some kind of workplace agreement whereby certain types of information are restricted to the chosen few. To divulge information that should not be, breaches trust and respect; your education with regards to Indigenous peoples and/or issues will stop there!

In Conclusion

Get to know your area...Wiradjuri or Yorta Yorta? Who speaks for the community? Who has the knowledge of the area? If need be, ask these people if they would consent to taking you out and showing you the way in which they would like the places to be interpreted...do it their way wherever and whenever possible. Ask the hard questions in order to acquire knowledge that you can ethically and appropriately use in your workplace.

Indigenous cultures in this country are the oldest living cultures in the world. As such, they demand respect and protection and preservation. The contribution that recreational professionals make in these areas can be crucial to their overall survival. Respect is not a given; it must be earned, must be ongoing, and must look always at how specific interaction can offset the delicate balance between human and mother nature...our earth mother.

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