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The National Trust has been working closely with the Cooktown community to revitalise our Museum (the James Cook Museum) and re-tell the shared history of the town. This process has led to a deeper understanding and appreciation of Cooktown's unique shared heritage as the first recorded place of reconciliation in Australia.

Reconciliation Rocks, the place where that act of reconciliation occurred between the local Bama people and Cook's Endeavour crew in 1770, represents an under-told and unrecognised Australian story that is of outstanding value to the nation.

The National Trust has made a formal nomination of Reconciliation Rocks to Australia's National Heritage List today.

"There are only 116 places on the National Heritage List. The list aims to encompass places that reveal the richness of Australia's extraordinarily diverse heritage that contributes to our national identity" says National Trust Advocacy Manager, Jane Alexander. "This nomination aims to fill a gap in the list with regards to places of Indigenous heritage and places that represent reconciliation and cross-cultural understanding. Reconciliation Rocks is a very special place that makes us consider what reconciliation means to us as individuals and why it is so important for the future of our country".

CEO Jonathan Fisher says:

"It is particularly important that the National Trust's role as a champion for environmental, built and cultural heritage is recognised." He adds "the opportunity to promote the listing of Reconciliation Rocks is a perfect example of how the National Trust can act to improve the protection of significant places which otherwise may be vulnerable or go unrecognised. We are grateful for the support of the local community and look forward to a positive decision as a modern act of reconciliation in the place of Australia's first act of reconciliation."

Local Indigenous (Bama) man Harold Ludwick adds:

"Cooktown shows a story of [the] humanity of our people, when they met with Captain Cook. They instigated meetings with Captain Cook...and it was that understanding from both cultures that made that ground zero for the birth of Australia." He goes on to explain why this story is so significant for Australia. "It is vitally important because we have been working hard to mend this country...it is the pedestal for both cultures to unite in a way that Australia hasn't united since 1770. This could be the nucleus for other places to take notice of what can be achieved for the grand-children and great-grand-children...These cultures should exist side by side, as it should be in this nation."

"We can't change the past, we all have a history," says Cooktown Bama Aunty Alberta Hornsby, "But here in Cooktown we have chosen to show a balance."

It is this balance that is represented by Reconciliation Rocks, the place of Australia's first recorded act of reconciliation and the place of continued reconciliation through the recognition of shared history.



Why is Reconciliation Rocks so important?

Reconciliation Rocks is of outstanding value to the nation as the place where Australia's first recorded act of reconciliation took place and where 48 days of mutual respect and contact occurred between the Indigenous Bama-ngay and the crew of HMB Endeavour in 1770 – as recorded in the Endeavour journals of Captain James Cook and Joseph Banks and passed down by the Bama-ngay.

Reconciliation Rocks is of outstanding value in demonstrating the start of Australia's reconciliation journey and the foundations of a shared history that evolved through the practice of respect, shared understandings and recognition of the value of other cultures. Historically, Reconciliation Rocks marks the start of the reconciliation journey that began in Cooktown pre-settlement and continues within the town today with this National Heritage List nomination.

Reconciliation Rocks demonstrates the remarkable story of sustained contact between two cultures that occurred in Gangaar/Cooktown from 18 June 1770 to 4 August 1770 when the two cultures shared knowledge, resources and mutual respect. During the 48 days that Cook and his crew were in Cooktown, they encountered a strong, dynamic and cultured group of Indigenous people – the substantial time ashore allowed the explorers to document the extensive dynamics and humanity of Australian Indigenous people. It was these cultural dynamics, combined with Cook's luck in beaching Endeavour on land recognised by the Bama-ngay as neutral, which created the platform of observation, diplomacy, acceptance and humanity that allowed the act of reconciliation to take place between the two cultures.

Reconciliation Rocks is of outstanding value for its rarity – it is the only place in Australia where a pre-settlement act of reconciliation between Indigenous Australians and European explorers occurred. It is the place where the first recorded act of reconciliation occurred between Indigenous Australians and European explorers. It is one of only a very few places that represent Australia's reconciliation journey and is the earliest of these places. There are very few places with similarities to Reconciliation Rocks – that is, places of intangible heritage significance which relate to this history of reconciliation and shared history.

Indigenous heritage places are generally under-represented on the National Heritage List and there is a clear gap within the National Heritage List when it comes to places demonstrating European-Indigenous relations. The outstanding value of Reconciliation Rocks to the nation is recognised by the local Indigenous community, who strongly believed that the place should be used to showcase to all Australians the process of reconciliation for the future healing of the nation. With its strong, shared story, the site is a rare place of outstanding value to the nation.

Reconciliation Rocks has outstanding value to the nation because of the place's strong and special association with the Cooktown community, Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Reconciliation Rocks is recognised by this community as a place of immense significance that demonstrates the complex cultural structure of the Bama-ngay, the commencement story of Australia's reconciliation and the place of the first recorded act of reconciliation between Indigenous Australian's and European explorers. The place is a publicly accessible symbol of the power of shared history and shared futures.



Many of the local Indigenous community are descendants of the Bama-ngay encountered by Cook and his Endeavour crew and Reconciliation Rocks is a place of outstanding community pride and value, and a tangible demonstration of the ability of cultural heritage places to assist in the process of reconciliation. Reconciliation Rocks is of outstanding value to the nation for demonstrating a pre-settlement depth of Indigenous culture and practice, as related through Bama-ngay oral tradition and recorded in the journals of Joseph Banks and James Cook. Reconciliation Rocks is laden and layered with Indigenous tradition – pre-contact, contact and post-contact.

During their 48 days in the area, Cook and his crew were confronted by a strong, cultured, dynamic people and for the first time, Cook and Banks were able to document in detail the dynamics of Aboriginal people. Their culture, beliefs and society were recorded and, for a fleeting moment, recognised by Europeans.

Indeed, as Cook repeatedly caught glimpses of these dynamics, his experience of the place as a site of confrontation would have receded. The feedback loop of Bama strategy fostered an atmosphere that in turn allowed Cook to receive glimpses of the dynamics of humanity and rendered both the Bama-ngay and Cook collaborators in a 48-day environment in which a particular reconciliation moment would finally occur. However, it must be remembered that the 'Little Old Man', "reached out first, we have always been reaching out for recognition." [i] This continuing Indigenous tradition of reaching out and offering reconciliation is of outstanding value to the nation.

Reconciliation Rocks offers outstanding significance to the nation for its continued reconciliation focus and tradition. Bama man Harold Ludwick summarises the outstanding value of Reconciliation Rocks to the nation as: "The history of Cook is more important ... as Cook spent the most time there than any other single places [sic] during his travels. It was the most contact with a first nations people that Cook had during any of his travels. His arrival to Australia is documented more vividly and thoroughly at Cooktown than anywhere else – it is the perfect place to celebrate reconciliation – it shows the meaning of 'two cultures: one people' - here we live and breathe the reconciliation, and this story of reconciliation is of national significance." [ii]

"We can't change the past, we all have a history," says Bama Aunty Alberta Hornsby, "But here in Cooktown we have chosen to show a balance." [iii] It is this balance that is represented by Reconciliation Rocks, the place of Australia's first recorded act of reconciliation and the place of continued reconciliation through the recognition of shared history.

