

HFNC Excursion to Burrunj (Black Range) & Mt Talbot – 20 May 2017

Rod Bird

This excursion was led by archaeologist Ben Gunn from Stawell. It was the best attended excursion for some years with 21 members and friends present: John & Glenys Cayley, Lyn & Dave Munro, Rod Bird & Diane Luhrs, Janeen Samuel, Amanda Smith, Reto Zollinger & Yvonne Ingeme, Roger Thompson, Peter Hocking, Darryl Delahoy and friends Ben Gunn & Leigh Douglas, Johanna Gunn, Meg Watson, Sandy Vanrenen, Doug Gardner, Jennifer & Andrew Lacey.

We left Hamilton at 9 am, stopped briefly at Cavendish to car-pool and then again at Cherry Pool (**Djarabul**) on the Glenelg River (**Bugara**) where some had morning tea and others looked for birds on the pool. Ben Gunn, who had the previous evening presented a talk on the rock art of the Burrup/Dampier Peninsula, remarked that this pool had been an important place for Aborigines travelling between the Grampians range and country to the west.

Birds noted at Djarabul:

- | | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Australian Darter | 4. Hoary-headed Grebe | 7. Long-billed Corella |
| 2. Pied Cormorant | 5. Royal Spoonbill | 8. Crimson Rosella |
| 3. Little Pied Cormorant | 6. Grey Fantail | 9. Little Raven |

We drove into the Burrunj State Park from Djarabul, taking the fork to the right at HGH Corner. We followed the track around, past some washout sections of road, and eventually came to the parking ground for our exploration of the **Burrunj** shelter sites. Much of the landscape had been severely burned in recent years.

The first shelter is an isolated rock some 100 m west from the car park. Our club has had many excursion to this area since the Aborigine rock art sites were first encountered by Ellis Tucker in 1962 (Hamilton Spectator 29 Nov 1962) and our club visited in 1963. HFNC members Ellis, Lionel Elmore, Keith Walker, and Ian McCann from Stawell FNC, also found many other sites in the Gariwerd Red Rock and Billawin area. Since then, Ben Gunn has added greatly to the recording and interpretation of art sites in the Gariwerd and Burrunj areas. He was aided recently by the easier access afforded after fires in those areas and he has added about 30 new sites. The total now exceeds 100 for these areas.

Ben gave us information on the nature of the art that we observed and commented that the primary colours used were red and white ochre. The latter pigment is of a different composition from the red and fails to absorb and bind tightly with the sandstone grains and is therefore less durable. Diane and I had observed that effect in Bushman rock art images of Eland in Africa. Parts of those images are gone.



Ben Gunn and HFNC members & friends



Burrunj Art Site 1: white & red ochre

There was some discussion as to whether the art work had faded since we first saw the art. I doubted it. Since most of the early photos were taken with slide film it is not easy to compare with modern almost exclusive use of digital images. Someone also commented that photos taken now with digital cameras very often appear to display images more clearly than can be seen by the unaided eye. The images can also be manipulated to enhance colours and contrast (as has been done with some of the images below).

The age of the art work is unclear but perhaps less than 5,000 years.



Burrunj Art Site 1: images of animal tracks and people



Burrunj Art Site 1: faded handprint in red?



Burrunj Art Site 1: *Goodenia ovata*

We crossed the flat on the sandy track and boardwalk, looking for orchids. I was lucky to spy Fringed Hare Orchid (*Leporilla fimbriatus*) at one spot along the way. I first saw this species here in 1974. Others who had passed by were alerted to look for these little gems on the return walk from the range.



Fringed Hare Orchid in focus – Ben & Leigh

Near the sandstone range we saw change in vegetation there since the fires. The dense growth of bush-peas and *Thryptomene* that once graced this margin has gone, as had *Micromyrtus* on the rock ledges.

The ledges were slippery and caution was needed in getting to the rock shelter. The main overhang has been fenced off to prevent vandalism of the art in this extensive area. Reto pointed out obscure handprints on the walls and there were a number of other images, some of which are shown below.



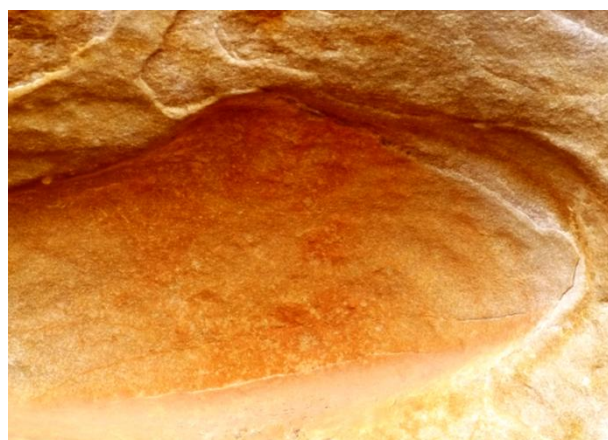
Burrunj Art Site 2: Protective cage



Burrunj Art Site 2: Tracks & marks in red ochre



Burrunj Art Site 2: Animal tracks



Burrunj Art Site 2: Obscure hand stencil

The third major art site is north along the cliff about 70 m. This site is unfenced and vandals have scratched the main stencil but that was present in 1974 when I first photographed this stencil. This symbol was a focus of a music performance based on my *'Currewurt Spirits in Stone'* at the Promenade of Sacred Music, Hamilton, April 2010.

There are three main hand stencils at this site.



Burrunj Art Site 2: Three hand stencils





Burrunj Art Site: Regeneration after fire



Burrunj Art Site: Bundled Guinea-flower



Burrunj Art Site: Large-leafed Ray-flower

There were few flowering plants seen but prominent among them were the rare *Cyphanthera anthocercidea* (Large-leafed Ray-flower) and *Hibbertia prostrata* (Bundled Guinea-flower). The Ray-flower had regenerated profusely after the last fire. Dave & Lyn Munro found Mosquito Orchid (*Acianthus pusillus*) and a few fungi including *Hohenbuehelia* sp. (possibly Dark Fan Hohenbuehelia).

After lunch in the car park, where we saw Varied Sittella and White-eared Honeyeaters in the trees, Ben led the way to Mt Talbot. This was quite an adventure for few of us had been there before and there were many twists to the route.

We passed the rocky outcrop called Black Ian's Rock by climbers or Red Rock by some others. The latter is confused with Red Rock in the Victoria Range and now has a new official name. We found 8-10 hand prints there on an exposed wall on 9 Jul 1995 during an outing with the Friends of the Grampians.

We observed several very sandy areas cultivated for production of Grampians Thryptomene (*Thryptomene calycina*) and other species, perhaps Protea, as we approached the low ranges in this area.



Approach to Mt Talbot from the east

At Mt Talbot, accessed off a very rutted track, we were shown a large rock that had faint Aboriginal motifs at one spot. It was difficult to determine what the symbol was.



Mt Talbot: Faint rock art symbols?

We walked up to a rocky ridge and Ben pointed out the large rock pool that was present under a giant boulder.

That source would have supplied Aborigines who travelled through this area.

The main flowering shrub here was Hop Goodenia (*Goodenia ovata*).

We departed at this point, most heading east to the Henty Highway and then back to Hamilton.



Mt Talbot: Returning from the rock pool

Appendix: Photos by Dave Munro (DM) & Leigh Douglas (LD)



Burrunj Art site: Mosquito Orchid (DM)



Burrunj Art site: *Hohenbuehelia* sp. (DM)



Burrunj Art site 1: HFNC excursion (LD)
Darryl & Rod (left) Ben, Glenys & Amanda (right)



Burrunj Art site: HFNC excursion (LD)
Lyn (front), Diane, Dave, Rod, Reto & Ben



Burrunj Art site: HFNC excursion (LD)
Dave & Janeen



Burrunj Art site: HFNC excursion (LD)
Yvonne, Reto, Lyn, Roger, Dave, Ben & Diane



Burrunj Art site: HFNC excursion (LD)
Dave & Peter



Mt Talbot Rock Pool: HFNC excursion (LD)
Darryl, Lyn, Ben, Reto, Rod & Amanda



Mt Talbot: HFNC excursion (LD)
Ben & Darryl
Rod