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**'... SHEER, UTTER, EUROPEAN ARROGANCE ...'
CHALLENGES TO THE AUTHENTICITY OF
ROCK ART SITES IN THE GRAMPIANS-
GARIWERD REGION OF VICTORIA,
AUSTRALIA**

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*Working Paper 71/98
November 1998*

ABSTRACT

The issue of authenticity continues to pervade tourism studies. Hughes (1995) describes the issue as an *obligato* that runs through tourism research. MacCannell (1976) has suggested that tourism is a quest for the authentic precisely because it has become so scarce. It assumes that the quest for authenticity is focussed not only on people as objects, but also on material objects (Harkin 1995). Getz (1995:315) has defined authenticity as 'genuine, unadulterated or the real thing'. This article addresses authenticity in terms of the management of indigenous rock art sites in Victoria, Australia.

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The evolution of rock art tourism in the Grampians-Gariwerd region of Victoria has been *ad hoc* and fortuitous. Rumours that Aboriginal art sites existed in this region are believed to have circulated amongst nearby gold mining populations from the 1850s (Ord 1896). The first site 'uncovered' by non-indigenous people was the Billimina Shelter, believed to have been located in 1859 when a station owner was searching for stray cattle. The site did not become public knowledge until Mathew's (1897) publication of his site recording. This pattern of a time lag between initial location and the eventual publication of existence was often repeated for other public sites until the early 1950s.

The location of rock art sites in the region may be disaggregated into two periods, each with a distinct group of individuals involved. The first period dates from early 1929 until 1943 and involves members of the ethnological section of the Royal Society of Victoria. Although this party did not 'discover' any sites, they were responsible for publicising their location. They were also responsible for the construction of the first protective grilles at two Gariwerd sites in 1937. The location of sites during this period was in a sense revealed to Melbourne-based 'enthusiasts' by local people, often landowners, who had known of the existence of the sites for some time.

The second period began in 1955 and involved local field naturalists, and continued until 1973 when a central authority responsible for Aboriginal and Archaeological relics was established. Sites were often located during field naturalist excursions whose primary object was to seek out botanical specimens. Since the establishment of the Relics Office the discovery of art sites has continued to be unsystematic, *ad hoc* and fortuitous.

Rock art tourism in the region has concentrated on ten sites, all of which were the earliest sites discovered in their immediate environs. As these sites became public knowledge, those involved in their public disclosure took efforts to have the sites shielded or protected by enclosing them with wire netting. At some sites graffiti and other forms of vandalism were becoming problematic; Mathew, for example, in 1896 found charcoal graffiti so prolific at the Billimina Shelter that he had considerable difficulty identifying the partially obliterated paintings. These protective measures were intended to reduce and control graffiti.

In terms of the phases in the development of sites and sightseeing objects as attractions, as delineated by MacCannell (1976), these protective enclosures not only served to protect the rock art, they in a sense served to mark, comprehensively, the cultural landscape. The delineation of the art as Aboriginal rock art conferred on the sites the 'sight sacralisation' that assures the visitor of the authenticity of their experience.

When steps were being taken to sacralise these ten sites in the Gariwerd-Grampians region through the action of site protection, the authenticity of four sites was questioned by members of the general public and archaeologists. The sites in question are Manya Shelter (formerly known as 'Cave of Hands'); Bunjils Shelter; Ngamadjidj (Cave of Ghosts), and Mugadgadjin (Black Range 2).

Utilising Gunn's (1972, 1994) theories about the design and management of areas surrounding the nuclei of tourist attractions, the protective fences or grilles equate with his notion of 'inviolable belt'. As the area immediately surrounding the nucleus, in this case the rock shelter with rock paintings, the grille as inviolable belt has a protective function. A managed space can protect a fragile and valuable piece of artwork from damage, whether it be from graffiti and other damage from tourists, or feral goats that used the shelter thus threatening the art by their constant rubbing against the rock face. The construction of the protective barrier also equates to MacCannell's (1976) 'framing and elevation' phase of the development of visitor attractions.

Harkin (1995:654) has noted that temporality is an important dimension of authenticity in tourist experience. The significance of art sites as tourism destinations, lies in their historicity. People wish to experience art as a 'sign of history' in an attempt to connect their individual life or fate to collective destiny

Bunjils Shelter

Bunjils Shelter is arguably one of Victoria's best known art sites, in that a replica of its art has been on display in a tourist attraction in nearby Stawell since 1975, and it was chosen by Australia Post in 1984 to represent Victorian rock art in a series of eight postage stamps entitled 'The First Australians'. An information sheet for public distribution was produced in 1975 by local government and a local tourism committee. The site is generally regarded to be one of the most significant Aboriginal art sites in Victoria, and yet its management has been characterized by nagging doubts about its authenticity.

Since this site was first reported in 1957, its authenticity has been questioned. One common view has been that the motifs of Bunjil and the two dogs are 'fakes' painted by non-indigenous people. Massola (1957) considered the paintings to be of Aboriginal origin, however he conceded that at first glance the figure of Bunjil did not appear to be genuine as it seems to be traced in white paint and is quite unlike the work of Aboriginal people.

The authenticity of the site came to a head in late 1976 when the Victoria Archaeological Survey was asked by the Department of Crown Lands and Survey to make recommendations concerning site management. Growing tourist interest in the site made it necessary for management purposes to resolve the question of the origin of the paintings. PJF Coutts, the Director of the Survey, replied that he was reluctant to make recommendations until the site had undergone tests to establish its authenticity. For his part, Coutts doubted the paintings were genuine.

Purported Aboriginal paintings can often be authenticated by comparison with known authentic motifs using visual parameters such as style, appearance, and context. This was not possible at Bunjils Shelter where the art is unique, isolated, and claimed by some to be European yet appears Aboriginal in context, pigment colour and application. A fundamental assumption of pigment analysis is that Aboriginal people used traditional ochres and non-Aboriginal people used non-indigenous paints. Of course if Aborigines used European pigments and vice versa then pigment analysis cannot resolve the question of the origin of the paintings.

Between 1979 and 1981, five separate sets of analyses were conducted on pigment samples collected from the site. Analyses included Emission spectroscopy, X-ray fluorescence (XRF), Infra-red spectroscopy (IRS), X-ray diffraction (XRD), and Scanning electron microscopy (SEM and EDS).

In 1979, on the basis of optical emission spectroscopy analysis of pigment samples, that McConnell (1985, 1986) has since been highly critical, Coutts became convinced the paintings were 'fake'. With the Shire of Stawell's permission, the Survey was prepared to produce signage for the site declaring that the paintings had not been painted by Aborigines. He reported that intensive questioning of local European people had identified the person(s) responsible for the paintings, which appear to have been made in the early twentieth century. He believed that the perpetuation of the 'myth' of Aboriginal origin was not in the interests of archaeology, the Aboriginal community, and the wider scientific community.

Some time between 1979 and 1980 Bunjils Shelter was struck from the VAS Site Register when European origin became accepted within VAS. Despite the fact that in late 1981 scanning electron microscopy (SEM) analysis had established the Aboriginal origin of the site, it was not restored to the Register until early 1983.

The 1981 SEM analysis confirmed that the internal red and white outlines of all three bichrome figures of Bunjil and both dogs, had been painted using traditional Aboriginal ochres (kaolinite and an iron-rich clay). Overpainting of some body parts of Bunjil and the second dog had occurred with a European whitewash and the red in the tail of the second dog had been added with a red lead paint.

The history of the authentication aspect of the management of this art site has been embarrassing. Interpretation of the origin of the painting has been characterized by three views:

- the paintings were Aboriginal in origin (Ord 1896; Howitt 1904);
- some of the paintings had been added or 'touched up' by Europeans (Massola 1957; Banfield 1974); and
- the paintings have been entirely the work of Europeans (Sullivan 1979b).

The irony of all this is the knowledge that from 1972, when manuscript notes in the Howitt Papers, in the possession of the State Library of Victoria, became available to the public they contained information that removes any doubt about the paintings' authenticity (Howitt Papers). This is not to infer that pigment analysis was not necessary to determine which pigments were of commercial origin, rather the issue is that the question of authenticity need never have become a management issue.

Howitt (1904) divulged what he knew of the creator spirit called 'Bunjil' and confirmed the existence of the art site in the Black Range near Stawell. This information was obtained at Ramahyuk from conversations in the summer of 1884 with a local Jardwadjali speaker named John Connolly. In 1972 notes of these conversations and other papers were presented to the State Library by the Howitt family. My examination of these notes and Howitt's (1904) published text revealed that Howitt (1904) did not faithfully reproduce the information he obtained from John Connolly. Unfortunately the discrepancies have had a considerable impact on the history of management of this site. With regard to location, Connolly gave Howitt clear directions, yet Howitt chose not to publish them. Another major variation between Howitt's notes and his publication concern the number of motifs at the site. Howitt (1904) specifically stated the site contained the figure of Bunjil and his dog, however his notes are clear that two dogs were painted beside Bunjil. Howitt's published reference to one dog only has fuelled local speculation that some of the painting was done by Europeans; certainly the belief that the second dog was of European origin has been widespread (Massola 1957; Halls 1967; Banfield 1974).

The most valuable aspect of having finally identified Howitt's Bunjil informant and having confirmed with the information was obtained, is that it finally puts to rest any lingering doubt about the authenticity and Aboriginal origin of this art site. The discrepancies between Howitt's private notes and his published work could only become public knowledge when the notes were available to the general public from 1972. However the informant and the nature of the information was not uncovered until Clark (1991) reviewed the management history of the site.

Manya Shelter

The existence of this rock art site became public knowledge in April 1929 when members of Royal Society of Victoria were alerted to the site's location by Ernest Lewis, the alleged 'discoverer'. The authenticity of Manya Shelter was first questioned later in that year when members of the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria (FNCV) approached the Forests Commission of Victoria to have the site adequately protected from vandalism. Forester W. Hill, from the Stawell Forest District, made an assessment of the art site, and informed head office that he believed the FNCV should be informed that the supposed origin of the paintings at this site was questionable. He believed the hand prints at this site had been placed on the rock many years earlier by some the Edwards girls, whose father owned the adjoining Mokanger station. These girls often accompanied their father to a boundary rider's hut in the Victoria Range, and were in the habit of roaming the hills. At this time Hill considered it common practice for young people to place their hands against rock walls and, by blowing red powder about their hands, leave their imprints. He considered it hardly possible to associate the hand stencils at this site with the hands of Aboriginal peoples. He suggested the origin of the paintings be investigated before they were preserved as Aboriginal paintings. No further developments occurred until February 1934 when the FNCV once again wrote to the Forests Commission to have the site adequately protected from vandalism. Hill repeated his earlier doubts and stated that nothing in the intervening years had persuaded him to alter his opinion that the site was not of Aboriginal origin. He

recommended that expenditure be set aside or action be taken; however if the Field Naturalists wished to erect a fence permission should be granted.

The construction of the protective fence commenced in January 1937 and was completed in August. Given the time it took to have a protective fence erected at this site, it is highly likely that Hill's doubts about the site's authenticity had some effect. It would seem that his views were considered sympathetically by FCV head office staff, who generally adopted his recommendations. The fact that the Forests Commission did not finance this work may be indicative of their acceptance of Hill's views. Other than the views forcibly expressed by Hill, there have never been any subsequent claims that the Manya site is not of Aboriginal origin. Indeed, Gunn (1981a,b) has ranked it the second most important art site in Victoria.

Mugadgadjin Shelter

This art site in the Black Range, west of the Grampians-Gariwerd National Park, became public knowledge in 1963. It was the second site located in the Black Range, and Gunn (1981a) considers it the fourth most important art site in Victoria. In 1973 AL West, Curator of Anthropology, National Museum of Victoria, and PJF Coutts, Curator of Archaeology, Archaeological and Aboriginal Relics Office, inspected the site as part of a general tour of art sites in the region. West and Coutts (1973) described the motifs at this site and noted that two pigments, red and white, were present. They suggested the white pigment was suspect, and some of the motifs, especially the arrows at the right of the shelter, were considered 'fake'.

In May 1976, whilst Coutts was leading a team of 12 people who were excavating the site, the Wimmera Mail Times published a story entitled 'Some are fakes!', in which Coutts claimed that some of the paintings in the Black Range were fake. Coutts believed they had been painted by Europeans some 15 years earlier, using a flat house paint. Coutts explained the grounds for his suspicion were that the human figures had fingers, and Aborigines did not draw fingers in paintings. The white figures were painted over a set of red ochre figures which he believed the Aborigines had painted just before or after the coming of Europeans in the 1800s. 'The vandalism is sheer, utter European arrogance. It shows a complete lack of respect of respect for the Aboriginal cultural tradition.'

Coutts explained his reasoning in the following words:

'We found that one human figure at Black Range, painted in what looks like white pipe clay, was produced with a non-Aboriginal, possibly European, paint. We studied the figure in the first instance because it seemed out of context with other paintings in the Grampians. The fingers, for example, are very badly painted. However, this does not rule out the possibility that the artist was an Aboriginal who used European paint (Coutts and Lorblanchet 1982).'

In August 1980 Gunn collected two pigment samples from this site for analysis. He reported that this was one of two sites, the other being Ngamadjidj (see below) that were undergoing investigation in an attempt to ascertain either Aboriginal origin or European origin of the white pigment motifs they contained. Gunn (1980a) referred to the challenge issued by Coutts in 1976, who had subsequently informed him that he had also met a woman who claimed responsibility, but she had since died. Gunn noted that the red motifs at the site were of undisputed Aboriginal origin; only the white pigment paintings were suspect.

Preliminary analysis of the pigment sample from this site was that because the presence of gypsum was noted it was considered unlikely that it would be found in Aboriginal art of this region, despite the fact that gypsum occurred in natural deposits in the district (Hancox 1981a). Further analysis by McConnell (in Gunn 1987:11) concluded that the composition of the white pigment was similar to that of surface clays in the surrounding area and it was consistent with pigments used by Aborigines in the region.

In 1985 an officer of the Victoria Archaeological Survey sought to review the oral history of the European origins of some of the motifs at this site. In conversations with a family which had had long family ties with the Black Range area. Two members of the family were represented as having some association with the site: one in the 1920s, and the second in the early 1960s. Despite these local claims to the contrary, Gunn's

(1987) analysis of the graffiti at this site led him to conclude that the art predated the earliest dated graffiti of 1922, and he considered all motifs at the site to be of Aboriginal origin.

Ngamadjidj Shelter

The Ngamadjidj site is believed to have been first located in 1903, but did not become public knowledge until 1956. The authenticity of the Ngamadjidj art site has also been questioned, and analysis of pigment samples from this shelter has been linked with that of samples from Bunjils. In 1980 samples were collected from this site and Mugadgadjin in an effort to ascertain the origin of the white pigments motifs they contained. Analysis conducted in 1981 adjudged the samples to be 'probably Aboriginal' (Hancox 1981).

CONCLUSION

In 1990, when the Koorie Tourism Unit of the then Victorian Tourism Commission and the five Brambuk Aboriginal communities launched their submission to the Place Names Committee to reinstate Aboriginal place names and confer more appropriate names on the public art sites, the commission received a letter from one local person who claimed that all the art in the Grampians had been painted by a French artist in the mid 1850s who visited the Grampians after having seen central Australian art.

Fees (1996), in a study of the politics of authenticity in a north Cotswold town has observed that authenticity is not an intrinsic quality of objects in themselves, but something which is ascribed to them. He noted that objects are authentic because someone with authority to do so says they are, and thirdly, the experience of an object as authentic or otherwise has practical consequences. Fees believes the issue is where the authority ultimately resides to determine the meaning, value and use of the object. They must be authentically something - even 'authentically fake'.

In the example of these four rock art sites, their authenticity was contested, some by people at the Periphery, such as locals, who did not have the authority to ascribe authenticity, and some by archaeological officials at the Centre where the authority to ascribe authenticity resides. In the case of two sites the politics of authenticity involved a contest between locals and archaeologists; in the case of the other two the contest was within the archaeological fraternity.

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