ABSTRACT:
This book is the outcome of several year’s engagement with aspects of public history in Australia. It weaves together the results of a number of Australian Research Council research project which we have undertaken including a national project on historical understanding called ‘Australians and the Past’ and a study of memorials and memorialisation in Australia, ‘Places of the Heart’. It also draws on reflections about our work with a range of community groups, museums and heritage agencies. Over the ten years or so that the book has been in process, there have been many significant shifts in both the history discipline and the field known as public history, both in this country and many others around the world. What began as a defiant intellectual project on an impossible to categorise area (sociology, history, anthropology) that we knew was essential to understanding the great interest and passion for history in many different forms within the broader population, has now become one of many which examines what is variously referred to as consuming history, using history, the heritage industry, cultural tourism and, more theoretically, historical consciousness.

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When you stand and look at the stars, you are really looking at past history. The light from Alkaid, the end star in the handle of the Big Dipper, has taken about 210 years to reach your eyes. If Alkaid stopped today, people on earth would still see it about 210 years later. They can go on and on, at the same terrific speed, with no loss of energy, forever!

1. A) approach; B) reach

Together, they challenged long-held beliefs about how oral stories should be collected and shared. As a sustained reflection on this large-scale experiment in collaborative research, Oral History at the Crossroads has methodological and ethical implications for scholars. It also provides a contemporary model for curating public history, pushing the field in new directions.