



Carol Pamkal and Marlene Lee from Manyallaluk. Credit: WAC-10

A review of the 10th World Archaeological Congress, held on the unceded lands of the Larrakia Nation, Darwin, Australia

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Logo designed by June Mills, as per the WAC-10 website. Credit: WAC-10

The World Archaeological Congress, first convened in 1986 in Southampton, UK, has always had a driving vision to explicitly recognise the historical and social role and the political context of archaeological enquiry. Having just returned from the 10th Congress, held on the unceded ancestral lands of the Larrakia Nation in Darwin, Australia, it is clear this vision still stands true.

The tone was set from the beginning by WAC President Koji Mizoguchi, who called for archaeologists to 'seize the unprecedented challenges before us – global change, climate change, wars, hatred, discriminations and socio-cultural injustices – with resilience and resolve'. He went on to say that by using the 'transformative potential of archaeologies transcending boundaries' we can create a 'more just, equal and sustainable world'.

This strong and hopeful message ran loud and clear through many of the 175 (!) sessions and the five keynote and plenary addresses. As archaeologists, it is often

difficult to lift our heads from the trenches and see how what we are doing can help to build a better world. The transformative power of archaeology was very well illustrated in a session convened by Dr Paul Everill, from the University of Winchester, on the AMPHORA guidelines (<https://www.solent.ac.uk/research-innovation-enterprise/research-at-solent/projects-and-awards/documents/amphora-guidelines-social-prescribers.pdf>) and wellbeing in archaeology. The session highlighted several projects across the world, including Wessex Archaeology's own heritage inclusion project at Erlestoke

prison, which are using archaeology to engage with marginalised communities. It included a contribution from a Ukrainian colleague, Dr Sergiy Taranenko, who is using the guidelines in their *Spiritual Restoration through Culture* project, an initiative for currently serving military personnel and their families to improve their wellbeing by using heritage crafts and archaeology to 'reset emotionally'.

Several sessions focused on the effects of climate change on archaeological deposits, both in the past and now. Forestry England's presentation by Lawrence Shaw advocated for an integrated approach



Stu Eve and Leigh Chalmers present on *Digging for Erlestoke* at WAC-10. Credit: Wessex Archaeology

between environmental and heritage sciences. He highlighted how forests are not only rich ecological systems but also layered cultural landscapes, with stories beneath the trees embedded in their land management practices.

Professor Anabel Ford of University of California Santa Barbara stressed the importance of projects being worked on and led by indigenous communities, showing results from her joint project with the Maya Forest Gardeners where the modern indigenous practice of forest gardening (polyculture farming that works with the cycles of nature) directly informs and predicts the archaeological record. Sander Aerts of Wessex Archaeology presented a notable paper on the practice of heritage-led nature recovery, demonstrating how the study of past landscapes can reveal how ecosystems have responded to human activity over time. This knowledge can be used to support adaptive strategies for habitat restoration, biodiversity conservation and sustainable land use. This approach is particularly pertinent to the UK. Many schemes using the Biodiversity Net Gain framework are taking place with little to no consideration of archaeological deposits or how the nature recovery work could be informed by past landscapes.

For me, Professor Kisha Supernant of the University of Alberta's keynote entitled 'Indigenous Archaeology as Restorative Justice' was a powerful reminder of just how far we have to go. Using examples from her own work locating the unmarked graves of indigenous children who died in

the residential school system in Canada, she explored the extractive and colonial nature of the practice of archaeology both *on* and *of* indigenous communities. Her work was especially apposite for WAC in Australia, as many other presentations throughout the week explored the 'Stolen Generation' – Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children removed from their families in the 20th century. As a response to researching these historic events, Supernant called for the introduction of an 'Archaeology of the Heart'. This is drawn from various strands of archaeology and other disciplines and is intended to speak to the whole person – our intellectual, emotional, spiritual and physical selves. It aims to centre the heart in our modes of practice, through how we relate to one another as people – our students, other archaeologists, community members and diverse publics. It is an archaeology of caring and compassion that sits alongside the objective scientific lens of our method and technology.

As befits the overall vision of WAC, many of the sessions were thought-provoking and challenging and, in some cases, incredibly moving, but I left Darwin inspired and with a hopeful heart. The world of today is often overwhelming: conflict, climate change and wealth inequality all contribute to that feeling of helplessness. But the spirit of WAC and the collective power of the delegates and their work reinforced the words of Mizoguchi – that we all need to embrace the transformative power of archaeology and we can all use it to help build a better world.



WAC President Koji Mizoguchi at the Opening Ceremony. Credit: WAC-10

'... we all need to embrace the transformative power of archaeology and we can all use it to help build a better world.'

WAC President Koji Mizoguchi



Stu Eve

Stu is the Chief Executive of Wessex Archaeology. With more than 25 years of experience developing archaeological and heritage practices in the UK and internationally, Stu is an innovative leader with a focus on collaboration and creativity. Stu's specialist area of expertise is digital applications for archaeology.