



Aboriginal cultural heritage rediscovery at Taylors Rock

Mount Arapiles-Tooan State Park

Background

Aboriginal cultural heritage, including rock art sites, has been rediscovered at Taylors Rock (Declaration Crag) in Mount Arapiles-Tooan State Park.

The rediscoveries are enormously important to Traditional Owners the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk peoples, who have occupied the lands around Mount Arapiles – known as Dyuritte – for thousands of years.

The sites have been added to the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register, and Parks Victoria and Barengi Gadjin Land Council, who co-manage the park, have a legislated responsibility to protect the area from visitor impacts.

What are the rediscoveries?

In addition to quarry sites and artefact scatters, rock art has been rediscovered. There are dozens of motifs in charcoal and red ochre, including a decorated oval reminiscent of designs painted on Aboriginal shields.

How were they rediscovered?

Observations indicating rock art were initially made during a routine visit by Traditional Owners and Parks Victoria staff. The sites were subsequently verified by an independent expert and assessments undertaken by Traditional Owners, Aboriginal Victoria and Parks Victoria. The sites were then added to the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage register.

How are these cultural values being protected?

To protect the site while a long-term management response is explored, Parks Victoria and Barengi Gadjin Land Council, have installed visitor signage requesting people to respectfully avoid entering the area effective immediately.

Park Rangers and Aboriginal Heritage Officers will be visiting the site and the park to make visitors aware of its cultural significance.

The *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* protects Aboriginal cultural heritage and financial penalties apply for harm caused by individuals or corporate bodies.

How does this impact visitor access?

Signage has been installed at Taylors Rock requesting visitors to respectfully avoid entering the area effective immediately. There is otherwise no change to visitor activities such as rock climbing, bushwalking, camping and cycling in the rest of the park.

Does this mean people can't climb Taylors Rock?

To protect the site while a long-term management response is explored, Parks Victoria and Barengi Gadjin Land Council request people avoid entering the area – this includes climbing on the rocky outcrop and boulders.

There is otherwise no change to visitor activities in the rest of the park.

Will there be further restrictions in the park?

Sustainable recreation, including no-impact rock climbing, is supported by Parks Victoria and Barengi Gadjin Land Council.

There is no review into rock climbing at Mount Arapiles-Tooan State Park.

What happens now?

Parks Victoria and Barengi Gadjin Land Council understand that Mount Arapiles is a world-class rock climbing destination.

Parks Victoria and Barengi Gadjin Land Council plan to discuss with rock climbers, local tour operators, community groups and other stakeholders cultural heritage protections at Taylors Rock.

Parks Victoria hopes that all parties can work together to protect and communicate this significant rediscovery, and celebrate the area's rich Aboriginal history.

There is otherwise no change to visitor activities in the rest of the park.

Will this impact tour operators or local businesses?

Parks play an important role in regional and local economies. Parks Victoria supports sustainable nature-based tourism that contributes to productive, healthy and prosperous local communities.

Parks Victoria and Barengi Gadjin Land Council understand that Mount Arapiles is a world-class rock climbing destination that draws local, national and international visitors. For thousands of years it has also been incredibly important part of the cultural landscape for Traditional Owners.

Parks Victoria and Barengi Gadjin Land Council will discuss cultural heritage protections at Taylors Rock with local tour operators.

Cultural heritage and environmental values are not incompatible with recreation – people can enjoy a range of activities in almost all of Victoria's parks and reserves.

Victoria's rich Aboriginal cultural heritage can be celebrated by all, and can also be a driver of visitation and economic opportunities for the region.

What if other Aboriginal cultural heritage is found?

As with most parks and reserves in Victoria, Mount Arapiles-Tooan State Park contains Aboriginal cultural places. The full number, extent, type, location and significance of these are not currently well documented.

Parks may contain small, localised cultural heritage sites – such as rock-quarries, artefact scatters and scar trees, and significant places that also include intangible values such as creation stories.

Over time, as assessments reveal more details of Victoria's incredible cultural history, we will look at whether new park management strategies are required to protect and preserve them.

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Isn't this why climbing was restricted at the Grampians?

The heritage-listed Grampians National Park is home to one-third of Victoria's flora and the majority of surviving Aboriginal rock art places in south-east Australia.

To protect these values there are restrictions on most recreation activities within the park's Special Protection Areas, which cover around 33 per cent of the park.

No-impact abseiling and rock climbing is permitted in the 100,000 hectares of national park that is outside of these Special Protection Areas.

When will more information be available?

Parks Victoria and Barengi Gadjin Land Council will continue to discuss cultural heritage protections at Taylors Rock and make new information available as soon as possible.

Information for the public will be maintained on the Mount Arapiles-Tooan State Park page of the Parks Victoria website.