

HFNC Excursion to Eastern Black Range in 19 August 1995

Rod Bird & Dave Munro

Participants: John & Glenys Cayley, Lyn & Dave Munro, Rod Bird, Janeen Samuel & Ken Grimes met with Gillian Walker and Pat (Stawell FNC) at Bunjils Cave on the southern end of the Eastern Black Range. The weather was fine and warm.

There were great granite tors on this hillside and the painting of Bunjil was seen in a hollow in one of those rocks. We wondered then at the age of the painting and at its significance to the indigenous people.



Bunjil was the major Dreamtime figure of south-eastern Australia and this is the only painting with a recorded Aboriginal interpretation. Our presentation of the mythology is presented below:

Bunjil's earthly manifestation, and images of his *Wirringan* helpers, dwells in a granite alcove in the Eastern Black Range, drawn in white kaolin, red ochre and charcoal.

Bunjil was the Dreamtime creator of the land and people. He warmed the sun and the sun aroused the earth and the people emerged from the dust.

Bunjil appointed the brothers *Bram*, to dispense country to clans, initiate tribal ceremonies and make the laws and customs that governed the lives of Aboriginal people.

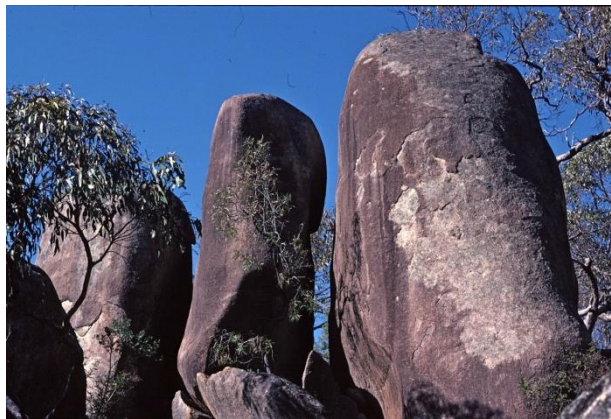
Bunjil's work done, *Bellin-Bellin* the raven made a whirlwind, to lift him to the sky, to be a star to watch over the earth with his shade, *Werpil* the Wedge-tailed Eagle.

Part of the painting was “touched up” with whitewash by two small boys from Stawell, some 70 or more years ago (the boys thought a swagman had done the original work).

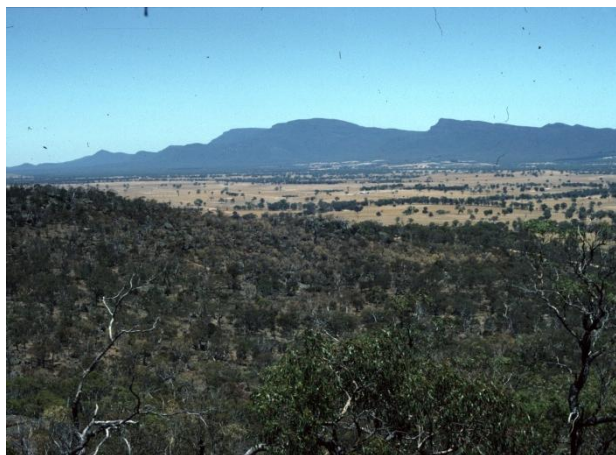
Vandals damaged the painting in 1980 by spray-painting over it. The paint was subsequently removed but some of the original art work was lost. A screen was placed around the rock face in 1980 to prevent further vandalism. Similar action was taken at rock art sites in the Grampians and Western Black Range.

While much of the vandalism is just mindless ‘art’ graffiti, regrettably there were (and are) many people with racist views that have damaged rock art sites across Australia. Some even resort to cutting their way through the wired enclosures to deface the images.

The surrounding landscape of rocks and low shrubs, along with the view of the not-far-distant Grampians, gave us the feeling that this was a special place.



Gigantic granite tors at Bunjils Shelter and a view to Mt William



After lunch at Neil and Jane Marriot's new home, and admiring the native plants in the garden and the great views of the Grampians to the west, our hosts (and a their visitors) tackled the walk with us up **Flagstaff Hill** to the highest point in the range.

The object of our excursion was to locate an aboriginal rock well which had been reported by Cecily Tudehope (1963) in the *Victorian Naturalist*, Vol 80 p.261.

The Stawell naturalist Ian McCann had learned of this site from a Mr J Boyd who had a farm in the Panrock Creek valley at the foot of the range. Ian then took a party including the author to this site which is close to the summit.

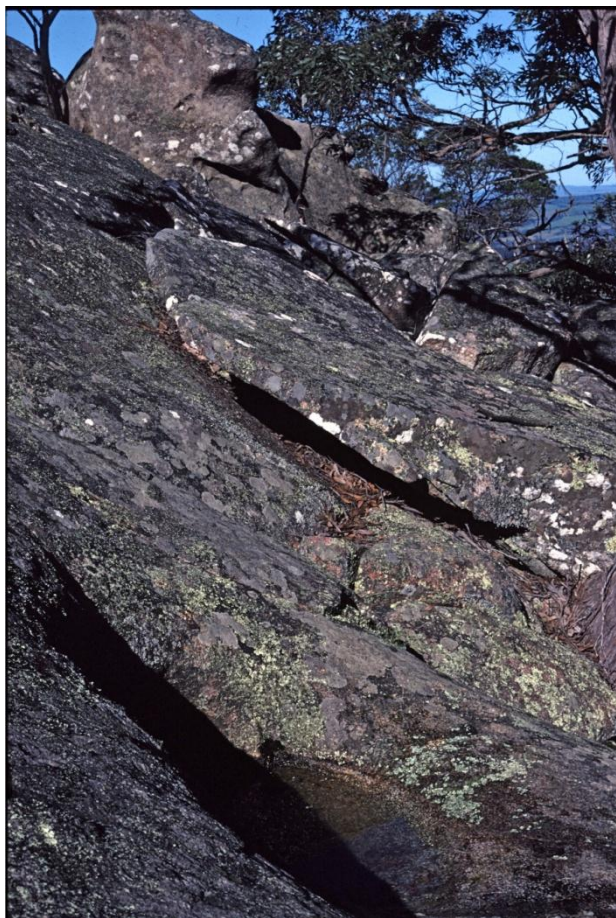
A depression in the rock filled with water was discovered (secretary Glenys Cayley noted in the Minute Book *‘we were all expecting a large waterhole and were amazed to find a small but deep depression in the side of a granite slab’!*).



Neil Marriot and others at the Native Well

After much discussion, this was reckoned by most of us to be the target of our endeavours. Whether that was so remains to be confirmed at another time.

An anonymous pencilled note on a copy of Tudhope's paper in the HFNC archive suggests that the site is ' ~100m SSW of the Trig point on the NE peak (heading towards the SW peak) and halfway down a large steep sloping rock slab '.



We noted the massive slabs of rock on the hillside. Some were abundantly covered with Rock Fern (*Cheilanthes austrotenuifolia*), moss or lichen.

Cecily Tudehope had described the 'well' as 'situated 33 feet from the top and 20 feet from the bottom edge of a huge rock embedded in the hillside...the well is an oval basin...3 feet 5 inches by 3 feet 4 inches...its depth increases from 12 inches at the waters edge to 24 inches at the opening of an aperture which is the mouth of an underground channel, measurable to a distance of 8 feet 8 inches into the rock'.

The author wondered, 'upon leaving this lonely well, hidden away on this picturesque mountainside, how long it would endure in its pristine state'.

Why was this rock cavity called a 'rock well'? The Tudehope article suggests that the hole filled from a source within (or under?) the rock, so that may be an explanation. However, it seems more likely that any water in the cavity is derived from flow off the surface of the slab.

In WA such a 'rock well' would have been termed a gnamma hole. That is a general description for a water-holding cavity in granite; the cavity being formed largely by erosion over centuries.

In some cases the gnamma hole was enlarged by the Aborigines chipping away with a stone tool, after emptying the hole of water and sludge and setting a fire in the cavity to crack away some of the rock. There did not appear to be evidence of that type of activity with the Flagstaff Hill rock well.

Plants identified

Bunjils Cave:

Blue Caladenia (*Caladenia caerulea*)

Bluebeard Caladenia (*C. deformis*)

Golden Moths (*Diuris lanceolata*)

Trim Greenhood (*Pterostylis concinna*)

Flagstaff Hill:

Trim Greenhood (*Pterostylis concinna*)

Dwarf Greenhood (*P. nana*)