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To cite this article: Jillian Walliss & Katherine Kok (2014) New interpretative strategies for geotourism: an exploration of two Australian mining sites, Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change, 12:1, 33-49, DOI: 10.1080/14766825.2013.868902

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14766825.2013.868902

Published online: 21 Mar 2014.

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New interpretative strategies for geotourism: an exploration of two Australian mining sites

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(Received 31 May 2013; accepted 8 November 2013)

Since its origins in the early 1980s, Geotourism has expanded from an initial focus on the geological features of quarries and mining sites to encompass landscapes deemed of geological significance. This paper argues for the re-alignment of the interpretative ambitions of Geotourism to reflect this expanded scope. We explore how the application of more experiential landscape driven interpretative strategies might shape the development of two Australian mining sites which offer potentials for Geotourism: the operational mining landscape of Queenstown, Tasmania and the coal mining sites of Yallourn North in Victoria’s La Trobe valley. Through these case studies, we highlight how the championing of the experience of landscape itself as a mode of interpretation and education (as distinct from textual interpretations) offer valuable techniques for engaging with biotic and abiotic characteristics, aesthetic qualities, ecological processes, cultural histories and sustainable futures. Rather than maintaining a strict focus on ‘scientific’ geology, these strategies offer the potential for uncovering the complex intertwining of cultural and scientific perspectives that comprise sites of Geotourism.

Keywords: Geotourism; interpretation; landscape; Australia; mining

Introduction

The origins of the Geotourism are traced to the work of Dr Thomas A. Hose who during the 1980s became concerned that English quarries and mining sites were being erased through processes of environmental remediation (Hose, 2011). Hose considered these sites of significance for geological research and proposed their retention as a valuable educational resource. This early work forms an important foundation to what is now defined as the Geotourism movement. According to Hose, Geotourism aims to:

provide interpretive and service facilities to enable tourists to acquire knowledge and understanding of the geology and geomorphology of a site (including its contribution to the development of the Earth sciences) beyond the level of mere aesthetic appreciation. (Hose, 1995, p. 17)

The National Geographic offers a more recent definition, claiming Geotourism as that ‘which sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place – its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being of its residents’ (National Geographic, 2010). This definition adopts ‘geographical character’ as a ‘unifying umbrella’ suggesting
that these sites be considered ‘the entire combination of natural and human attributes that make a place worth visiting’. National Geographic’s approach to interpretation is equally all encompassing, highlighting the promotion of ‘high-quality, appealingly presented information about the place’ (National Geographic, 2010). The concept of the GeoPark, offers an additional definition of Geotourism. The GeoPark, which is promoted as an ‘adhoc’ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) supported brand, emphasises sustainability and socio-economic benefits for community (UNESCO, 1995–2012). Accordingly, the Geo Park aims to:

inform about the sustainable use and need for natural resources, whether they are mined, quarried or harnessed from the surrounding environment while at the same time promoting respect for the environment and the integrity of the landscape. (UNESCO, 1995–2012)

The evolution of this terminology demonstrates a major shift in scale and scope of Geotourism, expanding from Hose’s initial focus on resource and industrial sites (mines and quarries) to include landscapes that contain significant geological features. Many of these sites such as Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, the Grand Canyon and Iguazu Falls are already highly valued and visited tourist destinations (Dowling & Newsome, 2010a, p. 3). A confusing ambition accompanies this expansion. For example the National Geographic’s definition would claim almost all landscapes of significance as potential sites for Geotourism, and offers no real distinction between Geotourism and more general landscape driven tourism agenda.

This widening scope has been paralleled by an increasingly ‘scientific and professional’ (Gordon, 2012, p. 66) approach to Geotourism driven primarily by the scientific community. The first Global Geotourism Conference was held in Perth, Western Australia in 2008, followed by further conferences in Miru Mulu, Malaysia (2010) and Muscat, Oman (2011). Papers from these conferences, subsequently published in edited volumes, reveal the absence of a critical reflection on the implications of shifting from a tight geological focus to a broader engagement with landscapes reflective of complex relationship between cultural and natural processes.

Instead interpretative practice places high value on the educational value of Geotourism sites, predominantly through the lens of science. An emphasis on in-situ museums, scientific classifications and geology acts to ‘museumify’ the landscape, privileging an educational experience over other modes of engagement. Further these strategies appear to be isolated from relevant theoretical and technical developments associated with the management of cultural and natural landscapes. Many of the landscapes nominated as potential sites for Geotourism, for example, are of significance to indigenous people. Any interpretation within these spaces requires the careful conceptualisation of the relationship between western sciences to indigenous knowledge systems. Similarly the interpretive approaches proposed remain static and text based, divorced from technological advancements that offer multiple platforms including hand-held interpretive devises.

Even more importantly, this explicit educational focus is not necessarily aligned with tourist motivations. For example most tourists who visit the monumental landscapes of Uluru and the Grand Canyon (now claimed under the definition of Geotourism) do not necessarily desire an educative experience. This is well demonstrated in the attempt to recast the experience of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park into a more educational experience about indigenous culture following its hand back to the traditional owners in 1985. Research into tourist attitudes found that while largely respectful of the traditional owners, tourists did not necessarily desire an explicit educational experience of the
desert landscape. Instead they wished to project their own meanings and understanding onto this iconic landscape (Walliss, 2011).

In the remainder of this paper we discuss how the championing of the experience of landscape itself as a mode of interpretation and education provides new directions for conceiving Geotourism, as well as contributing to the development of new economic futures for mining communities. This requires a shift from a focus on textual narration to a greater valuing of a ‘designed’ experience.

Beyond the museum: expanding approaches to interpretation

As resource development slows, hastened by the desire for green energy sources, the economic futures of many mining communities are being questioned. This is the case of Victoria’s Latrobe Valley (which will be discussed later in this paper) which has provided the state with brown coal energy since the early nineteenth century. Extensive policy research has focused on issues of employment transition and retraining, with tourism often cited as an economic alternative. A more focused engagement with the potentials of the mining sites themselves, as distinct from the historic towns, communities and infrastructure associated with the mines, achieves less attention.

The Transiting Cities – Low Carbon Futures research project run by the Office of Urban Transformations Research (OUTR) group at RMIT University offers an alternative approach, using the combination of design and research to speculate on the future of Latrobe Valley. The project aims to produce:

strategies for an adaptive and resilient regional centre, which can respond to the variable scales and conditions of change that effect life in the Latrobe City; enhancing the existing and future qualities of this urban environment, the rehabilitated mines, associated infrastructures and define opportunities for growth. (OUTR, 2013, http://transitingcities.com/about-transiting-cities/)

In 2012 OUTR ran an international design ideas competition focusing on how to ‘rethink, regenerate, rework, reactivate’ the singular economy of the La Trobe valley. The winning entries presented different futures for the physical environment of the mining landscapes. One scheme re-imagined the mining landscapes as an interconnected hydraulic network, which included the recreational use of water cooling ponds for power stations. Another proposed ecological remediation through the embracement of site disturbances. These proposals all recognise the larger potential of these mining sites as landscapes, rather than artefact, offering visitors new uses and experiences.

These approaches highlight the potentials for broadening the potential appeal of Geotourism to beyond those already interested in geology. This is particularly important given the acknowledgment within an emerging Geotourism discourse of little evidence to support a demand for interpreted geological sites. Dowling and Newsome (2010b, p. 235) state that ‘there is relatively little known about the demand for these products’. Most interest is shown by ‘professionals involved or interested in geological matters’ (Mao, Robinson, & Dowling, 2009, p. 79) or casual tourists interested in ‘pleasure and some limited intellectual stimulation’(Dowling & Newsome, 2010b, p. 235).

We suggest that an expanded definition of experience inclusive of aesthetics offers a useful direction in conceiving a new scale of interpretative strategies. While Hose’s original definition aimed to develop understanding ‘beyond the level of mere aesthetic appreciation’, it can be assumed that his comprehension of aesthetics was as a largely visual phenomenon.
A contemporary definition of aesthetics is concerned with far more than a ‘passive’ visual engagement. Knowledge and learning occurs as a result of somatic experience; an aesthetic beyond the visual. As landscape theorist Elizabeth Meyer (2008) reminds us, aesthetics operates at the level of the experiential and performative; offering the ability to change perspectives, evoke empathy, challenge relationships and foster obscure beauty. This attribute is particularly relevant within disturbed toxic landscapes, often the focus of Geotourism sites. Meyer (2007, p. 64) argues for the use of multiple platforms to learn and care about the environment, identifying the potential for human aesthetic experiences to ‘become places of social agency’ and ‘move citizens to action’.

Three precedents offer valuable guidance in considering the experiential and performative potential of Geotourism; the land art movement, developments in environmental aesthetics and contemporary urban post-industrial sites. Emerging in the 1970s, the large-scale landscape interventions of land artists such Robert Smithson, Richard Serra and Gordon Matta-Clarke provide a valuable exploration of the potential intersection of art practice and environmental issues. These artists drew attention to overlooked issues of industrialisation in an era of production. Through an investigation of the sublime in the disturbed landscape, Smithson presented these spaces as a ‘sort of remnant naturalness’, prompting visitors to enter and consider the temporal qualities (Dreher, 1992, p. 29; Maskit, 2007, p. 329). Serra focused on industrial materiality and monumentality, transforming societies’ perception of industrial materials such as rusted corten steel, to reflect a certain aesthetic. The spaces produced by these artists become understood as an expression of cultural time, process and technology. Interwoven with memories, narrative and past societal perspectives, these site driven responses reflect complex relationships between nature and culture. Contemporary artists and photographers such as Edward Burtinsky and J. Henry Fair, continue this exploration within industrial landscapes, including mine sites. Through their provocative documentations, the artists render these places as highly stimulating through capturing their monumental scale, spatiality, composition and materiality. All of these site driven art practices offer evidence of our evolving relationship to redundancy, consumption, technology and natural resources.

The discourse of environmental aesthetics provides further guidance in understanding the experiential qualities of industrial landscapes. Initially defining aesthetics as either ‘natural’ or ‘cultural’, the discipline has more recently embraced the ‘in between’ nature of the disturbed industrial site. Maskit (2007, p. 331) for example argues for an aesthetics of ‘the interesting’, which he defines as ‘the characteristics of an object of aesthetic appreciation that leads us to think other wise … It is to see possibilities previously unseen’. This definition shares similarities with Nye’s (1994) concept of the ‘technologically sublime’, which highlights how modified landscapes of industry can simultaneously evoke awe and disgust the viewer. These theoretical framings suggest the potential of a direct experience of environmental modification (such as found within a mining site) can manifest in the tourist experience as equal parts fear and wonder.

More recently, late-twentieth century engagement with urban post-industrial spaces exemplified by significant international projects such as the refurbishment of Tate Modern and Manhattan’s High Line Park demonstrates the potential of shifting once obsolete industrial sites into inspiring contemporary spaces and experiences. As Edensor (2005, p. 76) argues, these forgotten landscape of ruins ‘rebuke normative aesthetic orderings’ and offer an escape from the aesthetically and socially regulated spaces. He warns of the dangers of tourism leading to the homogenisation of these very specific sites and advocates for their potential as a kind of ‘anti-tourism’, expressed through their qualities of ‘rough, disrupted and potentially perilous, replete with sensors other than the gaze’. Similarly, Armstrong
(2006, p. 119) argues for the retention of ‘landscapes of contempt’ which offer voids layered with time and meaning, evoking ‘an aesthetic of disorder, surprise and sensuality’.

These three precedents crossing art and spatial design practice and aesthetic theory offer guidance for extending the parameters of interpretation within Geotourism sites beyond conventional text-based strategies. In the second part of the paper, we explore how these alternative strategies might shape the development of two Australian mining sites which offer potentials for Geotourism. We begin with an examination of Queenstown, Tasmania an operational industrial mine landscape which feature community driven tourist strategies that merge art practices with direct experiences of mining sites. We then conclude with a more speculative project conceived for Victoria’s coal mining region where a new tourist experience is ‘designed’ directly within a redundant landscapes of an operating coal mine.

**Queenstown – an operating mining landscape**

Queenstown is situated within the valley of a copper mine, some three to four hours drive from the Tasmanian capital of Hobart. This landscape has been shaped by over 130 years of continuous prospecting and mining. Beginning with the discovery of gold and silver, Queenstown has developed into one of the largest copper resources in the world. Technological advancements have shaped the landscape; the first cog railway line in Australia (1897); the second hydroelectric power station in Australia (constructed at Lake Margaret in 1911); progressive copper smelting techniques (inspired by a lack of fuel); and, more recently the implementation of modern environmental practices. Human tragedy and environmental devastation has accompanied this long mining history. In 1912, 42 miners died in a fire in the underground mine, while the King River, absent of any aquatic life, continues to run yellow from the continuous seepage from the mines.

The specific geology of Queenstown combined with industry practice and cultural occupation has produced a particularly iconic landscape. To reach Queenstown, tourists travel through Tasmania’s impressive wilderness landscapes. This sublime scenic journey is abruptly contrasted by the dramatic transition into Queenstown, an intense juxtaposition of wilderness and human disturbance. Unlike the dense rainforest vegetation of Tasmania’s wilderness forests, the landscape of Queenstown and its surrounds are infamously stripped bare of vegetation and scared by acid rains. It is impossible to deny that any visitor’s first experience of the deep reds, pinks, browns, purples and blues of Queenstown denuded landscape (as shown in Figures 1 and 2), is an intensely sublime experience shaped by the monumental scale of devastation and strange beauty.

While mining continues as a major source of income, modern technologies have diminished the number of employees necessary for operation. As a result the community of Queenstown has begun to explore the potential of the town and its broader surrounds for tourism as a new economic model. This can be understood as a ‘bottom up’ approach to tourism, built on community efforts, passion, local knowledge and relationships, maintaining the local mining identity. An engagement with the arts and the possibility of a direct experience of the live mines form key elements for conceiving a tourist experience. These interactions depart significantly from more formal modes of interpretation and education advocated from Geotourism.

**Interpreting the landscape through art practice**

The Landscape Art Research Queenstown (LARQ) is a non-profit community development business established in 2006 by prominent Australian print maker and artist Raymond
Arnold. Projects have been supported by Arts Tasmania and Tasmania Regional Arts Funding. Since its inception LARQ, shown in Figure 3, has hosted:

five funded international artist residencies, five unfunded international residencies, staged nineteen exhibitions, managed eleven art workshops, mentored young local students and welcomed many visitors to its gallery for openings, artists talks, ‘arts industry’ nights and casual visits. (Landscape Art Research Queenstown [LARQ], 2012, http://landscapeartresearchqueenstown.wordpress.com/future-exhibitions/)
These initiatives aim to ‘foster connections, sense of place and artistic interventions in the contested space of the west where wilderness branding slugs it out with the technological forces of the mining, forestry and power industries’ (LARQ, 2012). LARQ invites international and Australian artists to live and work within the mine landscape of Queenstown. During residencies of up to six-weeks, artists work within an open studio located in the main street and are encouraged to engage with community groups, schools and the mining industry. Geologists are invited to talk to the artists offering a more detailed understanding of the geological foundations of the landscape and the mining activity.

During her residency in 2012, Tasmanian architect and artist Judith Abell extended the parameters of landscape to include broader notions of materiality. Queenstown exists simultaneously as an industry and community. The materiality of the mines extends into the very fabric of the town; merging the industrial with the domestic; the monumental with the individual. A regular walking of the hills and streets of Queenstown proved a major catalyst for Judith’s practice. The photographic documentation of the geology, topography and architecture of the town uncovered patterns and adjacencies of materiality.

Abell worked predominantly with waste materials salvaged from the mine at Mount Lyell including conveyor belts, telecommunications wire, air handling ducts and air filters. She also ran a project with a group of students from St Joseph’s Catholic School, where they learned to weave with paper from salvaged telephone books. Material experiments completed within the residency time frame ranged in scale from a piece of jewellery, to lamps and large, wall-based pieces (Figure 4(a) and (b)). Judith also developed sketches for more functional applications, such as wall and roof cladding and wilderness track protection.

Each artist’s residency ends in a public exhibition and the development of a catalogue record. These documents present an intense dialogue between place and industry, in what Arnold (2012, p. 5) describes as an attempt to observe the ‘relationships between things rather than the things themselves’. Most importantly, these responses expand the concept
of mining and geology beyond scientific understandings to include a focus on a cultural engagement within a specific geographic space. These works states Arnold (2012, p. 5), are explicitly about ‘people, places and time’. They offer valuable lens for uncovering and heightening the diverse and often competing forces which shape the landscape in which the Queenstown community inhabits.

These vivid interpretations of place are contrasted by a second mode of tourism which offers tourists a direct experience of the live mines of Queenstown, either as an underground experience or a surface open cut experience.

A direct experience of mining: tours above and below

The Mt Lyell Underground Mine tour offers the rare opportunity to experience one of the only authentic underground mines in Australia. Descending approximately 1200 metres through 9 kilometres of winding underground tunnels, this tour by vehicle offers the rare experience of being underground. Given the mine is still working, fast machinery take priority in the one way traffic tunnels. These trucks continuously cart 10 tons of copper rock to the rock crusher located at 700 metre depths. Stepping outside the vehicles, sounds (trucks, two-way radios, fans and other machinery), smells and the humidity in the tunnels create an intense and often disorientating sensory experience. The anticipated restricted space and the sense of enclosure is perhaps not as intense as expected, except when confronted by the monumental trucks that ever so tightly occupy the tunnels. This exposure to life for a modern day underground miner is narrated by knowledgeable tour guides (all who have worked as miners) who offer facts on the mining processes and technologies, environmental achievements, local perspectives and geology.

An underground experience however is not something that all tourists would find appealing. A less challenging engagement with contemporary mining practice is offered by an
above ground mine tour conducted by Mt Lyell Enviro Tours. This journey focuses on the monumental and historic above ground open cuts mines. Tourists are transported through the extensive ‘lunar’ landscape to the obsolete open cut mine where immense unstable cliffs, as shown in Figure 5, illustrate the extent of the early mining operations. An experience of eroding slopes, man-made waste rock mountains and unusual vegetation is balanced by extensive discussion of the geological characteristics of the area, on-going environmental issues and shifts to more sustainable mining practices such as the tailings dams.

Both of these mining tours are driven by community relationships and first-hand knowledge of the mining experience. The tours expose visitors to the sustained mining history and culture practices, alongside a direct experience of the highly modified landscape and the resultant disturbed ecological processes. Until recently these local tours, were overshadowed by the Wilderness Trail Train, a heavily publicised commercial tourism venture that links Queenstown to the coastal town of Strahan.

Experiencing the landscape: private sector ventures

The West Coast Wilderness Railway was redeveloped following an investment of over $30 million from the Federal Government and Tasmanian State Government. This funding allowed the restoration of the cog railway infrastructure constructed in the late nineteenth century to link the mines of Queenstown with the coastal port of Strahan. A twenty-year lease to run a tourist operation centred on the railway was won by Federal Group and opened in 2002. Unfortunately this private venture opted out of the contract only halfway through the lease, citing escalating capital and maintenance costs (Martin, 2013). In April 2013, the West Coast Wilderness Railway was closed.

The train journey however did provide a very unique experience of the difficult terrain mining companies and settlers faced in moving goods and resources to and from Queenstown. The Mount Lyell Mining and Railway Company completed the railway’s construction in 1897. Due to the incredible steepness of the terrain, an innovative rack and
pinion railway known as the Abt Rail System was imported to allow the train to move through the significant gradients. Over time the line became redundant and outdated, leading to its eventual closure in 1963.

Tourists travelled in purpose built carriages pulled by restored 100-year-old steam locomotives (Figure 6(a) and 6(b)) that ran on the original rail line. The tour provided an insight into the difficulties of construction as the infrastructure traverses steep terrain and cuts through seemingly impenetrable rainforest. Over the six-hour (35 kilometres) journey, tourists are transported through diverse landscapes as the train passes mining relics, colonial ruins, steep terraces and gorges, dead rivers (Figure 7(a) and 7(b)) and rainforest ecology. The sounds, smells and motion of the train itself facilitate an imaginary trip back in time while a tour guide offers facts and stories about the mining industry and life of the early settlers. Despite offering a quality tourist experience, the numbers of visitors per year dropped from a peak of 45,000–30,000 in 2013 (Martin, 2013). In comparison over 200,000 tourists visit Tasmania’s premier tourist attraction, the world heritage listed penal settlement of Port Arthur, located 100 kilometres from Hobart.

The failure of the West Coast Wilderness Railway illustrates the potential difficulties of investing in significant tourist infrastructure (including museums) in more remote regions, which are often the sites of Geotourism. These ventures require significant return for the private sector to be involved. As a result of community campaigning and passion, the Federal Government has promised to contribute a further $6 million for rail repairs, whilst the Tasmanian Government is responsible for finding an operator and on-going operational costs ($1.5 million a year over the next four years) in the hope of reopening the railway in summer 2013/2014 (McKay, 2013).

More recently there has been interest in formally recognising Queenstown as a Geotourism site. While this will certainly promote Queenstown as part of a broader international network, we argue that this move should not occur at the expense of the current community driven strategies that provide the visitor with an experience of this intense interaction between people and place, technology, history, ecology and landscape. Currently Queenstown operates without any unified interpretative strategy. But rather than be viewed as problematic, we argue that it is this diversity of voices and experiences located in-situ within the landscape that makes an experience of Queenstown so appealing. Some iconic features such as Iron Blow – the site of the first mine, shown in Figure 8(a)–(c), do offer formal educative panels. This interpretative strategy is contrasted by the informal and almost cartoon like murals depicting mining processes, shown in Figure 9(a) and 9(b), located on the town’s main street. Turn the corner and the visitor can enter the gallery spaces of LARQ where they might catch an exhibition of an internationally significant artist’s response to the very particular Queenstown landscape. These moments, together with the opportunity to participate in more formal mine and railway tours, combine to offer a diverse range of perspectives and understandings of Queenstown. No formal museum or textual interpretation can replace this engagement with the existing community, continuing mining practices and the extraordinary landscape, experienced at various scales and modes (visual, bodily, textual and spatially).

Not all communities however are situated directly within mining landscapes. Modern mining operations in Australia tend to segregate communities (who are increasing a fly-in fly-out workforce) from the physical location of mining. This separation offers considerable challenges in developing tourist strategies. In the second example we examine the possibilities for engaging with the Yallourn open cast mine in the LaTrobe Valley in Victoria. Adopting practices first explored in the land art movement, this interpretative strategy focuses on extending and heightening a direct experience of the landscape.
The Latrobe Valley – a direct experience of landscape

Yallourn open cast mine and associated power station, is one of Victoria’s major brown coal energy producers. The mine currently contributes to approximately 22% of the State’s energy sources (Energy Australia, 2012). The population of Yallourn North is under 1500, whilst the entire Latrobe Valley comprises little over 72,000 people (Australian Bureau Of Statistics, 2011). Since the early 1920s the community has been supported by a coal industry and unsurprisingly, has a sympathetic view of ‘dirty brown coal energy’.

Figure 6. (a) and (b) The Wilderness Railway steam locomotives and the purpose built carriages for tourist comfort. Photograph by author, Jillian Walliss.
Figure 7. (a) and (b) Gorges, dead rivers and rainforest ecology which the Wilderness Railway winds through. Photograph by author, Katherine Kok.

Figure 8. (a)–(c) The Iron Blow lookout constructed over the first open cut mine dug by hand. Photograph by author, Katherine Kok. Textual Interpretative panels. © West Coast Council. Reproduced by permission of West Coast Council.
This disturbed landscape of modern consumption has become an accepted part of their environment. Although the modern day mine only employees a small percentage of the community, the high paying jobs still indirectly help support the region. With a closure date forecast of 2032 and a changing energy future, major questions remain over the economic future of the area. Regional tourism is cited as a possible future.

How then might tourism engage with the space of the modern open cut mine? In the remainder of the paper we will present a speculative design strategy, which explores how an engagement with the very particular qualities of the mining landscapes (including

Figure 9.  (a) and (b) Murals depicting the mining processes and local tourism opportunities. © West Coast Council. Reproduced by permission of West Coast Council.
emerging ecological processes) might produce a valued tourist experience. This strategy proposes a highly malleable experience conceived through a series of spatial interventions constructed directly within the landscape of the open cut mine. This proposal offers a major shift in direction from conventional approaches to post-mining sites which emphasis ecological rehabilitation aimed at erasing the presence of mining. Conversely, these interventions aim to heighten the topographic and geological features, chemical processes, ecology and hydrologic systems, all of which are the direct outcomes of geology and subsequent mining processes.

Interventions seek to emphasis scale and process, without any explicit interpretative material. The intention is not to directly educate nor prescribe a desired reaction but instead to prompt the visitor to see and experience the landscape and its complex processes in new ways. Seven interventions were developed, three of which will be discussed. No set sequence of exploration is intended; instead visitors construct their own journey.

The perilous walk

Township Field, located in the redundant area of the mine, is particularly interesting for its unfamiliar smells, brightly coloured and dramatic topography, resurgent vegetation (where soil properties permit) and bird life and kangaroos. The topography of the open cut pit is both vast and monumental, imbued with the different processes of mining and more spontaneous processes of ecology. This intervention, shown in Figure 10, proposes a simple long (1500 metres) straight, and seemingly monotonous walk, which transects through the irregular topography. Importantly, the walk is marked by posts, positioned at 100 metres intervals.

This marking is intended to bring attention to and intensify the scale of this landscape. In the spirit of land artists such as Richard Long, the act of walking a direct shape or sharp line operates like a ‘sculptural inscription’, focusing the walker on the ‘materiality of the earth encountered by the artist’s mobile body’ (Roelstraete, 2010, p. 14). The use of this spatial device offers visitors an experience of the ‘landscape rather than rivalling its monumental scale or altering it’ (Roelstraete, 2010, p. 18), allowing focus on the materiality, movement and time. The unexpected journey is unlike the everyday urban orderings, prompting uncertainty or perhaps elements of surprise as a new environment is understood through the visitor’s movement through the landscape (Edensor, 2005, p. 94).

Figure 10. The Perilous Walk depicting the obscure landscape of mechanical overburden dumps, reclaimed by nature. The walk is physically and mentally challenging. Photograph by author, Katherine Kok.
**Inhabiting the landscape**

Experiencing the landscape through an overnight stay provides an extremely different tourist opportunity to the day trip. Eco-style camping is generally associated with pristine bush land or national parks. There is no reason however why a former mining site cannot match the landscape experiences prized within these contexts. This proposed eco-style camping, located south of the Township Field consists of a series of elevated huts connected by board walks sited around the unusually coloured turquoise lakes. Similar to the more conventional experiences of ‘nature’ this experience shown in Figure 11, exposes the visitor to the rhythm and processes of the landscape.

Rather than viewing the monumental scale from afar, the visitor is immersed in the intricacies of the landscape offering the ability to witness their shifts, cycles and processes over the course of the day/s. Similar to the experience of Queenstown, the visitor engages directly within the mining landscape, offering the opportunity for a self-directed exploration and interpretation.

In addition to the camping facilities, an artist residency offers the potential to engage with the broader community including the resource industry. This residency, located strategically in the vicinity of the waste dump of black ash, challenges the artist to respond to landscapes of disturbance and toxicity. Similar to the mandate of LARQ, the proposal aims to provoke responses that link ‘industry, people and place’.

**Witnessing consumption**

The final intervention focuses on the Maryvale Field where enormous industrial excavators continue to extract brown coal. An elevated platform, shown in Figure 12, allows visitors to witness the mining technologies and process undertaken by the massive machines. This extraction operation will continue to shift towards the final area of excavation due to be completed by 2032. Symbolically, the platform marks a relative point to measure and comprehend the rate of consumption. Visitors act as spectators to huge volumes of earth that are continuously transported over 24 hours to the power station.

Similar to the approach of Smithson, attention is drawn to the scale and magnitude of the disturbed landscape and the monumental rate of consumption required to feed the energy demands of Victoria. The view from the platform will continue to morph into a vast industrial cavity; a space which sits uncomfortably against contemporary discourse on sustainability and climate change. This experience brings the visitor into a direct

Figure 11. Eco style camping within unusually coloured turquoise lakes, both disturbing and delightful. A lookout tower in the distance marks the original surface level prior to the discovery and exploitation of the valuable geological features. Photograph by author, Katherine Kok.
relationship with energy consumption, challenging them to consider the scale, pace and ethics of energy production.

These three interventions champion the experience of the landscape itself as a method of interpretation and education. Drawing on the techniques and practices of land art and the spatial design practices they demonstrate how the qualities of landscape and place can be revealed, heightened and isolated. These strategies differ significantly from more conventional forms of site interpretation that instead privilege textual narration. In contrast these strategies engage directly with the landscape as text.

Conclusion

Developments in tourism often emerge independently from a proven demand. Proposals can emerge from strategic initiatives such as projected economic benefits for communities or from shifts in scholarly discourse (as in the case of Geotourism). For example, the development of indigenous cultural tourism in Australia was closely linked to achieving government strategies of Aboriginal self-determinacy and economic self-sufficiency. Subsequent research however has found that many tourists do not desire a heavily interpretative or narrated experience, instead primarily seeking a direct experience of the landscape.

As the scope of Geotourism expands beyond the realm of quarries and mining sites into landscapes deemed of geological significance, it is important to acknowledge that a landscape is not a museum. This paper has argued for the ambitions of Geotourism to be critically re-evaluated in response to this expanded ambit. Through the case study of Queenstown, Tasmania we have highlighted the value of a community driven tourist strategies where creative art practices engaging with the specific qualities of place juxtapose against the opportunity for tourists to directly experience underground mining. The failure of the West Coast Wilderness Railway Experience demonstrates the difficulties of attracting sufficient tourist numbers to more remote areas, offering further support for community driven enterprises. In the second case study we speculated on the potential of creative and spatial practices to work directly with the landscape of the contemporary open cut coal mine as a mode of interpretation and education.

Both of these case studies highlight the value of mining sites as an intense experience of place, process and technology. Yet best practice tends to direct the management of these sites post-mining towards environmental remediation. Rarely in Australia are the vast mining sites scattered across the country considered as potential sites of tourism. Instead
Australian tourism favours the beauty of its natural landscape such as the vast areas of desert, rainforest wilderness and the dramatic coast lines. There is no reason why disturbed mining sites such as Queenstown and the Latrobe Valley could not offer an equally dramatic and inspiring experience of landscape. However as this paper has argued, it is essential that the strategies of Geotourism respond to these sites as complex multi-dimensional landscapes. Correspondingly, their interpretative strategies must shift from a focus on geological education to engage with broader experiential qualities of landscape.

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