

## Sisters Rocks: changing connections to a sacred place

Darren Griffin

Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation  
ch@bglc.com.au

Ben Watson

Dr. Vincent Clark & Associates Pty Ltd  
bwatson@vincentclark.com.au

### Abstract

*The Sisters Rocks are an isolated group of granite tors located in the Black Range (Burrong), 3 km southeast of Stawell in western Victoria, southeastern Australia. According to Aboriginal Dreamtime stories associated with this place, the rocks were created by the ancestral hero Bunjil. Bunjil's wives are said to have imbued meaning into the place by marking the rocks and naming them. There have been various claims that there were once Aboriginal rock paintings at this place, a plausible assumption considering that most similar geological features in the surrounding area contain rock art, most notably Bunjil's Shelter located 7 km to the southwest. Bunjil's Shelter is in fact thought to be connected directly to Sisters Rocks by a traditional Aboriginal song line, marking the route followed by creator-beings during the Dreaming. Today, a tradition of marking Sisters Rocks continues in the form of modern graffiti, a phenomenon that began during the late-nineteenth century. It is possible, if not likely, that prehistoric art initially prompted the production of graffiti by modern visitors, a problem that is common at rock art sites the world over.*

*But does the transformation of connection by different agents through time change the reverence of Sisters Rocks, or are changing cultural connections what make it sacred? The place is an important example of the continuation of intangible culture and relationships with place, and their survival into the contemporary world. The view of indigenous people and their connections to this place are of primary importance in terms of its heritage values and significance. The graffiti certainly poses challenges for the management of this place — there have been various calls to remove it since the 1930s — but there are also various arguments for its retention; the graffiti itself is part of the history of this place, and might be considered part of what makes it significant as both a historical site and indigenous place. This paper explores the changing cultural values of Sisters Rocks, including its continued importance to contemporary traditional owners, and the implications these values have for its management as a heritage site.*

