SN-0030 The Bidwern Project - Digital recording and archiving on the western Arnhem Land Plateau

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Collection Date: 22 February 2009
Scholar #1 Info: (if more than one scholar's process is described, copy this set for each scholar)

- **Name**: Kim McKenzie
- **Email**: kim.mckenzie@anu.edu.au
- **Title**: Mr
- **Institution/Organization**: Research School of Humanities, The Australian National University
- **Field of Study/Creative Endeavor**: Ethnographic filmmaking and environmental mapping

Collector Info (can be the same as "Scholar" above):

- **Name**: Kim McKenzie
- **Email**: kim.mckenzie@anu.edu.au
- **Title**: Mr
- **Institution/Organization**: Research School of Humanities, The Australian National University

Notes on Methodology:

*Self report*

Scope

The scope section is provided by the collector, with input from the scholar(s), and attempts to estimate the scope of the group that performs the processes described: How broadly do the practices described in this story apply to others in same field, in related fields, etc?

1. In the opinion of the scholar, who participates in the process the story describes?
2. What is this process intended to accomplish for the scholar?
3. Who is the intended audience of the processes described?
4. Is this the only process the scholar uses to accomplish his/her goals?
5. What "shared services" would help transform the story into something of more benefit for the scholar or his/her audience? What process or processes in the story could be automated?

Keywords

Please provide some keywords that will allow us to group or cluster related stories--or aspects of stories.

1. Was this story collected for a particular Bamboo working group? If so, please include, as keywords, the appropriate group(s).
   - Shared Services
   - Stories
   - Tools and Content Partners

2. Suggested keywords: Does this story contain elements that could be mapped to these keywords? If so, please indicate which ones and briefly describe the mapping. Add any additional keywords in #3. (These are global keywords from this page keywords)
   - Annotate
   - Discover
   - Engage
   - Interact
   - Publish
   - Preserve
   - Share

3. Please list additional keywords here:

4. Related Stories: Are there parts of the story that relate to other collected stories? Please provide title(s) and link to the story page.

SN-0055 Video Preservation, Annotation and Publishing for the Arts and Humanities - The EVIA Digital Archive Project

Story
"Bidwern" is a word from an Aboriginal language of western Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory of Australia. It translates to English as "many fingers" and it is sometimes used to express, with just a hint of gentle mockery, the clever things done with modern technological gadgetry.

Arnhem Land is a huge area of far northern Australia, bordered on its west by the World Heritage area of Kakadu National Park, by the Gulf of Carpentaria to the east, and by the Arafura Sea to the north. In contrast to much of the rest of Australia, and with notable exceptions of some missions, mines and pastoral enterprises, the area has remained under Aboriginal control. It is an area of great linguistic and cultural diversity and is renowned nationally and internationally for its music and art.

Most of the population lives along the coast, the great tidal rivers and their flood plains. This distribution strengthened during the twentieth century with the establishment of coastal missions and government settlements, though people were also drawn to mining camps and cattle enterprises further inland from Arnhem Land.

Much of the interior of Arnhem Land rises abruptly to a vast sandstone plateau, the "rock country". It is a rugged, dissected landscape, difficult to access and to move about in. The signs of long human occupancy are everywhere in thousands upon thousands of paintings on rock shelters. However this occupancy almost came to an end by the mid-twentieth century when most of the families had left to live at missions, pastoral properties or at the camps where feral buffalo were hunted.

In the past several years there has been a return of people to parts of this remote area. The Bidwern project seeks to document aspects of this. The renewed presence of people on the western Arnhem Land Plateau is due to two factors. Firstly the desire of Aboriginal owners of that area to live on their own land and, secondly, a great interest in the ecology and land management of the Plateau. Due to the decades of absence, the number of people who grew up on the Plateau and thus retain a close knowledge of it are few. Their knowledge of the area's human and natural history, much of it embedded in the Plateau's particular languages, is a valuable resource both for future Aboriginal generations and for present-day researchers. The Plateau work therefore involves disciplines across the Humanities and Natural Sciences, from Linguistics and History and Anthropology to Zoology, Botany and Ecology.

Very broadly speaking, the Bidwern project is concerned with digital and environmental mapping. In various ways it seeks to digitally record and preserve aspects of what is happening across the spectrum of these new endeavours on the Plateau with a view to dissemination and use now and in the future. Processes include observational use of digital video, language, oral history and music recording, and GIS mapping of rock-art and other sites. Of great importance too is the assembly and collation of many hours of recordings, thousands of photographs, texts, maps and so on that have been created in the past but which have not been brought together as a documented, inter-related corpus of information.

A key challenge for the Bidwern project stems from the diversity of digital information involved - both in terms of media formats and, more particularly, in the nature of the content of information deriving from so many disparate sources and different disciplines. Although some, indeed much, information can be mapped geospatially, the project also needs a broader sense of "mapping" by which information will ultimately be able to be retrieved and analysed in new ways unforeseen by any one of us entering resources from the standpoint of our own interests.

Of absolute importance is the need for the Bidwern project and its outcomes to belong to the rock country, in a way to be a part of its future. If it isn't used by, and useful to, all the people who care for this area - both now and in years to come - there will not have been much point.

So, in terms of Bamboo, the Bidwern project can be seen as involving many digital processes from creation to archiving to retrieval and use. As before, it encompasses interests in both Humanities and Sciences and its aims include the potential for research use by Aboriginal and academic communities. Additionally, it aims to present, preserve and make available a body of information useful in multiple ways for the ongoing management of an ecologically fragile environment.

Other Comments:

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