

HUNTER-GATHERING IN THE DIGITAL WORLD TO BUILD A KEEPING PLACE FOR THE FUTURE

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ABSTRACT

How do we find and gather relevant material from the rapidly increasing digital sources found along the landscapes of the Web, other libraries, CD-ROMs etc ? And with what we have gathered to add to the AIATSIS Digital Library, how can we plan to preserve and create culturally sensitive and appropriate descriptions of our collections, for future access in our keeping place, a keeping place for all.

Apart from digitising our own collections, the AIATSIS Library has borrowed and digitised material from other libraries such as annual reports of the state government Protectors of Aborigines. A far greater challenge is in gathering relevant materials from digital libraries, from Google Books, Internet Archive and the Gutenberg Project as well as a rapidly increasing number of individual libraries.

Preserving our collections alone does not tell all the story about our keeping place – a more appropriate means of describing our collections covering the rich diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, languages and lifestyles is required. The AIATSIS Library has recently redeveloped its subject thesaurus which describes the AIATSIS collections in our Catalogue and Digital Archive.

The subject thesaurus complements the language and place thesauri – ‘pathways’ that are available to browse on the AIATSIS website. The Thesauri have been accepted internationally as an approved code by the Library of Congress and are now present in the records submitted to Libraries Australia.

...and what we gather, we share. The AIATSIS Thesauri and digitised collections are for all to use.

An Indigenous Portal – Bringing Culture Back Home and Beyond

Since submitting the abstract for this article in January 2008, events such as the 2020 Forum and new software acquired by AIATSIS, have occurred that have changed the

possibilities on the development of a national knowledge centre / keeping place. This article details some of these issues as well as within AIATSIS.

“There was general agreement that culture, art and symbols are vitally important both for preservation of culture and for recognition. To quote a report from one discussion group, ‘We know the summit will have been a success when the Prime Minister speaks an Aboriginal language in 2020’.

This quote was from the *Final Report* (1) of the Australia 2020 Summit, Chapter 7, Options for the future of Indigenous Australia. Some of the forum’s major “Ideas” were:

“7.38 Establish a National Knowledge and Cultural Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, showcasing the cultural contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Canada and New Zealand have such centres.

7.38.1 A National Knowledge Centre Network should also be established to provide support to regional knowledge centres that recognise the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and to keep and tell the story of country.

7.38.2 These centres could be linked to community hubs so that resources can be shared. Digital technology provides opportunities to make Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures part of the digital revolution by using the technology to document, record and share cultures.”

More specifically,

One group provided more detailed ideas on the regional nature of the knowledge centre proposal

- A National Indigenous Knowledge Centre Network should be established to reflect the fact that Indigenous knowledge is a great asset.
 - The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies should be used to provide support to regional knowledge centres, through a memorandum of understanding. The regional knowledge centres need to use existing facilities and have more resources invested in existing infrastructure to transform current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural centres into the future. The concept should be linked to the development of community hubs.
 - Establishment of the regional centres acknowledges that each Indigenous group and region is different and has different knowledge to preserve, share and develop into the future.
 - The centres help redress the concern that each time an elder dies part of the culture is lost.

- The regional knowledge centres should have the following characteristics:
 - be owned and operated by and employ Indigenous people, contributing to improved local employment options
 - focus on supporting and capturing regional knowledge and all Indigenous knowledge across Australia. They should not be limited just to the surface culture. It is much more than this. It is Indigenous thinking strategies, knowledge of the land, complex adaptive systems, law, and so on
 - provide a one-stop shop for teaching Indigenous children and teaching others—health workers and teachers, for example—about Aboriginal culture
 - provide a location for Aboriginal knowledge production and research by Aboriginal people
 - have two programs—one with material accessible to the general public and a second with information solely for the local Indigenous people
 - provide a social and cultural context and increase value and self-esteem
- Access to country: identify country and ensure access to country for all Indigenous groups, as in New Zealand.
- It is important to retain and regenerate language and culture by preparing books and resource materials in language for use in schools—CDs, photos, videos, and so on.

The Federal Government will respond to these ideas from the 2020 Forum in December 2008. These ideas are indicative of the consensus that is forming on the means to preserve, store and return digital copies of collections back – to communities, local Indigenous knowledge centres etc.

These are some of the issues that AIATSIS Library and Audiovisual staff have been considering. We are continuing to develop strategies to work towards these outcomes.

Background on AIATSIS

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) is the world's premier institution for information and research about the cultures and lifestyles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The Library of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, in conjunction with the collections of the Audiovisual Archives, has one of the world's premier collections of materials relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies. As a research collection, it contains both current and historical resources.

The AIATSIS Audiovisual Archive holds the world's premier collection of moving image, recorded sound and photographic materials relating to Australian Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories. Its vaults contain approximately 45,000 hours of recorded sound, 650,000 photographic images, 6000 video titles, 1000 artefacts and approximately 6 1/2 million feet of motion picture film.

The majority of the items held in the Audiovisual Archive represent the primary results of field research funded by the AIATSIS Research Grants Program as well as historical and contemporary items which have been deposited by individuals, families or organisations for safe-keeping and appropriate access. The material is unique and irreplaceable and provides an invaluable link between past, present and future generations of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

It is the audiovisual collections that contain both the “at risk” materials and where hardware and format obsolescence heightens the need to digitise.

AIATSIS Digital Archive

AIATSIS is a national Indigenous knowledge centre. One of our roles is to be a backup for collections that have their home in many areas around Australia. In the longer term, our digital archive will be able to be accessed remotely by communities with prescribed access to their material or through interfaces such as *Ara Irititja*.

AIATSIS is building a digital archive containing:

- Collections of the Audiovisual Archives, initially focusing on at risk audio tapes, photographs, film, video
- The Library’s public digitisation and online exhibitions
- Physical digital collections – CD-ROMs etc
- Copyright free digital material gathered from Google Books, Project Gutenberg, Internet Archive etc

AIATSIS Collections – Challenges

- Substantial parts of the AIATSIS audiovisual collections are not open to the public for cultural or personal reasons,
- There is much unidentified audiovisual material that can’t yet be made available until it can be identified which can take substantial time to research,
- Intellectual property of collections – moral versus legal and the risk management of these issues to assist communities.

Return of Collections

The Audiovisual Archive has visited communities at Cherbourg, Palm Island, Fitzroy Crossing and Brewarrina. Through these visits, they have developed protocols for engaging with Indigenous communities and access to materials. The Archive have also

run *Keeping your history alive* workshops – for training communities in information and advice concerning the care and handling of audiovisual material.

Building a virtual national Keeping Place - Indigenous Collections across Australia

Collections of materials owned or created by and about Indigenous peoples are held at AIATSIS and other libraries, archives, museums all over Australia, often far from their place of origin. These comprise photographs and films of people, community, family; recordings of the sounds of language, story, song and ritual. Other components are publications and manuscripts of anthropologists, linguists, and other disciplines.

The traditional view of collections is that they remain in the library/archive which holds them, but this is changing with digitisation for many libraries and archives.

Much of this invaluable cultural heritage can be brought back home digitally – appropriately and sensitively as required to Indigenous people living in communities and away from country, and where appropriate to schools and the general public etc.

AIATSIS is implementing innovative strategies in creating a digital “keeping place” in assisting especially remote clients and providing support to other libraries and their researchers. One of our roles will be serving as a backup for collections which originate in many areas around Australia.

Many Ways to Bring Culture Back Home

Visits to communities are important for collecting agencies to engage with communities, build relationships, show their collections and provide copies for IKCs, keeping places and individuals. Unfortunately, it is neither practicable nor possible to visit all Indigenous communities. A coordinated national approach with the cooperation of national and state libraries / archives is required.

There is presently no overall strategy or responsibility for a whole of government approach to the preservation, access and return of Indigenous cultural heritage. This is the primary task proposed by the 2020 Forum on Indigenous Futures.

Whatever outcomes flow from this, there are already delivery mechanisms in place and it is essential that as much flexibility be factored in to suit the needs of communities.

Standards

Strict adherence to technical standards is a core requirement to maintain Indigenous cultural heritage (and indeed, all) into the future, where regular cycles of reformatting appear inevitable.

AIATSIS has also meticulously followed standards in metadata, file formats to be able work with other collecting agencies and deliver material to *Ara Irititja*. It is essential to have a pathway to the future whatever hardware, software, metadata or file formats we use now and beyond.

Ara Irititja / Our Story

The Northern Territory Library (NTL) provides public library services to remote communities through their Libraries and Knowledge Centres (LKC) Program. This program was developed in response to requests from Indigenous communities, who wanted assistance to preserve their cultural heritage and provide appropriate access to it. Each of the thirteen LKCs has its own *Our Story* database, which enables the community to establish a unique digital collection of local knowledge by creating, adding and repatriating content related to their own culture and history.

Our Story uses the *Ara Irititja* software, developed specifically for Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara communities in Central Australia. An important feature of the database is the ability to restrict access to individual items to cater for cultural sensitivities. Parts of the database can be customised to reflect local names and language/s.

The *Ara Irititja* software is undergoing a major redevelopment and will include many new technologies. This redevelopment will ensure that *Ara Irititja* is one of the most advanced and suitable products for the management of Indigenous community digital heritage.

The existing and potential growth in the use of *Ara Irititja* means that it will be one of many conduits for AIATSIS and other cultural collecting agencies to deliver digital content to communities.

Finding the Collections

One of the major issues is how communities and individuals can find out where collections are held and how they may be accessed. Collections are held in federal, state and local government funded libraries, archives, museums and other collecting agencies all around Australia.

Existing resources such as Libraries Australia, RAAM etc can be of some help, but they do not provide the detail or the ease of discovery required. This is a major issue that needs to be addressed.

Other relevant issues

- Rights management – substantial work needs to be done to determine ownership to correctly return materials,
- Interconnection with Federal Government broadband initiatives to remote areas,
- Education and employment for Indigenous community officers to support these initiatives.

AIATSIS Thesauri – Describing Indigenous Collections

To pay due respect to Indigenous collections, it is essential that they are more appropriately described than the standard tools of libraries and archives allow.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library and Information Research Network (ATSILIRN) Protocols recommend for the Description and Classification of Materials, that:

- Develop, implement and use a national thesaurus for describing documentation relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and issues.
- Develop and use subject headings and guidelines for archival description which are sensitive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and which promote effective retrieval.
- Improve access by the introduction of classificatory systems which describe items by their geographic, language and cultural identifiers.

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) has made the AIATSIS Thesauri available on its website. It must be added that they are intended to be used alongside any local descriptions that communities, libraries etc may wish to use.

The three AIATSIS thesauri contain headings for language groups and peoples, subjects relating to Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies, and place names. These headings are used to describe items held in Mura®, the AIATSIS Collections Catalogue.

AIATSIS recognises the need for libraries and other collecting agencies to use more appropriate headings to catalogue Indigenous collections. The thesauri will also be useful for Indigenous knowledge centres and keeping places. The thesauri will be regularly updated and can be downloaded in PDF format.

All three thesauri have now been approved by the Library of Congress for use in catalogue records internationally. The Library will now make the majority of its catalogue records available on Libraries Australia and internationally on WorldCat, raising the awareness of the AIATSIS Library and its collections.

AIATSIS Library has used the Multites web server so the thesauri are interactive with our online catalogue, so that once a term is selected the user can select the item type (Books, manuscripts, Pictorial etc), and a search of the catalogue is automatically made.

The AIATSIS Thesauri is available at <http://www1.aiatsis.gov.au/thesaurus/>

From Catalogues to Discovery Tools

Many library catalogue interfaces have not kept up to date. Few offer web 2.0 features or readily access digital resources. Clients prefer a discovery model that provides a more enjoyable and helpful experience reflecting the other web resources that they have become accustomed to using. There are now “bolt-on” interfaces created in response, which are incorporating many of these features

AIATSIS has chosen Primo Direct from Ex Libris as its Discovery and Search Tool This will allow clients to go beyond our existing catalogue to access open digital resources, finding aids, publications and items gathered from other digital resources

Of equal importance is that Primo will support a consortium model which will provide options for a joint digital archive where the AIATSIS Thesauri can be used to describe the collections.

Other Related Developments

The AIATSIS Library is beginning to investigate the possibility of browsing our collections through map interfaces. The AIATSIS Language/People and Place Thesauri have the 250,000 scale map grid references in all terms.

Should this be possible to achieve, we will be able to provide a map browsing facility which will greatly assist with finding our collections by place. The combination of browsing by map area and the use of faceting of metadata is a powerful tool to discover the AIATSIS collections. It will enable communities to easily find out what AIATSIS collections relate to a particular area. The value of this will be increased with the Primo interface if other libraries and archives add their holdings using the AIATSIS Thesaurus terms.

Additionally, with the Primo interface, individuals will be able to tag and add comments relating to the collections, further adding value.

Conclusion

Whilst there are many uncertainties in the issues discussed in this article, it is clear that the work in AIATSIS to develop its digital archive and plan for the best means of digital repatriation has achieved initial momentum. The redevelopment of *Ara Irititja* is

equally promising as an invaluable means to deliver digitised collections of interest to many communities.

I look forward to writing further on these issues as developments unfold. The value of returning the photographs, film, music – the culture to communities and individuals can never be over-estimated.

References

1. Australia 2020 Summit. *Final Report*. Canberra, Dept. of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2008.
www.australia2020.gov.au/docs/final_report/2020_summit_report_full.pdf

BIOGRAPHY

Rod Stroud is the AIATSIS Library Director. Rod has worked in the AIATSIS Library since 2001 as Client Services Manager and has been involved with the Family History Unit and information services to the public. He is particularly interested in improving access to remote clients and building stronger links amongst relevant record-holding organisations.

Rod previously worked since 1975 in the National Library, mainly in information services, concentrating on family history and later on with online services and the web.