

Aboriginal Darwin: A guide to exploring important sites of the past and present, by Toni Bauman. Aboriginal Studies Press, 2006. xxx, 150 pp., maps, photographs, bibliography, index. ISBN 0-85575-446-X (paperback).

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Darwin, the capital city of the Northern Territory of Australia has been described as an enclave of settled Australia in the remote north, surrounded by a hinterland of sparsely populated pastoral leases and indigenous homelands where Australian Aboriginal people remain in the majority. As in the six state capitals, settlement has displaced the original inhabitants, seemingly leaving little evidence that the city was built on the land of the Larrakia people. In addition, in recent decades as the economy has boomed the expansion of Darwin has obliterated most significant material reminders of the city's colourful history. However, despite being washed by 'the tide of history' the Darwin urban landscape is daily contested by a visible Aboriginal presence reminiscent of scenes in southern Australian cities over a century earlier.

In a more formal contestation of urban space, the remarkable revival of the dwindling Larrakia language group into an incorporated 'Larrakia Nation' with more than 1,600 members has resulted in an assertion of rights to land in and around Darwin under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* and the *Native Title Act 1993*. In keeping with the theme of dramas being played out in Darwin to varying scripts, Tina Bauman's, *Aboriginal Darwin: A guide to exploring important sites of the past and present* reads an Aboriginal presence into twenty-seven selected sites where an Aboriginal connection may not at first be obvious. As Bauman states, her aim is 'to peel back the layers of meaning and where to look to gain a better understanding of the rich heritage and complex cultures of Aboriginal people in Darwin both before and since colonisation' (p.xi).

Bauman is a social anthropologist, mediator and facilitator experienced in Australian indigenous issues who has gathered information from many sources for this guidebook, with the help of contributors Samantha Wells and Julie Wells, both Darwin historians. Bauman emphasises, 'All of Darwin is a living Aboriginal cultural landscape [with] as many ways of seeing Aboriginal Darwin as there are Aboriginal people' (p.xi). In an introduction headed, 'Aboriginal Darwin today,' the author urges the visitor to look beyond the 'romanticised stereotype of the "real" Aborigine' (p.xiv) and accept the diversity of Aboriginality, from the ten Aboriginal politicians elected to the Northern Territory Parliament since 1971 (p.63), to others who 'choose to live primarily as hunters and gatherers' (p.xiv). Included are the 'long grassers' (p.xviii), whose open air camps around Darwin may be hidden by the two-meter high spear grass that flourishes in the monsoon season. Looking beyond the tokenism of plaques and monuments, Bauman points out, 'One of the most pressing and controversial social issues in Darwin is land and housing for Aboriginal people who visit Darwin' (p.xvii).

A ten-page 'potted history' headed 'Looking back' makes clear how the Larrakia people have been affected by the establishment of a permanent settlement at Port Darwin, suffering the changing policies inflicted upon them, the upheaval of World

War II and eventually the granting of citizenship rights as ‘a frontier ethos has given way to a culture of progress and urbanisation’ (p.xxix). Absent from the overview, ‘Fighting for equal rights,’ is any specific mention of the strikes by Aboriginal labour in Darwin in the 1950s and the Union campaign following the imprisonment and exile of the strike leaders. Otherwise, the abbreviated history is expanded in detail throughout the book in the sections relating to particular sites. For example, the struggle for land rights by the Larrakia and their supporters in the 1970s is adequately covered by photographs and captions and in boxes adjoining relevant sites.

For the purpose of the guidebook, Darwin is divided into eight ‘Precincts’ with up to seven sites of interest listed in each precinct, all listed on the contents page. The location of all sites, numbered from 1 to 27, is shown on a map of the city (p.xxx) and in several detailed precinct maps throughout the book. Surprisingly, the Larrakia names for geographical features are not shown on the maps, although some names are given in the text, including a list of Larrakia words for marine resources commonly harvested from the Darwin harbour. Each precinct has a description of its location and how to get there, with access, opening times, available tours and facilities wherever these are applicable, accompanied by many and varied historical illustrations with sources acknowledged that add to the body of the text and provide an attractive and informative guide for visitors and a useful reference book for readers with an interest in indigenous affairs or Northern Australia in general.

Although few tourists would view the modern Darwin Supreme Court building, opened in 1991, as an Aboriginal site, *Aboriginal Darwin* relates the story behind the memorial of Yolngu painted coffin poles inside the building and the ‘Milky Way Dreaming’ mosaic on the ground floor to emphasise the contribution by Aboriginal people to a building that has also been the stage for the long-running Larrakia land claims (pp.65-69). However, it is difficult to view the ‘World War II Oil Storage Tunnels’ (p.21) as a significant Aboriginal site and the text does not justify it - the wartime involvement of Aboriginal people is amply described by Bauman in other more relevant sites.

Darwin offers many opportunities to participate in celebrations of Aboriginality, from barracking for the Aboriginal All Stars Australian Rules football team at Marrara Stadium (p.78) accompanied by a commentary on Radio Larrakia (p.140), to dancing to the reggae beat of an Aboriginal band on the night of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Awards held in the gardens of the NT Museum and Art Gallery (p.102). Seven pages list similar Aboriginal events and festivals in Darwin and the ‘Top End’ of the Northern Territory, including Aboriginal tour operators and Aboriginal organizations (pp.135-141). However, a more imaginative and creative writing style is required to convey the exhilarating liminal atmosphere that participants may experience at these multi-racial events, culminating in the annual celebratory ‘Festival of Darwin’ (p.33).

Visiting Aboriginal lands around Darwin requires a permit from the Northern Land Council (NLC), as described in the final section that provides the office’s address and website. However, the NLC has relocated to the CBD since the publication of *Aboriginal Darwin*, demonstrating the tendency for guide books to become dated. For example Bauman notes, ‘While many state and territory governments have apologised to the Stolen Generations for past wrongs, the Federal Government has not’ (p.121).

Another easy criticism of *Aboriginal Darwin* is that the text has been written by non-Aboriginal people, although there is obvious input from Aboriginal people, most evident in descriptions of an earlier easygoing self-help Darwin lifestyle of community dances, picnics and living off the land. Even the institution for 'half caste' children removed from their mothers is remembered for 'the camaraderie and intimacy between inmates which helped sustain them' (p.120). Only a stone monument and a park now mark the site. To ensure that *Aboriginal Darwin* lives up to its title, more should have been done to insert some of the varied Aboriginal voices by the use of transcribed commentaries. However, with the knowledge of cultural protocols and local history provided by *Aboriginal Darwin* and the courage to step beyond the limitations of an introductory guided tour, the opportunities exist in Darwin for the visitor to begin a memorable encounter with indigenous Australia.