

## Fujisan World Heritage Site

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Fujisan World Heritage site was only inscribed on the World Heritage List in June 2013 only nine months before our visit on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2014. It had been first listed on Japan's indicative World Heritage List since 2006. It is a site that straddle two prefectures and is inscribed as meeting two cultural criteria in its OUV: *Criterion (iii) A unique testimony of "Fujisan worship" cultural tradition. And Criterion (vi) Directly or tangibly associated with artistic works of outstanding universal significance.*

The fact that at 3776 metres it is the highest mountain in Japan or that it has a fascinating and well documented volcanic history or that it contains some significant natural values didn't measure up. In fact this detail doesn't even rate a mention in the brochure.

On our arrival we inspected the Visitor Centre for Fujisan which was still wearing lots of snow from the heaviest snowfall in history (1.5 metres) just 10 days earlier. We were not to know that within hours of our visit another 40 cms of snow would be dumped there.

What was most impressive was the appreciation and presentation of the OUV. An interpretation officer found us and gave us an 8 page leaflet that focuses so aptly on the OUV with Page 1 "Fujisan, sacred place and source of artistic inspiration"; Page 2 "Fujisan and religious Beliefs; Page 3 Fujisan and Art"; and Page 4 "Passing Fujisan on to the Future". A selection of photos taken in the Visitor Centre illustrate the degree to which the theme has been pursued can be seen by Googling John Sinclair Picasa and looking at the "Fujisan" album.

The OUV theme ran all through the Visitor Centre, in all of the displays, in the galleries and in the interpretive video on arrival. When we signed the Visitors Book at about the middle of the day there had already been over 500 visitors through the centre

that day. Most were on tours with busloads who remained for only about 30 minute or so but it was enough to see the impressive video and go away with a better understanding of the site's OUV.

What was particularly impressive was the strong focus on the aesthetic inspiration from Mt Fuji in all art forms. This made for a very attractive displays of art. A selection of photos taken in the Visitor Centre illustrate the degree to which the theme has been pursued can be seen by Googling John Sinclair Picasa and looking at the "Fujisan" album.



### The emphasis on Fujisan's aesthetic values was impressive

The inscribed World Heritage site has several components and these are described on the inside four pages of the leaflet. They include the various walking trails used by the 100,000 climbers who annually ascend the mountain between 1<sup>st</sup> July and 30<sup>th</sup> September because this is part of the religious significance as are the temples and shrines along the route. The summit is of special significance. The lakes encircling the base are inscribed as is a waterfall. The surprising inclusion is a pine tree grove on the coast and far removed from Mount Fuji but from where Mt Fuji is very visible and this has inspired many artists and poets.

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**Visitor Centres:** What was amazing was that the officer responsible for interpretation and visitor information advised that this Visitor Centre that pre-existed the World Heritage declaration is to be replaced within three years by a bigger and grander purpose built Visitor Centre to be provided jointly by the two prefectures (state governments). Based on our experience with other Japanese Visitor Centres this will be an impressive building as well as an incredible display. Having seen Visitor Centres at other Japanese World Heritage sites from Yakushima to Shiretoko (See my 2011 & 2012 reports) I can envisage the excellence of the interpretation to come. Given that the nearest thing that there is to a Visitor Centre to Fraser Island is the Discovery Centre at Hervey Bay and that the current presentation of Fraser Island's World Heritage OUV leaves a great deal to be improved on, these words made me wonder, "If the Japanese can see such benefits in presenting the OUV why are Australian authorities so parsimonious when it comes to presentation of World Heritage values?"

**The role of volunteers:** We quizzed the bilingual interpretation office who had been to several Australian World Heritage sites including Uluru and the Great Barrier Reef about the role of volunteers. He shared his office with Rangers and Volunteers. There are about 30 volunteers who work from the Visitor Centre. These mainly assist as guides to the centre and with interpretation and administration. Many other volunteers are recruited to help with other aspects of management including litter and weed control. There is now an awareness of a new weed, a pernicious vine that is new to the area mainly around the lakeside. Alas as the snow was being scraped from the roads and carried off to be dumped the weed seed is destined to be spread far and wide making control more difficult.

**Community support:** We sought information on community engagement in the area's management but although there was trouble in interpretation there was clear evidence of the measures taken to gain maximum community support. This was evident in the "Thanks" posters that had been especially produced and were seen in many places. There were an amazing was the number of posters stating in both Japanese and English, "*Thank you for supporting the recognition of Fujisan as a world cultural heritage site*". In doing so they were not only thanking the community but are able to raise community awareness of the OUV.



These were the five different posters produced and still being widely displayed throughout the Fujisan area.



Even the Railway Station carried a banner of support



One of the four posters produced and widely distributed and displayed thanking the community for its support.

The proximity of the Highlands theme park so close to the Kawaguchiko Visitor Centre is a bit off-putting. This Dreamworld clone rises high above the landscape but if the riders of the roller coaster can think above the white knuckles and screams they would have a magnificent view of Mount Fuji if it isn't clouded in as it was for most of the day we were there. Fortunately we did experience some breaks in the clouds to capture some photos.

I went to the Mt Fuji area as a curious tourist and because it was recently added to the World Heritage cultural heritage list. I hadn't anticipated that it would yield as much inspiration for the presentation of the World Heritage values when we were there out of season and superficially it seems to have little relevance to Fraser Island. However there is much we can learn from this and other Japanese sites in the presentation of the OUV of World Heritage sites.



## Ogasawara World Heritage Natural Site

Few westerners seem to go to this World Heritage archipelago. I was the only westerner amongst the 500 on the boat and I saw fewer than five others during the two full days and two half days touring around the islands. It was a 25 hour voyage each way by a 6,000 ship, Ogasawara Maru, Two full days and two half days from 6<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> March 20124 exploring the World Heritage values of these islands that have so many parallels with Lord Howe Island even to latitude and geology.

Like Fujisan the islands OUV is much more strongly communicated as is the model of behavior such as the compulsory quarantine measures before anyone boards the *Ogasawara Maru* or steps ashore. Since ships are the only way of reaching these islands and they are 1,000 kilometres south of Tokyo quarantine is much easier to apply. Sadly though the quarantine measures are being applied a little too late because the islands have been over-run by a variety of weeds and introduced animals and pathogens. Luckily not every island has been impacted and some are free of rats and others free of cane toads and cats. Others escaped the depredations of goats and pigs so quarantine is applied to movements between the island and even within them. For example, to enter a sanctuary on the worst affected island, Chichijima, we had to be cleaned of any possible weed seeds that may have been lurking in our clothing. They don't want to add to the problems in areas where they don't exist.

The variety of weeds is also daunting. One of the worst introduced weeds is *Casuarina equisetifolia*. This was originally brought in to grow as a fuel wood but it now forms dense forests from the outer margins of the island to the mountain tops. It isn't intruding much on natural forests but the Pine trees have intruded and these are being progressively removed in the most sensitive area. Of the herbaceous weeds many are familiar to us on Fraser Island such as cliveas and Mother-in-Laws tongues, some of our worst weeds such as Asparagus ferns, Coral Creeper and Abrus don't appear to be here yet.

The number of weeds would seem incompatible with World Heritage values but the worst infestations are in

the settlement areas that are not in the World Heritage area. Further because Ogasawara is included in the Tokyo Prefecture, there are huge resources being applied to controlling the problem.

The OUV though is being communicated in almost every way from the promotion and advertising for the islands to the markers in the street, the logo for the island and the guides and tour operators. It is remarkable that the OUV is now so well expressed that snails (300 different endemic species have evolved on Ogasawara) are treated as icons and the public seems to view these creatures with the same affection and interest as Fraser Island visitors regard dingoes and understand the management measures being undertaken to protect them. Admittedly the endemic bird species are high on the list of visitor interest as are the number of endemic plants.



### World Heritage OUV

The Islands are inscribed under **Criteria (ix) Ecosystems**. Cited for “*Remarkably high rate of endemic species and ongoing evolutionary process on the oceanic islands ... Oceanic islands: Islands that have never been connected to a continent.*”

The short statement reads:

#### ***A Treasure Trove of Endemic Species.***

*The Ogasawara Islands are located about 1,000 km away from Tokyo to the south. They consist of islands that are surrounded by vertical cliffs and ocean whose beautiful color is referred to as "Bonin Blue". Since the islands have never bordered a continent in their history, the wildlife species found in Ogasawara are the descendents of animals and plants that arrived there by chance. Some were carried by birds or the wind, while others were washed up by ocean currents or clung to driftwood. Those species have survived by adapting themselves to the environment of the islands. They then became established on the islands and evolved in their own unique ways in a long period of time within an environment far separated from the mainland. As a result, this led to the occurrence of many endemic species which are not to be seen anywhere else, such as Melastoma tetramerum and Hemicordulia ogasawarensis. Roughly 40% of the vascular plants, about 25% of the insects, and more than 90% of the land snails (roughly 100 species) are endemic to Ogasawara.*

#### ***Ongoing Evolutionary Process***

*The evolutionary process on the Ogasawara Islands is presently ongoing. The land snails and plants in*

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*particular have repeatedly undergone speciation by changing their morphology in accordance with their environment. This type of evolutionary process is called "adaptive radiation." What is more, important examples that suggest mechanisms whereby species adapting from the ocean to the land can also be observed. As an example, Stenomelania boninensis is thought to have expanded their habitats in coastal to brackish water and then on to purely freshwater environments.*

As an example of management we could only visit particular areas accompanied by an accredited guide. Our guide was Hiro. I noted in my diary:

*Hiro took us to the northern and most pristine part of the island pointing out a variety of endemic plants. We recognized some related to Australian species such as an endemic Eleocharis, Cyathea and an endemic Freycinetia. I was amazed by the almost over-the-top quarantine precautions we had to undergo to get into the special pristine area where all tourists had to be accompanied by guides. The soles of our boots had to be sprayed with vinegar and our external clothes-roller over by a sort of flypaper that was designed to extract any seeds adhering to our clothing. Then we had to place a special coloured stone into a tin to indicate that we were taking a particular route. However this very simple pattern was able to provide a vast amount of information on the patterns of recreation and usage of this particularly attractive Sanctuary managed by the Forestry Department although with significant volunteer assistance.*

*The area was fenced to keep out goats that targeted some of the rare endemics like ground orchids and cats that were predators on the rare Wood Pigeon. Pigeon numbers are reported to be down to 100 but they are confident that they are starting to get on top of the problem.*

Another example of Quarantine was noted in my diary: *We had been told that Hahajima had escaped most of the invaders that have infested Chichijima. The worst of the detrimental introductions to Chichijima apparently has been a fusarium fungus that has decimated the snail populations. Given that snails are to Ogasawara what finches and tortoises are to the Galapagos in their diversity and speciation (with over 300 species for the archipelago) this has been a tragedy for the study of evolutionary biology. Since this fusarium isn't on Hahajima stringent efforts are being made to quarantine the island. We all had to walk across a foot wash of sea water. There was a ranger on hand who ordered anyone with any mud on their boots to scrub them clean before they could board the ship.*

### Impressions

Despite the very obvious intrusion of weeds the underlying World Heritage OUV was still incredibly

strong. The Ogasawara islands have more endemic species than the Galapagos Islands although the latter are more famous because of their association with Charles Darwin. While Ogasawara is sometimes known as the Galapagos of Asia because of the extent of the evolution that has taken place the reality is that it is understated.

The thing which most impressed me is how successfully Ogasawara has promoted its OUV. A large part of this was how it started delivering the messages about the OUV before anyone got there and when the 360,000 visitors did arrive after the 26 hour ship voyage there were many innovative ways with which the OUV was sold. They have been able to promote snails from their lowly public perception to having iconic status on Ogasawara. That has involved clever and innovative marketing and promotion.



This logo was developed by the Chamber of Commerce and Tourism and featured widely on badges, publications, posters and banners around the island.



Footpath inlays & access hole covers describe OUV