

Australian Capital Territory

# Heritage (Decision about Registration of the Birrigai Rock Shelter, Paddys River) Notice 2015

Notifiable Instrument NI2015—248

made under the

**Heritage Act 2004, s40 Notice of decision about registration**

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## **1 Revocation**

This instrument replaces NI2015—64.

## **2 Name of instrument**

This instrument is the *Heritage (Decision about Registration of the Birrigai Rock Shelter, Paddys River) Notice 2015*.

## **3 Registration details of the place**

Registration details of the place are at Attachment A: Register entry for the Birrigai Rock Shelter, Paddys River.

## **4 Reason for decision**

The ACT Heritage Council has decided that the Birrigai Rock Shelter, Paddys River meets one or more of the heritage significance criteria at s 10 of the *Heritage Act 2004*. The register entry is at Attachment A.

## **5 Date of registration**

4 June 2015

Pamela Hubert  
A/g Secretary (as delegate for)  
ACT Heritage Council  
4 June 2015



ACT Heritage Council

**AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY  
HERITAGE REGISTER  
(Registration)**

For the purposes of s. 40 of the *Heritage Act 2004*, an entry to the heritage register has been prepared by the ACT Heritage Council for the following place:

**Birrigai Rock Shelter**

**(Part) Block 10, Paddys River**

**DATE OF REGISTRATION**

4 June 2015 Notifiable Instrument: 2015–

Copies of the Register Entry are available for inspection at ACT Heritage. For further information please contact:

The Secretary  
ACT Heritage Council  
GPO Box 158  
CANBERRA ACT 2601  
Telephone 13 22 81

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This statement refers to the location of Birrigai Rock Shelter, (part) Block 10, Paddys River as required in s. 12 (b) of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

#### LOCATION OF THE PLACE

Birrigai Rock Shelter, (part) Block 10, Paddys River. Situated below the summit and on the western side of Front Hill, in amongst a group of large granite boulders.

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This section refers to the description of the Birrigai Rock Shelter as required in s.12(c) of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE PLACE

Birrigai Rock Shelter consisting of the following attributes:

- Rock shelter, including boulders, located on the western slopes of Front Hill;
  - Potential and known archaeological deposits.
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This statement refers to the heritage significance of the Birrigai Rock Shelter as required in s.12(d) of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

#### STATEMENT OF HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

Birrigai Rock Shelter, located in the Tidbinbilla Valley, is a rare and important prehistoric site in the ACT which dates back 21, 000 years, exhibiting a number of aesthetic qualities highly valued by the Aboriginal community of the ACT and surrounding region. It provided shelter from the southerly winds and also good views of the valley from its entrances. To the west the mountainous area of Jedbinbilla is visible, while to the east Tidbinbilla River and Paddys River and the Bullen range can be seen [*Criteria (b) and (e)*].

The Birrigai Rock Shelter is also highly valued by the Aboriginal community of the ACT and surrounding region, for reasons of strong and special cultural and social associations. The shelter forms part of a broader cultural landscape within which ceremonial practices, such as male initiation, were performed. The shelter has special associations with the phase of Aboriginal occupation and land-use in the ACT, and is widely celebrated as being an important place in the ACT for demonstrating Aboriginal land use, and indicating the length of association with Aboriginal people and their occupation of the ACT. It provides the earliest known dates for Aboriginal occupation in the ACT [*criteria (a) and (g)*].

The Birrigai Rock Shelter continues to contribute significantly to the wider understanding of the cultural history of the ACT, and also the prehistoric occupation of the Australian landscape because of its use as a research site. Its research assemblage demonstrates the main characteristics of an Aboriginal rocks shelter, and future studies have the potential to provide additional information about the local and regional patterns of Aboriginal land-use and settlement patterns. The research already undertaken at the site is associated with influential archaeologist Josephine Flood, whose work at Birrigai and the Australia Alps has pioneered Aboriginal site occupation models for the ACT [*criteria (c) (d) and (h)*].

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## CONSERVATION OBJECTIVE

The guiding conservation objective is that Birrigai Rock Shelter, Paddys River shall be conserved and appropriately managed in a manner respecting its heritage significance.

The ACT Heritage Council may adopt heritage guidelines applicable to the place under s25 of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

For further information on guidelines applicable to the place, or for advice on proposed works or development, please contact ACT Heritage on 13 22 81.

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## REASON FOR REGISTRATION

Birrigai Rock Shelter, (part) Block 10, Paddys River has been assessed against the heritage significance criteria and been found to have heritage significance when assessed against criteria [(a), (b), (c), (d), (e), (g), and (h)] under s.10 of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

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## ASSESSMENT AGAINST THE HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

The Council's assessment against the criteria specified in s.10 of the *Heritage Act 2004* is as follows.

In assessing the nomination for Birrigai Rock Shelter, Paddys River, the Council considered:

- the original nomination and documentary evidence supplied by the nominator;
- information provided by a site inspection on 17 May 2013 by ACT Heritage; and
- the report by ACT Heritage titled, *Background Information Birrigai Rock Shelter*, June 2015, containing photographs and information on history, description, condition and integrity.

Pursuant to s.10 of the *Heritage Act 2004*, a place or object has heritage significance if it satisfies one or more of the following criteria. Future research may alter the findings of this assessment.

**(a) importance to the course or pattern of the ACT's cultural or natural history;**

Birrigai Rock Shelter, Paddys River, meets this criterion.

The place is important in documenting the course and pattern of the ACT's Aboriginal history, as it provides the earliest known dates for Aboriginal occupation in the ACT, (21, 000 years). Based on the presence of quartz flakes in the basal layer dated to 21,000 ± 220 BP, Flood and her colleagues noted the shelter was first used in the Late Pleistocene. This coincided with the Last Glacial Maximum, when the glaciers were at their thickest, and the sea levels at their lowest.

The shelter is part of a broader cultural landscape in which a range of ceremonial activities took place, including male initiation.

**(b) has uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of the ACT's cultural or natural history;**

Birrigai Rock Shelter, Paddys River, meets this criterion.

The place represents rare and uncommon aspects of the ACT's cultural history, as it provides the earliest dates (21,000 years) for Aboriginal occupation of the ACT. Birrigai Rock Shelter is one of only three shelters recorded in the southern ranges of Australia with early dates, similar to these, for Aboriginal occupation. In addition, the distribution of focal points for Aboriginal subsistence in the ACT favours lowland contexts, such as Pialligo, Hume, Lanyon, and Gungahlin. Birrigai Rock shelter is therefore also uncommon in that it is situated in a montane environment, which, in the Last Glacial Maximum was inhospitable, similar to that in contemporary alpine and sub-alpine areas in south east Australia.

**(c) potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of the ACT's cultural or natural history;**

Birrigai Rock Shelter, Paddys River, meets this criterion.

The shelter will contribute significantly to the wider understanding of the cultural history of the ACT because of its use as a research site. It has potential to provide information about local and regional patterns of Aboriginal land-use and settlement patterns.

While the site has already been subject to archaeological investigation, further analysis of the shelter and its assemblages could be undertaken. These could provide new lines of evidence and assist to resolve a number of key questions and issues. For example, the lithic assemblage requires further analysis and should be examined in the future using current methods and techniques. In addition, further analysis of the site depositional history could also be undertaken to resolve questions relating to site formational processes and the depositional history of the site.

**(d) importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of cultural or natural places or objects;**

Birrigai Rock Shelter, Paddys River, meets this criterion.

Birrigai Rock Shelter is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of an Aboriginal rock shelter. Few shelters have yielded characteristic assemblages and demonstrable antiquity in the ACT. Further, the place is important in reflecting a pattern of archaeological material typical of similar sites.

**(e) importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by the ACT community or a cultural group in the ACT;**

Birrigai Rock Shelter, Paddys River, meets this criterion.

The Shelter exhibits aesthetic qualities that are valued by the Aboriginal community of the ACT and surrounding region. These qualities are represented in the place's location on the western slopes of Front Hill, situated within view of culturally significant environs such as Jedbinbilla to the west, the confluence of Tidbinbilla River and Paddys River, and the Bullen Range to the east. The place's situation within this landscape, the views towards it and from it, are widely recognised as significant to the Aboriginal community of the ACT.

**(f) importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement for a particular period;**

Birrigai Rock Shelter, Paddys River, does not meet this criterion.

There is no evidence that the place was important in its use as a rock shelter beyond the ordinary within the context of the ACT for the period in which it was occupied. In addition, until further, contemporary research is undertaken at similar sites, there is insufficient evidence to suggest it retains a level of physical integrity beyond the ordinary in the context of the ACT.

**(g) has a strong or special association with the ACT community, or a cultural group in the ACT for social, cultural or spiritual reasons;**

Birrigai Rock Shelter, Paddys River, meets this criterion.

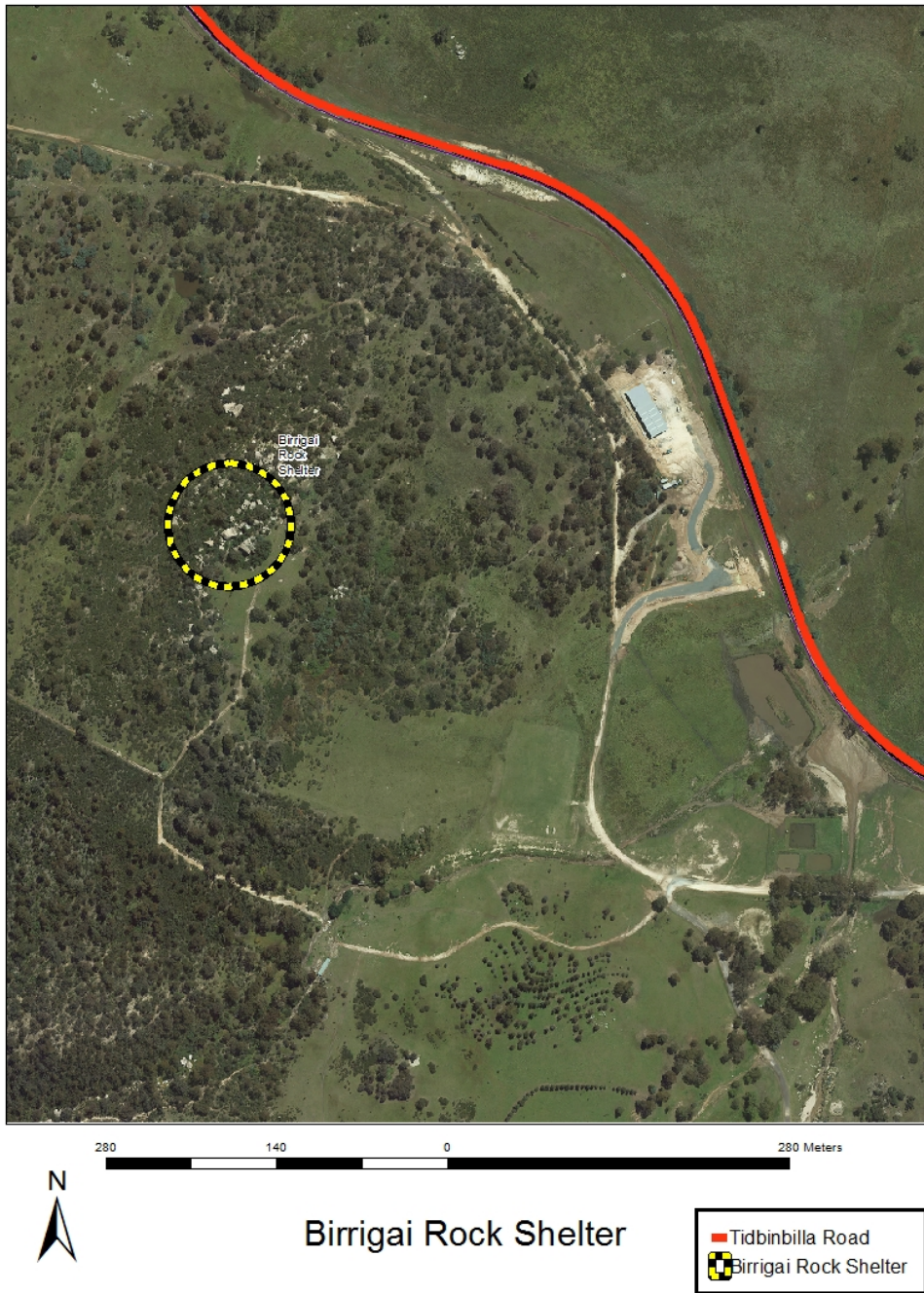
The shelter has strong and special associations with the Aboriginal community of the ACT and surrounding region, for cultural reasons. Because of its long-term association with Aboriginal people, the shelter retains social significance for the present day Aboriginal community in the ACT and surrounding region. The shelter demonstrates the occupation of the ACT by Aboriginal ancestors, and is also situated within a broader area associated with ceremonial practices, such as male initiation (Jedbinbilla).

**(h) has a special association with the life or work of a person, or people, important to the history of the ACT.**

Birrigai Rock Shelter, Paddys River, meets this criterion.

The shelter has special associations with the work of archaeologist Josephine Flood. Flood completed influential work on Aboriginal occupation and subsistence modelling for south eastern Australia and the Australian Alps in 'the Moth Hunters.' This work is the most widely disseminated and well known concerning the importance of Bogong moths and the lifeways of Aboriginal people in south eastern Australia. In addition, during the 1980s, she conducted important archaeological research into rock shelters in the Australian Alps, resulting in the discovery of early occupation dates at Birrigai Rock shelter, which are still widely referenced.

**SITE PLAN**



**Image 1** Birrigai Rock Shelter Site Boundary