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AN ANALYSIS OF CHALLENGES TO THE AUTHENTICITY OF ROCK ART SITES IN THE GARIWERD (GRAMPIANS) REGION OF VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA

Ian D. Clark

Abstract: This article addresses authenticity and its implications for the management of indigenous rock art sites in Gariwerd (Grampians), Victoria, Australia. The issue of who has the authority to ascribe authenticity is also considered. In the case of the four rock art sites in this paper, 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.

The issue of authenticity continues to pervade tourism studies. Hughes (1995) describes the issue as an obligation 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 focused 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'. In this paper, issues of the authenticity of rock art and the implications for the management of rock art sites are addressed.

The evolution of rock art tourism in the Gariwerd (Grampians) 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 (Clark 1991a).

The location of rock art sites in the region has been disaggregated into three periods, each with a distinct group of individuals involved and a distinctive methodology of site discovery (Clark 1991a). 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 (Clark 1991a).

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 (Clark 1991a). Thirty-five sites were 'found' during this period and reported by Aldo Massola, the Curator of Anthropology at the National Museum of Victoria. Sites were often located during field naturalist excursions whose primary object was to seek out botanical specimens. The third and current period began in 1973, and the discovery of art sites continued to be unsystematic, ad hoc and fortuitous until 1980 when the 'Victorian Rock Art Survey Project' began employing the services of R. G. Gunn. This project continued until 1986 and involved a field component that saw Gunn survey the immediate environs of known sites. From 1979 until 1984, 56 new sites were located and recorded, taking the total of known sites in Gariwerd and its environs to 95. Since 1986, a further nine sites have been located, making a total of 104 (Gunn 1991).

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, and racially motivated damage following the declaration of the

Grampians National Park in 1984.

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 and show it to be a managed place. 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 Bunjils Shelter (Massola 1957; Sullivan 1979); Many Shelter (formerly known as 'Cave of Hands') (Clark 1991a); Mugadgadjin (Black Range 2) (West and Coutts 1973), and Ngamadjidi (Cave of Ghosts) (Clark 1991a).

Utilising Clare 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 rockshelter 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, such as graffiti left by tourists. The construction of the protective barrier also equates to MacCannell's (1976) 'framing and elevation' phase of the development of visitor attractions.

It is no surprise that active attempts at site protection of some of the Gariwerd sites raised issues. Site protection is part of the sacralisation process, which attests to the authenticity of the managed space. Four sites have been subject to discussion about authenticity and what follows may be described as an 'oppositional narrative' of the four sites (Hutnyk 2000: 133).

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 on the site 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 (Gunn 1983), and yet its management has been characterised by nagging doubts about its authenticity (Massola 1957; Clark 1991b).

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.

In 1976, growing tourist interest in the site made it nec-

essary for management purposes to resolve the question of the origin of the paintings. P. J. F. Coutts, the Director of the Victoria Archaeological Survey (VAS), said he was reluctant to make recommendations until the site had undergone tests to establish its authenticity.

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 and isolated. 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 (Hatthem 1979; Gunn 1980a, 1980b; Hancox 1981a, 1981b). Analyses included emission spectroscopy, x-ray fluorescence (XRF), infra-red spectroscopy (IRS), x-ray diffraction (XRD) and scanning electron microscopy (SEM and EDS), some of which were later determined to be inappropriate (McConnell 1985, 1987).

In 1979, on the basis of optical emission spectroscopy analysis of pigment samples, Coutts became convinced the paintings were 'fakes'. With the Shire of Stawell's permission, the VAS 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 (Aboriginal Affairs Victoria n.d. a: Letter 440/79 [Pt. 1]).

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 subsequent SEM testing in late 1981 suggested an Aboriginal origin, 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 iron-rich clay). Over-painting 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 red lead paint (see Gunn 1983).

Interpretation of the origin of the painting has been characterised 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 1979).

In 1972, manuscript notes in the Howitt Papers, in the

possession of the State Library of Victoria, became available to the public, and they contained information that removes any doubt about the paintings' authenticity (Howitt n.d.). 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 the management issue that it did.

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. The author's examination of these notes and Howitt's (1904) published text in 1991 revealed that Howitt (1904) did not faithfully reproduce the information he obtained from John Connolly (Clark 1991b). Unfortunately the discrepancies have had a considerable impact on the history of management of this site. With regard to location, Connolly gave clear directions, yet Howitt chose not to publish them. The information provided by Connolly is as follows:

Bunjil a man, supposed to be father of all the blacks a place at Pleasant Creek at Black Range — there is a rock with a large cave under it. Bunjil is painted in it and a little dog in each side. Road from Pleasant Creek to Campbells Reef — there is a boundary riders hut about half a mile wsw from the well. The Black Range Hut. Hut close to road follow into Pleasant Creek. After leaving the hut mountains runs to point along side road. A little up the hill from the point 60–70 yds there is a big round stone in a sort of hollow, the mouth of the cave faces towards the hill. Bunjil does no harm, I think he does good (Howitt n.d. 1053/5(c), Ms. 9356 SLV).

Another major variation between Howitt's notes and his publication concerns 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 obtained from him 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.

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 (FCV) to have the site adequately protected from vandalism. Forester W. Hill, from the Stawell Forest District, believed the hand prints at this site had been placed on the rock many years earlier by some of the Edwards girls, whose father owned the adjoining Mokanger station. 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. In February 1934 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 no 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 may be speculated 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, or possibly their limited budget for such works. 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 (1981) 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 (1981) considers it the fourth most important art site in Victoria. In 1973 A. L. West, Curator of Anthropology, National Museum of Victoria, and P. J. F. 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'.

On 26 May 1976, whilst Coutts was leading a team of twelve 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 fifteen years earlier, using 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 Ab-

origines 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 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: 92).

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 reinforced this view, because the presence of gypsum was considered unlikely 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, Don Hough, an officer of the VAS, 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. The family asserted that one of their members was responsible for the paintings at this site (Aboriginal Affairs Victoria n.d. b). 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 graffito of 1922, and in conjunction with the results of the pigment analyses 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 Shelter. 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 1981b).

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. This claim was not taken seriously.

The issue of who has the authority to ascribe authenticity takes us to the heart of the matter. In the case of the four rock art sites in this paper, 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. 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'. It is noteworthy that the views of Aboriginal people are absent from these oppositional narratives. Coutts (1982) has observed that when the *Aboriginal and Archaeological Relics Preservation Act* was passed in 1972, the Aboriginal community of Victoria was not consulted in the drafting process, and the legislation was passed on the mistaken assumption that Victoria's Indigenous population had been dispossessed of their cultural heritage and no longer maintained links with traditional tribal areas. Today, with changes in attitudes, it is often Aboriginal people who have authority over their sites and archaeologists work with Aboriginal communities.

Associate Professor Ian D. Clark
School of Business
University of Ballarat
P.O. Box 663
Ballarat, VIC 3353
Australia
E-mail: i.clark@ballarat.edu.au

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Agra 2004 congress proceedings

Dr Giriraj Kumar, the Chairman of the 2004 IFRAO Congress in Agra, India, has appointed Dr K. K. Chakravarty and myself to edit and publish the proceedings of this event. Although we are trying to contact each of the 140 presenters individually, we are unable to do so in many cases. Therefore I would like to issue this general call for submissions of manuscripts to all presenters at the Agra event. Papers presented or offered in absentia are eligible for inclusion. With the exception of contributions to Symposia M (*Dating of rock art*, to be edited by symposium chair Professor A. Watchman) and P (*Rock art conservation and management*, to be edited by Professor B. K. Swartz, Jr), all other papers should be sent to me at your earliest convenience, preferably in electronic form (images in TIFF 300 dpi), to IFRAO, P.O. Box 216, Caulfield South, VIC 3162, Australia. Papers lacking high-resolution images can be sent by e-mail to auraweb@hotmail.com.

Robert G. Bednarik