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Article: Developing the Australian Survey of Sculpture, Monuments and Outdoor Cultural Material

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## **DEVELOPING THE AUSTRALIAN SURVEY OF SCULPTURE, MONUMENTS AND OUTDOOR CULTURAL MATERIAL**

Donna Midwinter

In 1990, when I last had the opportunity to attend the American Institute for Conservation Annual Meeting, the acronym SMOCM did not exist. At that time the Australian Survey of Sculpture, Monuments and Outdoor Cultural Material (SMOCM) was in its embryonic stage.

A small dedicated group of conservators who recognized their common interest in outdoor monuments was beginning to meet to discuss relevant conservation issues.

Over the subsequent six years this small group of a dozen or so conservators has grown remarkably. We registered ourselves as a special interest group of the Australian Institute for Conservation of Cultural Material (AICCM) in 1990. Now SMOCM has a small operating budget, enabling us to communicate regularly with 1000 people throughout Australia via our quarterly newsletter.

Our main target group for promoting awareness of outdoor sculpture remains the local councils (municipal governments), as they are the custodians of most outdoor heritage items. Under the Australian Heritage Act of 1977 the local councils are responsible for maintaining a register of heritage items. Hence a venture similar to your Save Outdoor Sculpture! (SOS!) has been created and is gaining momentum across Australia.

The development of a strong conservation network through SMOCM has provided a tremendous forum for sharing ideas. At meetings we have discussed a variety of conservation issues, including identification of materials; the historic and artistic significance of sculptures and monuments; processes of manufacture; causes of deterioration and treatment materials and techniques.

In order to cover all this ground, we have sought advice from other professionals and craftspeople such as architects, archaeologists, curators, artists, engineers, scientists, plumbers and founders.

Custodians of outdoor heritage collections now seek our advice regarding care of their material. This demonstrates that the care of outdoor collections is being viewed as a responsibility warranting professional attention.

The aspirations of conservators interested in outdoor collections has grown and evolved to the point where we are now embarking on a national program to create an Australian database of outdoor sculpture and monuments. Project coordinators are employed in New South Wales and Victoria. Pilot projects have been completed and data, including images and maps, are being entered on computer. A quarterly newsletter is being produced called *Monumental Trackings*. Volunteers are being taught to carry out survey work and we will soon be running

workshops for councils that have already completed their surveys. The workshops will address management issues for outdoor collections.

I would like to thank Susan Nichols, Director of Save Outdoor Sculpture! She visited Australia in 1994 and acted as a catalyst for the development of the Australian survey of SMOCM. Through Susan's enthusiastic description of SOS!, Australian conservators were able to visualize the many benefits of such a project.

The SOS! project has provided ongoing inspiration for me. I recommend that you find out more about the SOS! survey in your area, and get involved. The networking possibilities in your community, across the country and as far away as Australia are enormous.

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