A Training Manual for UNESCO-LNTA-DoIC Guide Training Workshop at the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape, Lao PDR

Cultural Heritage Specialist Guide Training and Certification Programme for UNESCO World Heritage Sites (Site-Specific Module)
Cultural Heritage Specialist Guides Training and Certification Programme for UNESCO World Heritage Sites

(Site-Specific Module)

A Training Manual for UNESCAP-LNTA-DolC Guide Training Workshop at the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape, Lao PDR


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For their kind assistance.

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### Unit 1
Becoming a UNESCO Cultural Heritage Specialist Guide at the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape

#### Learning Objectives
This Unit is designed to provide you with an understanding of:
- How tourism currently operates at the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape
- What are some of the challenges and issues in cultural heritage tourism at the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape
- What a cultural heritage specialist guide can do

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This Unit is organised as follows:
1.1 Introduction
1.2 Tourism overview
1.3 Challenges and issues
1.4 The role of the Cultural Heritage specialist guide
1.5 Unit summary and structure of training manual

#### Unit References
- Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape Heritage Management Plan
- Tourism Department annual tourism information 2008
- Lao National Tourism Authority website: http://www.tourismlaos.gov.la/
- Lao PDR, National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy
- Pond 1993
- Black et al. 2001 cited in Dioko and Urukul, 2005
1.1 Introduction

Tourism is a major contributor to the national income (7-9 per cent of GDP) and employment of the Lao PDR. Tourism requires many workers and contributes directly to reducing poverty. This is recognized by the Lao Government in its national tourism strategy, which favours pro-poor, community-based tourism development and identifies tourism as an important economic sector for growth. There has been an increased interest in cultural heritage conservation. Local communities are also becoming more interested in learning how they can be involved in both the protection and promotion of cultural heritage sites. The inscription of Laotian cultural sites such as the town of Luang Prabang and Vat Phou, Champassak on the World Heritage List have contributed to the increase of tourism to the Lao PDR. The management challenges and tourism impacts in Vat Phou and Luang Prabang show that a balanced approach to tourism, heritage conservation and local community involvement is necessary to achieve sustainability.

The role of Cultural Heritage Specialist Guides is an important one. A guide’s actions and behaviour directly affects the experience of tourists. A guide has the opportunity to influence tourist behaviour and promote interactions between the tourists, heritage site and local community to the benefit of all three.

This Unit will introduce you to tourism at the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape (which will be described in this document as the ‘Plain of Jars’). The Plain of Jars is in the process of being nominated for inscription as a World Heritage site as soon as 2011.

The first section of this Unit will provide an overview of the important role of tourism in the Lao PDR and in Xieng Khouang. It will also introduce the concept of ‘sustainable tourism’, and explain why tourism needs to support the local economy.

The second section of this Unit will look at some of the challenges and issues in cultural heritage tourism, including the importance of conservation. In this section we look at how tourism can have a positive effect on the conservation of the property and encourage the local community to value its heritage features. It will also consider how limits on tourism and tourist behaviour are important to long term conservation of the heritage features that tourists want to see. In the third section,
we explore the role of Cultural Heritage Specialist Guides at the Plain of Jars. Finally, we summarise the Unit and discuss the structure of the training manual.

1.2 Tourism overview

Tourism is one of the Laotian economy’s major areas of growth and one of the most important economic areas. It is the second largest source of money into the Lao PDR after mineral exports. It is also of increasing importance to the economy of Xieng Khouang Province. Xieng Khouang’s socio-economic development strategy describes tourism as the second most important economic sector after raising animals.

In 2007, Lao PDR welcomed more than 1.6 million international tourists, with more than 70% coming from neighbouring countries. The Lao PDR’s main tourism assets are its rich natural and cultural heritage, including a network of 20 National Protected Areas and 49 officially recognized ethnic groups. Since the Government began opening the country to international tourism in the early 1990’s, average annual growth in the number of arrivals has been higher than 25%.

The Government’s National Tourism Strategy to 2020 sees culture and nature-based tourism as a tool to:

- reduce poverty and promote heritage protection;
- increase employment opportunities;
- strengthen human resources in the tourism sector; and
- reduce the negative effects of tourism.

In Xieng Khouang, the official number of domestic and international visitors in 2008 is 22,729 but in reality as many as 40,000 may have visited. The average tourist stays for 2 days and spends US$ 36 a day. This brings US$1.6 to $2.8 million revenue into the province. The jar sites are the main attraction in Xieng Khouang followed by Indochina War sites. However, visitor surveys indicate that heritage sites, ethnic groups and trekking are the main areas of interest. While most tourists would like one or two day visits, 16% indicated that they would prefer a stay of 4 days or more.

In the past, difficult overland access to the province and security concerns resulted in inconsistent numbers of tourists. Over the past five years arrival numbers have been steadily increasing. Tourist facilities at the major attractions are still limited, although the numbers of accommodation establishments have increased from 13 in 2001 to more than 57 in 2008 (with 615 rooms).

The tourism office in Xieng Khouang became a
Department in 2008 and increased its staffing and funding. The Department employs 20 staff, of which 5 are women and one is from an ethnic minority. The Department is in progress of establishing sub-units responsible for eco-tourism, marketing, etc.

Xieng Khouang counts nine private tour operators:

- Sousath Travel
- Interlao Travel
- Indochina
- Lao Travel Service
- Natural Travel
- Diethelm Travel
- Lao Youth Travel
- Amazing Travel
- Lane Xang Travel

These companies provide transport and guiding services, and other services upon demand. Their customers usually do not book prior to their visit. The most popular tours are jar sites 1-3 and the Old Capital of Xieng Khouang. Each tour company reports that it has a number of guides employed as regular staff, and employs freelance guides in the high season or when special services are required. As of 2008, 38 guides are working in Xieng Khouang. Of these guides, 18 have been trained nationally, 20 were trained by the province, only 7 are female and 11 are from an ethnic minority group. More recently, 74 villagers have received training for village guiding, including 57 men and 17 women. A third of trained village guides are from ethnic minority groups, and a quarter of these are women.

1.3 Challenges and issues for cultural heritage tourism in a developing rural province

There are a number of challenges and issues in Xieng Khouang which affect the Plain of Jars and its potential for tourism development. These include personal safety and security, pressures on the stone jars and buried archaeology, environmental pressures including future infrastructure development, increases in tourism, and increased agricultural production and land usage.
One of the main risks to safety and security in Xieng Khouang is UXO. The intense bombing that took place in the region during Second Indochina War (1965 – 1975) involved 580,000 bombing missions over Laos, dropping nearly 2 millions tones of ordnance. Xieng Khouang was the second most affected province in Laos. Nearly one-third of the ordnance did not explode and lies on or near the surface. This high level of UXO contamination is a serious threat to the personal safety of residents and visitors. It is also a challenge to the socio-economic development of Xieng Khouang Province. The UNESCO-Lao Safeguarding the Plain of Jars project is combining the removal of UXO with archaeological exploration to provide safety for visitors and to record the archaeological story during UXO clearance. This is known as ‘archaeo-demining’. UNESCO recognises that UXO must be removed prior to tourism development. The tourism sector is sensitive to dangers to human health. A UXO accident involving a tourist would severely impact on the region’s tourism development.

Exercise 1.1: Identifying and meeting challenges as a Cultural Heritage Specialist Guide at the Plain of Jars

Before going any further, you might like to ask yourself the following two questions:

- What do you think are some of the challenges in developing cultural heritage tourism in Xieng Khouang?
  - to conserving the jars
  - for communities
  - to tourism itself

- What can you, as a future Cultural Heritage Specialist Guide, do to ensure that tourism helps to meet these challenges?

You may be interested in writing down your answers now, and comparing them with your answers after finishing this module, to see how they change.
Pressures on stone jars and buried archaeology

There has been a long history of neglect and damage to the jars. This has often been caused by a lack of awareness of the jars’ significance. In some cases this arose from the local people’s attempted re-use of the jars, for example for cooking or as animal drinking troughs. In other cases, it was from intentional damage, often caused by outsiders, such as the Chinese Haw or from ordnance dropped during the Second Indochina War. Another cause of damage is farming, for example, when slash and burn techniques and ploughing are used to make a farming area larger, or when cattle are permitted to graze near jars. With increased tourism, tourists themselves are another source of damage. This could be through accidental damage and wearing down the jars through contact, or through intentional theft or damage. Additionally, with time comes erosion of the stone caused by natural forces such as wind and rain. Many of these factors, including theft, erosion and agriculture may also cause damage to buried archaeological artefacts. Archaeological artefacts are often located in remote locations and more difficult for the Government to monitor.

Environmental and development pressures

Xieng Khouang is one of the least developed provinces in the Lao PDR. Attempts are being made to improve basic infrastructure including building roads, dams and generating electricity to improve the livelihoods of communities and to promote economic development. However, the need for infrastructure often does not take into account cultural heritage. Several jar sites have been affected by roads. Other activities which may have a negative effect on the environment and the jars include mining, through both the direct effects of mines and indirect effects (for example increased road construction for transport access to mines); slash-and-burn agriculture (through burning); and logging (which increases the risk of erosion).

Tourism pressures

If developed unsustainably, poorly planned tourism and inappropriate infrastructure will destroy the valuable and unique character of the Plain of Jars. This may result in fewer economic and educational opportunities for future generations. It is therefore important that both heritage managers and people in the tourism industry (including
Cultural Heritage Specialist Guides) support infrastructure that is properly located and developed in a sustainable way. This means supporting roads, accommodation establishments and retail shops that do not diminish the visual appearance or condition of the Plain of Jars.

Supporting sustainable tourism means supporting tourism practices that will protect and maintain the heritage so that it can be enjoyed by both present and future generations. This involves protecting:

- the tangible archaeological heritage (including jar sites and Buddhist monuments, the natural features that ancient civilizations used as points of reference when planning these sacred sites);
- the intangible heritage (such as traditions and festivals); and
- the revival and survival of cultural industries (such as crafts, for example cloth-weaving).

Presentation of heritage resources to visitors in a sensitive way will also improve the educational value of the Plain of Jars and Xieng Khouang. This will allow future generations of foreign visitors and Laotians to learn about local indigenous knowledge, traditions and life-styles.

Protection of the heritage landscape should be the number one priority of both heritage managers and the tourism industry. It is also important that tourism is developed in an economically sustainable way. This means that there must be enough tourists and tourist spending to sustain investments in the hospitality industry (including hotels, guesthouses and restaurants) and other tourism-related sectors.

Development of tourism infrastructure and services should be done in a step-by-step way to match what tourists actually want and need at that particular time. It should also acknowledge the needs of the local population and preserve the heritage resources of Lao PDR. Instead of heavily promoting a site and attracting tourists to a destination before it has the facilities to look after them, tourism should be developed gradually so local managers and the private sector can measure and manage its negative impacts. After all, it is essential that the integrity of Xieng Khouang’s cultural landscape is maintained and protected. Otherwise, tourism’s economic and educational opportunities will be lost along with Xieng Khouang’s irreplaceable heritage assets.
1.4 The role of the Cultural Heritage specialist guide

It may be useful at this point to briefly consider how a Culture Heritage Specialist Guide at the Plain of Jars is different from a usual tour guide. The role of a Culture Heritage Specialist Guide will be explored in more detail in Units 4 and 5.

Cultural Heritage Specialist Guides must have basic tour guide skills

To begin with, it should be recognised that Culture Heritage Special Guides share the same basic training and function as tour guides generally. This means you will be someone who leads the way at the Plain of Jars, protecting the tourists from dangers such as UXO. You will combine the roles of ambassador, teacher, policeman, doctor and entertainer! You can help the interpretation of the significance of natural and cultural environments at the Plain of Jars. You can also promote minimal impact practices, to support the sustainability of the natural and cultural environment. You can also encourage tourists to consider their own lives in relation to larger environmental or cultural concerns. All of these aspects of tour guiding are equally relevant to Culture Heritage Specialist Guides and should be considered as part of your role at the Plain of Jars.

Specialist skills of a Cultural Heritage Specialist Guide

However, as you will see in this module, becoming a Cultural Heritage Specialist Guide will involve you gaining specialist skills in interpretation and managing visitor behaviour. It will also enable you to have a role in bringing the benefits of tourism to the local communities.

Interpretation of significance is at the centre of the heritage tourism experience at the Plain of Jars. Cultural heritage significance is the thing that makes a heritage place like the Plain of Jars different to another type of tourist attraction. However, just by visiting the Plain of Jars—without interpretation—it is not easy to understand its significance. Therefore interpretation is one of the most important parts of a Culture Heritage Specialist Guide’s role. In Unit 2 we will try to understand what makes the Plain of Jars significant, and in Unit 4 we will look specifically at interpreting the Plain of Jars.

Influencing visitor behaviour to promote conservation and sustainable tourism is essential to the success of the Plain of Jars, and this will be discussed in Unit 5. This includes:
- Promoting minimum impact practices by providing guidelines on acceptable tourism behaviour and identifying conduct which benefits the communities, cultural heritage and environment;
- Observing the carrying capacity of the site; and
- Ensuring the sustainability of the natural and cultural environment and sharing the benefits of tourism.

As discussed in Unit 6, you, as Cultural Heritage Specialist Guide, can help to promote meaningful and beneficial interactions between tourists and the local community. This will assist the local community to gain economic benefits from tourism. It will also encourage the local community to view the Plain of Jars as a valued community asset, and encourage community-based conservation efforts. If done sensitively, encouraging such interactions will also add a further dimension to the visitor experience by incorporating into the visit the villages around the Plain of Jars. This will allow the visitor to experience village-based cultural industries such as handicrafts, and intangible heritage such as dance and music.

1.5 Unit summary and structure of training manual

This Unit provided an introduction to tourism at the Plain of Jars, Xieng Khouang and in the Lao PDR, and introduced the important concept of sustainable tourism. The Unit identifies some of the challenges and issues in cultural heritage tourism, and how tourism can have a positive effect on conservation if the right behaviours are encouraged.

The next Unit outlines the values and significance of the Plain of Jars. Following this, Unit 3 considers ways to protect and manage the cultural resources of the Plain of Jars, and Units 4 and 5 take an in depth look at the visitors who are interested in the Plain of Jars – how the Plain of Jars can be interpreted for them, and how their behaviour can be influenced and their experience improved. Finally, Unit 6 focuses on the contribution the Culture Heritage Specialist Guides to the Plain of Jars.
## Unit 2
### Understanding the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape

#### Learning Objectives

This Unit is designed to provide you with an understanding of:

- An overview of the background and geography of the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape, and why it has been seen as a strategic site across history
- An understanding of the pre-historical, archaeological, artistic, social, political and religious values of the site
- Familiarity with the tangible and intangible heritage values and significance of the site, including associated living traditions of the local communities

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This Unit is organised as follows:

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2.2 Overview of the Plain of Jars
2.3 Historical value of the site
2.4 Artistic values of the site
2.5 Archaeological value of the site
2.6 Socio-economic, political and religious perspectives on the site
2.7 Intangible heritage values of the site
2.8 Associated Living Traditions of the community
2.9 Unit summary

#### Unit References


2.1 Introduction

The Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape is best known as a landscape of mysterious stone containers. There is a real danger however; that these stone jars by themselves can not hold the interest of the visitor for very long. This could be described as the ‘seen one jar seen them all’ syndrome. However, the jars themselves are just part of a landscape that includes many other physical elements and a unique story that connects it all. In summary, one jar or one site can not tell the story of the Plain of Jars.

This Unit aims to familiarise you with both the tangible elements, or fabric, of the Plain of Jars, as well as its story. The fabric includes the jars themselves and associated archaeological evidence both above and below ground. It also includes evidence of the important role of the landscape during the Second Indochina War. It even includes the natural environment: as a place of biodiversity; in its natural aesthetic beauty, and as a source of food and natural resource development.

In a broader sense, the Plain of Jars is made up of activities both from the past and today. It is a place of long history and living communities. The story of this landscape includes the story of the jars themselves. This story includes the burial practices of people in the past but also their lives. It also includes the important role of the landscape in connecting people from different cultures through trade and movement. It the story of an important strategic location from the ancient times and during the Second Indochina War. Today, the role of the Plain of Jars has an important role in the ongoing development of the Lao PDR. The Cultural Heritage Specialist Guide plays an important part in telling this story.
2.2 Overview of the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape

2.2.1 Background and location

The Plain of Jars archaeological landscape is located in Xieng Khouang Province. Xieng Khouang Province is situated in the central east of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and borders Viet Nam’s Nghe An Province (a distance of 120km from the Plain of Jars), and the Lao PDR’s Luang Prabang (100km), Vientiane (170km), Huapan (160km) and Bolikhamxay (70km) provinces.

![Figure 2.1: Location of Xieng Khouang Province (Source: Lao-UNESCO Project, 2001)](image)

The topography of Xieng Khouang is characterised by three distinct areas: the high plateau; foothills and mountains; and low-lying valleys. Several hot geothermal springs are present as a result of groundwater heating underground. The high plateau area forms the divide between the Mekong catchment area and the catchment area of the Ca River that flows to the Gulf of Tonkin through Viet Nam. The Mun-Mekong and the Gulf of Tonkin areas are the locations of the two oldest and most developed archaeological cultures in mainland South East Asia. It is interesting that the Plain of Jars connects them geographically.

Current land use consists mainly of agriculture. A more diverse and intensive range of crops is grown in the lowland areas (500-600m), and in upland and slope areas (1000-1200m) farming...
mainly consists of slash-and-burn rice or maize cultivation, livestock, and gathering.

Swidden agriculture conducted at low population levels is a sustainable use of the land with a long history of practice dating back at least to the Iron Age. However, continued burning with increased population density has lowered the quality of the soil in many regions, resulting in wide expanses of unproductive grasslands. Only 5% of the total surface is cultivated, with rice paddy land representing 80% of this cultivated area.

In the Xieng Khouang Province, past geological activity has resulted in metallic mineral ore deposits, including high grade iron, gold, tin, copper, lead, and zinc. Historic small-scale mines of iron ore are scattered throughout the province. Ancient evidence of the mining of limestone and lignite is believed also to exist. More recently, concessions ranging from 2 to 15 years have been granted for larger scale mining.

2.2.2 The jar sites

The jar sites themselves are found up to c. 1400m, and are located on ridges, lower hill slope spurs and on the edges of upland valleys. 85 sites are known, of which 58 have been mapped. The 58 sites contain around 2000 jars and nearly 500 stone discs.
Figure 2.2: Location of jar sites in Xieng Khouang  
(Source: Sibylle Creutz)

Seven (7) sites are accessible for guided tours.

At **Site 1**, which is 8km from the provincial capital Phonsavanh, the jars are found in five (5) groups all located within short walking distance of each other and occupy an area of 28.5 ha. The site counts 334 sandstone and conglomerate jars, 30 stone discs and 122 mainly quartzite stone markers.

**Site 2** is located on a hill ridge approximately 20 km from Phonsavanh. It comprises an area of approximately 17 hectares and is in two groups, each group being located on one each of two spurs dissected by a road. It consists of 93 sandstone jars, 14 discs and 9 stones.

**Site 3** is made up of eight (8) jar groups scattered around the existing village of Ban Xiengdi and totals 247 sandstone jars.

**Site 16** is associated with the village Ban Phai, 6 km northeast of old Xieng Khouang in Khun District. It consists of 36 jars, of which 35 are granite and 1 is sandstone.

**Site 23** is located near the hot springs in Muang Kham, and consists of four groups (32 jars), one of which is a quarry site. The jars are manufactured out of massive conglomerate and breccia.

**Site 25** is located on hills close to Ban Songhak village, and consists of 40 jars in total in five groups.

**Site 52** at Ban Phakeo village consists of four groups of nearly 400 sandstone jars, some with lids.
Exercise 2.1: Understanding the heritage values of the Plain of Jars

Heritage values are the things about the Plain of Jars that make it important to people. Identify some elements of the Plain of Jars which contribute to the following heritage values.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Element contributing to value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>E.g. Aesthetic/artistic value</em></td>
<td>Carved figures such as the ‘frogman’ bas relief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic/artistic value</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific value</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Social value</td>
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<td>Spiritual value</td>
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<td>Historic value</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archaeological value</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2.3 Proposed statements of significance for inscription on the World Heritage List

As set out in Unit 2 of the Core Module, the process of inscription of the Plain of Jars on the World Heritage List is required to follow the guidelines set out by the World Heritage Convention. The most important step of the inscription process is to establish the outstanding universal value of the site.

The World Heritage Convention sets out the criteria for the assessment of the outstanding universal value of a site. There are a total of ten criteria. A site is considered to have outstanding universal value if it meets one or more of these criteria.
The Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape is proposed for inscription on the World Heritage List under the following criteria:

**Criterion iii. Bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilisation which is living or has disappeared**

The Plain of Jars bears exceptional testimony of a long lost civilization, characterized by distinct funerary practices, which occupied and evolved within the geographically defined Plateau of Xieng Khouang during the Iron Age (ca BCE 500) and continued into the early Historic Period (ca CE 1500). The megalithic stone jars and associated stone grave markers, the quarry sites, the natural limestone crematorium cave at Site One, human remains inside the stone jars and burials surrounding them are evidence for complex burial practices, indicative of a highly complex society, with antecedents and analogues to neighbouring archaeological cultures, but unique to the Xieng Khouang Plateau where the unique fusion of cultural traits was both more complex and more long-lived than elsewhere.

**Criterion iv. Be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history**

The Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape is an outstanding example of Iron Age megalithic burial landscape. The vernacular technological ensemble that makes up this landscape, consisting of the stone jars and associated stone features, the practice of cremation and secondary burial, burial goods, landscape setting and location, illustrates the growing cultural differentiation of societies in the Southeast Asia during the Iron Age, which led to the cultural mosaic of the region known to historical geography as “Indo-China”.

**Criterion v. Be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change**

The Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape is an outstanding example of a group of megalithic cemeteries which represent, through its distinct perception of death, the culture’s identification with a specific geographical location as its homeland to which successive generations are born, died, return to the land, and reborn again.

This cultural individualization and territorialization by a group through distinctive funeral practices resulting in intergenerational transfer of “ownership” of their land is a foundation of the historic nation-states of Southeast Asia, and further afield. The cemeteries of the Xieng Khouang Plateau are not only linked through material form but also in choice of location and
distribution in the landscape.

The organization of the landscape reflects on overland (trade) routes and economic interaction with cultures both to the northeast and southwest, and thus the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape illustrates, preserves and has the potential to provide further insights into the cultural ecology of not only this now extinct civilization, but also of the earliest formative stages of the development of the phenomenon of the many complex and highly evolved nation-states of historic Southeast Asia.

The integrity of the landscape is high due to the low level of existing impacts; however, with the rapid growth of the population and major economic development projects in the province the integrity of this culturally organised landscape has become vulnerable and in need of comprehensive protective measures. Provincial development plans such as the ongoing exploration for mining and planned dam projects threaten to introduce irreversible change to the landscape, fragmenting the connections between the various archaeological elements of the burial complex and isolating the jar field cemeteries from their geographic context.

2.2.4 Proposed Statement of Outstanding Universal Values

The Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape is a culturally organised relic landscape which evolved as a result of distinct funerary beliefs and practices and which reflects growing cultural differentiation in Southeast Asian Iron Age. The funerary tradition included secondary burials, cremation and megalithic features and constructions created by the people for the people.

The locations of the cemeteries in the landscape were determined by beliefs, overland (trade) routes and/or economic activities. The distribution of the jar sites is an outstanding example of how the landscape connects people to their homeland, along cultural exchange routes.

The individual locations for the jar sites are strategic places which overlook expansive areas and/or are along passages. The sites are found surrounding the central plateau and along upland passages, and identify Xieng Khouang as a crossroads between the Red River and Gulf of Tonkin in the north and east, and the Mun/Mekong River Basin in the south and west. The long-term and enduring geographical strategic importance of Xieng Khouang is understood from historical documents and more recently during the Indochina conflicts. The Plain of Jars material evidence establishes a linkage between India, China and Southeast Asia and may be the first evidence of a cultural relationship which historically becomes known as Indo-China.

The high concentration of recorded stone jar sites and other features, the knowledge gleaned through investigation regarding its function, technical knowhow of the people who created it,
distribution and significance coupled to the low level of impact make the Plain of Jars Archaeological landscape high in integrity and authenticity and bear an exceptional testimony to megalithic stone jar burial tradition of a civilisation long extinct. The components of the complex funerary practices are well-documented and its integrity is considered high due to the minimal impacts and the considerable number of recorded features. The authenticity of the resources is deemed high and future research has the potential to further enhance its authenticity.

Contemporary Thai Phuan and Hmong burial locations in Xieng Khouang often mimic Plain of Jars and illustrate ongoing landscape organization. The village-based management system for the Plain of Jars Archaeological landscape succeeds in reconnecting modern-day custodians of the funerary ensemble, which includes the tangible and intangible heritage, with their ancestors.

### Exercise 2.2: Understanding World Heritage significance

A common question asked by visitors to the Plain of Jars may be: why should the Plain of Jars be listed on the World Heritage List?

- Repeat the Outstanding Universal Value and criteria in your own words. What are the main components?
- How would you explain to a visitor the reasons why the Plain of Jars may be listed?

Hints: Keep in mind the level of understanding of the audience. Talking about the ‘story’ of the Plain of Jars may be a useful tool for explaining its outstanding universal values.

### 2.3 Historical value of the site

It is believed that the Plain of Jars Plateau has been an important strategic location for a very long time. The earliest occupation of the area may date back as far as the Palaeolithic period (more than 10,000 years ago). After this time there was a period of migration of the ancient Lao people until, according to local tradition, Khun Muong united the Lao principalities outside China and created the first Lao kingdom around 200 BCE. It is believed that contact with the Chinese Han Dynasty (206 BCE- 220 CE) existed, as Han Dynasty pottery and stone rings have been found at the Plain of Jars.

Xieng Khouang may have formed the northern part of the Lao Khottaboun Kingdom (1000-600 BCE-CE 979). The capital of the newly established Kingdom was later renamed Vientiane. During the 7th and 8th centuries CE, Vientiane became a trading post for merchants from China and India. It is likely that traders from or
going to the north would have crossed the Xieng Khouang Plateau. There are indications that the Kingdom was already Buddhist. The Plain of Jars has been dated to the Iron Age (500 BCE to 800 CE), although no evidence indicates whether it was part of the Lao Khottaboun Kingdom or the Han Dynasty.

The location of the jar sites reflects the geographical strategic saddle location of the Plain of Jars between the Gulf of Tonkin and Mekong basin. It suggests that the Plain of Jars developed as an independent identity distinct from the Han Chinese and by the 7th century related to Khmer and Tai Kingdoms with Indian cultural roots developing to the west and south. The wide distribution of the jars, their uniformity in material and basic form, their apparent role in secondary burial practices and their relationship to trade routes may be evidence of long distance trade and cultural exchanges between China, India and the Southeast Asian archipelago.

Evidence of cultural exchanges between the jar sites in Xieng Khouang and sites elsewhere may also be found in carvings on the jars. Carvings include the human-formed bas relief on a jar at Site 1 (known as the ‘Frogman’) and carvings on stone discs of a similar human with raised arms, which resemble artistic images found in China and India (See 2.4 below).

The Tai Phuan are a Buddhist Tai-Lao ethnic group that migrated from southern China. By the late 13th century they had formed an independent state ruled by a prince in the Plain of Jars area. They prospered from the overland trade in metals and forest products. In the mid-14th century, Xieng Khouang was incorporated into the Lao Lane Xang Kingdom under Fa Ngum. Although they had to pay taxes and royalties, during this period the Phuan retained a high degree of autonomy.

After Siam (Thailand) extended its control to Lao territories east of the Mekong in the 1770’s, Muang Phuan became a Siamese vassal but also maintained tributary relations with Dai Viet (Viet Nam). To exert greater control of the lands and people of Muang Phuan, the Siamese launched three separate campaigns (1777-1779, 1834-1836, 1875-1876) to resettle large parts of the Phuan population to the south to regions under firm Siamese control. This resulted in many people being resettled in central Thailand and a depopulation at the Plain of Jars. It also coincided with invasions of the Haw, who were Chinese bandits (‘Yellow and Black Flag’ bandits) who plundered Luang Prabang and Xieng Khouang well into the 1880’s. The ongoing aggression resulted in three quarters of the population being murdered or moved, countless monuments being destroyed, and treasure looted.

Eventually the Phuan state was ruled by a Thai Commissioner until the Franco-Siamese treaties of the 1890’s placed Xieng Khouang under colonial rule as part of French Indochina until briefly after World War II. The hold of the French on Laos was destabilized by the loss of territory to the Japanese and Thailand in the south
during WWII. Following events led to the French protectorate of Laos becoming a constitutional monarchy, with sufficient rights to form a national parliament.

In 1954, Phatet Lao forces moved to Phongsaly and Xamneu provinces. A coalition government was formed between the Royalists, the Neutralists and the Phatet Lao, although in May 1959 internal fighting broke out. On January 1st 1961, the Phatet Lao took possession of Khoun, Paek and Kham districts, turning the Plain of Jars into a communist stronghold. The Royal Laotian Air Force backed by the Americans made its first aerial strike in January 1961, and the US supplied airpower in greater and greater amounts as the war progressed. In May 1964, the US increased the aerial bombardments and dropped bombs on the Plain of Jars at Muan Phan, Ban Khong, Tha Thom and Thavieng for the first time. President Lyndon B. Johnson provided secret economic, financial and military aid to the Lao government, hoping to prevent a victory by the communists.

Tham Piu Cave in Muang Kham was used by locals during the war to seek shelter. In November 1968 a single rocket fired from an American aircraft caused the death of hundreds of people who had taken refuge in the cave. The site is a National Heritage and memorial services to commemorate the event are held each year.

In July 1969, the Lao Royalist Army launched a major offensive to regain a foothold on the Plain of Jars. By October 1969 they occupied several key strongholds in Xieng Khouang. However, Phatet Lao forces recaptured the Plain again in early 1970 and despite efforts from the Royalist Army held the initiative from that point on.

A cease-fire and peace agreement was signed in Vientiane on 21 February 1973, ending the US involvement in the conflict. On 2 December 1975, a cease-fire between the Royal, Neutralists and Phatet Lao troops was agreed, marking the end of Lao as a kingdom and the official establishment of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic.

Due to its strategic importance, Xieng Khouang experienced heavy aerial bombardment and intense ground battles. As a result of the carpet bombing thousands of inhabitants died or fled Xieng Khouang, and it is estimated that ten thousand of people were displaced or air-lifted out of the province. This conflict has left a deadly legacy of UXO which is still being cleared today.

2.4 Artistic values of the site

Figure 2.3: Member of today’s Tai Phuan community (Source: Sibylle Creutz)
The Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape has a number of elements which make up the site: the stone jars, the stone lids, stone discs, stone grave markers, a natural limestone cave, subterranean burials, archaeological materials such as grave goods, and quarries.

The most identifiable elements of the Plain of Jars are the stone jars themselves, which range in height and diameter between 1 and 3 metres. The jars are tubular with a height to width ratio of 1.5:1 and are mainly distinguished by their rim execution and stone type. The stone jars are undecorated with the exception of a single jar at Site One. This jar has a human bas-relief carved on the exterior (See Figure 2.5). These carvings resemble the rock paintings figures at Huashan Cliff in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous region in China, dated to 500 BCE-200 CE. The paintings depict large full-frontal humans with arms raised and knees bent. A comparable figure carved on a stone disc was recorded in 1929 by Mills and Hutton between Kartong and Waichong in the Assam, Northeast India.
Five main rock types for jar, disc and lid manufacturing have been identified: **sandstone**, **conglomerate**, **granite**, **limestone** and **limestone breccia**. The majority of the jars are sandstone and have been manufactured with a degree of knowledge of what materials and techniques were suitable. It is assumed that Plain of Jars’ people used iron chisels to manufacture the jars, although there is no conclusive evidence for this.

Regional differences in jar shape have been noted, particularly in relation to Phukoot district in the north of the province. While these differences in most cases can be attributed the rock source, differences in form, such as smaller openings and openings on both ends (double holed jars) have been recorded in Phukoot district only.

From the fact that most of the jars have lip rims, it is presumed that all stone jars once had lids. However, few stone lids have been found. This may suggest that the bulk of lids have been fashioned from perishable materials. Stone lids with animal representations have been noticed at few sites such as Ban Phakeo (Site 52). The bas-relief animals are thought to be monkeys, tigers and frogs. No lid has ever been found in place on a jar.

Not to be confused with stone lids are the stone discs, which have at least one flat side. They are grave markers which were placed on the surface to cover or mark a burial pit. These grave markers appear less frequently than stone jars, but are found close to jars. Similar are stone grave markers; which are unworked, stones placed intentionally to mark a grave. To the north of Xieng Khouang there is extensive network of grave markers known as ‘standing stones of Huaphan’, marking elaborate burial pits and chambers.

### 2.5 Archaeological values of the site

The archaeology of the Plain of Jars has been of international significance since the 1930s, when the French geologist and amateur archaeologist Madeleine Colani began her involvement with the site. Despite this, little is known about the people who created and lived on the Plain of Jars, and because of this the area will continue to be of interest to archaeologists for many years to come.

Colani recorded and excavated at 12 Plain of Jars’ sites and published two volumes with her findings in 1935. The archaeological material and context led her to her interpretation of the Plain of Jars as an Iron Age burial site. Inside the jars, she found coloured glass beads embedded in black organic soil, burnt teeth and bone fragments, sometimes from more than one person. Around the stone jars, she found human bone, pottery fragments, iron and bronze objects, glass and stone beads, ceramic weights and charcoal. The bone and teeth inside the stone jars show signs of cremation, while the burials surrounding the jars contained unburnt secondary burial bones.
Colani also excavated inside the natural limestone cave and found archaeological material to support a theory that the Plain of Jars had a centralized crematorium. This cave had an opening to the northwest and two man-made holes at the top of the cave. These holes are interpreted as chimneys of the crematorium. (see Figure 2.8, below).

No further archaeological research was conducted until November 1994 when Site One was surveyed and mapped by Professor Eiji Nitta of the Kagoshima University in collaboration with Lao Archaeologist Thongsa Sayavongkhamdy. Nitta\textsuperscript{11} argues that the surrounding burial pits are from the same period as the stone jars, as they are cut into the ancient surface on which the jar was placed. Nitta sees the stone jar as a symbolic monument to mark the surrounding burials. He dates the Plain of Jars to the late first – early second millennium CE, based on the burial urn and associated grave goods.

Sayavongkhamdy undertook further survey and excavation work between 1994 and 1996 supported by the Australian National University. Sayavongkhamdy and Bellwood\textsuperscript{12} interpret the stone jars as a central single person’s primary or secondary burial surrounded by secondary burials of family members. Archaeological data collected during UXO clearance operations supervised by UNESCO archaeologist Julie Van Den Bergh in 2004-2005 and again in 2007 provided similar archaeological material results.

Similar to Nitta, Van Den Bergh recorded stratigraphical evidence that the stone jars and surrounding burials are from the same period.\textsuperscript{13} The differing burial practices of cremation inside the jars and secondary inhumation surrounding the jar, as noted by Colani, can not easily be explained. In particular, the cremated remains were identified as mainly belonging to adolescents and the associated materials do not appear to differ greatly from the surrounding burials. The UXO clearance operations did not include emptying of jars and thus no additional evidence could be gathered. However, Van Den Bergh proposes that the jars initially may have been used to distil the dead bodies, and that the cremated remains within the jars may represent the latest phase in Plain of Jars. The stone jars with a smaller opening may reflect the diminishing need to place an entire body inside.

The suggestion that stone jars functioned as ‘distilling vessels’ was put forward by R. Engelhardt and P. Rogers in 2001\textsuperscript{14}. This suggests similarities with traditional Southeast Asian Royal mortuary practices. In contemporary funerary practices connected to Thai, Cambodian and Laotian royalty, the corpse of the deceased is placed into an urn during the early stages of the funeral rites. This is seen as the period when the deceased is undergoing gradual transformation from the earthly to the spiritual world. The ritual decomposition is followed by cremation and secondary burial. The royal burials are located across...
watercourses from the habitation areas in a geographically high, prominent area. Meanwhile, it is interesting to note that amongst the Black Tai people\(^\text{15}\) who have been in the region at least since the 11th century, the elite are cremated releasing their spirit to heaven, while commoners are buried, leaving their spirit to remain on earth.

The jar sites are located on lower slopes of mountains surrounding the Central Plain, on mountain ridges and areas fringing the upland valleys. There is little doubt that Jar Site One is an exception and that its location was chosen because of the presence of the natural limestone cave. So far the recorded quarry sites are located in close proximity to the jar sites.

Colani connected the location of the jars sites to ancient trade routes and in particular with the salt trade. Colani assumed salt was a commodity sought after by the Plain of Jars people, bringing the traders to the Xieng Khouang Plateau. The Xieng Khouang area is rich in metallic minerals\(^\text{16}\) mainly due to the granite intrusions and associated hydrothermal activity. Two principal iron ore deposits exist in the Lao PDR and both are located in Xieng Khouang. The presence and locations of the numerous jar sites in Xieng Khouang may relate to trading and mining activities. History has also shown that at the northern end of the Annamite Range, Xieng Khouang provides relative easy passage from the north and east to the south and west.

Within the geographic setting of Xieng Khouang, the jar sites may reflect a network of intercultural villages. The location of the jars would therefore be associated with long-distance overland routes which connect the Mekong basin and the Gulf of Tonkin System. The jar sites within the Plain of Jars show superficial regional differences such as jar form, material and number of jars per site. However, they share common setting characteristics such as burial practices, elevated locations and commanding views over the surrounding area.

The stone jar sites of the Plain of Jars find parallels in Indonesia and India. Colani identified these areas in her 1935 Monographs. She reports that in the early 20th century four sites with stone jars were recorded by Mills and Hutton in the Cachar Hills of Northeast India very close to the limit of the Jaintia Hills. Each group is situated on a ridge and the jars are often positioned in parallel lines. The megaliths carry carvings of animal figures, such as frog, fish, elephant, pig etc. and human and symbolic outlines. Four stone jar sites are mentioned by Colani: these are Kartong, with 50 jars; Kobak (unspecified number); Bolasan, with 400 jars; and near Derebora, Malangpa and Ndunglo, with 42 jars.

Inside one of the jars, fragments of burnt cranial bone fragments were found; this corresponds with the cremated bones and teeth found inside the stone jars in Laos. In addition to the jar sites, a stone with human representation comparable to the ‘frogman’ was
recorded in the same area. Although many megaliths can be found in this region, no further information regarding the stone jars is available.

In Indonesia, stone jars are known as stone ‘vats’. They have been recorded in the valleys of Bada and Besoa, Central Sulawesi and Bima, Sumbawa Island in Indonesia. The stone vats of Sulawesi are part of vast megalithic complex including stone statues, menhirs and dolmens.

Local archaeologists suggest the stone vats are 2000 years old. Human bones were found inside the vats, often accompanied by potsherds and fragments of iron knives. Few excavations have been conducted at the sites, but the investigations show that here too secondary burials surround the stone vats.\(^\text{17}\)

In Viet Nam, the Sa Huynh burial jars, while not made of stone, are very large in size and could thus be identified as part of the megalithic tradition. Colani had already compared the burial associated goods and tradition of cremation of the Plain of Jars to the Sa Huynh culture in Central Vietnam, which flourished between 1000 BCE and 200 CE. Archaeological sites have been discovered from the Mekong Delta to just south of the Tonkin region. Sa Huynh sites were rich in locally-worked iron artefacts. They show evidence of an extensive trade network, with Sa Huynh produced objects found in archaeological sites in Central Thailand, Taiwan (Orchid Island), and the Philippines (Palawan).

Stone burial jars exist in the Philippines where they were found in connection to secondary burial practices dating to the 6-7th centuries CE.\(^\text{16}\) The stone jars, however, are not of megalithic proportion and are associated with caves and rock shelters. It is believed that these may have evolved locally from the anthropomorphic secondary burial ‘Maitum’ urns dated between 1st-4th centuries CE.\(^\text{19}\) The burial jars are made of ceramic and were associated with metal implements, glass beads and bracelets, shell spoon, scoop, bracelets and pendants, and pottery with incised decoration, foot rings and non-anthropomorphic burial jars.

As a technological ensemble, the Plain of Jars can be compared to the World Heritage Site of Ban Chiang in Thailand and the standing stones at Huaphan, north of Xieng Khouang Province. Ban Chiang is important in the understanding of the highly specialised development of technology in Southeast Asia. However, its cemetery does not reflect the complexity shown at the Plain of Jars. This shows growing cultural differentiation during the Iron Age in Southeast Asia.

The standing stones of Hintang in the northern province of Huaphan were published by Madeleine Colani alongside the Plain of Jars. Located on a mountain ridge for about 10 km are clusters of schist upright erected stones and circular discs, covering burial chambers cut out of the bedrock. Human remains were excavated...
at a single cluster, San Kong Phan, although artefacts without bones were found in other burial chambers. Pottery that was more coarse and undecorated, as well as bronze artefacts and stone pendants, were excavated around the standing stones.

Colani dated the ensemble to the Bronze Age. Little is known beyond these early investigations by Colani and the site only seems to appear on one single mountain ridge. The site has been heavily impacted by the construction of a secondary road and there is evidence of illegal excavation at each cluster. Colani concludes that there is no evidence to link the Plain of Jars to the standing stones.

2.6 Socio-economic, political and religious perspectives on the site

The Plain of Jars can be approached or interpreted using a number of different perspectives: socio-economic, political and religious. One basic approach would be to ask what the elaborate burial practices tell us about the values of the ancient culture in which the stone jars were created.

One way is to understand the origins of the Plain of Jars from an economic viewpoint. The distribution, scale and materials used in the Plain of Jars are evidence of the economic development, status and rise and decline of a civilisation. The materials used in making the jars and their scale suggest a society of relative economic wealth. This society had the time and resources available to devote to manufacturing megalithic burial monuments. The distribution of the jars shows an organically organized landscape spread over a relatively large area, most likely based on cultural exchanges and trade routes. The volume and location of the stone jars relates to the social and political values of the society which created the Plain of Jars. The fact that the jars occur as a widespread vernacular practice, not restricted just to the elite, suggests an egalitarian political and economic arrangement.

The vernacular nature of this heritage has importance for its current social significance. The burials symbolise concerns across generations about burial practices. They also express broader philosophical issues of death and rebirth, similar to those in a Buddhist society. In this sense, Plain of Jars has the potential to communicate directly to the social, as well as spiritual, values of communities currently living in the region. The heritage management strategy, which is centred on activities at the community level, recognises the vernacular significance of the Plain of Jars.

As noted above, the Plain of Jars as a landscape is a strategically important place for both human migration over generations as well as trade. These movements of people over time and their social implications, such as increased differentiation between cultural groups, add to the social significance of the Plain of Jars.

Figure 2.9: Jars from sites in India (Source: Colani 1935)
The more recent history of the Plain of Jars – from Phuan Kingdom to the colonial era and Indochina Wars - is an aspect of the social and political history of the region which will interest both local and foreign visitors. The strategic importance Xieng Khouang played during the war adds an extra layer of heritage significance. The material evidence of these eras needs to be prominently addressed in the management of the site (for example, UXO from the Indochina Wars).

The spiritual values of the Plain of Jars include the significance of the burial practices to the particular spiritual outlook of the society which created the jars. This could be compared to the contemporary spiritual significance of the role of Buddhist sangha, of contemporary secondary burial practices, and of Hmong burial practice.

2.7 Intangible heritage values of the site

This is a rather difficult and little understood part of the Plain of Jars. Further investigation will increase our understanding of ancient rites associated with the Plain of Jars. However, we can evaluate the values or significance ascribed to the sites by the local community today.

At some jar sites the local inhabitants have continued to use the site for burial. While the connection with the Plain of Jars burial rituals has been lost, some contemporary traditions of burial consider the setting highly suitable. Both Hmong and Phuan burials have been recorded at jar sites, and while the Phuan burials use lower foothills and spurs to place jedis, Hmong prefer the mountain ridges.

Although the local communities no longer claim a direct connection to the Plain of Jars, several jar sites are taken up in local beliefs or ceremonies. A villager told how during Lao Phimai the villagers of Ban Nakho lead a procession from the temple to the jar site to tie white strings around jars and built sand stupas. The villagers at Ban Songhak believe spirits roam their jar sites, and they use water collected in jars to cure sick children. In recent times, ceramic Buddha statues were placed in the stone jars for safekeeping.

Regarding stories and legends, in some senses the Plain of Jars is a ‘storied landscape’, with a tradition of storytelling which is interwoven into the landscape. Stories of this type include the legend of Xiengdy and his beautiful ‘fragrant-haired’ daughter, associated with the trench and tomb between Naphia village and Phaxay district, and the story of the giant named Kab who resided in Tham Kab cave.

This tradition includes the alternative local legends on the origin of the jars, which is an important aspect of the intangible heritage of the site. These alternative local legends need to be dealt with sensitively in the interpretation of the site, particularly when
presented side by side with archaeological approaches.

This includes the local legend of Khun Jeuam, laolao and giants. The local legend is embedded in recorded history but not confirmed through material evidence. It is interesting to remember that Khun Jeuam is reported to have lived in the 6th century CE while the material evidence indicates the jars were present around 1000 years before his victory.

2.8 Associated Living Traditions of the community

Present day communities living in the Plain of Jars region practise a variety of traditional activities. It is not possible at this stage to identify among them specific ancient traditions and products descended from Plain of Jars culture. However, modern goods, traditions and even food can be linked thematically to jars and the cultural exchange routes. Highlighting these connections may link present day communities to their ancestors as an important part of their identity.

The living traditions include the production and trade of cultural goods, such as:

- paper umbrellas;
- weaved silk and other cloth;
- woodcarvings;
- woven baskets;
- khaens (bamboo flutes);
- laolao;
- brooms; and
- woven and embroidered goods.

Some of these traditionally-produced goods are associated with the wider population. In other cases, they are associated with particular minority groups. For example, while weaving is practised across ethnic groups, special hand weaving techniques unique to the Taidam people that have been inherited from many generations ago can be witnessed at Nathong Handicraft Village.

A further living tradition can be seen in the gastronomy of the region, the production and trade of food. One particularly distinctive example of this is 'Nok aen' (fermented swallow) and its associated tradition of swallow trapping.

Performance, such as the tradition of double drum playing in Phonkham Village, is an area of lived traditions which are important to community identity. Continued practise is essential to continue these unique cultural forms. Another example is the playing of the khaen, or bamboo flute, which is practised by both the Phuan and Hmong.

Sometimes performance forms are linked to stories. Double-drum playing is associated with the well-known legend of the widow from the era of ruler Jao Noi Muang Puan. According to legend, she invented the technique by beating an animal skin stretched over a
mortar where she was storing food away from hungry animals.

2.9 Unit summary

This Unit provided detailed description of the physical elements of the landscape, and the archaeological, historical, political, socio-economic, religious and living cultural areas of significance of the Plain of Jars. As a Cultural Heritage Specialist Guide, these are areas which make the place special and which visitors will often have come to experience and to learn about. This Unit may be useful to refer to for particular information about an aspect of the Plain of Jars in future. This information is also provided to show that the Plain of Jars is a landscape with many linked elements. It should help to provide some useful context which will assist when looking at some of the specific heritage and tourism management aspects in the following Units.

Figure 2.9: Contemporary religious observance in the Xieng Khouang area (Source: Julie Van Den Bergh and Samlane Luangaphay)
Figure 2.10: Weaving loom
(Source: Sibylle Creutz)

Figure 2.11: Paper umbrella
making
(Source: Sibylle Creutz)

Figure 2.12: Double drum playing
(Source: Sibylle Creutz)
## Unit 3
Protecting and Managing the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape

### Learning Objectives
This Unit is designed to provide you with an understanding of:
- What the present condition of the Plain of Jars is
- The measures that have been put place to protect The Plain of Jars
- What some of the key issues are relating to protection and management of the Plain of Jars, including pressures on the jars and buried archaeological resources, tourism and future development

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### Unit References
3.1 Introduction

The Plain of Jars has a number of elements which make up the site: the stone jars, the stone lids, stone discs, stone grave markers, the natural limestone cave at Site One, evidence of subterranean burials, grave goods, quarries and caves. These elements require protection and management in order to remain intact and maintain their integrity.

The responsible authorities for protection and management of the Plain of Jars are the Ministry of Information and Culture, the District Information and Culture Offices, and village administrative authorities. Protection and management takes place under three forms of protection measures:

- legal instruments – for example, existing legislation and guidelines aimed at protecting the Plain of Jars
- physical conservation interventions – including preservation, restoration and reconstruction
- a management system – as provided in the Heritage Management Plan

This Unit focuses on the protection and management of the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape, which is the perhaps the most significant aspect of the Xieng Khouang District’s tangible cultural heritage. However, the same system is applicable to other cultural sites in Xieng Khouang.

3.2 Present condition of site

It is important to note that the Plain of Jars is more than just the locations that are visited by tourists. It is also more than just the known jar locations. In fact, the Plain of Jars is considered to include:

- all known and unknown jar sites in Xieng Khouang, including their associated moveable heritage and attributes;
- the setting of each site; and
- the landscape in between.

The Plain of Jars as a landscape has been described as significant because it shows a network of cultural exchange between individual sites that evolved over time and made use of the environment. This is a type of site known as a ‘cultural landscape’.

It is important to think about the Plain of Jars as a landscape, rather than just a collection of jar sites. It changes the way the site will be managed, as well as providing new opportunities for ways to interpret the jars for tourists.

When considering the condition of the Plain of Jars as a cultural landscape, it is important to consider not only the
condition of individual jars, sites and associated archaeological deposits, although this is perhaps the easiest way to understand the site; it should also include a consideration of the natural heritage of the landscape as well as its character.

3.2.1 General assessment of condition

(a) Jar fabric

The majority of the ancient cemetery sites do not suffer from reuse, and only a few sites have been integrated into cultivation areas or villages. Despite the damage caused during the war, by Chinese bandits or through natural processes, the jars sites demonstrate a continuity and connection of form, material and location. While few jars have been moved from their original location and there has been some intentional damage, in general the sites have mainly suffered from benign neglect and lack of understanding.

(b) Archaeological deposits

Published records locate the archaeological material and deposits at depths between surface and 100cm. Few sites have been excavated or have suffered severe erosion, which means the integrity of the deposits remains high. The effects of the war damage on subsurface material are hard to assess, but the potential exists for in situ deposits.

(c) Landscape

The condition of the landscape generally is considered to be good. The sites are characteristically situated on lower hill slopes, mountain or hill spurs and ridges. These areas have been traditionally in use for slash and burn agriculture by the Khmu and since the late 19th century by the Hmong, but have generally suffered very little other impact. An exception to this is the scarring of the landscape as a result of ordnance dropped during the Second Indochina War. This scarring is obvious today and has made some impact on the visual character of the landscape. In addition, UXO from the Indochina Wars can also be seen as a cause of degradation in the landscape, affecting movement over and use of the landscape. In some instances, encroachment of village or agricultural cultivation on jar sites has caused a loss of setting or damage to the resources.

There is consensus that the barren landscape is a result of human deforestation; however, it is difficult to date such event without further investigation. The reason for massive deforestation is of interest as it may be relevant to the activities of the Plain of Jars culture. The burning of grasslands for grazing keeps the vegetation low, although in comparison with photographs of the early 20th century some
forest regeneration is present.

Increased development such as roads improvement, electricity provisions and mining exploration may have severe consequences on the landscape. Sustainable development taking in consideration the need for improvement of living conditions, economic needs and heritage preservation is therefore required.

3.3 Threats to safeguarding the Plain of Jars

3.3.1 Types of threats

Evidence of damage caused by specific threats to the Plain of Jars includes:

- Damage by Haw bandits circa 19-20th c but possibly as early as 11th c (e.g. Site 1) (Note however that this evidence is probably of heritage significance in itself)
- Damage from Indochina Wars (e.g. Site 1) (Again, note that such evidence probably has some heritage significance)
- Damage due to road building and improvement (e.g. Sites 2 and 16)
- Weathering of bedding planes and stone fabric, making Jars susceptible to breakage (Site 1 and 16)
- Cows and livestock
- Cultivation of the land (e.g. Site 52)
- Reuse for contemporary burial practices
- Reuse of the stone material
- Intentional damage by humans for no particular reason
- Looting
- Lack of understanding or benign neglect
- Growth of trees in or against jars
- Damage through tourism (e.g. Sites 1, 2 and 3)
Exercise 3.1: Identifying and classifying threats

Our response to different threats may vary depending on whether the threat is from nature or from humans.

- Write down in the column below the threats that you think are mainly caused by nature, or by humans

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Hints: Consider whether you would need to deal with human or natural causes in responding with the threat – some ‘natural’ threats may be more caused by humans (for example, consider whether cattle damage is really caused by human practices, and can therefore be regarded as a ‘human’ threat).

Types of threats that pose specific issues are as follows:

(a) Security

During the Second Indochina War (1965 to 1975), Lao PDR experienced intense ground battles and aerial bombings which affected 15 provinces, including Xieng Khouang. Xieng Khouang Province witnessed over 580,000 bombing missions that dropped nearly 2 million tonnes of ordnance during a 9-year period. 85% of the villages and over 50% of all agricultural land in the province were bombed. An estimated 30% of this ordnance failed to explode.

Three decades after this carpet bombing, many people are still being killed or badly crippled from ordnance that explodes unexpectedly. The high levels of UXO contamination is a serious threat to personal safety and a severe impediment to socio-economic development of the province, which worsens with the passage of time as the UXO become increasingly unstable. It has, for example, hindered agricultural activity...
and forced many people to make a living from the dangerous practice of collecting UXO to sell as scrap metal. The provincial authorities also recognize this as an obstacle for development and give UXO clearance linked with poverty alleviation activities high priority.

As part of the UNESCO-Lao Safeguarding the Plain of Jars project, seven jar sites were cleared of UXO in two phases (2004/5 and 2007). The project utilized an innovative methodology for “archaeo-demining” that has now become the global standard for removing UXO from archaeological sites without damaging the archaeological remains. The sites in the Plan of Jars have been cleared to the following specifications: 25cm depth on paths, 1m depth for a perimeter of 5 metres around the jars and a surface clearance of the remainder of the site area. The objectives of the clearance programme are to present a safe site for visitors and facilitate archaeological research around the jars. It is a long-term objective to clear the remaining sites of UXO. However due to the large number of jar sites, the high cost of skilled labour and the need to clear food security lands as main priority, this goal may not be fully realised for some years to come.

Failing to provide safe areas for tourism visitation will prevent certain visitors (for example, families with children) from coming to Xieng Khouang. An accident involving UXO and a tourist will upset the sensitive tourism business and may lead to people choosing to vacation elsewhere.

(b) Pressures on Stone Jars and Associated Resources

A number of past, current and emerging threats were identified at the jar sites during Phase III of the UNESCO-Lao Safeguarding the Plain of Jars Project. Instances of past destruction to jars were recorded in the 19th-20th centuries, when warring parties such as the Chinese Haw raided Xieng Khouang. However, following excavation results at Site 1, it is possible that similar such instances may have occurred as early as the 11th century. During the Indochina conflicts (second half of the 20th century) the plain became a strategic military focal point, and the jar sites became casualties of war.

One of the main threats to the stone jars and associated resources is linked to lack of awareness of villagers. The lack of understanding of the jars’ significance has resulted in reuse and intentional breakage of the resources. The jars have been reused as cooking areas, animal drinking troughs (see Figure 3.3), foundation stones and whetstones. Ongoing conservation awareness seminars should be conducted in villages nearby jar sites to highlight the significance of the Plain of Jars.

Extensions of agricultural areas which incorporate jar sites areas cause direct impacts through slash and burn techniques
and ploughing of fields. Examples of this can be seen at Ban Nam Oun (Site 34) and Ban Phakeo (Site 52). In addition, deforestation may affect tourism potential or result in accelerated erosion. Appropriate zoning has to be implemented to protect the cultural resources, safeguard the natural beauty of these areas, and to preserve the jar setting.

Stringent measures are needed on site to prevent visitors from using the jar site as a recreational ground. Development of tourism activities such as picnics on site will increase rubbish and encourage visitors to sit on or lean against the jars. Any infrastructure or activities on site must be designed to enhance the significance of the prehistoric burial site and ensure the preservation of the archaeological deposits.

Natural erosion processes particularly take their toll on conglomerate and weak limestone jars. The conglomerate jars are generally massive and in reasonable condition. However where the conglomerate exhibits close bedding, the jars are very fragmented and in poor condition. The poor condition of these conglomerate jars is due to the advanced weathering of the bedding planes making them very susceptible to breakage. The moderately weak, very porous, honeycomb, lenticular limestones are generally in poor condition. Stabilizing these vulnerable jars should be a priority in the long-term conservation research programme.

Sites located on hill ridges or near steep hills are particularly prone to erosion. In some instances, stone jars have been eroded down hill. At Site Two the construction of the road during the French colonial period disregarded the jars and resulted in the displacement of six jars (Figure 3.2).

Cattle grazing on the jar sites use the upright jars to rub against, causing the jars to break and the soil around the jars to erode (Figure 3.4). In some cases, it can be seen that the animals walk over the disc and lids causing them to break or crumble. Termites are known to incorporate jars into their hill, obscuring them from view.

Aeolian processes combined with water make plants grow inside the open jars. If these plants are not regularly removed the roots of the plants and trees take position in rock fissures and ultimately results in the jar breakage (see Figure 3.5). In response, regular maintenance of the vegetation and cutting of young trees should be undertaken at jar sites.

In recent history several jars have been removed from their original place. During Colani’s excavation jars, discs and lids were moved and during the Second Indochina War ongoing bombardment displaced several jars. General Van Pao presented a jar from Site One to the CIA, which currently resides in the Smithsonian in the USA. In addition, in the 1970s two jars were taken from Site One to decorate the...
Russian theatre in Phonsavanh; four jars of unknown provenance were taken to Vientiane (of which three can be found at the National Museum and one at Wat Phrakeo); two jars were moved from Site Two in 1977-1978 to the Russian cooperative in Ban Nikhom Latsen, and Phuxang Hotel took two jars from Site One in 1991-2 in order to decorate their premises. Since 2005, the Heritage Law protects the standing structures as well as the subsurface deposits, and forbids the removal of them.

Recognition of the site as a World Heritage property would bring with it increased investment and tourism. Clearly there must be a balance between conservation and cultural tourism. Through good management, site carrying capacity can be monitored and regulated. An increase in tourists to the jar sites poses a potential problem as a greater number of people come into contact with the jars. Tourism behaviour is repetitive and certain jars (i.e. the biggest jar at Site 1) are targeted for climbing and are starting to show erosion. In addition, the tourists walk around indiscriminately and step on discs, broken jars and fragments. Tourism management, including site guards, appropriate site interpretation and education of the tourists and guides should be a high and ongoing priority for site conservation.

However, lack of tourism would also create conservation pressures. A lack of interpretation of the jars and sites may lead to indifferent behaviour of local and international visitors towards the jars. Lowered tourism interest would result in a lack of funds for management. There is need for regular heritage guide training, updating of the site interpretation, continuing conservation awareness seminars and educational programmes to address this issue in both the short and long-term.

(c) Pressures on Buried Archaeology

Some of the archaeological sites are located in remote areas, away from villages and roads. Their isolated location makes it harder for government to monitor or stop illegal excavation. Heritage management at the village level increases the chance to monitor illegal or destructive activities.

Subsurface archaeological material may be affected by eroding bomb craters, erosion caused by trampling of cattle and steep hill slopes. The cattle like to rub against the outer jar surface, making the subsurface areas around the stone jars especially vulnerable. The Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Department in collaboration with the National Research Institute provided erosion management training for the seven Level 5 sites. By sharing the technical know-how and using only local materials, the trainers empowered the villagers and made it possible for them to transfer this
knowledge to their daily activities. The erosion management training should be extended to include all jar sites.

Lack of information degrades the significance of the Plain of Jars. Site interpretation should be regularly updated to incorporate the results of ongoing archaeological research. Educational programmes should reflect the importance of the archaeological landscape. It is the responsibility of the Heritage Guide to provide the most update theories and facts relating to the Plain of Jars.

Archaeo-demining was developed by the UNESCO-Lao Safeguarding the Plain of Jars Project. This innovative methodology combines archaeological data retrieval with the clearance of UXO in a post-conflict situation. The methodology includes a number of training modules for the various groups involved in the clearance programme. This training focuses on conservation, data retrieval and artefact recognition and the initial handling of finds.

(d) Environmental Pressures

The province of Xieng Khouang is one of the most economically disadvantaged regions in Lao PDR. There has been much recent infrastructure development, including upgrading of the main and secondary roads, electricity provision to the capital, districts and main roads and mining concessions. This has led to an influx of economic immigrants, as well as movement within the province as local people move closer to the main roads to have access to basic infrastructure, services and the beginnings of economic improvement.

The need for roads often does not take into account the heritage significance of the jars, and several jar sites have been affected. Examples can be seen in Ban Phai (Site 16), where a jar was moved and broken to accommodate the upgrading of the road by CRWRC, and at Site 07, where the road runs through the middle of a site (see Figure 3.6).

Despite government policy to eradicate slash and burn agriculture, large tracts of upland areas are burnt down every year, often affecting the jars at the sites. Logging (both legal and illegal) also adversely impacts on jar site areas by causing accelerated erosion and diminishes the potential of the site for tourism development.

(e) Future Development Pressures

The above-mentioned trends are expected to continue. Main future development pressures are expected in watershed management, including dam projects; increase in agricultural land area and livestock grazing area; tourism activities, the spread of residential areas; road construction; and mining and mining exploration.
The Xieng Khouang Provincial Government is focussed on increasing economic development and poverty alleviation through the expansion of crop plantation and establishing Xieng Khouang as a centre for raising cattle for export. Tourism is identified as another source for poverty alleviation. Risks associated with tourism may include tourism service expansion into uncleared UXO areas, and construction of hotels and guesthouses in conservation areas.

Probably the most significant pressure, however, will come from the exploration and mining industry which is rapidly expanding in the mineral-rich plateau. If not addressed, the effects of mining may be devastating. Similarly, if dam projects were implemented unrecorded jar and settlement sites may be affected.

(f) Tourism and Site Development

If managed sustainably tourism provides international and domestic visitors opportunities to learn about the Plain of Jars’ natural and cultural heritage. Tourism can contribute to the local economy and finance management and protection of the heritage landscape by generating public revenue from site entry fees and taxes levied on local tourist establishments.

When not managed well, tourism may undermine the very heritage assets upon which it relies to attract visitors and produce economic benefits. Some of the negative impacts that may appear due to poorly managed tourism include vandalism of archaeological sites; looting; inappropriate infrastructure developments; erosion; and conflicts within communities arising from unequal access to the benefits of tourism. At present, the incidence of intentional damage to Jars sites from tourists breaking off stone fragments for souvenirs, graffiti, and unauthorized excavation is on the rise.

As will be seen in more detail in Unit 5, some potential negative physical impacts of badly-managed tourism on the Plain of Jars include:

- Theft – removal of artefacts;
- Intentional damage and graffiti- irreversible damage to heritage monuments;
- Pollution – including air and noise pollution and rubbish littering the jar areas;
- Erosion – worsened by the movements of large numbers of people around the jars;
- Overcrowding – particularly given the likelihood of the Plain of Jars being listed as a World Heritage Site; and
- Uncontrolled development – may result in appropriate use of the site and obstruction of views.
(g) Public Awareness and Understanding

It is clear that the public awareness and understanding of the significance of the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape is crucial to the preservation of the sites. Without the understanding and support of the local communities, efforts to manage and conserve the sites can not be successful. The current understanding of the jars is embedded in the local story of Khun Jeuam23. This legend is perpetuated by the local school system without the benefit of the existing archaeological information. Few villages value the jar sites and destruction and potentially damaging reuse of the jars is commonplace. In addition, the significance of the Plain of Jars as an archaeological landscape, with underground deposits and a wider setting, is a concept which is not widely understood.

It may be difficult to reconcile conservation and protection of the archaeological landscape in a rural impoverished region isolated from economic development and benefits. However, the opportunities that World Heritage listing and increased tourism and development of community-based heritage tourism would bring to the region cannot be underestimated. The financial incentives linked to increase of tourism and World Heritage status make it easier to engage village communities, district and province government levels in the heritage conservation and management process.

Heritage conservation is creating broad economic opportunities for the local communities and region. Training programmes are empowering villagers and equipping them for employment in structured organisations; examples of this are transferable knowledge on erosion management or the Village Assisted Clearance programme for the UXO clearance of jar sites whereby the villagers are interviewed, receive first aid training, and learn to work as part of a team. Much emphasis is placed on raising tourism awareness for villagers, both positive and negative impacts which may arise from visitation and interaction. Example of the positive impact is tourism supply chain opportunities for local products while example of negative impact may include be a loss of traditional values.
Exercise 3.2: Developing a response to threats at the Plain of Jars

For each threat you identified in Exercise 3.1, write down a response which may assist in safeguarding the Plain of Jars.

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3.4 Legal instruments / protection measures in place

3.4.1 Existing legislation and guidelines protecting the Plain of Jars

There are a number of guidelines, decrees, laws and international instruments that relate to the protection and conservation of the Plain of Jars. Some of these create direct obligations for every person who comes into contact with the Plain of Jars, and may involve criminal penalties for those found in breach of these laws. International instruments such as conventions and charters, however, may operate at an international level and create obligations for the Government of the Lao PDR, or even suggest good practice for conservation without creating any obligations at all.

It is important to note that all of these forms of written protection are only effective if they are enforced, and an important part of enforcement is monitoring. As a Cultural Heritage Specialist Guide, you will have an important role in monitoring behaviour and, if necessary in the circumstances, notify the relevant authorities if you believe that a law has been breached.

The major laws and international instruments concerning the
protection and conservation of the Plain of Jars are summarised below:


The Presidential Decree:

- outlines the regulations and measures for management, conservation, preservation and use of national heritage;
- specifies that the Plain of Jars is immovable national heritage, and strictly forbids removal of any Jars (Article 6);
- identifies the Ministry of Information and Culture (MIC), the Province, Municipality and Special Zone Information and Culture Services, the District Information and Culture Offices and village Administrative Authorities as responsible for the management of national heritage, whose duties include creating an inventory of the heritage assets, fund raising and liaising with foreign agencies;
- forbids the construction of buildings, restaurants or entertainment premises within the archaeological site of national value without the authorisation of the MIC;
- provides that management, conservation and preservation of heritage are funded by a Government-established National Heritage Conservation Fund;
- provides that archaeological investigation can only be undertaken with the permission and under the auspices of the MIC, with all archaeological material belonging to the State, and that accidental finds should be reported to the Department of Information and Culture within three days with compensation payable to the finder.

b) *Guidelines for Villages on Conservation, Protection and Support of the Cultural, Historical and Natural Heritage that is within their Respective Areas of Responsibility* (2003)

This document was introduced after it was identified that a lack of conservation awareness and support has resulted in damage of valuable sites and damage or disappearance of artefacts. It aims to ensure the sustainable and permanent management, conservation and protection of National Heritage sites while recognising that community-based heritage tourism can benefit heritage sites, communities, and the domestic and international visitor.

The document was issued by the provincial governor of Xieng Khouang Province and sets out particular
responsibilities of the various authorities involved in heritage conservation (see ‘Who’s who in safeguarding the Plain of Jars’ at 3.5.1 below).

c) Guidelines concerning the protection of Plain of Jars by Xieng Khouang Provincial Department of Information and Culture (2007) (Agreement No. 150, dated 10 of July 2007)

These guidelines relate to the management of Site One, and include the do’s and don’ts expected from visitors on site. They include:

- No planting vegetables, tending animals or organizing activities on the Plain of Jars without permission
- No overnight stays, aggressive or lewd behaviour on the premises of the Plain of Jars
- No climbing, stepping on, carving, damaging or graffiti on the jars
- Excavation at the Plain of Jars is only allowed with authorization from the Ministry of Information and Culture
- Do not take weapons, knives or luggage to the Plain of Jars
- Visitors are advised to follow and respect the instructions provided by authority or staff manning the jar site
- Individuals breaking the aforementioned rules will face serious consequences

d) The Law on National Heritage ('Heritage Law') (11th November 2005)

The Heritage Law supersedes previous all National Heritage legislation in the event of inconsistency. The Law focuses on National Heritage but has the following provisions for the management, preservation and conservation of World Heritage sites:

- The authorisation of the Ministry of Information and Culture is needed to carry out repair, rehabilitation and restoration of World Heritage Sites;
- The management of National Heritage Sites inscribed on the World Heritage List is to have its own administration e.g. Office of World Heritage. The specific role and status of the Office will be defined separately from the 2005 Heritage Law; and
- The Ministry of Information and Culture will supervise and encourage the Offices of World Heritage in the implementation of laws, regulation, planning, and projects concerning World Heritage.

The ownership procedures of World Heritage properties are not defined in the Law. National level Heritage
ownership is registered with Ministry of Information and Culture. For instance Plain of Jars was registered in 1993 by Provincial Department of Information and Culture, who then formally became the office responsible for the sites.

The Law identifies the need and sources of funding for a National Heritage Fund, however, it falls short of providing detailed rules covering management and use.

e) International cultural heritage conventions, documents or charters

The following international conventions, documents and charters are relevant to cultural heritage management, usage or conservation:


1964 *International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites* (‘the Venice Charter’)


1972 *Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (signed by Lao PDR in 1987)

1976 *Charter of Cultural Tourism*

1981 *The Australia ICOMOS Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance* (‘the Burra Charter’)

1990 *ICOMOS Charter for the Protection and Management of the Archaeological Heritage*

1994 *Nara Document on Authenticity*

2003 *Convention on the Protection of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* (not ratified by Lao PDR)

2005 *ICOMOS Xian Declaration on the Conservation of the Setting of Heritage Structures, Sites and Areas*

2005 *UNESCO Hoi An Protocols for Best Conservation Practice in Asia*

The Plain of Jars was included on Lao PDR’s World Heritage Tentative List on 25 March 1992, at the initiative of Department of Museums and Archaeology of the Ministry of
Information and Culture. This indicated the intention of the Government of the Lao PDR to afford the highest level of protection to the site.

3.4.2 The Heritage Management Plan

When it is introduced, the most important legal protection for the Plain of Jars will be the Heritage Management Plan. The Heritage Management Plan is currently in draft form. When it is finalised, if anything in another law is inconsistent with the Heritage Management Plan concerning the Plain of Jars, the Heritage Management Plan will have higher authority than the other law. This means that in practice, you should become most familiar with the Heritage Management Plan. In addition to being an important part of the legal framework protecting the site, it will also guide day to day decision-making about the management of the Plain of Jars.

An important protective mechanism introduced by the Heritage Management Plan is known as zoning.

3.4.3 Zoning and land use controls supporting heritage protection of Plain of Jars

Zoning involves the classification of identified areas, or ‘zones’, surrounding archaeological sites as areas which are protected. Development and in these identified protection areas is controlled according to the specific rules of each zone, but in any event, should be limited to low impact activities.

The zones are developed to provide protection to key elements which characterise the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape while taking in account the realities of future development needs. Article 43 of the Heritage Law (‘Protected Area of Heritage Sites’) divides the protection area into three zones:

- **Zone 1** is the central area, where the core heritage fabric is located, and which must be protected in its original circumstances and where no construction is permitted;
- **Zone 2** is the area surrounding the central area, where some activities are permitted, provided that no damage shall be caused to that surrounding area;
- **Zone 3** is the administrative area where construction is permitted to serve Zones 1 and 2 for the accommodation of tourists.
The Heritage Law provides for the creation of specific regulations for each heritage Zone. For the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape the following applies:

Within **Zone 1**, (‘the Core Zone’) contains the jar sites themselves. Accordingly, in Zone 1 no direct impacts on the Plain of Jars’ resources and associated buried deposits will be allowed. Zone 1 is for education, research and sightseeing purposes only. The Core Zone should be respected as a site of significance, research and conservation. Acceptable activities within the Core Zone are those related to the site management, interpretation and visitation (for sites opened to the public). Persons or institutions wishing to undertake archaeological investigation within this zone are required to contact the MIC and obtain formal permission in accordance with the Heritage Law.

It is the Site Manager’s duty to design infrastructure for tourism-visited sites within this zone. The Site Manager will collaborate with district and village level authorities and the design will have to be endorsed by the MIC prior to implementation. Infrastructure within Zone 1 is limited to walking paths, rubbish collection points, appropriate signage, information points and improvement of access to the site.

**Zone 2** is intended to protect the setting of the jar site. Zone 2 needs strong environmental protection to ensure minimum visual impacts on the jar sites and their immediate environment. Non-commercial forest conservation areas, agricultural extension areas and livestock grazing will be encouraged within this zone. Existing agricultural activities and small infrastructure projects, such as temporary sheds and animal shelters will be allowed to continue in Zone 2. The regulations of the Provincial Governor have approved management of surrounding mountaintops and hills, including prohibiting any construction on the mountaintop. Major earthworks, residential or public buildings outside the village zone and visual impacts such as mobile reception towers, electric pylons are not permitted within Zone 2.

However, near certain sites, such as Site One, an existing rural community lives within the Zone 2. In order to anticipate and regulate ongoing village development, a Village Extension area was identified and agreed with local government within Zone 2. Within this extension area construction of additional village (residential) houses will be allowed. Where private landowners with property within Zone 2 want to use the land to build their family home, the government should assume ownership of the property and allocate comparative land outside the Zone 2.

Apart from Village Extension Area, Zone 2 will also make provision for a Tourist Service Area. This area will include at
minimum a visitor centre, which will provide information to the tourists prior to visiting the heritage site. The villagers will be responsible for the maintenance of this area and its facilities as part of the community-based management of the jar sites, and will also be given opportunity to sell food and drinks to the tourists. Permissible within the Tourist Service Area are:

- an admission ticketing office;
- an information kiosk;
- a car park;
- food and beverage stalls not exceeding 1 ha; and
- toilet facilities.

**Zone 3** is needed to protect the integrity and authenticity of the site. For the Plain of Jars the limits of the World Heritage property are proposed to coincide with the boundary of the province. Within this large area World Heritage Impact Assessment will take place in order to ensure that large infrastructure or development projects do not impact on the sites or their setting. Future World Heritage inscription would result in an influx of tourism to the province and a boom in tourism-related development. Particular care should be taken that proposed tourism infrastructure near Zone 2 does not negatively impact the purpose of Zone 2.

The protection measures will allow for development but require a World Heritage Impact Assessment to be undertaken prior to the development or infrastructure works. Such impact assessments will ensure that projects will not negatively affect World Heritage significance. The projects can usually still be realised, but may need to be adapted based on the outcomes of the assessment. Zone 3 will identify areas away from the jar sites where new settlements, light industries, mining, public facilities, etc are appropriate.

The detailed zoning for only eleven sites has been achieved; the remaining jar sites are to be zoned within the next 5 years. In the meanwhile, the following generic protection zones are in force:

- for zone 1: an area of 150 metres around the jars perimeter; and
- for zone 2: an area of 1000 metres around zone 1.

### 3.5 Who’s who in safeguarding the Plain of Jars

It is important to know who is involved in safeguarding the Plain of Jars. Understanding the various roles and responsibilities of people involved will help you to decide who to contact in certain situations, for example if you need information, or if you want to report an issue, so that you can perform your role as a Cultural Heritage Specialist Guide.

The introduction of the Heritage Management Plan for the
Plain of Jars will provide a new structure for the roles and responsibilities. As mentioned at 3.4.2 above, this will be the most important document to follow. For this reason, we set out below the roles and responsibilities as they are currently described (that is, prior to the introduction of the Heritage Management Plan) and how they will be described after the introduction of the Heritage Management Plan.

3.5.1 Current roles and responsibilities (Pre- Heritage Management Plan)

As set out in Guidelines for Villages on Conservation, Protection and Support of the Cultural, Historical and Natural Heritage that is within their Respective Areas of Responsibility (2003) (see 3.4.1 above), the current roles and responsibilities for safeguarding the Plain of Jars are as follows:

a. The Provincial Department of Information and Culture and District Office of Information and Culture is responsible for:

   - regulating and conserving the cultural heritage and historic places;
   - conducting surveys, data collection and registration, and for monitoring the implementation of decrees as well as assisting villagers;
   - monitoring the village-based conservation teams at least 2 times per year and holding village management consultations;
   - raising conservation and cultural heritage awareness; and
   - assisting villages with heritage site boundary demarcation and construct signage.

b. The Provincial and District Tourism Office is responsible for:

   - developing and supporting village tourism activities and protecting of the Plain of Jars’ heritage;
   - assisting villagers with related small-scale village development activities;
   - educating tourists on cultural do and don’ts;
   - consulting with the village, the Information and Culture Service and other concerned stakeholders on village tourism activities;
   - ensuring that in the event that tourism is causing negative impacts, concerned villagers have the right to request that the authorities reduce the number of tourists that visit the village, and that in the event that severe negative impacts arise, tourism operations in the concerned village should be terminated.

c. The Provincial and District Police Department is
responsible for:

- monitoring and enforcing the implementation of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic Presidential Decree no. 03 concerning the preservation of Cultural, Historic and Natural Heritage; and
- assisting the villagers by investigating illegal activities or suspicious persons on lands administered by the village.

d. The village authorities and villagers are responsible for:

- establishing village-based Heritage Conservation Teams;
- maintaining cleanliness at the site and ensuring those facilities are always kept clean and in good working order;
- monitoring tour guides, domestic and international tourists to ensure that tourism-related rules and regulations are adhered to;
- ensuring that people do not sell cultural antiques, nor sell or cook wildlife for sale, to tourists; and
- ensuring that people abide by rules and regulations and the Lao People’s Democratic Republic Presidential Decree concerning the preservation of Cultural, Historic and Natural Heritage.

e. The District Governor and all levels of Authorities are responsible for:

- following up, regulating, and providing guidance on the implementation of the guidelines in this document;
- establishing a district level committee that is responsible for regulating, conserving and protecting the cultural and historic heritage and aforementioned activities;
- promulgating documents related to heritage conservation and fostering understanding among the population so they take a leading role in the protection of the cultural heritage; and
- requiring that participation in cultural heritage protection is a duty of all people.

3.5.2 Roles and responsibilities (after introduction of the Heritage Management Plan)

As set out in the draft Heritage Management Plan, upon introduction of that document the roles and responsibilities for safeguarding the Plain of Jars will be as follows:

(a) The Roles of the Heritage Steering Committees in the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape Protection Zone
The role of the National Heritage Steering Committee for the implementation of the Heritage Management Plan within the boundary of Xieng Khouang Province (Zone 3) is limited to supervision.

The National World Heritage Committee meets 3 times annually to review and evaluate the management of the world heritage in Lao PDR; proposing the national heritage that meets the criteria of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, and suggest areas of international cooperation. In the meeting, the committee may invite specialists in various specializations such architecture, history, culture, city layout/plan, ethnicity or in other areas to attend.

To perform assigned tasks effectively, the National World Heritage Committee has a secretariat office that functions under leadership of this committee. The secretariat prepares the agenda of the committee meeting and other relevant documents, consolidates performances, and proposes an action plan to the committee meeting. When needed, the secretariat will coordinate with relevant ministries, local governments and UNESCO. To perform its tasks, the secretariat office has an implementing unit which consists of specialists in different fields such as architecture (Lao traditional style), history, culture, city planning, ethnicity, law, and natural and environmental conservation, the staff is approved by the Steering Committee.

The responsibilities of the Provincial Heritage Steering Committee in the implementation of the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape Management Plan within the boundary of Xieng Khouang Province (Zone 3) consist of:

- supervising the Site Manager and Heritage Office;
- approval or denial of construction or development projects within Zone 3 of the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape based on the recommendations of the Impact Assessment Team and Site Manager;
- educating the people about their duties and obligations for preservation of the Cultural, Historical and Natural heritage sites;
- providing guidelines and support the sub-committee for the implementing the solutions, regulations and laws on the management, conservation and preservation of the cultural, historical and natural heritage;
- agreeing on research programmes and strategies for the forthcoming World Heritage;
- supervising appropriate allocation of funds for heritage management;
- supervising the budget and expenditure of the Heritage Fund;
appointing a Site Manager;
appointing all other professional and technical staff in consultation with Site Manager and MIC;
deciding on proposals for display, interpretation and visitor facilities advised by the Site Manager;
deciding on income-generating projects advised by the Site Manager;
agreeing on training programmes advised by the Site Manager; and
receiving annual reports of World Heritage on the implementation of Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape Management Plan, including management activities, research results and training programmes.

(b) The Role of the Site Manager and the Heritage Office

A capable Site Manager will be crucial in the successful conservation, preservation and sustainable implementation of heritage and tourism management at the Plain of Jars. The main responsibilities of the Site Manager are to manage conservation, research and training programmes, be responsible for the timing of the activities and programmes, and to advise the decision-making bodies on policy and other issues arising during the implementation of the Plan. The Site Manager will be supported by the Heritage Office’s five units: Administration, Site Management, Archaeological Research and Conservation Team, Impact Assessment Team and Heritage Awareness Team.

The Site Manager’s duties in the following areas are to:

**Control and monitoring**

- advise Village Heritage Teams and Provincial Heritage Steering Committee on improvement works or changes within Zone 1;
- advise Village Heritage Teams and Provincial Heritage Steering Committee on development activities proposed in Zone 2;
- advise Provincial Heritage Steering Committee on development or infrastructure projects within Zone 3 and to advise potential developers on how schemes can, if possible, be amended to be acceptable;
- supervise the monitoring of the protection area by Impact Assessment Team;
- report any infringement on protective zoning to Provincial Heritage Steering Committee; and
- monitor community-based management of the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape.
**Archaeology and Survey**
- direct archaeological fieldwork of all types, including excavation and survey;
- decide on emergency salvage work in response to unpredicted discoveries;
- advise the Heritage Steering Committee on any proposals for archaeological research;
- oversee externally funded and staffed research projects;
- monitor the effectiveness of the Plan in protecting the archaeology of the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape and fulfilling the research objectives;
- organise archaeological services for other sectors;
- manage through the Heritage Awareness Unit the information at kiosks and centres; and
- prepare in collaboration with MIC new research strategies for the Plain of Jars.

**Documentation**
- oversee the maintenance and update of the GIS database;
- oversee and control the provision of documentation services for other sectors;
- oversee the maintenance of the Plain of Jars library;
- organise site maps to other sections if appropriate;
- prepare and submit annual progress report to Provincial Government Departments; and
- prepare and submit annual finance report to MIC, the Ministry of Finance and DoIC.

**Community and Economic Development**
- advise on tourism activity development near jar sites or within Zone 2;
- advise the PTD on site marketing;
- raise public awareness and to foster local support for the Plan; and
- develop heritage education within the community.

**Security, Access and Maintenance**
- manage the access of visitors to the site and monitor carrying capacity;
- closely monitor activities within the protection Zones; and
- oversee maintenance and security services, especially at tourist visited site.

**Conservation and Construction**
- liaise with PTD on appropriate tourism development at the jar sites and carrying capacity of the sites;
liaise with DAF on agricultural expansion activities in Zone 2 and management of conservation area;
advise other provincial departments in matters concerning the protection and conservation of Cultural Heritage in Xieng Khouang; and
advise local authorities in case of criminal acts against objects or sites of Cultural Heritage.

Training

seek to improve the short and long-term technical capacity of the Heritage Office;
seek interdepartmental cooperation on provincial and district levels to ensure Heritage Office staff and projects benefit from international funding and training sessions;
continue to improve the management and maintenance mechanisms deployed by local communities through workshops and seminars;
work closely with Provincial Tourism Department on improving the guide service and conservation awareness of the guides; and
work towards limiting guide service on the Plain of Jars to Cultural Heritage Specialist Guides (UNESCO and LNTA certified guides) only.

Office, staff management and financial control

oversee management and employment of civil servants and contracted staff;
manage the Heritage Fund and preparation of Heritage Office budget;
identify funding and funding agencies and submit proposals to promote, conserve and improve cultural heritage sites; and
represent Heritage Office of the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape at National, Provincial and International meetings and conferences.

The Site Manager is supported by five units in the Heritage Office. Each of these units has the following role:

The Administration Unit will consist of 5 people. It will be the Assistant Site Manager’s duty to assist the Site Manager in all his or her duties. The Secretary will perform administrative duties related to the Heritage Office, including the preparation of the annual reports, meetings minutes, organization of official functions, etc. The Accountant will keep accounts and management and operational budget; he or she will submit revised budgets to Steering Committee and will be responsible for the centralised sale of the entry tickets to the jar site. The ticket sale records will be updated daily and funds deposited into the Heritage Fund on a regular
basis; the process will be transparent and accountable. The Driver will drive and maintain the Office vehicle. The vehicle will be assigned to in field teams as priority. A Cleaner/Gardener will clean the offices and maintain the surrounding area.

The two people attached to the **Site Management Unit** will monitor tourist-visited jar sites twice a year and a minimum of once a year on all other recorded sites. They will collect annual cultural heritage, biodiversity and socio-economic information at the seven Level 5 sites, assist in analysing and prepare a report in English and Lao for submission to the Steering Committee. They will also function as a problem/threat intervention team and facilitate and participate in meetings between village and district or others in case of cultural heritage site management disputes. The Site Management team will be responsible for erosion management and village training on maintenance and management of jar sites.

The **Archaeological Research and Conservation Unit** will consist of one historian, two archaeologists, a conservator and GIS specialist. The team will conduct ongoing site survey and inventory of Cultural Heritage Resources in Xieng Khouang in close cooperation with district level and produce reports in Lao and English on their findings. They will form part of excavation and survey programmes instigated by external teams. They will appropriately store and conserve artefacts and maintain equipment. The GIS specialist will maintain the GIS database, produce maps on demand and implement research following the Heritage Management Plan research strategy. The Unit may also assist and advise the Department of Information and Culture on archaeological deposits, recording of Cultural Heritage and conservation of moveable heritage matters.

The **Impact Assessment Unit**, which consists of two people, will be responsible for the management and regulation for the protection zones for Cultural Heritage Sites. The Team will coordinating with the government and private sectors relating to development activities and assess the impacts of such activities to the heritage sites. It will also assist the district departments in protecting and conserving Heritage monuments and sites, which may include proposal writing to secure funding.

Communication of cultural heritage information is the responsibility of **Heritage Awareness Unit**. They will disseminate information to villages and schools to ensure understanding of heritage significance and community protection of the resources. They will continue to conduct in the village Heritage conservation awareness seminars, regular workshops, and trainings in the districts to upgrade the district
capabilities. The Team will train village and town based guides in Heritage Management and Plain of Jars research. Finally, the Team will produce heritage information for the general public and tourism.

The Heritage Office should be housed in a central building dedicated to conservation, management and research of Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape. It should include a visitor centre and museum, research facilities and accommodations, conservation laboratory, administration offices, artefact repository, library.

(c) The role of the District Office of Information and Culture

The District Office of Information and Culture supports the Heritage Office in the implementation of monitoring, research and conservation efforts and reports urgently to the Heritage Office in case of protective zoning breaches or other non-compliance of management or protective measures set out in 3.4.1 above. The districts have trained mobile teams whose responsibility it is to teach every village associated with a jar site about their role in protecting the site. The district is in direct contact with the villagers and liaises closely with the Site Management Unit of Heritage Office.

(d) The Role of the Communities in the Implementation of the Plain of Jars Heritage Management Plan

The communities are the main stakeholder in the management of the Plain of Jars and this is reflected in the Heritage Management Plan. They take on the responsibility of the daily management of the jar sites and are the first line to monitor and report negative impacts on the sites. The Village Heritage Teams will be employed to undertake management, maintenance and monitoring of the heritage sites and in lieu the village will be guided, trained and receive support in developing tourism or alternative ways of income.

3.6 Partners in development

The role of the following organisations in contributing to safeguarding the Plain of Jars, is follows:

UNESCO, with the Government of Lao PDR, initiated the Lao-UNESCO Programme for "Safeguarding the Plain of Jars", a multi-year phased programme to safeguard and develop the Plain of Jars.

Lao National Commission for UNESCO, as the national counterpart, is the coordinating body to serve as liaison between governmental and non-governmental bodies and UNESCO’s Secretariat. It has played key roles in implementing UNESCO Programmes in Lao PDR in the field of cultural heritage such as the safeguarding and World
Heritage inscription of Vat Phou and the previous phases of the Lao-UNESCO Programme to Safeguard the Plain of Jars.

**The Lao National Tourism Authority** is responsible for developing, administering and monitoring compliance with policy, legislation, regulations concerning the tourism industry and strategy on tourism development.

**The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry**, through local experts from the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute, will implement emergency erosion control measures. Their department in Xieng Khouang advises the project on livelihood alternatives and rural development for the target villages.

**The Xieng Khouang Department of Information and Culture** is responsible for the heritage of Xieng Khouang; these duties include survey, restoration, conservation and preservation. The Department is supported by the Ministry of Information and Culture.

**The National Regulatory Authority for UXO/Mine Action Sector in Lao PDR**, in charge of the coordination, regulation and monitoring of all unexploded ordnance (UXO) and mine action operations in Lao PDR, oversees the UXO clearance in collaboration with the Mines Advisory Group.

**Mines Advisory Group (MAG)**, co-laureate of the 1997 Nobel Peace Prize, is an international NGO specializing in Humanitarian Mine Action. In Xieng Khouang MAG has already worked on clearing seven of the Jars sites.

**New Zealand Agency for International Development (NZAID)** is the New Zealand Government’s international aid and development agency. The agency is responsible for delivering New Zealand’s Official Development Assistance and for advising Ministers on development assistance policy and operations. NZAID has been supporting the Safeguarding of Plain of Jars Programme since Phase III.

**Engineers without Borders – USA (EWB)** supports community-driven development programs worldwide through the design and implementation of sustainable engineering projects, while fostering responsible leadership. Engineers Without Borders-USA partners with remote, developing world communities in 47 countries usually off the radar of larger aid organizations. Professionals and students from a variety of professions including engineering, health, and business, make up the volunteers in our 300 chapters that are within the USA. Each of these EWB-USA chapters makes a five-year commitment to a developing world community to design, implement, and maintain low-cost, small-scale, replicable and sustainable water, sanitation, renewable energy, and other
projects – while respecting the community’s wishes, history, culture and way of life. The projects are recommended by the local communities around the world. Once projects are completed, EWB-USA volunteers train local community members, NGOs on the ground, and others to monitor and maintain the projects, while developing the necessary managerial, technical, and entrepreneurial skills. EWB-USA works to meet the objectives of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.

**Corporate, institutional or individual donors** – Individual companies, organisation or institutions may contribute financially or otherwise to the community-based management of the sites or any aspect which contributes to the preservation or knowledge of Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape. To date these include: Archaeological Assessments Ltd, GWP Consultants, Milsearch Ltd., University of Florida, and University of Arizona.

### 3.7 Unit summary

This Unit looked at the threats to the Plain of Jars from humans and nature, as well as the forms of protection that are designed to meet these threats. It also set out the range of partners who may assist in monitoring and dealing with some of these threats. Understanding the nature of the threats, the forms of available protection and the people who can assist in various ways will provide you with the ability to help to maintaining the special values of the Plain of Jars, which are attracting increasing numbers of tourists and providing an income for you and your community.
Unit 4
Visitors and Interpretation at the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape

Learning Objectives
This Unit is designed to provide you with an understanding of:

- How to use interpretation techniques and activities for the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape
- What current interpretation resources and thematic trails exist at the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape

Contents
This Unit is organised as follows:

4.1 Interpretation techniques and activities for the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape

4.2 Tips on using existing interpretation resources

4.3 Thematic trails for different audiences and interest groups

4.4 Unit summary

4.5 Worksheets and FAQs

Unit References
A Guide to Xieng Khouang guidebook
Northern Heritage Trail guidebook
Plain of Jars information kiosk posters
Case studies in core module
Worksheets & Lists of ‘Frequently Asked Questions’ (FAQs)
4.1 Interpretation techniques and activities for the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape

At present, there are some resources to help visitors and guides better understand the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape and associated heritage resources. These include:

- The Tourist Information Center at the Provincial Tourism Department
- Guidebooks on Xieng Khouang and Northern Laos
- Signage and information kiosks at some sites
- The MAG UXO information center in Phonsavanh
- Site guides at the Mulberries Silk farm in Phonsavanh

And most important – guided tours led by well-trained guides. This Unit will focus on how you, as a guide, can improve your interpretation skills to better communicate the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape’s heritage values to visitors. A well-trained guide helps visitors better understand and appreciate a heritage site, and creates awareness of the importance of heritage protection. Guides interact directly with visitors to facilitate both enjoyment and education as part of a heritage tour. The way this is done is through providing quality heritage interpretation.

Good heritage interpretation aims to make the visitor think and remember, not simply present facts that they passively listen to and then will probably forget soon after their visit. Therefore, a heritage guide should develop presentation skills and thematic heritage tours that challenge visitors to think and therefore leave a lasting impression. Each tour should have a “take home message” for the visitor. For this Unit, we will focus on one unifying theme (a heritage guide may propose others) for the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape that reflects the foresight of the people who made the jars and the brave traditions of the people that followed them. It is perseverance, which is conveyed in the statement below:

“The Plain of Jars is situated at strategic crossroads in Southeast Asia. Through the centuries it has seen the rise and fall of several great civilizations as demonstrated by the ancient stone jars, Buddhist monuments, war relics and cultural traditions that survive until today. The landscape challenges us to remember that culture is dynamic and echoes the natural, spiritual and political world that shapes it.”

4.1.1 Planning a Heritage Tour

To plan an interpretative tour there are three key decisions a guide must make. They are:

- What is the theme? – This means the take home
message we want to deliver to visitors. The theme “perseverance” has already been identified above. You may use the knowledge and techniques learned from this Unit to develop other themes for heritage tours that differ from the three samples we will use during this training.

- What is the medium to deliver the message? – This means how the take home message is communicated to the visitor. For our purposes, we will focus on a heritage guide’s verbal and non-verbal presentation while on a guided tour. Other supporting communication materials include guidebooks, brochures, and signage.
- Who is the audience? – The audience is the people on one of the three sample guided tours discussed in section 4.3. There are many different types of domestic and international visitors that go on tours in Xieng Khouang. A good heritage guide will spend time learning about the different tourist markets, why they come, and the type of experience they seek and enjoy.

Decisions on a tour theme, communication medium, and what audience is targeted should support the four broad goals of:

- Enhancing visitor experience;
- Protecting the jar sites and heritage resources;
- Protecting visitors from hazards; and
- Enhancing public relations and the role of the Provincial Heritage Committee.

This Unit focuses on the first goal, to enhance visitor experience through expertly guided heritage tours. A discussion on how heritage tours support goals number 2, 3 and 4 is presented in units 2, 3 and 5.
Exercise 4.1: Turning facts into stories at the Plain of Jars

One way of communicating the importance of the Plain of Jars is using themes. A theme is like the type of story you are telling. A theme can be related to values. Values are the things about the Plain of Jars that make it important to people.

Below are some examples of how a theme can be related to values, and how these can be related to physical elements at the Plain of Jars or other information. Can you fill the blank spaces?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Values related to theme</th>
<th>Related elements / information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Life and death at the Plain of Jars</td>
<td>Spiritual values</td>
<td>• Jars – believed to be used to hold remains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social values</td>
<td>• Cave (Site 1) - chimneys suggest it was the site of cremation itself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aesthetic values</td>
<td>• Burial goods – archaeological evidence to support strong beliefs regarding life and death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Archaeological values</td>
<td>• Landscape – orientation of jars within landscape has spiritual dimension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td><img src="https://example.com/table.png" alt="Table" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Historic values</td>
<td>• Damage by Haw bandits, bomb craters from Second Indochinese War - evidence of attempts to control site over time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social values</td>
<td>• Evidence of movement of people to area – similarity between jars found here and elsewhere (India / Indonesia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A creative community</td>
<td></td>
<td><img src="https://example.com/table.png" alt="Table" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An ingenious community</td>
<td>Scientific values</td>
<td>• Quality of artisanship of jars &amp; associated burial goods (eg frogman)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social values</td>
<td>• Continuation in cultural industries of local community – music, creation of handicrafts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><img src="https://example.com/table.png" alt="Table" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human influence over the landscape</td>
<td>Scientific values</td>
<td>• Plain of Jars as evidence of use of natural resources for cultural practices in harmony with natural values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social values</td>
<td><img src="https://example.com/table.png" alt="Table" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.1.2 Interpretative Techniques

Once we identify the “theme” of a tour, how we will communicate educational messages, and are aware of who the target audience is, a range of interpretative techniques should be employed to enhance the quality of a heritage tour.

**Before the Heritage Tour**

- **Provide enough information during your orientation to prepare visitors mentally, physically and emotionally** – This means that during your orientation, be sure to remind visitors about the length of their tour, any physical challenges, what they should bring, advise them on weather conditions and provide a brief overview of the itinerary. A heritage guide will also provide background information about local communities and how they are linked to the site. If you are able to meet your guest the day before the tour, provide some readings on the local history and culture. Prior to departure, review codes of responsible conduct and remind visitors of why the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape has been nominated to be a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Also keep in mind that some guests may be veterans of the Indochina Wars or Lao people that are returning to the province after many years to visit relatives and may become very emotional when they see relics of the war or landmarks that bring back memories from long ago.

- **Follow interpretive trails in section 4.3** – Three heritage trails are presented in section 4.3, or a heritage guide may develop interpretative trails of her own. The point here is to have a plan of where you will be going before the tour departs, including knowledge of what information you will present, at which sites and how often you will stop for breaks. Be prepared to adjust your tour program if a group that shows a lot of interest in a particular feature.

- **Create internal conflict and ambiguity by questioning the visitor** – This means making the visitor think by asking them questions. Even though the heritage guide will be able to present a lot of information about The Plain of Jars, there is still a lot that is not known about the site. You should therefore ask visitors “What do you think the Jars might have been used for?” or ask them “Have you ever seen a bomb crater from a 500 pound bomb?” Later, during the tour, revisit these questions and spend some time discussing the responses. This engages the visitor and...
stimulates them to seek more knowledge, both during and after the heritage tour.

- **Plan for a variety of topics** – A heritage tour will include information and learning on more than just the jars. Include information on culture, nature and different historic periods.

- **Appoint different tourists with different “jobs” or roles** – Before the trip departs, ask several guests to take on volunteer “jobs” that will enhance learning, safety, and lessen negative impacts of the heritage tour. For example, ask someone to volunteer to be the “Doctor” and give them the main task of reminding everyone to drink enough water. Someone else can be the “Rock Loving Geologist” that encourages everyone to avoid touching the jars. Ask a visitor to be the “Culture Police” that encourages the group to follow Do’s and Don’ts guidelines, and perhaps ask someone to be the “General” that does a damage assessment by counting bomb craters while on tour. There are many, many possible jobs. List as many as you can and determine which visitors like the most through trial and error.

**During the Heritage Tour**

- **Appeal to all senses** – This means facilitate visitor learning though sight, sound, touch, taste and smell. A heritage guide will need to do more than just talk to lead an outstanding tour. For example if visiting Muang Khoun, carry an old photo of the town and present it while on tour. Ask visitors to identify which buildings are still standing. Or carry a book on birds, and if you hear a bird calling that you can not see show visitors a picture of it. Avoid touching the jars, but instead encourage touching rock fragments, leaves, silk, bamboo and other natural materials. Taste a variety of local food, and invite visitors to small fragrant herbs or aromatic plants like bai nat or mai long leng. Explain what the plants are used for. Or even better, ask a local village to do so and translate for the group.

- **Highlight the unexpected and surprising** – Incorporate your own indigenous knowledge or facts not widely known into the heritage tour programme. Note that there is usually a pine tree growing out of a bomb crater, or Jars Sites are usually found on the top if hills. Why? Talk about the valuable and rare het paek and show this mushroom to your group if in season. Tell the guests Xieng Khouang is famous for kao kai noi sticky rice. Why is this variety of sticky rice called “small chicken rice?” These examples both highlight the unexpected and appeal to the senses.
• **Pose a challenging activity and offer a reward for accomplishing it** – Challenge the visitor by asking them to find an interesting archaeological, historic or natural feature while on the heritage tour. One activity is to ask the visitor to find which jar has the “frogman” at Jar Site 1. Offer a small reward such as a local kanom (perhaps made with kao kai noi) to the person that finds it first.

• **Make the experience personally relevant** – This means creating a link between the site and visitors. Topics that may be integrated into the heritage tour in Xieng Khouang include funerary practices of the people that made the jars, modern Lao funerary practices and comparison to funerary practices of visitors. War and conflict is also a theme that will be personally relevant for most visitors.

• **Allow the visitor to lead part of the tour through participation and interaction** – As part of the “job” that you assign visitors (discussed above) ask them at some time during the heritage tour to lead a discussion or present their point of view on an aspect of the heritage tour. For example, your “Rock Loving Geologist” might be asked to discuss how the jars are being affected by tourism and what measures can be made to better protect them. The ‘General’ can give updates on the bomb crater count and speculate about the size of bombs that made each crater.

• **Provide ongoing physical and mental orientation** – Visitors will often ask “how far to the next spot” and what are we going to see next” even though you may have already given a detailed pre-tour orientation. A heritage guide will provide continuous reminders on the above, and may use maps, photos or other printed media to provide continuous orientation to the group. A heritage guide will also remind guests of any upcoming hazards or physically challenging aspects of a tour.

**After the Heritage Tour**

• **Ask/review what the group has learned and encourage continuous learning** – Before heading back to Phonsavan, a heritage guide should assemble the tour group in a comfortable spot, preferably at one of the heritage attractions, and review what was learned. Allow time for any final questions and for the visitor to reflect on the heritage tour’s take home messages. Encourage visitors to read more about the sites they visited.

• **Introduce visitors to other places of interest and how communities benefit from tourism** – Try and extend visitor’s length of stay in Xieng Khouang by
recommending other heritage tours. You should also encourage visitors to purchase local handicrafts and food because it will help benefit local people and strengthen the economy in Xieng Khouang. Remind visitors that part the fee they paid to take today’s tour went to entry fees that fund site protection, maintenance and community development.

- **If known, provide advice to the visitor about their next destination** – Tour operators, guides and the tourist information center should have a supply of brochures, maps and other information about Lao PDR’s heritage sites and how to visit them.

### 4.2 Tips on using existing interpretation resources

Existing interpretation resources in Xieng Khouang are the Provincial tourism Information Center, Xieng Khouang Guidebook, Northern Heritage Trail Guidebook, posters found in information kiosks at 7 jar sites and the MAG UXO Information Center. A heritage guide should consider incorporating one or more of these resources into all tours. For example, a heritage tour might begin at the Provincial Information Center where visitors can pick up free brochures or purchase a guidebook. A visit to the MAG UXO Information Center can be a powerful way to end a tour with a message that highlights the misery war brings and encourages peace.

#### Types of interpretation resources

![Figure 4.4: Types of interpretation resources (Source: Julie Van Den Bergh)](image)
Thematic trails for different audiences and interest groups

The thematic trails in this section will appeal to domestic and international visitors. Each varies in duration and difficulty. **Trail 1** is not overly physically demanding and can be completed in a few hours. **Trail 2** will require a full day and involves walking for approximately one hour over moderately rough terrain as well as a visit to a local community. **Trail 3** involves some moderately strenuous walking and visits several Buddhist monuments.

**Trail 1: Archaeological Heritage at Jar Site 1**

**Pre Tour Orientation & Introduction** *(follow the guidelines in section 4.1.2 to enhance the interpretative aspects of this part of the heritage tour)*

At Site 1, the jars are found in 5 groups all located within short walking distance of each other and occupy an area of 28.5 ha. The site counts 334 sandstone and conglomerate jars, 30 stone discs and 122 mainly quartzite stone markers.

As Site 1 attracts a lot of visitors it is important to identify threats to the heritage resources. While a single event of climbing or touching the jars may not damage them, repeated climbing/touching causes erosion and breakage. Always remember that the stone jars are an irreplaceable and non-renewable resource! Unfortunately intentional damage to the jars has been recorded at this site, once a fresh surface is exposed the jar will erode more quickly than before - please help protect the jars and respect the place by not touching the jars.

The heavy aerial bombardment that Xieng Khouang suffered...
during the Second Indochina War has left a deadly legacy of unexploded ordnance (UXO) which is still being cleared today. As a result of this bombing thousands of inhabitants died or fled Xieng Khouang; it is estimated that ten of thousands of people were displaced or air lifted out of the province. This site was cleared of UXO by Mines Advisory Group (MAG) with the cooperation of the Department of Information and Culture and UNESCO between 26th of July and 15th of October 2004; no less than 127 UXO items were removed. The very expensive UXO clearance was mainly funded by the New Zealand Government.

Areas cleared of UXO have been marked with red and white square markers. The space between the white markers indicates the safe area. If you see UXO please do not touch it. Report any UXO finds to your guide or site managers at the ticket office; always remember UXO kills! Stick to the UXO cleared areas and follow the walking paths to ensure your safety and limit trail erosion.

Today’s walking tour will take you along UXO cleared paths and onto a cleared area around the jars. The paths have been cleared to a depth of 25cm, and area around the jars down to a meter.

Finally, please use the rubbish bins that have been provided on site or alternatively you can carry the rubbish off site and dispose near the ticket office.

**Begin the Tour at Site 1**

This heritage tour follows the path up the hill and stone steps
to Group 1. The first stop is at the rear (to the east) of ‘King’s Cup’ [information stop 1]

1. Site One is the most investigated site to date. Archaeological evidence ranging from Neolithic to 19th century has been discovered in burials, cultural layers and incidental finds. During the early 1930 the French archaeologist Madeleine Colani supported by the Ecole Français d’Extrême Orient (EFEO) recorded and excavated at 12 Plain of Jars sites. Her systematic approach of research led her to empty the content of the jars, excavate underneath and around the jars. Inside the jars she found charred bones and teeth, charcoal and glass beads. Around the jars she found human bones, pottery, a few stone and metal objects, glass beads in burial pits; underneath the stone jars she found nothing. Further excavations at Site One by Japanese Professor Eiji Nitta, Lao Archaeologist Thongsa Sayavongkhamsy and Belgian Archaeologist Julie Van Den Bergh have confirmed several pit burials may surround a stone jar. If these archaeological investigations results are projected on the entire site, between one thousand and two and half thousand burials could be present at Site One!

While it has been known that the Plain of Jars has been used for burials since the 1930’s a local legend recounts the presence and use of the jars as follows: the good and just King Khun Jeuang defeated the evil King Chao Ankha who ruled Xieng Khouang [these were possibly giants!]. In honor and celebration of his victory the stone jars were manufactured and filled with rice wine. The large jar you are standing next is believed to be the King’s cup as it is the largest known stone jar. This is a story perpetuated by elders and school curriculum- very few other stories regarding the stone jars exist.

The site does not only contain stone jars, note the large whitish stones; those are quartzite and have been brought to the site. The quartzite is a grave marker- comparable with headstones. The source of the quartzite is unknown, unlike the source of the stone jars of Site One. Look towards the west and notice the lonely mountain in the plain – this is Phukeng Mountain where the sandstone and conglomerate was quarried to and made into the magnificent jars you see around you. The distance to Phukeng is around 10km. Most recorded quarry sites are located very close (not more than 2km) away from the sites. Phukeng is the only source of sandstone (or suitable stone) in the vicinity and the location of Site One is without a doubt chosen because of the presence of its natural limestone cave. We will discuss the cave later at info stop number 3.

It is also interesting to know that Site One was a strategic military position during the 1964-1974 War. War trenches,
foxholes, anti-aircraft positions, and tank scrapes were constructed and used by the various warring factions during the war. Note the trenches around Group 1 and the large bomb craters. Notice the huge jars which were displaced by the bomb blast and have fallen to the north of the hill.

*Post World War II History*

Before moving on, let’s take a break to briefly discuss some important historic events that followed World War II and had influence on what was to later transpire here at the Plain of Jars.

After World War II, France’s position in Laos was destabilized by the loss of territory to the Japanese and Thailand. The King in Luang Prabang, sensing the weakened position demanded compensation. In 1941, the French agreed to attach Xieng Khouang and Vientiane to the Luang Prabang protectorate, effectively consolidating Lao rule by the king of Luang Prabang. These events led the way to transform the French protectorate of Laos into a constitutional monarchy, with sufficient rights to form a national parliament. The French however, continued to influence administration of the country.

During the second Geneva Convention on the Restoration of the Peace in Indochina, in 1962 Laos’s neutrality was to be guaranteed and the Government of Laos undertook never to permit the territory of Laos to be used in furtherance of a policy of aggression. This neutrality was not to last considering the interests of the USA and North Viet Nam.

Despite the Geneva Conventions, on August 9, 1960, Captain Kong Le staged a military coup and toppled the government with the aim of replacing it with a politically neutral administration. The King backed by the US forced Kong Le’s Neutralist troops to retreat to the Plain of Jars. On January 1st 1961, Phatet Lao took possession of Khun, Paek and Kham districts turning the Plain of Jars into a communist stronghold. The Royal Laotian Air Force backed by the Americans made its first aerial strike on Jan. 11, 1961, using four American AT-6 aircraft, equipped with wing-pylon mounted rockets drastically changing the nature of the war. The US supplied airpower in greater and greater amounts as the war progressed.

Since 1959 the Americans had been recruiting Hmong for reconnaissance missions into Phatet Lao and North Viet Nam territory and trained them to be Special Forces. Helping them and organising the Hmong into an army was Lieutenant Vang Pao, the only Hmong Officer in the Lao Royal Army. The Hmong army was supported by the CIA which provided the troops and refugees with food, medicine and weapons. The Hmong base was located in the stronghold of Long Tieng (*Long chaeng*), on the flank of Phu Bia.
On April 17 and 18, 1964, a tripartite meeting was held at the Plain of Jars to discuss the political unrest in Laos a consensus was not reached. Later in May 1964, the US escalated the aerial bombardments and dropped bombs on the Plain of Jars for the first time. President Lyndon B. Johnson provided secret economic, financial and military aid to the Lao government hoping to prevent a victory by the Communists. The bombers provided support for the Royalist and Hmong ground movements. The bombing continued day and night and targeted roads and villages hoping to turn the war in their favour. The war was fought through the years on a seasonal basis, with Royalist and Hmong backed by US forces advancing in the monsoon season and the Phatet Lao gaining territory in the dry season.

Between 1969 and 1972 the plain was captured and recaptured by Hmong, Royalists and Phatet Lao. The loss of Muang Souy, Lima Site 108 was a blow to the Royal forces and presented another turning point in the Plain of Jars’ battle. On January 27, 1973, the US and Viet Nam attended negotiations in Paris on a cease-fire and peace for the former Indochina. A cease-fire and peace agreement was signed in Vientiane on February 21, 1973. This agreement ended the US involvement in the conflict. On December 2, 1975, a cease-fire between the Royal, Neutralists and Phatet Lao troops was agreed; it marked the end of The Lao “Kingdom of a Million Elephants and White Parasol” and the Lao People’s Democratic Republic was officially established.

Follow the arrow and take the path down the hill leading to group 2, stop at the bottom of the steps [information stop 2].

2. You are here standing on an ancient road; this road was enlarged by the French in colonial times and leads to Luang Prabang. Madeleine Colani already suggested that the jar site distribution and location in Xieng Khouang was connected to trade routes; placing the Plain of Jars at the cross roads. She theorized the Plain of Jars’ people needed salt, which brought traders to this area.

The traders may have been interested in metal: Xieng Khouang is a very active geological region which is rich in metals such as copper and gold. The two principal iron ore deposits in Laos are located in Xieng Khouang. Not far to the north of Phonsavan lies a high grade iron ore deposit very close to the surface; it is possible that these ancient people thrived in this area due to the metal trade. Continue to the cave notice the bomb craters at the entrance of the cave [information stop 3].

3. This natural limestone cave has two manmade holes on top - walk inside and look up. Some people say bombing caused the holes but as Colani already recorded them in the
1930’s this information is wrong. The French Archaeologist Madeleine Colani excavated inside the cave and found lots of burnt bones, charcoal and some grave artefacts; she interpreted the cave as a crematorium whereby the holes on top function as chimneys. The cave was also used during the Indochina war for shelter.

The local inhabitants of Xieng Khouang believe that the cave functioned as the kiln to fire the jars. In the legend of Khun Jeuang the stones were not carved but formed out of a type of cement that is made from exotic materials like buffalo hide, sugar cane sand and lime that is shaped like pottery and fired in a kiln. Walk back to Group 2 and stop at a large conglomerate jar [information stop 4] to see why local people though this true.

4. This jar was carved out of conglomerate stone. Conglomerate is calcified river sediment, and when you notice the rounded pebbles inside the stone matrix is it easily understood why locals believe the jars are made out of man-made cement. This however, is a natural kind of cement and Plain of Jars’ people carved, not molded, every single jar. While it is not understood how the jars were transported from Phukeng to Site One there is evidence that the jars were partially finished on site.

Here is also a good place to explain how stone blocks at quarry sites were carved into jars. When manufacturing a stone jar, the mason would follow the natural fault and bedding to separate a block from its surrounding. This means that the people had a good understanding of which rock source to choose: only areas where the fault/bedding could be shaped into a rectangular block were chosen. The size of the jar we can conclude was not predetermined by the ‘importance’ of the person(s) buried but by the rock source. There is a possibility of course that the truly big blocks were kept for elite, but these assumptions are premature and a lot more investigation is needed. Notice the ‘flat’ side of the jars that has a crust on it. This is the bedding residue.

Continue to walk through Group 2 and notice the different shapes of the jars and explain that the surface we now walk on is about 40 cm higher than the ancient surface onto which the jars have been set. The soil between the two surfaces contains small burial deposits and loose objects, possible remnants from disturbance of the stone jars, i.e. scooping out of the jars and discarding the content.

Make your way to the ‘Frogman’ [information stop 5]. Challenge the visitors to find the decoration and explain that Colani never notice this bas relief.

5. This is the only known jar which has a decoration. The ‘Frogman’, a term coined by the Lao Archaeologist Thongs
Sayavongkhamdy is a full-frontal human bas relief with arms raised and knees bent. The legs are partially buried into the ground, but were uncovered by Prof Nitta in 1994. This human representation is also known on two stone discs, one which can be visited at Ban Phakeo Jar Site. (Notice the 'lid' on the jar nearby, this is not a lid, but a stone disc.)

The frogman motive is known from rock paintings at Huashan in Guanxi, China which are dated to 500 BCE- 200 CE. Traditionally investigators have dated the stone jars to the Iron Age (500 BCE- 500/800 CE). A slightly earlier date is now favoured as some comparative materials have been found dating to Sa Huyhn culture in Vietnam and Han Dynasty in China both 2500-2000 years ago.

The stone jars of the Plain of Jars are not the only known stone jars in the world; we know already from Colani that stone jar sites exist in Indonesia (Sulawesi: Bada and Besoa Valleys and Sumbabwa) and Northeast India (Cachar Hills/Assam). What we know about these other jar sites, however, is minimal: burials have been found surrounding and inside the stone jars in Indonesia and cremated remains have been found inside the stone jars in India and interestingly enough the ‘frogman’ is a motif also known in Northeast India on a stone disc!

Continue to the jar with 'lid' (disc on top of jar), information stop [information stop 6].

6. The stone covering the jar is not a lid but a stone disc. Stone discs are found on the surface and are grave markers, i.e. another type of headstone. It is known from Colani that the disc’s decorative molding was placed into the soil with the smooth undecorated side showing. The stone disc would be placed over a burial pit, both marking and covering the pit. Decorations are often concentric circles but also animal bas relief have been found and are abundant at Ban Phakeo site.

It has to be said that stone lids exist but are not routinely found at each site. It is presumed that all jars were closed off and it is possible that perishable materials such as bamboo or wood were used in some cases. Lids are often dome shaped with a knob, resembling a lid of a cookie jar; the inside of the lids sometimes are shaped to fit the aperture of the jar.

A visitor may walk back or continue from this point. For the shorter walking tour follow the path between group 1 and the cave back to the ticket office. For the more energetic visitor continue the path up the hill to information stop [information stop 7].

7. Notice that a great number of jars we just passed were broken. Colani already recorded extensive damage and reports that the Haw bandits from China during the 19th
century were the culprits. They came down to Lao and plundered and murdered and broke the jars to cause maximum terror among the local population (as they most likely thought the place sacred). Of course during the Second Indochina War jars were damaged by bombing at this small group of jars however, the jar was broken through natural erosion whereby the jar broke along natural bedding or faults lines. Continue the path up the hill to information stop [information stop 8].

8. Take the opportunity at this stop to admire the jars below and the magnificent view over the plain. Notice the series of bomb craters which pockmark the site.

Discuss the village of Ban Ang which lies to the west of the site and the historic event that happened here in May 1959.

On the Xieng Khouang Plateau in May, 1959, the Royalist Army, dissatisfied with the performance of the Neutralists, Military No. 1 and Military No. 2. Army, cut food supplies in an effort to force the Neutralists armies to join them. The Neutralists however, initially, refused to follow command. In response the Royalist forces besieged Military No. 2 who were stationed near the Plain of Jars’ Site One using 7 infantries and managed to get within 30 metres of the camp. As the situation intensified, the Military No. 2’s leaders developed a plan to escape the siege and join the (revolutionary) armies to the north. On May 16, a commander of the Military No. 2 informed the Royalist Army that his troops accepted the integration of both troops and invitation to participate in the ranking-promotion ceremony on May 19. On the night of May 18, 1959, the commander of the Military No. 2 ordered soldiers together with pregnant women, children and sick/wounded people from Ban Ang village to escape undercover of the ceremony preparations through the lines of the Royalists and into the Phatet Lao strongholds further north.

Discuss how the site became known as the ‘the Plain of Jars’. Despite the name most jar sites are not on the plain but at higher grounds, lower hill slopes, mountain ridges and upland valleys. But as Site One has always been the most visible site and as it is on the Plain, the name for the entire area became the ‘Plain of Jars’. Now recognised by UNESCO, heritage managers and the Government as Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape. In order to preserve this wider setting the government has agreed to protect the area between the jars and the hill tops surrounding by establishing a non-development zone. Notice around this hill top the trenches and fox holes. Continue to the top of the hill to [information stop 9].

9. The highest point here was possibly levelled during the
war - notice how the jars have been incorporated into the dug out trenches. Walk to the right of the levelled space: point out the hole in the ground and ask visitors the purpose of this formation was. The hole was dug to provide space for a tank and is called tank scrape. The tank in the scrape would have been sheltered yet had extensive views over the plain and could cover several routes in and out of the plain.

This is a nice place to experience the sunset and is popular with young local couples courting. Continue down hill and follow the arrows to the ticket office or visit the top of the cave - [information stop 10].

10. The top of the cave has two anti-aircraft positions which make good use of the natural stone. The two manmade holes can also be seen from here.

Return to the ticket office and review what your group has learned. Here encourage the purchase of a refreshment or handicraft to support site management and the nearby local community. Integrating the community in site management and tourism services provides alternative income and give locals pride in their heritage.

Trail 2: The Heritage Landscape and Community at Jar Sites 2 and 3

Pre Tour Orientation & Introduction (follow the guidelines in section 4.1.2 to enhance the interpretative aspects of this part of the heritage tour)

Site Two comprises an area of approximately 17 hectares and is located on two spurs dissected by a road. The road was already mentioned by Colani who informed us that the French widened an ancient path which resulted in erosion and the movement of jars.

The UXO Clearance Project at Site Two, Ban Nakho was commenced on the 22nd of October 2004 and was completed on the 21st of January 2005. A total of 26 UXO items, including a 250 pound bomb, bomblets, rockets, artillery shells, mortars, hand grenades, 12.7mm projectile and 20mm anti-aircraft rounds were found here.

Begin the Tour at Site 2

After stopping at the ticket booth and information kiosk, walk up the hill to your left and stop at the big tree at the end of the steps. Note the location of the 250 pound bomb and recall how an elderly villager remembers bombs exploding around the jar site and this bomb shooting into the side of the hill. He matter-of-factly stated that the bomb did not explode as the jar site is sacred and so is the tree. Bomb craters surround the site did not displace the jars here.
Colani excavated extensively at this site and we can see two really large jars lying down and lying in a ‘dip’; this is evidence of Colani’s excavation. As late as 2001 small ceramic Buddha statues were present inside the jars. Colani noticed them too but deemed them unimportant. These ceramic Buddha statues have also been found at site 3 inside a jar. The statues were put in jars most likely for safekeeping during the Haw raids in the mid to late 19th century.

Unlike Site One, Site Two itself was not a strategic military position during the 1964-1973 conflict, although a Pathet Lao camp is located to the south west of the site and evidence of ground battle can be seen on some of the jars, such as the large upright jar and the one to its left (west).

Although in most sandstone jars the bedding runs vertically, here we can see a good example of horizontal and slant bedding sedimentation at Site 2. Carving against the bedding line would have been more work, but these jars are stronger and less affected by natural erosion.

Site 2 has good examples of what trees can do to jars if not removed on a regular basis: arolean sedimentation and rain forms a good place for seeds to germinate. The roots however penetrate fissures in the stone and as the roots grow the stone will crack open. Community based management as developed by UNESCO and the local government ensures that such relatively simple conservation procedures as clearing vegetation is implemented by villagers. One may reflect why in the past not more trees have grown in and damaged the jars; one possible answer is that jars may have been closed off for a long time and only in more recent times have lost their cover. Interestingly when we compare photographs taken in the 1930s few trees grow at the site, even the large ‘sacred’ tree is a mere sapling.

This area offers fantastic view over the plain and towards the mountains. During French colonial times the jar sites was frequently used for picnics; the locals still call the hill ‘Phu Salato’ meaning ‘table hill’. The French provincial capital is located approximately 30 km away and is called Muang Khun these days.

Walk towards the east past the bomb crater and follow the MAG marking to the small ruined stupa. Very little is known about this stupa. During the MAG clearance a small lead Buddha statue was found in its vicinity. We know that the centre of stupas often contained ‘treasure’ and the villagers confirmed the stupa was damaged prior to the war, probably by the Haw bandits who looted and plundered the region.

Walk back to the jar group and descend the hill on the south side. Call attention to the jars which have rolled down the hill as a result of the road cutting. Walk up the other end and
show the damage of ground battle at the first jar you see. Point out the bullet stuck in the jar.

Continue to the disc with animal representation, possibly a frog. Frogs are important in Lao history/culture. Discuss bronze drums with frog motives and representations of frog dances. Point out again that this is not a lid but a grave marker and would have been placed on top of a burial hole. It is possible that the grave marker's decoration would not have been visible for the living but turned toward the burial in the ground. Excavation results published by Colani suggest this.

The excavations conducted reveal no ancient material on the western hill, but finds on the eastern spur include polished and polishing stones, pottery, a cowry shell, glass beads and few metal artefacts such as a modern bronze bracelet.

The walk to Site 3 takes you past a Phatet Lao camp - trenches and a tank scrape can still be seen. The walk is 2.2 km to the next jar group (Group 6 of Site 3) and during UXO clearance in 2007, 19 UXO were removed on this 2 m wide path.

The Walk to Site 3

Along the walking trail point out natural features, allow visitors to touch plants and rocks, smell and taste herbs, and provide an explanation of agricultural practices below. This is also where the guide can discuss modern funerary practices and the small “bone pagodas” seen on hillsides along the trail.

During the walk also discuss the bare patches which look like bottle necks that are used by local villagers to catch swifts. Small birds tied to the bare patch are used to attract free flying swifts. The hunter sits in a small bamboo and grass structure at the bottle opening and catches the birds with nets when they touch down.

Site 3
Ban Xiengdi is one of the seven target villages piloting a community-based tourism management development programme. The project is a collaboration between UNESCO and the Lao government.

Community based heritage tourism promotes opportunities for income generation through employment as village-based guides, handicraft sales, provision of food and accommodation and revenue sharing of permit and site entrance fees (A portion of the entrance fee here goes directly to the community). The restaurant near the ticket booth is run by a local family- a percentage of the profit goes to the village fund and is used for the benefit of the entire village. Support the villagers who maintain and manage the site.

Near the ticket booth is a new temple and ruins of a temple where some heavily damaged Buddha statues can be seen. Despite some rumours the temple was not destroyed during the Indochina war, but was ransacked by Chinese bandits in the late 19th century. The majority of temples and stupas in the province were destroyed by waves of these bandits.

The site is made up of eight jar groups scattered around the existing village of Ban Xiengdi and totals 247 sandstone jars. Tour groups often only visit the main area, group 1, but the visit can include a relatively easy walk through the countryside in the dry season.

Here the guide can discuss the bombing and recount how villagers were forced to farm only during the night. The village houses are now concentrated but before the war would have
been spread out in the landscape, at the very lower slopes of the hill, close to the rice paddies. The village draws water from wells and received electricity at the end of 2008 only, making a big difference to households.

This jar site was also cleared of UXO by Mines Advisory Group (MAG) with the cooperation of the Department of Information and Culture, Lao National Tourism Authority and UNESCO between 27th of January and 28th of March 2005. The programme was funded by NZAID. During the clearance of Site Three, an area of 19 hectare, 22 items of UXO were removed. A single bommie had to be blown on site (at the main group 1), but thanks to the expertise of the EOD (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) technicians no one was hurt or anything was damaged. The villagers were integrated into the project and supported the experts in carrying equipment, cutting vegetation, surface search and staking out of lanes.

Walk through the paddy field to group 1, explain how/when rice is planted, harvested, how bunds are broken to let water through etc. The walking tour will take you along UXO cleared paths; it has to be pointed out however, that the bunds of the rice fields tend to change overtime and it can therefore not be guaranteed that these areas remain UXO safe. Caution is advised.

**Group 1** contains 158 sandstone jars and 33 discs; remember that the discs are grave markers and not covers for the jars. Mme. Colani in her 1935 publication mentioned the main group, an isolated jar to the west and some more ‘unimportant groups to the west’! She excavated around the jars and emptied the jars. Inside the jars she found bone, teeth, pottery and iron fragments, glass beads, and charcoal. The results of the excavations revealed polished stone implements, polishing stones and pottery. Lao archaeologist Thongsa Sayavongkhamdy undertook an excavation at the main group of Site Three in 1996. He excavated two trenches. His results reinforced Colani’s burial theory.

Notice the bomb crater at the entrance of the group and when you turn around and look at the landscape many more craters can be seen.

The location of these jars and the other groups at Site Three better reflect how Plain of Jars’ people chose their ‘jar site spots’. When you look around in the landscape you will notice small white monuments which have been placed in similar locations as the jar groups. These small white Buddhist monuments are called ‘jedi’ and contain human cremated remains. One can suggest that there is a continuation of burial site location and even practices (secondary burials, not necessary the cremation).

**Group 2** to the west of group 1 is a single jar and disc. Some
of the site/groups which are found may represent jar (and
discs) in transport to their final resting place.

Walk towards group 3 and discuss quarry sites, point out the
two so far recorded locations and mention that the jars of Site
2 are most likely from the same source. The quarry sites have
been recorded around 20 metres up on the hill side and
abandoned broken, unfinished jars as well as rough cut out
clocks can still be seen. The area has not yet been cleared of
UXO but a proposal for clearance has been submitted and
funding is being sought.

Group 3 counts 27 jars and a single disc. The jars here have
not yet been fenced and note how the conditions of these jars
are affected by rubbing of cows. The cows rubbing not only
smoothens the sides of the jars but also erodes the
subsurface around the jars, which is the area where graves
have been found. Continue to down the slope and over the
stream to 4.

Group 4 contains 16 jars and 1 disc. Similar to group 3 the
jars here are affected by the cows. Notice how the area has
been terraced, but farming is now discontinued. The villagers
have agreed to establish conservation zones around the jars
to ensure their protection. Conservation zone severely limits
the use of the area and prohibits development which causes
any impacts on setting, heritage resources or subsurface.
Continue through the rice fields and up the hill slope to 5.

Group 5. This group is known as Ban Fai. The area counts
32 jars and 5 discs. If you look north you can see Site Two at
a distance. One of the jars contains ceramic Buddha statues.
These statues were placed in the jar for safekeeping during
unsettling times, probably in the 19th century. The villagers
feel strongly about these statues and believe that if removed
sickness and bad times will befall the village. They
constructed a spirit house at the site to protect the Buddha’s.
Please respect the local beliefs.

From here you can walk to the main road or return through the
rice paddy to group 1 and the ticket office. Remember if you
walk to the main road the path has not been cleared.

The site has three additional groups:

Group 6 is the only group located to the north of the village.
The group can best be accessed from Site 3 or from Site 3
ticket office walking to Site 2. The group counts four jars and
one disc. It also contains some quartzite rocks which are
likely to have been used as grave markers. The quartzite was
brought from an -as of yet- unknown location to this site. The
group commands sweeping views of the surrounding area and
numerous bomb craters can be seen on the walk between
Site 2 and 3.
Groups 7 and 8 are difficult to access. Combined, they count 9 jars and 2 discs.

Group 8 was discovered during the UXO clearance operations in 2005.

Trail 3: Historic Muang Khoun and Ban Phai Archaeological Site (can add Jar site 1)

Pre Tour Orientation & Introduction (follow the guidelines in section 4.1.2 to enhance the interpretative aspects of this part of the heritage tour)

This tour begins with an introduction to local history as it relates to the old Tai-Phuan Kingdom of Xieng Khouang. The Tai Phuan are a Buddhist Tai-Lao ethnic group that migrated from southern China probably because of the Mongol threat to Southern China as early as 1236 CE. By the late 13th century, they had formed an independent principality at the Plain of Jars that prospered from the overland trade in metals and forest products. The capital of the Muang Phuan was the town of Muang Khun. In the 16th century it was a fortified religious centre which counted 62 pagodas and stupas covered in riches.

After Siam (Thailand) extended control to Lao territories east of the Mekong in the 1770's, Muang Phuan became a Siamese vassal but also maintained tributary relations with Dai Viet (Viet Nam). To exert greater control of the lands and people of Muang Phuan, the Siamese launched three separate campaigns (1777-1779, 1834-1836, 1875-1876) to resettle large parts of the Phuan population to the south to regions under firm Siamese control.

The story is well-documented in the Pongsawadan Meuang Puan or the Muang Phuan Chronicles. Three phases of Siamese actions into Phuan territory are recorded in the chronicles. During the first phase in 1792 the Vientiane ruler was forced by the Siamese to fight the Vietnamese in Xieng Khouang. Thousands of people were resettled under this wave in central Thailand. During the second phase (1834-1836) of depopulation at the Plain of Jars, Phuan people were forced to move down to the Mekong Plain and even to Bangkok. This mass imposed exodus followed the defeat of the Vientiane King by the Siamese. The third phase was related to the invasions of the Haw, Chinese bandits (Yellow and Black Flag bandits) who plundered Luang Prabang and Xieng Khouang well into the 1880’s. Three battalions of Siamese eventually restored order and peace. James McCarthy, a British surveyor travelled through Lao in 1884 and wrote on the impact of the Haw bandits destruction in Luang Prabang and Xieng Khouang “the vats had been wantonly destroyed, and piles of palm-leaf records lay heaped together, which, unless soon looked at, would be lost forever”.
Regarding the Xieng Khouang capital, he wrote the following:

*The pagoda on the hill, the finest in the region, had not escaped. From a distance it looked perfect, but on a near approach rents were found on three sides, almost from pinnacle to the foundation. It was wonderful that the spire, 60 feet high, had not fallen in. The Haw are said to have obtained as much as 7,000 rupees weight in gold from this pagoda. Fragments of urns, which had contained offerings, lay strewn about, and still showed elegance of form.*

The ongoing aggression resulted in the fact that three quarters of the population had been murdered or moved, countless monuments had been destroyed and treasure looted. Between 1871 and 1886 the Phuan state retained some pretence of autonomy under Prince Khamti and managed to do so by paying tribute to the court in Hue, Vietnam. The connection to the Vietnamese did not please the Siam Kingdom and the Prince was captured and sent to prison in Bangkok, where he died six years later. During that period the Phuan state was ruled by a Thai Commissioner until the Franco-Siamese treaties of the 1890's placed Xieng Khouang under colonial rule as part of French Indochina until briefly after World War II.

**Begin the Tour in Muang Khoun at the Provincial Tourist Information Center**

At the Tourist Information Center, call visitor’s attention to the information panels in the Centre. Here there is information on the province’s ethnic groups and history that can be incorporated into the heritage tour. Other stops on this tour program include:

- That Foun
- That Chompheth
- Vat Si Phom
- Vat Phiavat
- Ban Phai
- Old Vietnamese Cemetery
- Jar Site 1 optional

Also, while in Muang Khoun point out the location of the old Governor’s Residence, French Church and School. If you are familiar with any other sites of interest, they can also be included in this tour.

**That Foun** - Was built in 1576 at about the same time as the famous That Luang in Vientiane. It is said the stupa was erected to house the ashes of the lord Buddha, brought from India at a time Buddhism was proliferating in Laos.

**That Chompheth** - Was built earlier than That Foun and is
located nearby. It was erected to evoke Buddhist values of truth and clarity. The Stupa was named *Chom Phet* meaning “Diamond Pinnacle” because King Chao Kha Khad installed a large diamond on top of the monument in 1422. That Chompheth was heavily damaged by Haw invaders in the 1874 and almost completely destroyed during the war in the 1960’s.

**Vat Si Phom** - Was built in 1390 by Thammkhatha, one of the most skilled temple builders of his time. The Chronicles describe it as the most beautiful temples in the area, but unfortunately is was at some time torn down by the locals to build a new temple. It is not known why.

**Vat Phiavat** - Only the pillars and large stately Buddha image of the stately Vat remain. It was build in 1546 and destroyed by T-28 gunfire during the war.

**Ban Phai** - Ban Phai is located 6 km to the northeast of old Xieng Khouang in Muang Khoun. The site is relatively small and has 36 jars, of which 35 are granite and 1 is sandstone. The site is currently located immediately along a secondary road leading to a charcoal factory, and onwards to Muang Phan. Road improvements in 2006 led directly to the destruction of one of the jars located alongside the road. The site is slightly elevated but lacks the expansive views often found at jar sites largely because it is surrounded by forest. The granite jars are severely weathered. A well-worn path traverses the site. The site was cleared of UXO in 2007, 3 ‘bombies’ were successfully removed from the site.

**Old Vietnamese Cemetery**

On the road to Ban Phai a few kilometres from Muang Khoun is Thong Si where an old cemetery can be found. There are dozens of graves here, spread across both sides of the road and up the hillside to the north of the village. Some headstones are dated to the 1930’s, which suggests this cemetery may have been established by the colonial French administration for civil servants and labourers recruited from Viet Nam.

**4.3 Unit summary**

In this Unit, we have provided some ideas about ways to improve visitor experience through expertly guided heritage tours. This includes advice on how, using interpretation techniques, you can tell the story of why the Plain of Jars is significant in a way that can be entertaining and engaging for the visitor. An important part of this is through well-designed, interactive heritage tours and thematic trails, which can help personalise the experience for the visitor, and in this Unit we provide several such trails as examples.

**4.4 Worksheets & FAQs**
List of Frequently Asked Questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FAQ</th>
<th>ANSWER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What were the jars used for?</td>
<td>The Jars are part of elaborate funerary practice. They were either used as a burial vessel, but more likely they form part of the ritual whereby the dead person is placed inside the stone jar, a lid placed on top and when the corpse is distilled, the bones are collected and buried around the stone jar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there only three sites?</td>
<td>No, so far 58 jar sites have been visited and recorded; however, a further 27 sites are known as they have been reported by villagers. Sites can be found in each district within the province. We know of sites outside the district but have concentrate on Xieng Khouang as this is where the concentration seems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How were they transported to site?</td>
<td>We don’t know, we do however, have evidence that the jar or at least some were brought to the site unfinished. We know this as when we excavated around the jars on top of the old surface chips of sandstone can be found.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are they made out of rock?</td>
<td>Definitely! Every single jar has been carved out of rock! The local story tells that the jars were moulded from a kind of concrete. It is likely that this tale spread because some of the jars are carved out of conglomerate which is a natural cement. So far 5 kind of stone types have been identified: sandstone (80% of the jars), limestone, granite, conglomerate and breccias.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And where were they made?</td>
<td>Several quarry sites have been found. All but one of the quarries are located close to the jar site (or vice versa). The distance of 8km between Phukeng quarry and Site 1 jars is certainly due to the position of the cave. No granite quarry has been found and it has been suggested that the granite jars may have been carved out of weathered granite boulders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is that a lid?</td>
<td>No those are gravemarkers, these rounded discs were placed over burial pit or urn in the ground. We know from Colani that the moulded/decorated site was placed into the ground and thus invisible on the surface.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Exercise 4.2: Developing your own FAQs

Based on your experience with tourists, and your knowledge about the Plain of Jars, think of some FAQs which you expect to be asked.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FAQ</th>
<th>ANSWER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E.g. But someone told me they were used to store wine?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.g. Have bones been found in all the jars?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Unit 5
Influencing Visitor behaviour and Experience at the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape

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<td>▪ What impacts visitors can create at the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape, and some tips on how you can manage visitors to minimise these impacts</td>
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<td>▪ How you can formulate and implement a code of responsible visitor behaviour at the Plain of Jars</td>
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5.1 Introduction

This Unit will introduce you to the past, present and possible future impacts of visitation to the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape. There are several suggestions on how to manage visitors at Jar sites and other heritage sites, as well strategies on how, as a guide, you can develop codes of responsible behaviour. Finally, the Unit ends with guidelines on how to visit jar sites and local communities responsibly.

5.2 Impacts of visitors at the Plain of Jars

Tourism causes both positive and negative economic, social and physical impacts to the people and heritage assets found within the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape. At present, visitation to the many tourist sites scattered throughout the Plain of Jars is low except for Jar Site 1 that receives the highest number of domestic and international tourists. Even with a small number of visitors, negative impacts can already be seen on the jars themselves – notice that small pieces of jars are regularly broken off by visitors and some guides too. Other negative physical impacts on heritage sites that commonly arise when a site is not well-managed include:

- Theft – removing artefacts such as pieces of jars, Buddha images and pottery.
- Vandalism – this is when someone deliberately writes on, or damages, jars, temples, or other heritage features.
- Pollution – pollution means air and noise pollution as well as trash. Notice that trash is sometimes thrown directly into jars or scattered about the landscape. Burning trash causes air, water and soil pollution. All trash should be placed in rubbish bins and carted away to a landfill.
- Erosion – at some sites, erosion of the ground beneath jars is being worsened by too many people and animals walking on exposed soil. When it rains, this exposed soil is washed away, further weakening the base on which some jars rest.
- Crowding – as mentioned above, the number of visitors to the Plain of Jars is still low and there is not a serious problem with overcrowding yet. This situation is likely to change once the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape is inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, therefore it is important to develop a visitor management strategy now to avoid overcrowding at jar sites and other tourist attractions.

Damage to the jars may be done intentionally or unintentionally by climbing on leaning against the jars that become more and more fragile over time.
The damage seen in figure 5.1 was recorded in 2008, when Xieng Khouang received only about 25,000 visitors in total. Unless they are better protected, imagine what may happen to the jars when the number of annual visitors reaches 100,000.

When discussing impacts, there is often a focus on the negative physical and social impacts caused by tourism and how to prevent them. Well-trained guides recognize that tourism can cause an increase in the price of goods and services locally, diminish heritage values when tourists do not respect local codes of conduct, and damage the natural environment if improperly managed.

But tourism can also produce many positive impacts and a guide should actively try to help increase positive impacts of tourism. This means encouraging tourists to purchase local products such as food and handicrafts, always pay entry fees, learn and inform visitors about proper codes of conduct and do what they can to ensure trash is disposed of properly. Doing so will enhance the experience of tourists, local hosts and guides.

### Exercise 5.1 – List positive and negative impacts of tourism in Xieng Khouang

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### 5.3 Tips for managing visitors at the Jar Sites

How can we better manage visitors to ensure the ancient Jar Sites and other Archaeological features of the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape are properly protected?

First, as guides, you play an important role in preventing inappropriate visitor behaviour that can physically damage attractions. Providing good interpretation of the sites as discussed in the last chapter will help visitors better understand, and thus appreciate the sites they visit. When
someone appreciates and understands something, they are much less likely to intentionally damage it.

A guide should set goals for how they would like a tourist to behave while on tour. For example, you have probably by now determined that it is unacceptable for a tourist or guide to physically damage the jars. The desired behaviour is not to touch the jars in any way – this means no climbing, breaking or writing names on jars.

After you determine the desired behaviour (for any tour destination) next, assess the situation regarding who, when, why and where the tour will take place. Use this information to form a strategy that reduces impacts on the heritage assets. For example, if a large tour group from Japan will be in Xieng Khouang for only a very short time, consider taking them to Site 1 that has physical barriers to separate the jars and visitors and be sure to inform visitors (in their native language if possible) about appropriate codes of behaviour.

For all sites, especially those that do not have barriers to separate tourists and jars, consider the methods and approach you will use to influence visitor behaviour. And remember, a guide can only influence visitor behaviour if they can effectively aid visitor learning.

Some practices that aid visitor learning and influence behaviour are:

- Conducting pre-tour orientation and giving direct instruction while on tour – Many negative impacts are caused unintentionally and some simple reminders to tourists before the tour starts goes a long way in reducing impacts. Contrary to the Lao belief that tourists might somehow be dissatisfied by “being told what to do” most tourists, especially the type we want to attract to the Plain of Jars actually appreciate a pre-tour orientation to inform them how they should act.
- Gently reminding visitors of good and bad behaviour.
- Educating visitors about do’s and don’ts, the fragility and age of the jars and their significance as World Heritage, how to interact with local people, and what the consequences of inappropriate behaviour are.
- Monitoring visitor behaviour – a watchful eye and physical presence of a guide can deter inappropriate behaviour. This means a guide should never wait in the van while his group is wandering around a jar site.
- Modelling good behaviour – A guide should act the same way she wants her tour group to act. This means the guide should not climb on the jars, break off small pieces of a jar as a demonstration, or throw garbage into jars.
- Involving and engaging visitors – Turn the tourist into
an active learner. Give them an assignment. For example, you might ask your tour group to find the jar at site 1 that has the “frogman”. Or assign someone to count the number of broken jars at site 2. Ask someone if they can identify one of the jar’s lids, and prepare a small “prize” to give to the person that correctly identifies one. The prize might be a sweet local kanome that the visitor will be happy to receive, and probably result in an act of reciprocal generosity (perhaps a good tip!) at the end of the tour.

- Inspire the visitor to change and adopt more responsible attitudes during and after the tour – This can be done by “setting the stage” before or during a tour, for example, by stating that “today, we are all archaeologists, and as your guide, I encourage you to treat the jars as carefully as if it was the first time they were researched by Colani in the 1930’s (or more recently by Julie Van Den Bergh and Thongsa Sayavongkhamdy).” At the close of the tour, encourage the visitor to adopt this attitude when visiting the next site, and also recommend reading books about the jar sites and other attractions in Xieng Khouang.

- Be nice – this means that while as a guide you must sometimes fulfil the role of policeman, you must also be equally willing to provide travel advice, make friends, and create a fun atmosphere while on tour.

- Reward good behaviour – When a tourist exhibits the type of behaviour you are trying to promote, reward them using kind words, small gifts such as a kanome, or informational materials.

5.4 Formulating and implementing a code of responsible visitor behaviour at the Plain of Jars

A code of responsible visitor behaviour includes the core standards, principles, and values that govern how visitors should act and behave when visiting heritage sites and the host community. It contains the preferences and desires of the local community and it is the task of the heritage guide to help refine and specify the code, communicate to visitors the need to adopt responsible behaviour, and ensure that visitors abide by it.

In Lao PDR general behavioural guidelines for visitors have been developed and published in the Do’s and Don’ts booklet (and poster) and adapted for specific sites including the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape. Heritage guides should also develop site-specific guidelines in consultation with local communities who live in and around the heritage attraction. Some themes the heritage guide and community can focus on when developing the code include:
- Photography
- Transportation and arrival
- Personal hygiene
- Communicating and interacting with fellow visitors and locals
- Body language, customs and rituals that may be required of visitors
- Exhibiting emotions
- Shopping at local stores, buying souvenirs, and other consumption behaviour
- Appropriate dressing and attire
- Visiting the site
- Contributing to the host community
- Abiding by local laws and customs
- Security and UXO avoidance

Examples of general codes of behaviour for Lao PDR in general and Xieng Khouang in specific are found in the “Do’s and Don’ts in Lao PDR” booklet and “Together Let’s Protect the Plain of Jars” poster.

Implementing a code of behaviour can be a challenging task, especially if a guide is shy and inexperienced. Heritage guides can use a range of influence and communicative styles to encourage appropriate behaviour. These include:

- **Telling** – whereby guides provide specific instructions and closely supervise and directing the behaviour of visitors.
- **Selling** – whereby guides explain the need to behave in accordance to codes of responsible conduct and allow visitors to clarify or ask questions as to the reasons behind these required behaviours.
- **Participating** – whereby guides collaborate with visitors and make them partners, seek their input as to the best way to behave and encouraging them to participate.
- **Monitoring** – whereby the guide simply observes or monitors the behaviour of visitors, intervening only when necessary.
Exercise 5.2: Develop a visitor code of behaviour for the Plain of Jars

The Responsible Code of Conduct for Visiting the Plain of Jars

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5.5 Visiting the jar sites and local community

When visiting the jar sites and local communities, a heritage guide will put into action the responsible code of behaviour discussed in section 5.3. A guide uses a range of media and communicative styles to deliver messages that reinforce positive behaviour and discourage what is inappropriate. Below are some guidelines for visiting jar sites and local communities at the Plain of Jars.

Photography

While photography is permitted at all jar sites, a heritage guide will assist their guests to request permission before photographing people, events, or sacred objects. Guides and visitors should:

- Recognize that locals, particularly those who live in or near cultural attractions, may desire privacy and do not wish to be photographed.
- At some sites, especially sacred ones, the local community may restrict photography; when unsure always ask a local if it is photography is permitted.
- Send copies of pictures to locals if a commitment is made to do so.
- Be mindful in finding a vantage spot for photography; avoid straying outside of areas that have been cleared of UXO or climbing on jars.
- Be aware that photographing military installations is not permitted.
Transport and visiting

- Once permitted, travel to site 1 by bicycle should be encouraged. Visitors are now required to travel around the jar sites on foot and should be reminded that they will be required to walk before their tour departs.
- Check the local calendar of events before departing for your tour. If a local festival is taking place inform your guests and inform them of proper codes of conduct if they would like to take part in the festival or ceremony.
- When possible, encourage visitation in groups that do not exceed 12 guests. This will allow the guide to provide better interpretation and help her to monitor visitor behaviour more easily. It also generates more employment for guides.
- Never touch, rub, handle, or manipulate objects, artefacts, or parts of the structure of the heritage sites as these can be damaged.
- Never remove or take anything from the site (except pictures!) as a keepsake or souvenir.
- A woman is not permitted to touch a Buddhist monk. Please remind your female guests when visiting a Buddhist temple.
- Other ethnic groups may have restrictions on male and female behaviour. Please inquire with your hosts and communicate behavioural guidelines to visitors.
- Do not stray away from trails and guided pathways; sticking to such trails ensures that visitors do not trample or apply pressure on sensitive areas of heritage sites and avoid UXO.
- Avoid yelling, shouting or talking loudly; guides and visitors should avoid the use of mobile phones which can degrade the atmosphere and setting and irritate residents as well as other visitors.

Personal hygiene

- Guides and visitors should leave no trash laying about the site. If a refuse bin is not available, pack out all trash generated on the tour. If necessary, bring along bag to temporarily store your waste.
- Take steps to make sure that litter, plastic and paper, foils, water bottles, and even ticket stubs are not dropped or left. Some tissue papers or paper handkerchiefs, when improperly disposed of, take a long time to decay.
- Guides should avoid contact with visitors or locals if you are not feeling well or are ill; re-schedule the visit if possible or ask another guide to lead your tour that day.
- Strictly observe site rules and regulations regarding litter, eating, drinking and picnicking.
• Use sanitary restrooms where these are provided; plan ahead before entering sites, especially when children or seniors are in the group.
• Some visitors may be non-smokers. A guide may discourage smoking while in the van, while visiting heritage sites, or on the entire tour altogether.

Communicating and interacting with fellow visitors and locals
• Ethnocentrism caution!: Ask that visitors avoid making negative comparisons with local culture when conversing with locals. Visitors might accidentally intimate or imply how much more advanced or developed their way of doing things compared to local practice. When translating, this is where a heritage guide's diplomatic skills are important.
• Visitors should observe and model the proper etiquette and conversational approach of heritage guides and adopt them in their interaction with locals.
• Be careful of expressions and the kind of language used; some locals are keen to learn from visitors and may inadvertently adopt inappropriate words, terms, and expressions.
• If there is any aspect of the site, the environment or local food or practices annoy or disturb you or your guests, avoid verbally expressing this even if indirectly or by body language. Simply turn away without expressing anything. Remember that what is unacceptable practice to you or your guest may be acceptable practice to locals.
• Remember to offer praise and express appreciation to locals for what you find unique, beautiful, admirable, and wonderful in their community (especially by making reference to the heritage site). This will inspire them to maintain their way of life, be proud of their unique heritage and instil a greater urgency for them to preserve their rich cultural resources and traditions.
• Always communicate in a genuine and forthright manner.
• Strive to learn useful expressions, terms and phrases of the local language without trivializing its use. Seek to learn these in a genuine manner and if it so happens that your language learning skill is no longer as good as it used to be and you risk communicating the wrong message, it is much better to avoid doing so at the risk of insulting local residents.
• Avoid discussing or asking questions on sensitive matters especially on topics of politics, religious beliefs, and local customs except when conducted in the proper context.
As a matter of principle, avoid offering sweets to children and cigarettes to others if only to gain their friendship and confidence, most specifically if these items are from your place of origin. Locals receiving these may find them attractive, become attached, and continue to want these products even if they are not locally available.

Only a trained doctor should administer medicine to a local or visitor.

Body language, customs and rituals that may be required of visitors

- Lao people greet one another with a **nop**, where the hands are raised in a prayer-like gesture and by saying **sabai dee**. Men may shake hands but it is generally not appropriate for men to shake a woman’s hand.

- There are many ethnic groups in Xieng Khouang. Learn the customs, rituals, and practices for greeting locals, or when entering homes, shops or sacred premises; be sensitive of other special practices for greeting, showing respect, or interacting with elders, religious persons, or other respected individuals or authorities in the local community; though universally recognized or accepted, reaching out to shake hands—even if done out respect—may not be the best gesture to greet locals.

- When entering someone’s home in a rural area, visitors and guides will often be offered a glass of strong alcohol called lao lao. It is customary to drink one or two small glasses to accept your host’s hospitality, but if you do not drink alcohol, it is acceptable to simply raise the glass to your lips then place the un-finished, full glass back in front of you. Smile, thank your hosts and perhaps say “I am not feeling well and taking medicine today”.

Exhibiting emotions

- Avoid public displays of intimacy and affection; even if visitors consider themselves to be quite a distance from the site, locals, or other visitors, they may still be visible and inadvertently annoy others.

- Avoid exhibiting anger, impatience or annoyance in instances when bothered by the curiosity of locals, or when it seems to you that you are viewed with suspicion or ignored; demonstrate patience and understanding especially when it is difficult to communicate or get some messages across to locals with whom you are interacting.

- Avoid inappropriate and boisterous behaviour or playfulness especially in sacred, spiritual or religious
Shopping at local stores, buying souvenirs, and other consumption behaviour

- If possible and where information is provided, encourage visitors to purchase souvenir items that are authentic in the materials used to produce it, the process by which it was produced, and the craftsmanship and respectful use of human labour.
- Help local negotiate appropriate prices for their handicrafts. Many local complain that it is guides, not tourists that complain and discourage visitors from purchasing local crafts. If a visitor likes something and feel the price for it is fair, help them communicate with locals to make the purchase.
- Avoid exhibiting materialistic or overly acquisitive behaviour. Explain that sometime a local will simple not want to sell something because of personal or spiritual reasons.
- A heritage guide should discourage, and in fact prevent the sale of antiques and family heirlooms. This is illegal and robs the country of its precious heritage.
- Promote the consumption of locally produced food and drinks.

Appropriate attire

- Avoid immodest clothing that shows too much skin.
- Visitors must be ready to comply when asked to remove slippers or footwear upon entering holy sites and encouraged to dress neatly at all times.

Security and UXO avoidance

- Lao PDR is well-know as a safe and peaceful destination. However, there is some petty-theft reported at heritage sites and accommodation establishments. A heritage guide reminds their guests to secure their valuables and be mindful of them.
- UXO is an unfortunate legacy of the Indochina Wars that continues to threaten local people, guides and tourists. Remind your guests that if they spot UXO tell you and never touch it in any way. A good place to familiarize visitors about UXO is to introduce them to the MAG UXO Information Centre in Phonesavanh.

Abiding by local laws

- As mentioned above, there are laws forbidding the sale of antiques; a heritage Guide should inform visitors (and police) about these laws if they see them being broken.
• The sale drugs such as marijuana, opium and amphetamines is also illegal in Lao PDR. A heritage guide should inform visitors (and police) about these laws if they see them being broken.

• Heritage guides should also be familiar with laws related to their profession. For example, the Heritage Law, Tourism Law, and rules and regulations about guiding, tourism and immigration.

5.6 Responsible visiting on festivals and ritual days

Xieng Khouang, like the rest of Lao PDR, has many Buddhist festivals as well as festivals celebrated by non-Buddhist ethnic groups. While a heritage guide should encourage tourists to participate in local festivals, there may be situations where it is not appropriate for guests to do so. It is important to obtain permission from the hosts before bringing a tourism to participate in private religious rituals, funerals or family gatherings and also to inform the tourist how to behave properly during their visit.

One local ritual that tourists are likely to participate in is the well known baci ceremony, where small white strings are tied around someone’s wrist as a blessing, sign of reconciliation, or to welcome or send off guests. While this event may be formal or quite informal, there are a few behavioural guidelines that visitors should know, such as how to sit or position their hands, especially when the ritual is performed in someone’s home. As a heritage guide, you should communicate this code of behaviour before the ritual takes place or else the visitor may feel as if they “did something wrong” and offensive – thus diminishing the experience for both visitor and host.

Some of the main festivals in Xieng Khouang are listed below. Please add information on as many others you are familiar with when completing exercise 5.5.

January
Boun Khoun Khao – or the Harvest Festival is celebrated in the countryside after the rice has been harvested. This ceremony is held to give thanks to the spirit of the land and to ensure the next harvest will be plentiful.

February
Kud Chin & Kud Viet – Chinese and Vietnamese New Year is celebrated with parties, fireworks and merit making by Chinese and Vietnamese Lao.

Boun Maka Bousa – This festival is held on the full moon to commemorate the speech given by the Lord Buddha to 1,250 enlightened monks that gathered spontaneously, without prior notice. In the evening, the faithful visit local temples and circumambulate the vat three times with candles in a
ceremony known as *vien tian*.

*Boun Khao Chi* – A special offering of sticky rice is coated with eggs then roasted and offered to monks. This ceremony is associated with *Maka Bousa*.

**March**

International Women’s Day – This is a public holiday to commemorate women’s contribution to Lao society. There are many parties at homes and offices.

*Boun Pha Vet* – A temple-based Buddhist festival lasting for three day and three nights that is centered on the telling of the *jatka*, or story of Prince Vestsantara (the Buddha’s second to last life).

**April**

*Boun Pi Mai* – or Lao New Year is celebrated for three days in mid-April. The *Pi Mai* festival is based on the importance of water in people’s daily lives. During *Pi Mai*, people splash water on one another to cleanse them of misfortune and bring luck in the coming year. In the country’s many *vats*, Buddha images are cleansed with sacred water, and many Lao people make special offerings at the temples during this time of year. Luang Prabang has the most elaborate *Pi Mai* festival. In Xieng Khouang there are parades, beauty contests and performances.

**May**

*Boun Visakha Bousa* – This festival celebrates the birth, enlightenment and death of the Lord Buddha. It is held on the 15th day of the sixth lunar month. Beautiful candlelit processions take place in the evening.

*Boun Bang Fai* – Or the rocket festival. This is a rain-making and fertility festival held just before the rainy season where huge hand-made rockets are fired into the air to tempt the gods to make rain for the upcoming rice-growing season. This is a wild and happy ceremony that has music, dance, provocative performances and street processions.

**July**

*Boun Khao Pansa* – This festival, held on the full moon, marks the beginning of Buddhist lent, a three month period where monks are required to stay within their *vat* to meditate and focus on *darma* studies. Lao men are traditionally ordained as monks during this time.

**August**

*Boun Khao Padap Din* – Special offerings are made to the deceased on the new (darkened) moon of the 9th lunar month.

**September**

*Boun Khao Salak* – Offerings including daily necessities such as books, pens, sugar and coffee are made to specific monks.
based on a lottery system. Laypeople also give beautiful wax flower candles to the monks to gain merit.

**October/November**

*Boun Ork Pansa* – Held on the full moon which marks the end of the rainy season, monks who were ordained for the three month lent period leave the vat and rejoin their families. During the evening of *Van Ork Pansa*, in a charming ceremony small banana-leaf boats called *heua fai* are launched on rivers with offerings of incense, candles and small amounts of money to bring luck and prosperity.

*Boun Souang Heua* – The festive traditional boat racing festival takes place following *Ork Pansa*.

**December**

Lao National Day – December 2 is Lao National Day, which celebrates the establishment of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic in 1975. There are parades and fairs in all major cities and towns.

In December – February many ethnic minorities such as the Hmong, Black Tai and Khamu hold new year’s ceremonies and annual rituals specific to their ethnic group.

**Exercise 5.3 – Code of behaviour at local festivals**

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<th>Code of Behaviour &amp; Visitation Tips</th>
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<td><em>Boun Greh</em> (Khamu)</td>
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<td>Hmong New Year</td>
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<td><em>Kud Chin/Viet</em></td>
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<td><em>Boun Maka Busa</em></td>
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<td><em>Boun Kao Chi</em></td>
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<td>International Women’s Day</td>
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<td><em>Boun Pavet</em></td>
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<td><em>Boun Pii Mai</em></td>
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<td><em>Boun Visakha Bousa</em></td>
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Interaction and Participation

Here we recommend and summarize activities that could be useful for your heritage tours. You can give the visitors a chance to participate in the interpretive process and encourage mindfulness:

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<th>Audience</th>
<th>Suggested Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td>Young Children</td>
<td>• Count the number of complete jars</td>
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<td>• Find the trees which are hurting the jars</td>
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<td>• Find the ‘Frogman’</td>
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<td>• Draw the jar site</td>
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Older children and teenagers

Ask them to:

- point out the different shapes of the jars, and different types of stone
- find the ‘frogman’
- identify the elements of the jar site: ‘what belongs to the jar site?’
- count the examples of damage done by war
- after giving them maps of the site, locate where they are

Adults

Ask them to compare:

- the UXO problem to modern day conflicts
- burial practices of different cultures

Conduct a mock-debate on Plain of Jars related topic (Example topic: ‘Elephants were used to move the jars to their present location’)

Less mobile people

Participation in some local rituals and customs (e.g. learning to play a khaen)

Of course, you may like to think of some other heritage-related activities for your visitors to try!

5.7 Unit Summary

After introducing some of the potential positive and negative effects of tourism, in this Unit, we have looked in detail at what happens when a visitor is on site. This includes tips for managing visitors at Jar Sites, and creating and implementing a code of responsible visitor behaviour so that your visitors will represent the positive side of tourism. We also looked at specific things to consider when visiting jar sites and the local community, including behaviour regarding photography, communication with local people, and of course security and UXO awareness. We also considered the many local rituals and festivals in Xieng Khouang which visitors may be interested in experiencing, and also some activities for people of all ages and abilities to keep them engaged in the heritage tourism experience.
Unit 6
The contribution of Heritage Guides: The Cultural Heritage Guide at the Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape

| Learning Objectives | This Unit is designed to provide you with an understanding of:
|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                     | ▪ How tourism activities can benefit the local community
|                     | ▪ What tourist attractions exist in the Plain of Jars area and how to broaden the benefit of tourism to the wider community |

| Contents | This Unit is organised as follows:
|----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|          | 6.1 Introduction
|          | 6.2 Tourism activities which benefit the local community
|          | 6.3 Unit summary

| Unit References | Provincial Tourism Office Xieng Khouang, ‘Tourist Attractions in Xieng Khouang: Survey of potential and existing tourist attractions in the province’ (30 September 2006) (Translated by Xaixongkham Induangchanthy)
|                 | Plain of Jars Archaeological Landscape Heritage Management Plan (draft)
|                 | A Guide to Xieng Khouang guidebook
6.1 Introduction

This sixth and final Unit looks at how heritage tourism can benefit to local communities of the Plain of Jars, and in particular how your role as a cultural heritage specialist guide can assist this to happen. Your role as a point of contact between tourists and the local community is a very important one. You can assist in both providing a richer and broader experience for the visitor, as well as obtaining community support for both conservation activities and heritage tourism.

Without benefitting communities, community support for heritage conservation, and the heritage tourism which depends on conservation, will be very limited. It may even be withdrawn. With community support, not only are conservation goals more likely to be achieved but heritage tourism will be enriched. Community support will bring a broader variety of options for both the community and tourists, as communities are empowered to take advantage of economic opportunities and cultural exchange potential visitors bring. This empowerment can take many forms, from opportunities to provide tourist services (for example, accommodation and food) to the revival and continuance of tangible and intangible cultural forms, including handicrafts, performance and traditional festivities.

6.2 Tourism activities which benefit the local community and the sites

6.2.1 Passport Entry System

On 1 January 2010 a new entrance fee system will be implemented. This system is necessary to guarantee management and protection of the Plain of Jars, so we can safeguard the Plain of Jars for future generations.

In the current system, 50% of the fee is retained by the village and 50% is to be submitted to District Office administration fund. Of the 50% retained by the villagers 20% pays for the ticket seller’s time and 30% is deposited in the Village Fund. The villagers are expected to maintain the sites and basic infrastructure such as fencing and access to the site. The District puts its proportion of the fee into its general revenue, and does not necessarily re-invest the funds back into the site.

This system is inadequate as it does not make provision for monitoring, research, or reporting and makes it hard to monitor visitor figures as chronic under reporting
occurs.

The Passport Entry System is designed as a ‘one-stop’ ticket to between four to eight heritage sites. The funds are collected centrally and will be managed by the to-be-established Heritage Office and overseen by the Governor’s cabinet.

Raising the price significantly will allow for a number of actions which will make a big impact on management and conservation, such as:

- Hiring of villagers on full time basis to man the ticket booth, maintain the site and provide on site security;
- Paying basic fee per tourist visited to the Village Fund;
- Upgrading of basic infrastructure needs such as fencing, steps, bridge crossings, etc;
- Construction of basic tourism services infrastructure;
- Signage and interpretation;
- Resource condition, management, site carrying capacity monitoring;
- Surveys;
- Communication of significance;
- Promotion and marketing of community based tours and Jar sites;
- Ongoing research; and
- Village consultation, support and reporting.

The system is not based on percentage commission but will pay fair salaries to the villagers and a portion of the tourism revenue to the Village Fund. The Passport Entry Fee allows for the Heritage Office and local authorities to be efficient, and to implement the Heritage Management Plan.

6.2.2 Village guide services

In order to further integrate the communities into the management and provide alternative employment opportunities, a number of villagers have been trained as village guides. They have been instructed in tourism, conservation, interests of tourism, do and don’ts, identification of interesting stories, first aid, hygiene, and pricing.

The role of village guides is different to the role of Heritage Specialist Guides, and compliments it. It is the role of the Heritage Specialist Guide to engage village guides, and to translate the visitor questions and village story. This will give the tourists the opportunity to directly interact with Lao people and get a heightened

Figure 6.1: Village guides can give visitors a rare insight into village life (Source: Sibylle Creutz)
authentic experience. Such a village guide service is currently available at Sites 2, 3 and on the trek from Ban Thalin to Ban Phakeo.

6.2.3 Accommodation

There are a variety of accommodation options within Xieng Khouang Province to suit most budgets and tastes. Although by the time that visitors come into contact with cultural heritage specialist guides they may have already selected their accommodation, it may be possible to encourage visitors to extend their visit to the province and enjoy a different accommodation experience. For those visitors making enquiries prior to their visit, community-based options may be suggested.

An option for visitors who are interested in meeting members of the local community is homestay. This provides an opportunity for visitors and the local community to learn about one another, as well as for the proceeds of tourism to pass on directly to people. There may be a variety of homestays, with some offering home-cooked food, personal advice on activities in Xieng Khouang and the opportunity to interact in a more personal setting. Villagers have been trained to receive foreigners. Such training includes house keeping practices, cooking of local food for tourists, food hygiene, gender balancing, eco-lodge management and basic accounting skills. Homestay is currently available in Ban Phakeo and Ban Naphia.

Those who want to experience the natural heritage and biodiversity of Xieng Khouang first-hand may be interested in community-managed camping site at Ban Songhak. (to be opened in the near future).

6.2.4 Transport

Apart from motorised transport in the province, other potential transport options exist which have a greater community benefit. Transportation which is both environmentally sustainable and provides business opportunities include push and mountain bikes; ponies, which may particularly be favoured by children, and canoeing from Poung Mun village to Phoukoud town, or rowing on the Nam Kho Lake.

For a potential day trip to suggest is the scenic boat ride along the Nam Sun River to the Kaeng Chao Cascade and Tat Yong Waterfall, and its legend associated with Vang Fa Sa Nun.

Another good option to be amongst people and experience Lao culture is to walk. Walking provides an opportunity to interact with communities, and to make
purchases at one of the many little stalls along the road. One of the developed community-based tours consists of a relatively easy walk between Site 2 and 3, which will be extended in the near future to continue the walk to the waterfall at Ban Nakang. This path has been cleared of UXO, and village guides have been trained to accompany the visitors on the trail and explain the surroundings and village life. As mentioned above, it is part of the role of the Heritage Guide to translate and interpret the village guides’ stories to the visitors.

6.2.5 Sight seeing

The many sites of the Plain of Jars are a natural starting point for sightseeing in the province. Guides should encourage visitors to experience a variety of sites to help develop their understanding of the connections between the sites across the landscape. Providing a more varied experience will also spread the benefits of tourism more broadly, beyond only the most visited sites (e.g., jar sites 1-3).

Like many places, Xieng Khouang has layers of heritage. While the proposed nomination of the Plain of Jars to the World Heritage List will raise the profile of this aspect of the heritage of the province, it is important to consider that some visitors to Xieng Khouang may be as, or more, interested in other aspects of Xieng Khouang’s cultural heritage. One such potential aspect is the story of Xieng Khouang’s rich war heritage, which can be interpreted through its many sites with war remains. Among many others, these include the tank at Nakho Village, the Tham Xang Caves, which were used as a hospital during the Second Indochina War, the UXO display at the Tourism Department, ‘crater village’, the MAG visitor Centre and the Kongphunthisong (troop number 2) War Trek.

Another layer of heritage is connected to the rise and fall of the Phuan Kingdom in Xieng Khouang. The numerous religious monuments in the province, including Wat Vangkhouy Temple at Nasom Village and the many wats and stupas located in Khoun District, are testimony to this aspect of that heritage. The Old Capital of Xieng Khouang played an important role during the French Colonial period and colonial monuments can still be seen in Muang Khoun, such as the remains of the former hospital (built in 1916 in a fusion of Laotian and French styles) and remains of the French Church, school and cemetery.

Villages identified with particular ethnic groups may be interested in developing tourism. These include the
Hmong Villages of Nakhampeang, Thajok and Ban Nasala, in which visitors could join Hmong New Year, or Boun Kinjeng, celebrations between late November and early December each year. It could also include the Taidam ethnic minority of Nathong village. Another village, Phonkham village, is home to populations of Lao Loum and Phuan ethnic groups, as well as the tradition of double drum playing, which is mentioned below. The Heritage Specialist Guide has the opportunity to inform the visitor of the diverse local customs of these ethnic groups and the rituals of the festivals, and can assist visitors to display appropriate behaviour to avoid embarrassment for both the host and guest.

For visitors interested in experiencing natural beauty and outdoor activities, Xieng Khouang is the right place to visit. Natural sites include the hot springs of Muang Kham and at Xang village, caves such as Tham Xang and Thampong, the Tad Lang Waterfall at Nakang village and Phou Hua Nan waterfall. Encouraging the villagers to maintain the natural sites and provide picnics or refreshments at such site enables direct community benefit and ownership. Sites with stories attached, such as the ‘Naga trench’ near Ngan district town, the Mamany Kab footprint, and Nong Tang Lake, have intangible values embedded in the landscape. Some of these intangible values can only be experienced through village guides translated by Heritage Specialist guides. A further outdoor place which is associated with cultural industries and handicrafts (see below) is Mulberries Silk Farm, where visitors may take guided tours and purchase intricate, high quality textiles.

6.2.6 Cultural industries and handicrafts

Certain villages have been designated as ‘model villages’, which exemplify certain locally-produced cultural industries such as handicrafts. Such handicrafts include paper umbrella making, the making of spoons out of scrap metal from the war (but beware of UXO!), weaving of silk and other cloth, and woodcarving. Such ‘model villages’ include Naphia Handicraft Village and Nathong Handicraft Village. Connecting visitors to such villages is an excellent way to provide community benefits, as well to deepen visitor’s experience of the diverse cultural heritage of the province. It allows community members the opportunity to continue to gain livelihoods from producing cultural goods. It is also a means of continuing the transmission of the skills and techniques involved in the production of the items.

Some of the villages near jar sites have expressed an
interest in displaying (and selling) locally made goods and souvenirs. For instance, elders near Site 2 carve fire starters and children’s toys, villagers at Ban Xiengdi make brooms and, at Ban Phai, people weave.

The Mulberries Silk Farm (see above) offers silk produce. Other local products derived from mulberry includes mulberry tea and mulberry paper (Po Saa), which is a component of locally-produced paper umbrellas, an old tradition in Phou Koud District.

The Phuan and Hmong continue to make the khaen, a flute-like wooden and bamboo mouth organ which is one of the oldest known woodwind instruments in the world. Khaen were originally used in courtship ceremonies, and are now played at special events and festivals. While many people still know how to play the khaen, only one family in Xieng Khouang still knows how to make it. The Hmong khaen is made by a Hmong community in the mountains of Kham District, and it has an important role in funerals.

Around jar site 2 a craftsperson can be found who makes a ‘firestarter’ out of cow horn. The ‘firestarter’ allows a fire to be lit without matches or a lighter, but requires a specialised technique. Visitors may be very interested in the challenge of trying the device, and purchasing it as a souvenir. They also make a simple bamboo ‘challenge’ toy which may be of interest to the tourists.

6.2.7 Performance

Visitors interested in performance and, in particular, music, may be very interested in the tradition of double drum playing in Phonkham Village, which exists to this day at local ceremonies. This tradition of the Lao Phuan is believed by locals to repel pests from crops, and is associated with the well-known legend of the widow from the era of ruler Jao Noi Muang Puan. Legend had it that a widow invented the technique by beating an animal skin stretched over a mortar where she was storing food away from hungry animals. You may need to enquire as to when such ceremonies are held, and whether it is appropriate for tourist visitors to attend.

6.2.8 Gastronomy

Aside from the traditional Laotian cuisine which can be readily sampled at a range of local restaurants and vendors, the region is well known for producing various fruits, including peach, pear and prunes. Visitors could perhaps be encouraged to visit areas that produce these fruits and to buy fruits either from the orchards or village
markets. One way in which this could be encouraged is to distribute fruit as a snack during tours, which will both provide refreshment to tour patrons as well as promoting the local produce.

‘Nok aen’ (fermented swallow) and its associated tradition of swallow trapping may not be to every visitor’s taste. If visiting during the appropriate season, a side-tour may be arranged to witness swallow trapping in action. It should be noted that visitors may have differing views about this practice, which may need to be openly discussed and respected. In most developed countries swallows are not usually considered food, however if the visitor expresses interest in eating wildlife the responsible guide should point out the potential issues of sustainability and wildlife conservation that may be involved. Even sampling wild life may mean that sustainability of a (perhaps endangered) species may be put under pressure by over consumption.

Another local tradition is the production of rice wine (‘Laolao’) and Lao Hai (‘Khmu’). The production and consumption of these local favourites are often tied to local festivities or practices, such as baci, funerals, etc. As the Laolao takes such a large place in Lao Society it is opportune to introduce the tourist to it’s manufacturing process and, if they want, its taste. The best way for sampling Laolao is in a welcoming ceremony, but this can be interwoven with a visit to a local producer with opportunity to buy a bottle of the local spirit. A further option is the Mastake whisky, produced from the highly-valued Hed Wai mushroom from the pine forests of Xieng Khouang.

Cooking classes are an increasingly popular activity for visitors who want a more involved cultural experience, and may be combined with accommodation at a homestay or guesthouse. This could potentially involve a large number of people from the local community, from cooks and suppliers of produce to accommodation providers, and may also encourage the revival of local dishes that may be falling out of favour. Currently none of the communities provide such service but it may be arranged privately with entrepreneurial villagers. Several villages have been trained in cooking for foreigners and to maintain hygienic standards.

For those visitors who want to combine food with sightseeing, picnics at water falls may be an attractive option. These could involve members of the local community assisting with preparing food, and transporting and guiding to the picnic sites. One issue
that would need to be considered is the impact of such activities on the natural and cultural heritage of the district. Rubbish disposal would need to be managed sensitively by ensuring that all non-perishable waste is removed from the picnic site. It has to be pointed out that picnics are not acceptable at Jar sites, although could be combined with the walk between jar sites Two and Three, or one of the waterfalls (such as the Tad Ka Waterfall in Nong Het, or the Tad Ka Waterfall near Tajok).

6.2.9 Relaxation

Particularly after a few days walking around Xieng Khouang’s attractions, or even after exploring a jar site for an afternoon, visitors may be very interested in trying one of Xieng Khouang’s herbal saunas or massages. You may be able to assist with directing your visitors to places where herbal sauna and massage is available. Visitors interested in such activities may also be interested in the hot springs of Muang Kham and at Xang village. A trip to a local beauty parlour could also be suggested for a relaxing hair wash, manicure or pedicure.

Activities in Phonsavanh town are limited, but identifying opportunities to play ‘jeu the boules’, join a soccer game, volley ball or badminton may be an opportunity for tourists to interact with locals and be entertained. The golf course is another mode of getting tourist to enjoy the Xieng Khouang landscape.

6.2.10 Philanthropy and volunteering

For visitors who want to engage more deeply in the local communities, there may be opportunities from time to time for visitors to engage in philanthropy (or charitable giving), or volunteering for a charitable cause. This may be a wonderful opportunity for visitors to gain a special connection to Xieng Khouang as well as for the community to benefit. Be careful before recommending any such opportunities that it represents a genuine need, and particularly when visitors want to volunteer, ensure that they may not be taken advantage of in any way. This is an area where trust is important and care needs to be taken, but a deeper engagement and long term benefits may be possible.

One such opportunity is at the SOS Children Orphanage where one can hand over school supplies or volunteer to teach English.

6.3 Unit summary

In this final section, we consider how tourism and
community benefit can exist together. We look at particular activities and how they can best achieve the goals of benefitting the communities of the Plain of Jars and also deepen and improve the visitor experience. These activities can help broaden the range of communities which can benefit from heritage tourism and in turn help get broader support for heritage conservation of the Plain of Jars, as well as Xieng Khouang’s other heritage places, from these same communities.
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Case studies in core module

Worksheets & Lists of ‘Frequently Asked Questions’ (FAQs)

Pond 1993

Black et al. 2001 cited in Dioko and Urukul, 2005


The Atlas of Mineral Resources of the ESCAP Region Volume 7, Lao PDR, UN


Do's and Don'ts booklet & posters

IMPACT: Luang Prabang & Luang Namtha books

English for Eco guides books

Socially Responsible Tourism Laos Brochure
Endnotes

1 Source: Lao PDR, National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy
2 The visitor numbers are based on the tour permits issued by the Provincial Tourism Department.
3 Survey conducted in 2008.
4 Black et al. 2001 cited in Dioko and Urukul, 2005
5 Term first used by Thongsa Sayavongkhamdy in his opening address at the Archaeology Lao exhibition at National Museum in 1996.
7 Including two battalions, Kongphannoy Pudchai (a small battalion) and Kongphannoy 933 originally formed in Xieng Khouang.
8 “Large full-frontal humans, arms raised and knees bent, usually wearing a sword and often with a dog-like animal at their feet and a bird above their head, are surrounded by smaller humans, both full-frontal and in profile. The principal figures have been interpreted as chiefs, sorcerers or warriors; and the site as a whole is generally seen as associated with religious dances and divine intervention to ward off disastrous floods or malignant spirits. Dogs are still revered in the region, while the humans’ posture has led some researchers to see them as ‘frog-gods’ who would intercede with the Thunder God who commands wind and rain: the local Zhuang people worshipped frog-gods and at festivals still imitate a frog-posture in their dances.” Bahn 1992.
9 Mills and Hutton 1929. Fig 3.
11 Two volumes
12 Sayavongkhamdy and Bellwood 2000.
13 Unpublished reports on UXO clearance results at Sites 1, 2, 3, 16, 23, 25 and 52.
17 Pers.comm. Truman Simanjuntak
18 Briones and Chiong 1977.
19 Dizon 1996.
20 Colani, volume II, p.125.
21 Lens shaped cross section
22 Rogers and Van Den Bergh 2005.
23 According to the legend, the King Khun Jeuam defeated Chao Ankha who ruled Xieng Khouang. In honour and celebration of this victory the stone jars were manufactured and filled with rice wine.