

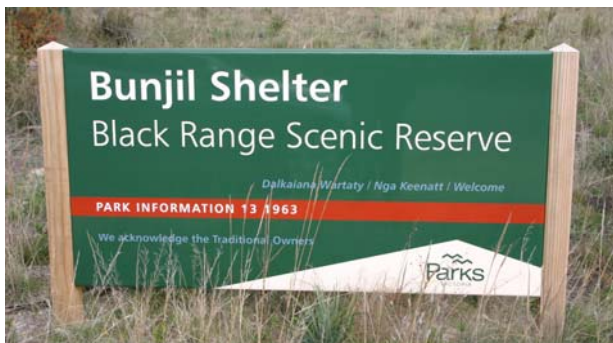
BUNJIL'S CAVE, Western Victoria

– Kent Henderson

The Bunjil rock shelter.



There are innumerable indigenous rock art sites in Australia, a significant number of which are in caves or rock shelters. Several are in Victoria (Clark 2007). A few days after the ACKMA Mulu trip, I found myself in Stawell in Western Victoria for the day on business, and given a little spare time, I journeyed ten kilometres south to visit Bunjil's Cave.



Signage at the site.

Whether this 'cave' can be described as such, or as a rock shelter, is a moot point – it depends on how you define a cave (and there are a number of views on this). Signs to the site describe it as a 'cave', while those on site define it as a rock shelter. I tend to the latter view, as Bunjil's 'Cave' is far from expansive...

The shelter is in a section of *Parks Victoria's* Black Range Scenic Reserve – not that far from The Grampians National Park (the home of several other significant indigenous sites). A return track of about 200m leads from the car park to the 'cave' – which is within, and at the base of, a large granite boulder. On the back wall of the shelter is a painting of Bunjil, with two dingoes. In indigenous culture, Bunjil was the creative spirit. When he finished his works, he became an eagle and flew into the sky where he continues to reside to this day. There are many sites in Victoria associated with Bunjil (Clark 2007).

While the cave has been protected by a grill since the 1960s, the age of the painting is unknown. The examination of pigment samples in the outline of Bunjil suggests traditional clay ochre was the paint medium. In 1911, parts of Bunjil and the two dingoes were over painted with European whitewash. More recent graffiti has been removed.



Site infrastructure.

The *Parks Victoria's* management of the site is excellent. The booth at the car park contains first rate interpretation. The tracking to cave is in good condition and easily traversed. There is signage along the route dealing with items of indigenous culture. The shelter itself is fully protected by a steel grill, with spaces wide enough to allow a camera lens. As, unsurprisingly, the traditional owners of the area have significant links to the site, their advice continues to be sought by *Parks Victoria* to guide and shape future management decisions, as it has in the past.

In summary, it is a very well managed site and I certainly recommend the short diversion to visit it if you are passing through Stawell (which is on the main Melbourne to Adelaide Highway).

REFERENCE:

Clark, Ian D. 2007. *The abode of malevolent spirits and creatures – Caves in Victorian Aboriginal social organization. Helictite*, (2007) 40(1): 3-10.