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Reconciling local, global, and Indigenous values: A history of the Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi World Heritage inscription

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ABSTRACT

The inscription of Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi on the World Heritage List in 2019 was the culmination of a fifteen-year long nomination process. The nomination recognized the international significance of this Blackfoot cultural landscape, but the process also exposed tensions between local, global, and Indigenous values. Consultation with Blackfoot and local settler communities during the National Historic Site of Canada commemoration that preceded the World Heritage site nomination indicated broad support for inscription of Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi. However, engagement with local settler communities during the World Heritage site nomination process led to multiple iterations of the submission, as the nomination team attempted to balance the original Blackfoot vision of a cultural landscape that extended beyond Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi against local community concerns with the nominated property boundaries and buffer zone. Integrating recent settler history within the ancient Blackfoot sacred landscape also proved contentious. In consequence, international experts reviewing the nomination struggled to reconcile globalized universalism with local perspectives and Indigenous values. Throughout the nomination, Jack Brink helped the nomination team navigate the contested values of Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi, ultimately leading to a successful inscription accommodating local settler history within the Blackfoot cultural landscape while representing a step forward on the path to reconciliation with the Blackfoot.

KEYWORDS

Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi, UNESCO, World Heritage site, nomination process, Blackfoot, Indigenous, cultural landscape, buffer zone

1. Introduction

On July 6, 2019, after a nomination process lasting fifteen years, Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi was inscribed on the World Heritage List – Canada's 20th World Heritage site. By recognizing and commemorating the international significance of a sacred Blackfoot cultural landscape, this inscription helped fill a national – and global – gap in the representation of Indigenous heritage on the World Heritage List. Achieving the Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi inscription required a dedicated team of Blackfoot advisors, Alberta Parks employees, Parks Canada

representatives, and various consultants, all working with four levels of government and negotiating the complex requirements of the World Heritage nomination guidelines. Although the composition of the team shifted over the years, Jack Brink played an instrumental role in the nomination, from inception to inscription¹.

¹ I was one of the people Jack brought on board to help make this inscription a reality. Unless otherwise cited, this paper is based on personal notes, personal recollections, and email exchanges with Jack.

The history of the Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi nomination illustrates the complexities of balancing local, global, and Indigenous values in the inscription of World Heritage Indigenous cultural landscapes. Blackfoot perspectives emphasize the ancient and sacred connection to the broader landscape, while remaining inclusive of settler society’s recent historical relationship to the place. Conversely, local settler community concerns impacted decisions on the proposed nomination property boundaries and buffer zone (Figure 1), while the presence of a rodeo grounds within the sacred landscape complicates the concept of a sacred landscape. At the same time, the specific contingencies of local and Indigenous values can be difficult to accommodate in globalized perspectives on what constitutes outstanding universal value. From the initial idea of pursuing World Heritage status for Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi in the 1997 Writing-on-Stone

Provincial Park management plan, through the commemoration of Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi as a National Historic Site of Canada in 2004, and over multiple iterations of the World Heritage nomination submission from 2004 to 2018, the conception of the Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi cultural landscape evolved and transformed as a consequence of dynamic engagement with the Blackfoot and local settler communities. Reviewing the process and outcomes of the Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi World Heritage inscription is an instructive case study for understanding the challenges of reconciling differing heritage values in a global context. More importantly, this review illustrates how the nomination of Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi contributes in a small way to the reconciliation of Canada’s colonial past with the Blackfoot present.

“For the Blackfoot people, Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi is the very heart of our ancestral land, and we believe that this place has a powerful role to play in teaching others around the world about the sacred landscape of our people. As a World Heritage site, Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi will help us continue to share our traditions, and be an inspiration to all who seek to understand their own deep and personal connections to the land.”

Martin Heavy Head (quoted in Parks Canada 2019)

Elder, Mookaakin Cultural and Heritage Society / Blackfoot Confederacy

Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi was inscribed on the World Heritage List as a cultural landscape with three serial components: Áísínai’pi, Haffner Coulee, and Poverty Rock (Figure 1). The World Heritage List describes the Outstanding Universal Value of Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi as follows:

“The property is located on the northern edge of the semi-arid Great Plains of North America, on the border between Canada and the United States of America. The Milk River Valley dominates the topography of this cultural landscape, which is characterized by a concentration of pillars or hoodoos – columns of rock sculpted by erosion into spectacular shapes. The Blackfoot Confederacy (Siksikáíitsitapi) left engravings and paintings on the sandstone walls of the Milk River Valley, bearing testimony to messages from Sacred Beings. Dated *in situ* archaeological remains cover a period between ca. 4,500 BP - 3,500 years BP and the Contact Period. This landscape is considered sacred to the Blackfoot people, and their centuries-old traditions are perpetuated through ceremonies and in enduring respect for the places.

Criterion (iii): The sacred landscape and the rock art of Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi provide exceptional testimony to the living cultural traditions of the Blackfoot people. According to Blackfoot beliefs, spiritual powers inhabit the earth, and the characteristics of the landscape and the rock art in the property reflect tangible, profound and permanent links with this tradition. The viewsheds of the sacred valley, with high grassland prairies, also contribute to its sacred character and influence traditional cultural practices” (ICOMOS 2019).

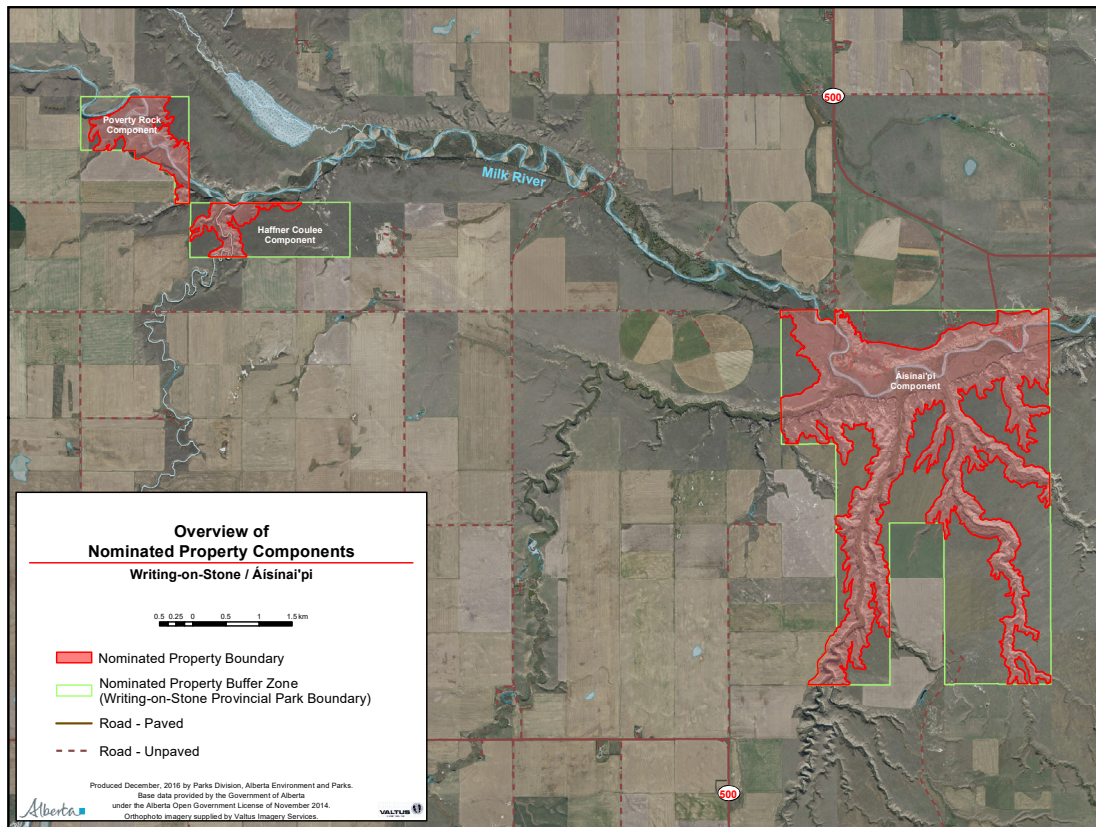


Figure 1a. The Writing-on-Stone / Áísinaí'pi World Heritage site boundaries and buffer zone. Verdigris Coulee is located immediately north and across the river from the Haffner Coulee component. Source: UNESCO World Heritage Centre, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1597/maps>.

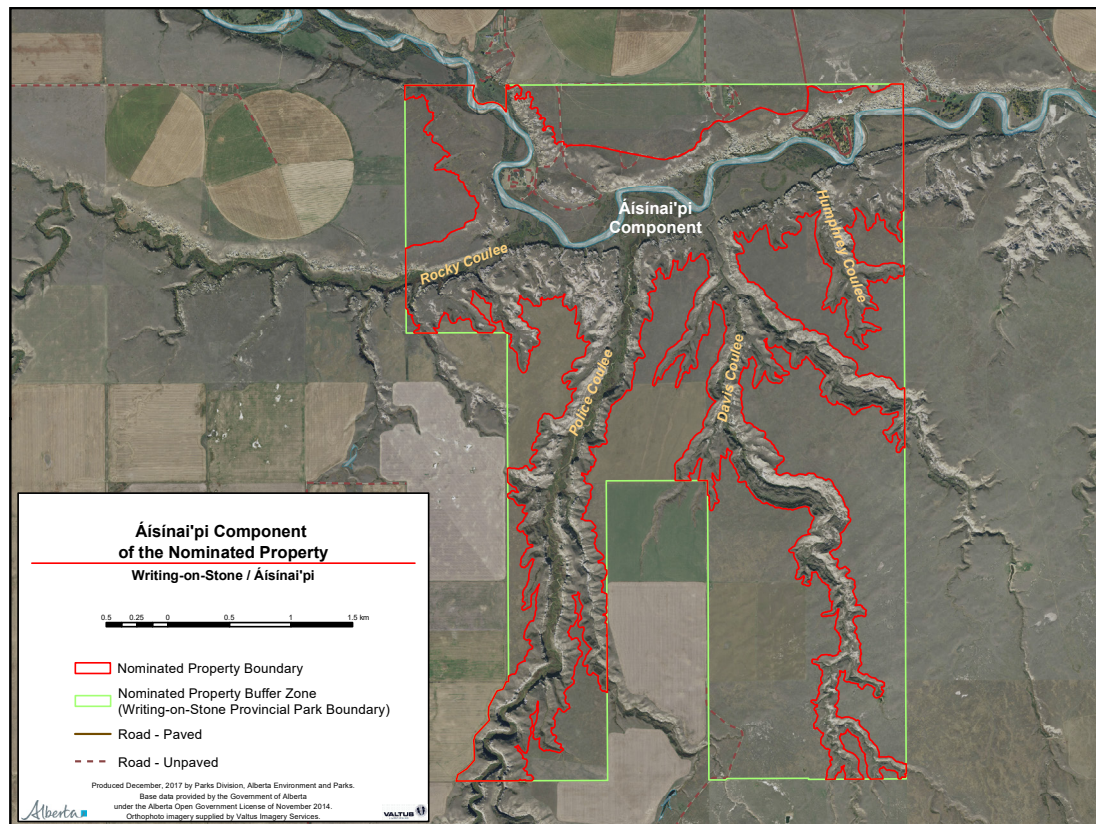


Figure 1b. The Áísinaí'pi component of the Writing-on-Stone / Áísinaí'pi World Heritage site boundaries and buffer zone. Source: UNESCO World Heritage Centre, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1597/maps>.

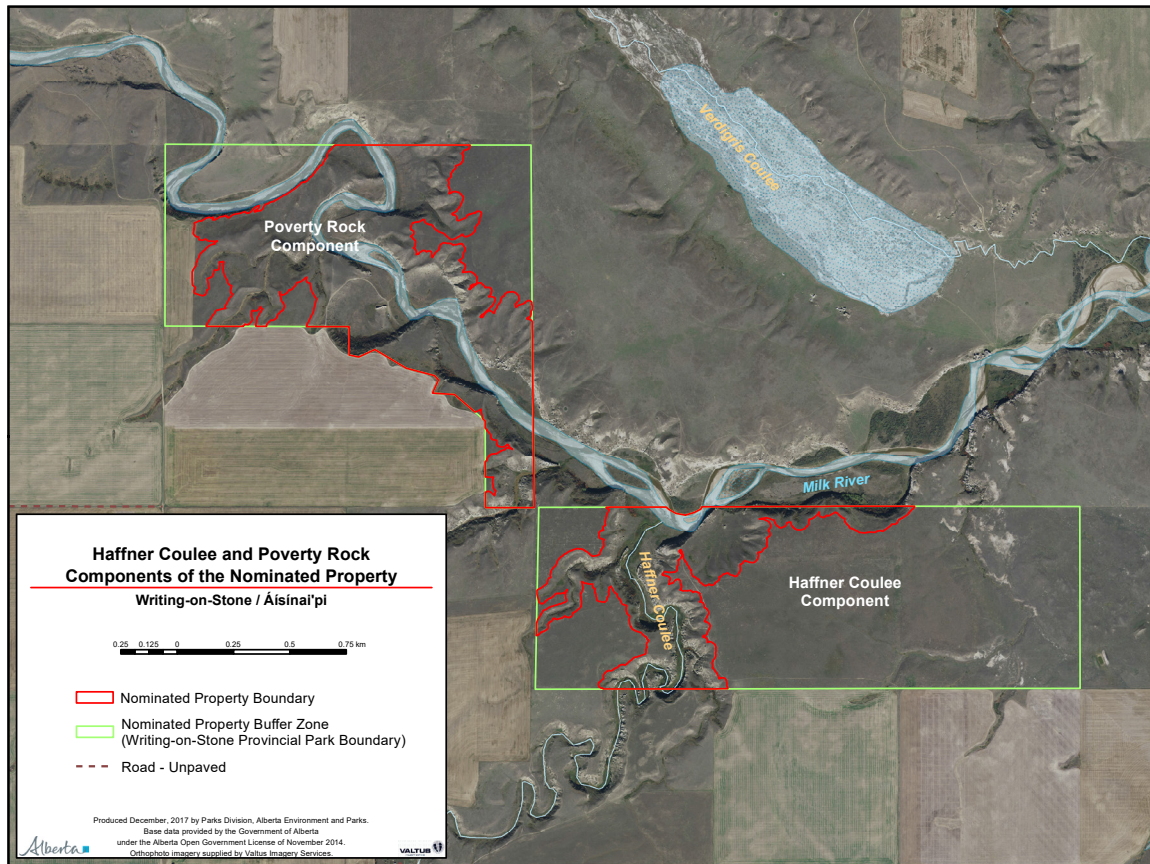


Figure 1c. The Haffner Coulee and Poverty Rock components of the Writing-on-Stone / Áísinaí'pi World Heritage site boundaries and buffer zone. Source: UNESCO World Heritage Centre, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1597/maps>.

2. The Áísinaí'pi cultural landscape

Blackfoot traditions and stories are unequivocal in their view of Áísinaí'pi as a timeless and sacred place (Klassen 2005). The landscape and rock art of Áísinaí'pi occupies a central place in Blackfoot history and culture (Figures 2 and 3). The significance of this place is preserved in wide-ranging Blackfoot knowledge that has been passed down from generation to generation. Blackfoot traditions describe the sacred origins of Áísinaí'pi and its rock art, while Blackfoot histories tell the personal experiences of the storytellers with this place from the last days of the traditional buffalo hunting culture and up to the present. Despite the onset of Euro-Canadian settlement in the late nineteenth century, and its attendant disruptions to Indigenous cultures, the Blackfoot have maintained their strong connection to Áísinaí'pi. They continue to visit this sacred place and carry out traditional practices to this day.

Áísinaí'pi first came to the attention of Euro-Canadian settlers by the 1850s, and by the early twentieth century the locality was well-known to the local settler population

(Klassen 2005). The local settler community was protective of this landscape and played an important role in having it set aside as a park. The first enquiries into the possibility of creating a park at Áísinaí'pi were made in 1929, and Alberta set aside several parcels of land totalling approximately 355 hectares as a park reserve in 1935 (Dempsey 1973:126). This decision was likely due as much to the recreational value of the parcel for the local settler community, as it was in recognition of its historical significance (Klassen 2005). In 1957, these parcels were formally designated as Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park². This designation reflected the local significance of Áísinaí'pi, the growing provincial concern with preserving heritage, and the developing recognition of the property's role in Indigenous history.

With the creation of the park, the popularity of Writing-on-Stone (as it was known by the settler community) as a

² Since 1957, the park was expanded several times to its current size of 2689 hectares.



Figure 2. The Áísínai’pi cultural landscape, looking south across the Milk River towards *Kátoyissiksi* (Sweetgrass Hills). All photographs courtesy of author except where noted.

provincial tourism destination expanded rapidly. At the same time, the rock art started to come to the attention of a few professional archaeologists and researchers, often due to the efforts of local residents (Klassen 2005). The first systematic survey and recording of the Áísínai’pi rock art was commissioned by the Glenbow Museum in 1960 and 1962 (Dewdney 1964), and the first major overview of Alberta rock art prominently featured the sites (Habgood 1967). By the early 1970s avocational archaeologists were actively recording the rock art sites (Klassen 2005). Despite its growing local renown, little knowledge of Áísínai’pi existed beyond the province. The earliest major overviews of North American rock art – Campbell Grant (1967) and Klaus Wellmann (1979) – did not reference Áísínai’pi.

The rock art of Áísínai’pi started to come to the attention of a national – and international – audience in the late 1970s, largely as a result of the pioneering rock art research of James D. Keyser. In 1976, Alberta Recreation, Parks and Wildlife contracted Keyser to carry out an inventory of Áísínai’pi rock art, leading to a lengthy and influential paper in the inaugural issue of the *Canadian Journal of Archaeology* (Keyser 1977). Over the next four and a half decades, Keyser would go on to publish numerous articles and books that featured the rock art of Áísínai’pi, dramatically increasing its exposure. From the 1990s onwards, a growing number of academic and popular publications raised the continental and international profile of Áísínai’pi.



Figure 3. The rock art of Áísínai’pi represents sacred and historic themes (DgOv-2:27).

3. Jack Brink and Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi

Much of the impetus for inscribing Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi on the World Heritage List can be traced back to Jack Brink’s long and intimate connection with the site. Jack book-ended his 40 year career as a provincial archaeologist with projects involving Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi. His very first project as the newly hired Eastern Slopes archaeologist at the Archaeological Survey of Alberta was a series of excavations at Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi in the fall of 1977 (Figure 4), representing the first systematic investigation of pre-contact deposits at the locality (Brink 1979). Prior to this project, the only excavations at Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi had been a salvage excavation of an exposed burial (Getty 1971) and an excavation of a historic North-West Mounted Police barracks (Adams et al. 1977). Later, in his subsequent role as curator of archaeology at the Provincial Museum of Alberta (now the Royal Alberta Museum) in the early 1990s, Brink commenced a multi-year inventory of new lands acquired for Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park, a project that continued until his retirement in 2018 (Figure 5).

Throughout this period, Jack was increasingly involved in all aspects of Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi research and management, initially investigating the archaeological history of the site and later exploring rock art recording and conservation techniques, and eventually participating in training, public interpretation, and interpretive displays at the park. From his work, Jack recognized the deep archaeological, historical, and public significance of Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi, and he felt that it deserved greater national and international recognition. In his provincial government roles, Brink was instrumental in raising the profile of Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi within the provincial government and with the public. Jack’s skill at bringing together people from diverse backgrounds and divergent inclinations – everyone from ranchers and local politicians to Blackfoot elders and bureaucrats—immeasurably helped advance the designation of Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi as a World Heritage Site from idea to reality.



Figure 4. Jack's crew excavating along the main rock art wall (DgOv-2:15), 1977. Photograph courtesy of Royal Alberta Museum.



Figure 5. Jack's camp in Davis Coulee, 1992 (left to right: Darryl Bereziuk, Lesley Mitchell, Jack Brink).

4. The 1997 Management Plan and the idea of World Heritage

When the first Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park management plan was under development in the late 1990s by Alberta Environmental Protection (1997), it was Jack Brink's idea to include a commitment to pursue UNESCO³ World Heritage designation in the plan. This commitment appears as the second to last recommendation of the document. If this almost has the appearance of an afterthought, it's because Jack always claimed it was just that – until he raised the idea late in the planning process it had not been on the table. Although it may have been a last-minute addition by parks planners, it was almost certainly something that had been percolating in Jack's mind for many years. After spending much of the 1980s deeply involved in the development of Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump (see Brink 2008), Jack was well-versed in the challenges and opportunities presented by World Heritage site status, and clearly saw the potential of Writing-on-Stone / *Áísínai'pi* to be recognised in a global context. The 1997 management plan planted the seed for the eventual inscription of Writing-on-Stone / *Áísínai'pi* as a World Heritage site.

Just as importantly, the management plan kickstarted formal engagement with Blackfoot communities in park management and interpretation, an involvement that up until that point had been largely absent at the park. As part of the management planning process, the planning team initiated formal contact with the Kainai; this was “a very educational experience for the planning team,” and the department committed to make efforts to “improve communications with the native community and to encourage their interest and involvement in the park” (Alberta Environmental Protection

1997:52). The management planning process “opened doors to communication between the Blood Tribe and park staff” and the plan committed the province to explore ways to increase involvement of the Blackfoot people in park interpretive programs and information (Alberta Environmental Protection 1997:52).

The 1997 management plan was an important and overdue step forward in terms of Indigenous engagement at Writing-on-Stone / *Áísínai'pi*. Until this point, the contemporary Blackfoot voice had been largely absent from the official discourse at the park. However, it is important to note that the Blackfoot had continued to visit *Áísínai'pi* for cultural and recreational purposes throughout the period before and after the creation of the park (Klassen 2005). Blackfoot individuals and families frequently visited *Áísínai'pi* to connect with a place of immense cultural significance, and park interpreters often led groups of children from Blackfoot schools on tours of the park (Gasser 1985; Klassen 2005). After the local riding association started the annual Writing-on-Stone rodeo in 1966 at rodeo grounds built within the park boundaries (Hughson 1984:196), the rodeo became a destination for Blackfoot cowboys, many of whom reconnected with *Áísínai'pi* as a result. A significant milestone in Blackfoot involvement at *Áísínai'pi* occurred when a young Piikáni university student, Eldon Yellowhorn, was hired as a park interpreter for the 1978 and 1979 summer seasons. Yellowhorn, who would go on to earn a Ph.D. in archaeology

³United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

from McGill University and become a professor at Simon Fraser University, had a profound influence on the direction and content of the nascent park interpretive program (Gasser 1985; Klassen 2005), which had only been in existence for a year before his arrival. Despite ongoing Blackfoot connections to Áísínai’pi in the decades since the establishment of the park, the 1997 management planning team “was given the message that the Blackfoot people have not felt welcome at the park” (Alberta Environmental Protection 1997:52). Over the next few years, addressing this perception and increasing Blackfoot engagement became important goals of park managers.

5. Áísínai’pi National Historic Site of Canada

“Places like Writing-On-Stone are not only sacred sites, they are historical sites of our being here, our history of being part of the land. All the land we stand on, is sacred, but places like Writing-On-Stone are significant historical sites for our people. Designation will help the rest of the world know that the Blackfoot people had an existence before contact with Europeans” (Frank Weasel Head [Miiksskim], Kainai elder, 2002, quoted in Mookaakin Cultural and Heritage Society and Klassen 2003).

Although the 1997 park management plan put the inscription of Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi as a World Heritage site on the agenda, it would be some years before the province moved ahead with this process. In the meantime, an important intermediary step along this path was the federal recognition of Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi as a National Historic Site of Canada (NHSC). This designation was spearheaded by Marty Magne of Parks Canada, a former colleague of Jack Brink at the Archaeological Survey of Alberta. In his tenure as Assistant Director and later Head of the Survey from 1985 until 1992, Magne was a major advocate of Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi. He initiated a new era of rock art research and conservation at the park (Klassen and Magne 1988; Magne 1990; Magne and Klassen 1991) and arranged for the first excavations at the park since Brink’s 1977 project⁴. This interest in Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi carried over into Magne’s later role as manager of Western Canada Cultural Resource Services at Parks Canada. In 2000, Magne launched a study exploring the feasibility of commemorating Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park as a NHSC (Klassen 2001). The *State of the Parks: 1997 Report* issued by Parks Canada (1998) identified Aboriginal Peoples and Cultural Landscapes as priority themes for representation by the National Historic Site of Canada system, and Magne recognized that Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi was an excellent candidate to represent these themes.

The Parks Canada feasibility study confirmed that Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi met the criteria for an Indigenous cultural landscape of national significance, and also reported on initial engagement with government and Blackfoot stakeholders (Klassen 2001). Representatives of the provincial departments responsible for parks and culture supported the proposed NHSC designation and saw it as an opportunity for building a positive relationship with Blackfoot communities. Nonetheless, senior managers cautioned that designation might be an issue if it affected current management of the park, such as the continued use of the rodeo grounds (Klassen 2001). The local provincial Member of the Legislative Assembly also supported the designation in principle, but indicated that the potential for greater Indigenous involvement in the co-management of Writing-On-Stone was a sensitive issue among local residents and should be treated cautiously (Klassen 2001). These concerns presaged some of the issues that would bedevil the World Heritage nomination process in later years. Representatives of the Kainaiwa Tribal Government (Blood Tribe) also supported the proposed National Historic Site designation in principle, but indicated that deeper consultation with the Blood Tribe was required, and the role of all three Blackfoot nations in Alberta and the Blackfeet Nation in Montana needed to be determined. Given these preliminary engagement results, Parks Canada and Alberta Community Development carried out parallel engagement processes over the next year with the Blackfoot nations and local stakeholders (Klassen 2002a, 2002b). Many of the issues and questions raised in this engagement foreshadowed the even greater hurdles later encountered in the World Heritage nomination process.

To this point in time, the Blood Tribe was the primary Blackfoot community involved with Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park managers, and the Kainaiwa Tribal Government recommended that Parks Canada discuss the NHSC initiative with the Mookaakin Cultural and Heritage Society. The Mookaakin Society had been established to preserve and promote traditional Kainai culture, including overseeing repatriation efforts and working with museums on behalf of the Blood Tribe (Conaty 2015:110). In November of 2001, the first of several meetings with the Mookaakin Society was held in Calgary, bringing together many of the Kainai community members that would go on to play major roles in the eventual World Heritage nomination of Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi, including Annabel Crop Eared Wolf, Narcisse Blood (Tatsikiistamik), Frank Weasel Head (Miiksskim), and Pete Standing Alone (Nii’ta’Kaiksamaikoan); another member of the Mookaakin Society, Francis First Charger, attended later meetings (Klassen 2002a).

⁴The 1988 excavations were led by Rod Vickers; a report for this project is unavailable.

During the 2001 meeting and those that followed, the Mookaakin Society described the significance of Áísínai’pi, expressed why NHSC commemoration was important, and outlined their vision for commemorating the locality (Klassen 2002a). NHSC commemoration would also build on the relationship the Kainai had been developing with Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park. Most importantly, the Mookaakin Society felt it was important to begin the process of reconciliation between the local settler community and the Blackfoot.

“Áísínai’pi has always been a heritage site for the Niitsítapi, long before Europeans arrived. Áísínai’pi represents the roots of our ancestors. The place is powerful, and going there triggers memories and emotions for our people. No other place is more important to the Niitsítapi, and it’s essential for the whole country to recognize the significance of Áísínai’pi. Commemoration of Áísínai’pi as a National Historic Site would go a long way to reconciliation with Canada – it would be part of the healing process” Mookaakin Cultural and Heritage Society, 2002 (quoted in Mookaakin Cultural and Heritage Society and Klassen 2003).

The Mookaakin Society indicated that the support of the local Milk River and area settler community was critical for ensuring the successful NHSC commemoration of Áísínai’pi. In December of 2001 a historic meeting was held at Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park, for the first time formally bringing together the Kainai and representatives of Alberta Parks, the Provincial Museum of Alberta, Parks Canada, and a member of the local community. This was the beginning of a period of positive engagement between the Blackfoot and the local community, something that had been absent at Áísínai’pi since the onset of the colonial period. A key takeaway from the NHSC consultations with the Mookaakin Society was that the Blackfoot strongly supported the commemoration of Áísínai’pi as a sacred cultural landscape – as opposed to a rock art site. The Mookaakin Society also acknowledged that the local settler community had a historical connection to Áísínai’pi, and they stressed that commemoration would not be successful without the support of local residents. Mookaakin Society members recognised that the settler community had played an important role in setting aside and protecting Áísínai’pi for future generations. The outcome of consultation with the local community was more equivocal.

Concurrent with Parks Canada engagement with the Mookaakin Society, Alberta Community Development also undertook consultation on the NHSC proposal with local government and community stakeholders (Klassen 2002b).

From November 2001 through February 2002, meetings were held with local elected officials, local businesspeople, and local residents. Although most local elected officials were generally supportive of the NHSC commemoration proposal, concerns about infrastructure, access, and over-visitation were raised. Some also contested the exclusion of North-West Mounted Police and local settler history from the commemoration, opposed federal involvement at Writing-on-Stone, and raised the spectre of potential Indigenous land claims to the park. In the end, however, letters of support were received from the towns of Milk River and Coutts as well as the County of Warner. Twenty-one local residents representing fourteen families living in the sparsely populated region around Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park were interviewed. Of these residents, 71.4% (n=15) were supportive of the NHSC proposal, while 24.8% (n=5) were neutral on the initiative (Klassen 2002b). Only one resident was opposed to the proposal. Despite this high level of support, and the positive outcomes of commemoration recognized by local residents, many concerns were raised. The negative consequences of increased visitation were most often expressed, but other issues noted were the perceived limited benefits to local residents, the lack of recognition for settler history, the potential for Indigenous land claims, and the potential acquisition of additional lands.

Blackfoot and local community engagement demonstrated widespread support for NHSC commemoration, and over the next two years Parks Canada and Alberta Parks worked with the Mookaakin Society to develop an application for designation and a report to be submitted to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (Mookaakin Society and Klassen 2003). To ensure that all three Blackfoot nations in Canada backed this commemoration, the Mookaakin Society facilitated the acquisition of letters of support from the Kainai, Piikani and Siksika. The development culminated with a group of Elders touring Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park in June of 2003 and meeting with Parks Canada and Alberta Parks representatives. Following the tour, fifteen Blackfoot Elders and community members and two dozen local residents attended a community barbecue hosted by Alberta Parks. This gathering was the first time since the establishment of the park in 1957 that the two communities had come together to share their mutual connections to Writing-On-Stone / Áísínai’pi, and fulfilled a key objective of the Mookaakin Society, namely that NHSC commemoration had to be inclusive of both communities and recognise their shared history over the previous century.

Throughout the NHSC application process, Mookaakin Society members emphasized that Áísínai’pi needed to be considered as a cultural landscape – a perspective that fit

well with the approach that Parks Canada had recently adopted (Bugey 1999). Sitting at the physical and cultural centre of the Blackfoot world, *Áísínai’pi* is one of the most significant of all Blackfoot spiritual sites. However, unlike the prevailing settler view that the significance of *Áísínai’pi* was vested primarily in its extensive rock art, the Mookaakin Society viewed the rock art as simply a physical manifestation and extension of the spiritual values of the landscape itself, which was inhabited by Sacred Beings. The spiritual significance of the *Áísínai’pi* landscape is heightened by the nearby presence of *Kátoyissiksi* (Sweetgrass Hills), a prominent group of isolated peaks just over the border in Montana.

When the NHSC application and submission report were submitted in 2003 to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, the proposed commemoration was restricted to the legally defined boundaries of Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park. Although the *Áísínai’pi* cultural landscape and associated sites extend beyond the park boundaries (and indeed into the USA), land use and ownership issues prevented the inclusion of areas outside of the park within the commemoration area. Ultimately, the commemoration of *Áísínai’pi* as a National Historic Site of Canada was successful, with the formal announcement made in March of 2005 (Figure 6)⁵.



Figure 6. Blackfoot, federal, and provincial representatives at the National Historic Site of Canada plaque ceremony, June 2012.

6. The path to World Heritage Site nomination

The NHSC designation process and local engagement portended the views and interests of stakeholders towards the potential future designation of Writing-On-Stone / *Áísínai’pi* as a World Heritage Site. It became evident early in

the NHSC consultation that commemoration was linked to a potential UNESCO designation, and the possibility became part of the NHSC discussion. No residents explicitly opposed the concept of World Heritage Site status for Writing-On-Stone / *Áísínai’pi*, and indeed several residents specifically advocated for this designation (Klassen 2002b). National Historic Site of Canada status was seen as a desirable first step preceding a UNESCO nomination, and some stakeholders viewed World Heritage designation to be more likely if NHSC designation occurred. A number of individuals considered this to be a natural outcome and positive continuation of NHSC commemoration. Nonetheless, several residents were concerned that World Heritage Site designation would involve a “buffer zone” around the park where certain types of development were controlled or restricted.

Mookaakin Society members strongly supported NHSC commemoration, but they also believed that Writing-on-Stone / *Áísínai’pi* deserved UNESCO recognition. The Mookaakin conception of the potential World Heritage Site boundaries, on the other hand, ran counter to the local settler community, and included the surrounding uplands rising to *Kátoyissiksi* in the south. In fact, the Mookaakin Society suggested that the inscription of *Áísínai’pi* as a World Heritage Site could tie into a potential cross-border UNESCO commemoration of *Kátoyissiksi*, an idea promoted by the Montana Blackfeet Nation (Dormaar 2003). In the view of the Mookaakin Society, *Áísínai’pi* and *Kátoyissiksi* are a single, inter-connected sacred site, and both areas should be commemorated as an international park. Although their vision of an international cultural landscape that included *Kátoyissiksi* would face insurmountable barriers, the Mookaakin Society would go on to take a major role in the eventual World Heritage inscription of *Áísínai’pi*.

In the late 1990s, a number of renowned archaeologists, including Christopher Chippendale, visited Writing-on-Stone / *Áísínai’pi*, elevating its international profile. However, the prospects for World Heritage designation gained a significant boost in June of 2001, when Jean Clottes, a European rock art expert and an ICOMOS⁶ advisor to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, visited Writing-On-Stone / *Áísínai’pi* (Klassen 2002b). Clottes had previously participated in the evaluation of several World Heritage rock

⁵ The formal announcement commemorating *Áísínai’pi* as a National Historic Site of Canada was made on March 24, 2005. However, the unveiling of the NHS plaque did not take place until 2012.

⁶ International Council on Monuments and Sites.

art site nominations made to UNESCO. Clottes felt that the site probably met UNESCO criteria for a World Heritage Site, with elements in its favour including:

1. No other North American rock art site had been nominated;
2. The nomination would be supported by Aboriginal groups;
3. Extensive oral traditions about the place exist;
4. The narrative function of much of the rock art is very significant and a key factor in setting it apart;
5. The rock art is part of a cultural landscape;
6. The extensive body of research;
7. Ongoing conservation program and experimentation;
8. A management plan and the mechanism for protection in place; and,
9. Access to the rock art is largely controlled through guided tours.

On the other hand, Clottes noted other factors that could hamper the success of the nomination. In particular, he recommended that the rodeo grounds, toilets and fence be removed, and signs relocated, before a nomination was prepared (Figure 7). He also recommended that a trial graf-

fiti removal program and a long-term vandalism plan be in place before the nomination process proceeded. Although the Police Post intruded on the landscape, he conceded that an argument could be made for it that would not prevent a successful commemoration. Lastly, he indicated that cattle grazing and trespass would have to be better controlled and managed. He stated that if the site is to be considered of international significance, then conservation of the site should take precedence.

Clottes' list of potential weaknesses was both prescient and discouraging. Nonetheless, based on his visit, Clottes updated his thematic study for the World Heritage Centre, *L'Art Rupestre: Une étude thématique et critères d'évaluation*, to include Writing-on-Stone as one of seven North America rock art sites worthy of World Heritage Site status (Clottes 2002). By early 2004, with NHSC designation imminent, and encouraged by Clottes' evaluation, Jack Brink began thinking about moving forward with a World Heritage nomination. A necessary first step in the process of nominating a site for World Heritage status involves adding the site to a State Party Tentative List. Parks Canada, on the strength of the NHSC submission, added Writing-On-Stone / Áísínai'pi to Canada's World Heritage Tentative List on April 30, 2004. In their evaluation, Parks Canada identified the site



Figure 7. The rodeo grounds, located immediately west of the Archaeological Preserve. The western end of DgOv-2, the 'Main Rock Art Wall', is located immediately behind the photographer.

as having “outstanding universal value” (OUV) under three of the UNESCO World Heritage Site criteria:

- (i) Áísínai’pi is a masterpiece of artistic expression of the Niitsítapi people;
- (iii) It is an exceptional testimony, through petroglyphs, pictographs, landscape features, archaeological sites, and oral traditions to continuing and changing life of the Niitsítapi on the Great Plains;
- (iv) It is an outstanding example of a landscape associated with Aboriginal spirituality (Parks Canada 2004).

With Áísínai’pi officially added to Canada’s Tentative List, the path towards a World Heritage nomination opened up.

7. The nomination, part one (2004 – 2008)

In February 2004, Jack kicked off the World Heritage nomination process by meeting with Alberta Parks managers, and by April funding was in place for a nomination preparation contract that had, in hindsight, the comically optimistic goal of completing a submission package by August of that year⁷. The Tentative List criteria proposed by Parks Canada closely mirrored the content of the Áísínai’pi National Historic Site of Canada submission, and perhaps this led to the assumption that the Áísínai’pi World Heritage nomination could simply be adapted from the NHSC submission. But it soon became apparent that the nomination would be much more complicated.

A team of Alberta Parks staff, including Keith Bocking, Rosemary Jones, Bonnie Moffet, and Bob Ward, was assembled to work with Jack on the nomination, and to gather and develop operational information for the submission. As the team began pulling together a nomination package, several issues soon became apparent. The World Heritage Centre (WHC) *Operational Guidelines* (World Heritage Centre 2005) contained specific requirements for management and monitoring, which were absent from the NHSC submission and not fully addressed by the existing management plan. The team also struggled with reconciling the Blackfoot cultural landscape with settler history, such as the presence of the reconstructed NWMP post, and non-conforming uses and facilities, including the rodeo grounds. Defining the nominated property boundaries and the buffer zone also proved to be a major challenge. Buffer zones are one of the trickier components of a World Heritage nomination. A defined buffer zone is a requirement of UNESCO, and even

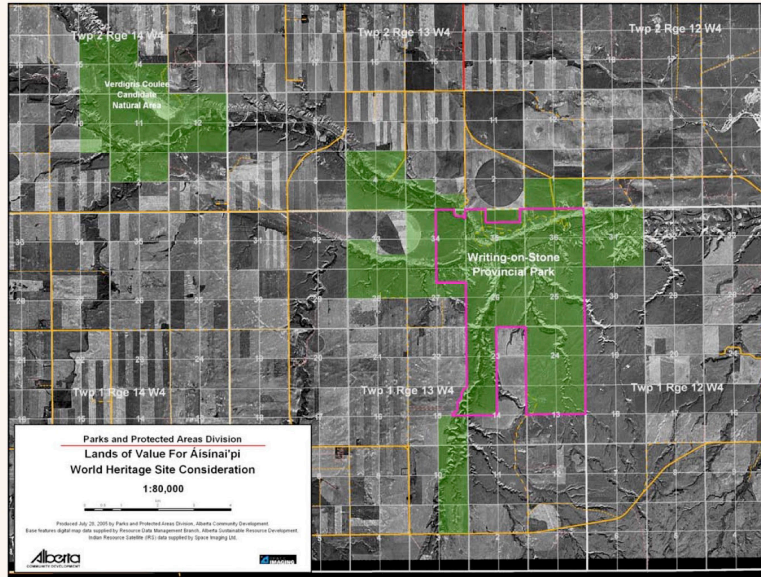
though not part of the World Heritage Site itself, UNESCO requires assurances that activities in the buffer zone will not have an impact on the integrity of the nominated property’s OUV. A number of boundary options were explored, from a base case of using only the park boundary, to one that included the significant rock art and cultural values of Verdigris Coulee (a “candidate natural area” designated with a provincial protective notation), and finally an option that included all public land and private land along the Milk River with “cultural value” (Parks and Protected Areas 2005). Likewise, options for the proposed buffer zone ranged from the inclusion of public land parcels adjacent to the park and protective notation areas, to all public and private parcels within the viewshed visible from the Milk River (Alberta Parks 2018). Restricting potential oil and gas and windfarm developments within the buffer zone was also a concern. In the end, the first draft of the nomination submission in September of 2005 included the park and the Verdigris Coulee candidate natural area as the proposed nominated property boundaries, while the buffer zone was vaguely defined as public lands surrounding and connecting these two areas.

The WHC *Operational Guidelines* also emphasized the importance of community consultation and support, which suggested a new round of stakeholder engagement would be necessary. As the complexity of land use and management in the nominated property and buffer zone became more apparent, the importance of consultation with local governments and landowners was recognized. In the fall of 2005 and into early 2006, meetings were held with representatives of local governments seeking their support for the nomination proposal, and efforts were made to meet with local landowners with properties falling within the proposed boundaries and buffer zone. Recognizing Jack’s ability to connect with people and assuage doubts, he was asked to participate in the landowner meetings.

To facilitate local engagement, a public “information bulletin” was prepared for distribution to local governments, residents, and landowners (Parks and Protected Areas 2005). The map accompanying this bulletin did not identify nominated property boundaries or a buffer zone, but rather only indicated the locations of Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park and the Verdigris Coulee candidate natural area, with surrounding public lands noted as “lands of value for Áísínai’pi

⁷Through this contract, my formal role began as researcher / writer on the Áísínai’pi World Heritage nomination, a role I maintained until the nomination was eventually submitted to the World Heritage Centre.

Proposed site:



Information Bulletin



Nomination of Áísinaí'pi Writing-On-Stone as a Unesco World Heritage Site



Figure 8. 2005 Information Bulletin map showing “Lands of Value for Áísinaí'pi World Heritage Site Consideration”. Source: Parks and Protected Areas (2005).

World Heritage site consideration” (Figure 8). As explained in the bulletin:

“The proposed World Heritage Site nomination area encompasses Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park. Subject to the approval of relevant parties, select lands with highly significant cultural and natural values in the vicinity of the provincial park and the Verdigris Coulee region will also be included” (Parks and Protected Areas 2005).

Furthermore, the bulletin stated that World Heritage Site designation and the buffer zone:

“...does not assert any control over the designated lands. The designation of a World Heritage site by UNESCO does not cause any change whatsoever in the legal status, ownership, or management of any of the lands included in the designation area. UNESCO will have no jurisdiction over the site, and neither the Provincial nor Federal governments acquire any new level of jurisdiction” (Parks and Protected Areas 2005).

The engagement with local landowners was intended to gauge their support for including leased and deeded land in the nominated property and buffer zone. The outcome of this consultation ranged from cautious support to outright opposition, but even Jack was unable to quell the fears of those most opposed. Despite reassurances that World Heritage Site status was strictly commemorative and would not lead to any legal change in land ownership or management, some landowners perceived the proposed nomination as an effort to reduce the rights of property owners. This “libertarian” view was not dissimilar to the views expressed by landowners at other World Heritage Sites in Alberta (Domes 2011:44). With these mixed results, the province decided to step back and reset, an early indication of how a small segment of the population would have an outsized influence over the nomination process.

Notably absent from this first phase of nomination preparation was formal engagement with the Blackfoot on the potential World Heritage Site designation. Given the central role of the Blackfoot nation and in particular the Mookaakin Society in the NHSC process, this absence may seem odd.

However, from 2004 until 2007 was actually a period of unprecedented Blackfoot involvement at the park. Not only were Blackfoot hired as seasonal interpretive staff throughout this period, but the Mookaakin Society was also closely involved in guiding the approach and content of the entire interpretive program at the park. One of the main recommendations of the 1997 management plan was the development of a park visitor centre. When plans to develop a visitor centre were announced in 2003 (Government of Alberta 2003), the Mookaakin Society was closely involved in all aspects of this project, advising on the siting of the centre, the design of the building, and most importantly on the content of the interpretive displays. Blackfoot representatives participated in the 2005 ground-breaking for the visitor centre and played a central role in the grand opening of the centre in 2007 (Figure 9). An indication of the extent that the Blackfoot relationship had been revitalized came in 2006 when Pete Standing Alone (Nii'ta'Kaiksamaikoan) held a sacred bundle opening at the park – the first such ceremony held at Áísínai'pi in living memory. Moreover, throughout this time, the Blackfoot were informally updated on the progress of the World Heritage nomination.

The park visitor centre was considered a critical step supporting the World Heritage nomination. With the opening of the centre behind them, the team was once again able to return their focus to the nomination. From the fall of 2007 and into 2008, the team worked on revisions to the nomination package. The main focus of these efforts was resolving the central problem of the boundaries and buffer zone. To overcome landowner opposition to the inclusion of private or deeded land in the nomination, the nominated property was reduced to correspond only to the park boundary. Further, the contentious idea of a defined buffer zone was nom-

inally dropped from the proposal and replaced with Jack's proposed solution: applying the concept of a Historical Resource Management Area (HRMA). Since 1998, the HRMA concept had been successfully implemented elsewhere in Alberta, including at Dinosaur Provincial Park World Heritage Site and also notably with Jack's assistance at the Majorville Cairn and Medicine Wheel provincial historic site (Government of Alberta 2015). Under an HRMA, all land within a specified area surrounding a historic site is listed under existing legislation as a "Significant Historic Resource". Proposed developments that will impact listed lands require review under the provincial *Historical Resources Act* for their potential to impact historic resources. This review may include an order for a Historic Resources Impact Assessment, along with recommendations for avoiding, managing, or mitigating impacts. Moreover, the government regulatory managers of historic sites have an opportunity to review all proposed developments within an HRMA to ensure that they are compatible with the historic and cultural values of the site, including viewsheds. If approved, developments within an HRMA must follow specific "standard operating conditions" that mitigate their impact. Essentially, an HRMA uses existing legal instruments and management systems to flag and regulate development within a defined area. Even without an HRMA, these same instruments and systems can be applied to any land, but the HRMA ensures that these are applied consistently and comprehensively in the vicinity of a significant site. For the Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi nomination, the HRMA concept was seen as an effective approach to resolve the buffer zone problem.

At the end of March 2008, the team was left with a revised but incomplete nomination document and many issues remained unresolved. Although the HRMA offered a potential solution to the buffer zone issue, its boundaries, operating conditions, and implementation were still unsettled. Moreover, the existing management plan expired in 2007, leaving the park without a current and up-to-date management system. The inventory and condition of significant features of the park, including the rock art sites, had not been updated since the 1990s, and a monitoring program had not been established. A long-term plan for the disposition of the rodeo grounds, recognized in the 1997 management plan as a "non-conforming use relative to the objectives of the park" (Alberta Environmental Protection 1997), was absent. And perhaps most importantly, formal and meaningful engagement with the Blackfoot in the development of the nomination content was missing. All of these were critical omissions that if not resolved could potentially derail the success of the nomination. Their eventual resolution, it would turn out, would involve significant compromise between global, local, and Indigenous values.



Figure 9. Narcisse Blood speaking at the Grand Opening of the Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi Visitor Centre, June 2007.

8. Nomination take two (2009 – 2011)

For almost a year, work on the nomination paused as the team searched for renewed funding and direction. But in 2009, the World Heritage nomination development was reinvigorated with the addition of some new team members. Julie MacDougall, in her role as Site Manager for Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park, joined Jack in a co-management role, giving him some much-needed support. Aaron Domes, the Visitor Services Coordinator at the park, also joined the team; his was an ever-expanding role, with Aaron eventually becoming the project manager that saw the nomination through to its successful conclusion. By the summer, new funding for the nomination had been accessed. At the inaugural planning meeting with the expanded team in August 2009, an ambitious timeline for submitting the nomination in February 2011 was developed. To meet this objective, the team immediately launched a series of initiatives to address the outstanding issues.

The immediate priority was formally re-engaging with the Mookaakin Society. In several meetings over the winter and spring of 2009-2010, the Mookaakin Society reaffirmed their support for the nomination and ensured that the tone and content of the draft nomination respected Blackfoot values and perspectives (Figure 10). These meetings brought together many of the Kainai members that participated in the NHSC discussions, but now also included Dorothy First Rider and Martin Heavy Head. One area of contention in

these discussions was the scope and extent of the nominated property boundary and buffer zone. Since the very beginning of the NHSC discussions, the Mookaakin Society had advocated for recognition of *Áísínai’pi* as a cultural landscape that not only encompassed Verdigris Coulee but also the lands between *Áísínai’pi* and *Kátóyissiksi*. Directly incorporating these areas in the nominated property boundary was not deemed feasible by the province due to local and regulatory concerns, but an HRMA that included Verdigris Coulee as well as the viewsheds visible from *Áísínai’pi* towards *Kátóyissiksi* was ultimately accepted as a compromise solution that would effectively manage the integrity of the larger cultural landscape. As the nomination package started coming together, the Mookaakin Society offered to facilitate engagement with the member tribes of the Blackfoot Confederacy (the Kainai, Piikani and Siksika in Alberta, and the Blackfeet Tribe of Montana). In May 2010, in a meeting led by Narcisse Blood, Frank Weasel Head, and Pete Standing Alone, Mookaakin and the Parks team met with Kainai, Piikani, and Siksika representatives to review the proposed nomination and to gauge the support of the tribes. The proposal was received favourably, and a decision was made to seek a joint endorsement from all four tribes at the Blackfoot Confederacy meetings in the fall of 2010.

Even though it had taken many meetings over many years to nail down the details, very early in the process it was apparent that Blackfoot communities were strongly supportive of the World Heritage nomination. In the context of Alberta, the support of the Blackfoot was not unusual – the nearby Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump World Heritage site, after an initial period of difficult engagement, now enjoys broad Blackfoot support and involvement (Brink 2008; Domes 2011; Opp 2011). But the strong Blackfoot support for the Writing-on-Stone / *Áísínai’pi* nomination is somewhat confounding from a more global perspective – since the 1980s, UNESCO had been faced with a backlash from Indigenous communities around the world that opposed or critiqued the creation of World Heritage Sites (see Meskell 2013; Disko and Tugendhat 2014). These groups criticized the lack of participation and representation of Indigenous peoples in World Heritage designations and management. Indigenous peoples also objected to the universalism and globalization of heritage that is inherent in the World Heritage system. In the case of Writing-on-Stone / *Áísínai’pi*, however, it wasn’t Indigenous opposition that complicated the nomination, but rather the concerns of the local community. To some degree, this included the tension of the local settler community with increasing Blackfoot involvement (see Opp 2011).



Figure 10. Mookaakin Society members and Alberta Park staff meeting to discuss the nomination, 2010 (left to right: Dorothy First Rider, Annabel Crop Eared Wolf, Julie MacDougall, Frank Weasel Head, Keith Bocking).

In the 2009-2010 discussions, the Mookaakin Society reiterated their support for more engagement with the local settler community – an objective shared by the team. In April and May of 2010, the province implemented a media campaign to disseminate information about the proposed nomination and to gain feedback from stakeholders and the public. The campaign included news releases, a website with a FAQ page and a link to provide feedback, and a Fact Sheet distributed to the public. In addition, two public information sessions were held in Milk River and Lethbridge on April 21st and 22nd, 2010. The Fact Sheet stated that the nominated property would be restricted to the existing park boundary, and that a specific buffer zone would not be part of the nomination. Instead, the sheet indicated that “[e]xisting designations, legislation, and provincial management systems provide adequate protection for the surrounding region and for maintaining the integrity of Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park” (Alberta Parks 2010a:2). In advance of the meetings, the proposed nomination received favourable coverage in all the major papers in Alberta. Although the public meetings were led by Park staff, Martin Heavy Head and Pete Standing Alone attended to provide a Blackfoot perspective on the nomination:

“This is a very big part of our heritage, a very big part of our belief system and we’ve always been there. So we are very interested in protecting it and going for this cause... Every hill, mountain, river, we have names for because this is our territory and Writing-On-Stone is part of that history” (Martin Heavy Head, quoted in Agnew 2010).

At the close of the consultation period at the end of May, the province reported that 85% of comments supported the World Heritage nomination (Alberta Parks 2010b). These comments were received from throughout the province, but local concerns persisted. Not all the local participants were swayed by the arguments for inscription, and concerns were raised about the impacts of over-tourism, trespass on adjacent lands, the effect of an inscription on resale values, and potential infringements on landowner rights to manage private and lease lands (Agnew 2010; Alberta Parks 2010b). Nonetheless, on the basis of the consultation, Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation (2010) announced that the nomination would be completed and submitted to the WHC in February 2011.

Regrettably, the public consultation materials did not make any mention of the HRMA concept, nor was a map provided that showed where the HRMA conditions would be applied. However, the draft nomination document includ-

ed a map with an HRMA boundary and indicated that an HRMA had been established to protect and manage physical and visual impacts to the nominated property. The proposed HRMA required mandatory development approval under the *Historical Resources Act* and used existing legislation to set specific conditions and restrictions on land use. The absence of the HRMA details in the consultation materials and presentations was unfortunate, as this disconnect between the public consultation and the HRMA concept would have later ramifications.

In addition to the HRMA, other management actions were implemented to strengthen the nomination and improve the chances of inscription. Inclusive baseline data on rock art sites, archaeological sites, landforms, and viewscales was compiled and described, including the results of Jack’s ongoing archaeological and rock art inventory work. A comprehensive, systematic program for the periodic monitoring of “key indicators” for rock art, archaeological sites, landforms, and viewscales was developed to meet *Operational Guidelines* requirements, and by the fall of 2010 the first rock art monitoring project had been scheduled. At the end of September, a draft nomination dossier was submitted to the WHC in Paris for a “voluntary review” for completeness and compliance with *Operational Guidelines* requirements. The only response from the WHC was a request for clarification of the nominated property and HRMA boundaries.

In October of 2010, the final production phase of the nomination process kicked into high gear. Over the next two months, the 200-page long nomination document was edited, formatted, and laid out, and the materials for fourteen annexes were assembled, including images, videos, and maps. But some key pieces of the nomination were still missing. Statements in support of the nomination had been obtained from the Premier of Alberta, the Minister of Tourism, Parks and Recreation, preeminent scholars, national and provincial archaeological associations, and the mayor of Milk River, but letters of support were still missing from other local governments and, more importantly, from the Blackfoot tribes. Although the Kainai Nation had endorsed a band council resolution, and the support of the remaining nations of the Blackfoot Confederacy was assured, finding an opportunity to get the chiefs together to sign a joint statement proved challenging. Even more importantly, the final HRMA concept had yet to be fully endorsed by the responsible ministers. Nonetheless, through the extraordinary efforts of Rosemary Jones and Aaron Domes working with a local design firm, a final proof of the nomination document and most supporting materials were ready for final ministerial and Parks Canada review by early December.

As they anxiously waited for word from the minister and Parks Canada, the team worked through the month of December on the final touches to the nomination package. Officially, World Heritage nominations need to be signed and submitted on behalf of the State Party, with Parks Canada in this case being the responsible agency. After Parks Canada approved the nomination in late December, a final press version of the document was locked down on December 31st, 2010. Then, on January 5th, with only ten days to go before the nomination needed to be shipped to Paris to meet the February 1st WHC deadline, Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation made the decision to postpone the submission of the nomination until 2012. Although the specific reasons for the postponement were not made public, the delay in submission was presented as an opportunity to broaden local community support.

9. Third time's the charm (2015 – 2018)

After the initial disappointment, and upon some reflection, the team recognized that the delayed submission was in fact an opportunity to improve and strengthen the nomination. In addition to fine-tuning the document itself, a number of key components of the nomination could be strengthened and expanded, including Indigenous and community engagement, monitoring, and of course the regulatory details of the HRMA. After debriefing internally and with the Mookaakin Society, the team identified some “lessons learned” that would be critical to the success of a future nomination submission. In particular, it was belatedly recognized that a successful nomination needs to start with establishing the boundaries and buffer zones through upfront public and Indigenous engagement. Moreover, Indigenous and local support for the proposed nomination property needs to be assured and documented before developing the nomination documents. These critical pieces of the nomination needed to be resolved at the beginning of the process, not at the end.

Throughout 2011, the team worked on revising and updating the nomination documents, and Parks staff focussed on securing Indigenous, local government, and local resident support. Then in early November of 2011, the province once again decided to postpone the submission of the nomination, this time indefinitely. Without solid support from the local community, the nomination was not viewed as feasible.

Over the next three years, work on the Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi nomination was largely suspended. Nonetheless, a variety of developments and projects in support of the nomination continued during this period. One development with significant implications for the nomination was park expansion. In September of 2011, three parcels of land

in the vicinity of Verdigris Coulee were formally added by order-in-council to Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park (Government of Alberta 2011). Two of these parcels (Haffner Coulee and Poverty Rock) bordered the part of Verdigris Coulee under protective notation (Figure 1) and were known to encompass rock art and landforms similar to Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi. In 2012 and 2013, assisted by Wendy Unfreed, Bob Dawe, and Karen Giering of the RAM, Jack implemented a comprehensive survey of the Poverty Rock and Haffner Coulee components, adding numerous archaeological and rock art sites to the park inventory. The monitoring program also continued annually and was expanded in 2013 to include the rock art and other features in the new park lands. During province-wide public consultation in conjunction with the South Saskatchewan Regional Plan (SSRP) in 2012, public support for nominating Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi for inscription on the World Heritage List was confirmed (Alberta Parks 2018), and this objective was included in the final SSRP (Government of Alberta 2018). In 2013, two Blackfoot interns were hired at the park under the province's First Nations Interpretation Internship program, and shared Blackfoot culture and stories with over 4000 park visitors (Government of Alberta 2014). This internship program continued at the park for several years, with some interns eventually moving into other park positions.

Despite these developments, formal work on the Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi nomination did not resume until May 2015. In the intervening period, some significant changes to the team had occurred. Since the last attempt to finish the nomination in 2010, Julie MacDougall had left Alberta Parks, and project management had shifted to Aaron Domes. The team was then dealt a significant blow when Bonnie Moffet passed away suddenly on November 14th, 2011. Bonnie played a critical role throughout the National Historic Site of Canada and World Heritage site nominations. As the visitor services supervisor at the park, she began reaching out to the Blackfoot after the 1997 management plan was adopted. Bonnie built strong relationships with the Mookaakin Society, Blackfoot elders, and Blackfoot community members. One of her goals was encouraging and facilitating the recruitment of Blackfoot park staff, eventually leading to the annual employment of seasonal Blackfoot park guides. Through the personal relationships she made with community members, a level of trust developed that encouraged a collaborative approach with the park. Without Bonnie's involvement the development of the World Heritage nomination with the Mookaakin Society would have required considerably more time and effort. The loss of Bonnie was compounded when Narcisse Blood (Tatsikiistamik) died in a tragic car accident on February 10th, 2015. Narcisse had been involved from the very first meeting about the NHSC designation. He was

a staunch supporter of the World Heritage nomination and an impassioned advocate for Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi. Narcisse played a leadership role in the Mookaakin Society and was instrumental in bringing Elders together with Alberta Parks and the Royal Alberta Museum. Through his knowledge, wisdom, and personality, Narcisse had been an indispensable guide and facilitator for the World Heritage nomination. Then on June 8th, 2015, the Elder Frank Weasel Head (Miiksskim) passed away. Frank was a prominent Elder and founding member of the Mookaakin Society. He had been involved in nearly every NHSC and World Heritage site meeting and played a significant role in establishing the nomination approach – particularly in setting the relationship with the local settler community⁸.

The resumption of work on the World Heritage nomination coincided with the election of a new provincial government, and the team took up the project with renewed vigour. Based on the 2010 experience, the first order of business needed to be settling on the nominated property boundary and buffer zone. The new park lands adjacent to Verdigris Coulee presented a dilemma. Including the two parcels in the nomination would potentially lead to questions about why the adjacent public lands of the Verdigris Coulee component, with perhaps even more significant features, was excluded. Ultimately, the team decided that the advantages of including the new parcels in the nomination outweighed the potential disadvantages. The second question that needed immediate attention was how the HRMA and buffer zone would be handled. As far back as 2012, the idea of restricting the nomination to the park boundary, without a buffer zone, was proposed as the solution to address local resident perceptions that a buffer zone beyond the park boundary would have implications for property and leasehold rights. Since the last attempted submission, little progress had been made on altering this perception and there was little appetite for continued consultation. In the end, the direction given to the team was to proceed with a nomination restricted to the park boundaries. However imperfect, this was a contingent and political decision that reflected the exigencies of the local situation. Although the nominated property would continue to encompass the most significant elements of the OUV, the difficulty with this approach was that the *Operational Guidelines* require nominated properties to have a buffer zone to safeguard the elements of the OUV. The workaround developed by the team was to make the nominated property boundary internal to the park boundary, so that it only enclosed the culturally significant landforms and rock art sites. This approach required the exclusion of upland archaeological sites and a significant downplaying of the viewscapes outside the park boundaries.

Including the Haffner Coulee and Poverty Rock parcels in the nominated property, along with the total rethinking of the boundaries and buffer zones, required a significant update to the nomination documents, and a comprehensive revision and redesign of almost every section, map, and annex. With the intention of submitting the revised nomination to the WHC in February 2017, the team worked all out over the next year revising the nomination and supporting documents to correspond and support the new approach. This involved another round of engagement with the Mookaakin Society and Blackfoot tribes, as well as further Parks Canada review⁹, as these parties needed to be consulted on the new approach. Additional engagement with the local community was minimal, on the other hand, as the nomination was now restricted to the park itself. By September 2016 a complete set of revised nomination sections, maps, and supporting documents was ready to be shipped to the WHC for a second Voluntary Review. This time around, however, the response from the WHC required more effort to accommodate. Although for the most part the nomination was compliant with *Operational Guidelines* requirements, the WHC questioned whether the proposed OUV criteria were compatible with an associative cultural landscape, considered the comparative analysis to be incomplete, and pointed out that the various property management plans for the three parcels were not fully integrated and up-to-date, and did not specifically address the management of OUV.

In considering the Voluntary Review comments, the team realized that it would be difficult to adequately address the concerns by the February 1st, 2017, submission deadline. In any case, two other Canadian nominations were targeting a 2017 submission, so in consultation with Parks Canada a decision was made to delay the Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi submission to February 1st, 2018. Modifying the OUV criteria required months of discussion with Parks Canada and, in the end, Criteria vi was added as a fourth criterion¹⁰, as suggested by the WHC. This new OUV angle required a cascading series of revisions throughout the entire nomination, including a reworking of the comparative analysis. The comparative analysis section is among the most important in the

⁸ Another prominent member of the Mookaakin Society, the Elder Pete Standing Alone (Nii’ta’Kaiksamaikoan), passed away on November 27, 2018. Nii’ta’Kaiksamaikoan participated in many of the National Historic Site of Canada and World Heritage site meetings and visits and was influential in guiding the nomination team.

⁹ By this point, Rebecca Kennedy of Parks Canada took on a leading role in shepherding the nomination through the WHC process. At Rebecca’s suggestion, Gordon Fulton, a retired Parks Canada expert on World Heritage sites, provided significant feedback to the team regarding OUV and the comparative analysis.

¹⁰ Criterion vi reads “be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance” (WHC 2005).

nomination, as it is used to demonstrate what sets the nominated property apart from similar sites around the world and makes the argument for why it deserves to be inscribed. In addition to comparing the OUV of the comparative properties, this analysis must also review authenticity and integrity, as well as the protection and management systems. Updating and expanding the comparative analysis ended up taking months of research and evaluation. And finally, a decision was made to develop a completely new and comprehensive management plan for all the Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park components. This plan needed to align with international management guidelines for cultural and natural properties, incorporate management strategies for all the nominated property features of OUV, and correspond to the systems developed for monitoring and managing these features. Developing the draft management plan was a separate but parallel process led by Brad Tucker of Alberta Parks, with input from the team, that lasted throughout 2017.

By the end of 2017, a completely reworked nomination dossier was finished and ready for final review. In many ways this nomination was stronger than the previous 2011 version. Including the Haffner Coulee and Poverty Rock components added breadth to the nomination and made it more comprehensive. The overall approach was also more focussed on the OUV, the comparative analysis was more effective, and the inventory and monitoring sections were better developed. Although the management plan was still in draft form, it was a critical document in support of the nomination. Most importantly, this version of the nomination included all the necessary letters of support, including a statement signed by all four chiefs of the Blackfoot Confederacy. The team was justifiably proud of the final nomination document when it was printed and signed in early January 2018 (Alberta Environment and Parks 2018a). Even so, the original vision of the Mookaakin Society – a Blackfoot cultural landscape that encompassed all of Verdigris Coulee and protected the views from the Milk River to *Kátoyissiksi* – had been significantly diminished.

10. The ICOMOS evaluation mission

Three copies of the nomination dossier, including 4000 pages of supporting documents, were shipped to Paris on January 14th, 2018 (Figure 11). After the inevitable delays in customs and an unexpected Parisian traffic jam, the boxes arrived at the WHC at noon on January 31st, with twelve hours to spare before the submission deadline. On March 1st, after a brief six week-long respite for the team, the WHC confirmed the completeness of the nomination dossier, officially launching the team into an intense year-long evaluation cycle.

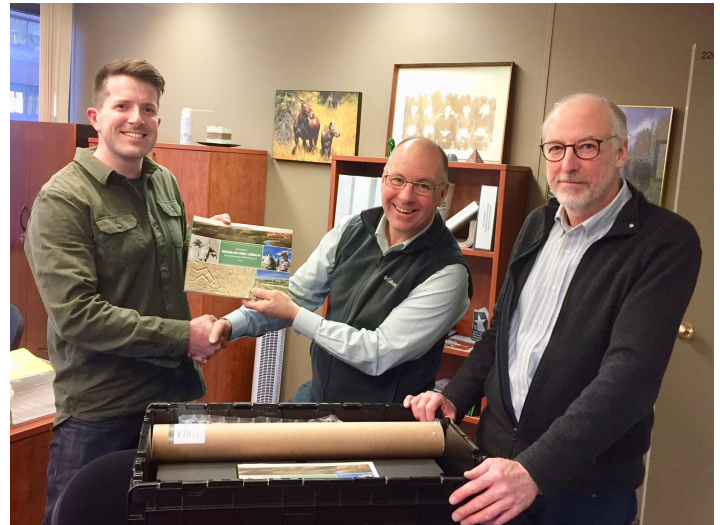


Figure 11. Jack and the nomination dossier ready for Paris (left to right: Aaron Domes, Steve Donelon, Jack Brink). Photograph courtesy of Alberta Parks.

As a cultural nomination, the WHC referred the Writing-on-Stone / *Áísínai’pi* submission to ICOMOS for technical evaluation. In turn, ICOMOS invited experts to review the nomination dossier, and also provided ICOMOS members from around the world the opportunity to comment on the nomination. The most critical aspect of an ICOMOS technical evaluation, however, is an evaluation mission to the nominated property by an expert selected by ICOMOS. Evaluation missions focus on how the nominated property satisfies the nominated OUV criteria, as well as the requirements for authenticity, integrity, protection, management, and community support. Authenticity refers to the link between the property’s attributes and its potential OUV, with that link “truthfully expressed” so that the attributes fully convey the OUV of the property (UNESCO 2011). Integrity, on the other hand, refers to “the completeness or intactness of the attributes that convey Outstanding Universal Value”; specifically, does the property include all attributes necessary to express its OUV, is it of adequate size to ensure the complete representation of the attributes, and to what extent does it suffer from adverse effects of development, deterioration, or neglect (UNESCO 2011).

Although a somewhat nebulous concept and complicated to address, the authenticity of Writing-on-Stone / *Áísínai’pi* was never in question. On the other hand, integrity posed a challenge. The nominated property encompassed examples of all the key attributes of its OUV, including a full range of rock art traditions and motifs, a variety of specific and categorical landforms linked to stories and traditions, and generally unimpaired localized views. However, a significant proportion of the rock art and landforms at Verdigris Coulee, including some of the more notable examples of

rock art motifs in the region, were not contained within the nominated property. In addition, the nominated property and the highly truncated buffer zone did not include or provide any protection for the expansive and culturally significant viewsapes beyond the park boundaries. And of course, the adverse effects from the presence of vandalism and graffiti, and perhaps more importantly the inclusion of the rodeo grounds (and for that matter the campground) within the sacred landscape, would require explanation and justification.

Jack had thought long and hard about how to address the worrisome issues of integrity during the evaluation mission. It would be impossible to prevent the evaluator from observing the graffiti and the rodeo grounds, and it was inevitable there would be questions about the boundaries of the nominated property and buffer zone. The challenge was finding a balance between acknowledging the impacts and limitations of the nominated property and promoting the high level of management and protection within the nominated property, the innovative conservation and remediation approaches, and the widespread Blackfoot and community support. When the team was informed in early May that the ICOMOS technical evaluation had commenced, Jack and the team had already sketched out an intensive five-day itinerary for the evaluation mission.

To develop the final itinerary, the team enlisted the help of more than a dozen people, including Alberta Parks staff members Suzanne Lodermeier, Rebecca Wilde, Brad Tucker, Dennis Spackman, and Travis Sjøvold, Blackfoot community members Martin Heavy Head, Camina Weasel Moccasin, Saa'kokoto (Randy Bottle), and Blair First Rider, Wendy Unfreed from the Archaeological Survey of Alberta, Karen Giering and Kristine Fedyniak of the Royal Alberta Museum, and Parks Canada representatives Rebecca Kennedy and Joëlle Montminy. On July 13th, ICOMOS notified the team that Serge Lemaitre from Belgium had been selected as the evaluator, with the evaluation mission running from September 24th to 28th. The complexity of the itinerary necessitated a dry run in late August. The rehearsal was scheduled in the middle of Jack's cancer treatments, but despite the difficulties this imposed on Jack he participated fully. The final evaluation mission itinerary eventually grew to include daily Blackfoot prayers, a helicopter overflight, more than a dozen presentations, three hikes led by the Blackfoot team members through the nominated property, a bus trip and hike to Haffner Coulee, round table discussions, a "dignitaries dinner" with cultural performances, and a community dinner with local residents at the Visitor Centre. Implementing the itinerary required the involvement of over 30 people, and the logistics of a military operation (Figures 12 and 13).



Figure 12. Camina Weasel Moccasin and Martin Heavy Head describing the cultural landscape during the Evaluation Mission, September 2018.



Figure 13. Saa'kokoto (Randy Bottle) interpreting the rock art during the Evaluation Mission, September 2018.

The evaluation mission went off with hardly a hitch during a week of mostly glorious fall weather. The potential issues concerning integrity were overshadowed by the positive aspects of the nominated property, due in no small part to the reverence and knowledge of the Blackfoot participants and the enthusiasm and passion of the team and Parks staff. At the final roundtable discussion, a number of management questions were raised by the evaluator, including impacts from permitted and potential visitor activities, potential impairments to the viewsapes, and local resident concerns. The evaluator also asked about engagement with non-Blackfoot Indigenous communities, the contemporary connection of the Blackfoot to Writing-on-Stone / Aísínai'pi, Indigenous

concerns with sharing a sacred place, and the alignment of the boundaries and buffer zones with the Blackfoot conceptions of the sacred landscape. And not unexpectedly, the evaluator raised questions about the presence of the “non-conforming” rodeo grounds. Martin Heavy Head played an important role in answering and contextualizing these questions.

At the end of the intense week, the team was euphoric. Although no one could be certain of the outcome of the technical evaluation, everyone felt that the mission had been a triumph. Even if the nomination was not ultimately successful, the process leading up to the mission and the bringing together of the group had been a revelatory experience and a fitting highlight to Jack’s career. Of course, the honeymoon did not last long. By mid-October ICOMOS had provided a follow-up letter requesting additional information on a number of topics (ICOMOS 2018a). Some of these were expansions of the evaluator’s questions, while others were new. Additional information was requested about the presence of rock art sites outside the nominated property, particularly at Verdigris Coulee, how agricultural activities in proximity to rock art sites were managed to prevent impacts, how potential impairments to the viewsapes were avoided, and once again, what plans were in place for the “non-conforming” rodeo grounds. Over the next month, the team quickly prepared a detailed response to these information requests (Alberta Parks 2018), and the subsequent report was reviewed with members of the ICOMOS panel in a lengthy teleconference at the end of November.

The ICOMOS panel submitted their interim evaluation report to Parks Canada on December 21, 2018, with another set of questions and requests. This time around the requests were more pointed and specific (ICOMOS 2018b). The panel requested more information about the significance of the rock art sites located outside of the nominated property boundaries and buffer zones, and the relationships of those sites to the ones included within the nominated property. They also requested more information about sacred cultural practices within the landscape, both in the past and the present, along with details on burials and the relationship to the “sweet grass” prairies.” There were also several questions about the buffer zones, including how the extent of the zones were determined, and what role the local community played in in this determination. The panel also requested more information about how the viewsapes would be protected in and beyond the buffer zones, and specifically how visual impacts from oil and gas developments would be managed and mitigated. The panel required information about the finalization of the management plan and a visitor management plan. And finally, the panel specifically asked for a timetable for the relocation of the rodeo grounds, an action which the

panel felt was important for protecting the integrity of the cultural landscape.

Once again, over the following two months the nomination team worked on a detailed response to the ICOMOS requests, which was submitted at the end of February 2019 (Alberta Parks 2019). Although responses to all the requests were comprehensive and substantiated, perhaps the answer with the greatest consequence was in reference to the rodeo grounds. The response from Alberta noted that the “rodeo grounds are part of the site’s historical fabric and cultural context” but also recognized that “their current location presents some management issues that call for resolution, such as the potential to detract from the aesthetics and security of the main rock art wall” (Alberta Parks 2019:36). As such, Alberta Parks indicated that they would “engage in a dialogue with the lease holder of the rodeo grounds ... to generate and implement solutions” with a commitment to find “solutions that are agreeable to all parties” (Alberta Parks 2019:36). A generalized five-year timetable for these solutions was provided, with the objective to “[p]lan and implement improvements to [the] current site OR plan and develop [a] new site” by 2024 (Alberta Parks 2019:37). Although the response specifically identified the Coffin Bridge component as a potential site for the rodeo, the response did not commit to the relocation of the rodeo grounds.

Throughout the technical evaluation process, ICOMOS focused on many of the protection and management themes that Jack originally predicted might be problematic at the onset of the nomination process. One of these themes was the exclusion of Verdigris Coulee and its rock art from the nominated property. However, this potential limitation was undoubtedly mitigated by the acquisition of the Poverty Rock and Haffner Coulee areas by the government. The inclusion of these components meant that a sizeable proportion of the Verdigris Coulee rock art cluster was incorporated into the nominated property, and also demonstrated the province’s willingness to expand the protection of the cultural landscape where feasible. Had none of the Verdigris Coulee area been included in the nominated property, a successful nomination may have been less attainable. Another theme was the size and effectiveness of the buffer zones, particularly in its ability to protect the integrity of viewsapes. Despite the dramatically downsized scope of the buffer zones in comparison to the original concept, the province was ultimately able to make a convincing argument that the buffer zone adequately protected the primary OUV of the nominated property. Notably, ICOMOS never raised the existing graffiti and vandalism as an issue, perhaps in large part to the efforts by Jack and park staff at remediation and conservation. At the same time, there was also an unexpected focus on the conti-

nity and ongoing contemporary relationship of the Blackfoot to the cultural landscape, which the nomination team had never felt was in question. Again, the contributions of the Mookaakin Society and the Blackfoot participants in the evaluation mission, which effectively demonstrated this profound contemporary connection, cannot be overstated. The successful inscription of Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi as a cultural landscape would not have been possible without the strong support and commitment of the Blackfoot.

The one theme predicted by Jack that ICOMOS could not quite accept was the rodeo grounds. When the evaluation report was released on May 15th, 2019, the team was elated to discover that ICOMOS recommended to the World Heritage Committee that Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi be inscribed on the World Heritage List (ICOMOS 2019). However, this recommendation came with two recommendations: namely, that the State Party “give consideration to the following: a) Providing a calendar for the relocation of the rodeo grounds outside the property area, within a maximum timeframe of five years, [and] b) Finalizing and officially adopting the revised management plan, including a visitor management plan” (ICOMOS 2019:36). Even so, it now seemed certain that Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi would be inscribed on the World Heritage List when the WHC met in July of 2019.

11. Inscription and outcome

Early on the morning of July 6th, 2019, the staff of Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park rose for a sunrise ceremony led by Saa’kokoto (Randy Bottle), and then gathered at the Visitor Centre to watch the livestream of the 43rd session of the World Heritage Committee taking place in Baku, Azerbaijan. When the decision to inscribe Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi on the World Heritage List was announced just after 5:30 am, the jubilant staff marked the occasion by unfurling a banner in the Visitor Centre and later serving cake to park visitors (Figure 14)¹¹. While park staff celebrated at Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi, no one representing the province was in Baku to observe the announcement. The original plan to send a joint Alberta Parks and Mookaakin Society group to join the Parks Canada delegation in Baku was dropped after a new provincial government was elected in April 2019. In the end, Parks Canada provided support for a lone delegate from the project team to travel to Baku, with Martin Heavy Head representing the Mookaakin Society. Parks Canada and Alberta Parks issued media releases announcing the inscription of Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi, and *CBC News*, *Global News*, and the *National Post* carried the story nationally. The response was otherwise muted in the province, and the only newspaper in Alberta to carry the story was the *Lethbridge Herald*.



Figure 14. The author’s mother at the Writing-on-Stone Visitor Centre celebrating the inscription of Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi on the World Heritage List, July 6, 2019 (left to right: Mary Klassen, Amy Gaulin). Photograph courtesy of Brandon Klassen.

The World Heritage Committee inscription of Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi came with the same two recommendations included in the ICOMOS evaluation, namely finalizing and adopting the management plan, and relocating the rodeo grounds within five years (World Heritage Committee 2019:261). The recommendation for the rodeo grounds did not come as a surprise; it had been one of the main sticking points throughout the ICOMOS evaluation process, and one of the earliest worries of the team, even going back to the visit of Jean Clottes in 2000. ICOMOS questioned the presence of the rodeo grounds in the middle of a sacred Indigenous cultural landscape. Clearly, ICOMOS had considerable difficulty accepting the argument that the rodeo grounds were an integral feature of the historical fabric of Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi.

¹¹ For health reasons, Jack was unable to attend the inscription ceremony at Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park, but he hoped to attend a planned celebration at the park.

The nomination submission identified the rodeo grounds as a “non-conforming use” within the nominated property (Alberta Environment and Parks 2018a) but did not refer to cultural value of the rodeo or make recommendations for alternative arrangements for the rodeo grounds. On the other hand, the draft management plan submitted in 2018 to the WHC as part of the nomination package identified rodeo events as “highly valued by local residents as part of a living cultural tradition and are part of modern Indigenous cultures... [R]odeo within Writing-on-Stone will continue to be a valued cultural activity and may grow as a tourism attraction” (Alberta Environment and Parks 2018b:89)¹². The draft management plan recognized risks posed by the rodeo grounds: “Problems with graffiti and other damage to rock art have occurred for decades” and “unauthorized entry into the Restricted Access Area has been noted and the fence was constructed for security purposes” (Alberta Environment and Parks 2018b:63). Although the final management plan made recommendations about fencing and access, it did not explicitly address potential relocation of the rodeo grounds.

Blackfoot perspectives on Áísínai’pi emphasize an ancient and sacred connection to the landscape, but their perspective is also inclusive of settler society’s recent historical relationship to the place; this includes to some extent a recognition of the rodeo’s role in the history of Áísínai’pi. In the latter half of the 20th century, participating in the rodeo became one of the venues for Blackfoot community members to visit the park, and one of the few opportunities for the Blackfoot to interact with the local settler society. As “horse people”, the Blackfoot quickly integrated rodeo into their culture, and the rodeo grounds at Áísínai’pi have a nuanced role in the Blackfoot relationship to this landscape. However, this secular “cultural tradition” has a very short history at Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi relative to the thousands of years that the Blackfoot have interacted with this sacred landscape: the rodeo grounds were only established after the park was created, and the first rodeo was held in 1966.

The discrepancy between the World Heritage Committee recommendations and the management plan did not go unnoticed, and the national media picked up on the narrative highlighting the rodeo as a living cultural touchstone at Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi. In August of 2019, reporters from the *Globe and Mail* newspaper and *CBC News* attended the Writing-on-Stone rodeo and produced photo spreads emphasizing the cultural value of the rodeo to European settlers (Hennel 2019; Klinkenberg 2019). Neither article identifies Áísínai’pi as a Blackfoot cultural landscape, nor mentions the impact or risks of the rodeo grounds on the sacred site. The *Globe and Mail* article only mentioned the inscription of Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi in the context of the threat it

posed to maintaining the rodeo and the Western way of life. One resident stated that he and others “were worried that the UNESCO designation could lead to the rodeo being ousted from the park” (Klinkenberg 2019). However, the article goes on to note that the province would be extending the rodeo lease for another five years.

From a global perspective, the argument that the rodeo is part of a “living cultural tradition” in the context of thousands of years of Blackfoot sacred use of the landscape may be difficult to accept. The inclusion of a highly localized and recent addition to the landscape may be seen as diminishing the outstanding universal value of a globally significant Indigenous cultural landscape. Even so, nothing in the final management plan prevents future discussions for relocating the rodeo grounds, if all parties agree. In the end, the approach with the rodeo grounds can be viewed as a pragmatic compromise needed to maintain local support for inscription. It remains to be seen whether the WHC will share this view during future periodic reviews of the inscribed property.

12. Postscript

Throughout the nomination, Jack Brink helped the team navigate the contested landscape and politicized history of Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi, ultimately leading to an inscription that recognizes the global significance of the Blackfoot cultural landscape. Even so, the historic and contemporary Indigenous relationship to this site was constrained to some degree by recent settler values. Nonetheless, the World Heritage nomination process led to significant and tangible benefits for Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi. Early in the process, Jack and the team had identified a number of potential weaknesses in the nomination, but in the years leading up to the inscription of Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai’pi, many of these issues were addressed by Alberta Parks and the Royal Alberta Museum through an ambitious program of initiatives and improvements. Jack played an outsized role in these projects, and he had his hands in everything from experimenting with new rock art conservation initiatives and graffiti mitigation, undertaking systematic archaeological and rock art inventories, and developing a robust monitoring plan. For their part, Alberta Parks began actively recruiting Blackfoot interpreters, connecting the Blackfoot and local communities, creating positions for an archaeologist and Blackfoot interns, developing a new management plan, and improving infrastructure – including the building of a small but first-rate visitor centre (which, of course, Jack also had a considerable hand in).

¹²The draft management plan was adopted in February 2023 (Government of Alberta 2023).

Of all the advances, engaging with Blackfoot communities in park management planning and decision-making is perhaps the most consequential. With the inclusion of Blackfoot values and concepts at Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi, historical designations have been strengthened, interpretive exhibits have been enhanced, visitor programs have been broadened, and visitor experiences have been enriched. Involvement of Blackfoot people has shifted the way the park is perceived and presented, leading to a new emphasis of Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi as a Blackfoot cultural landscape. In the years leading up to inscription, Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi gained the reputation as a model for the collaborative management of Blackfoot sacred sites and for the presentation of Blackfoot heritage and traditions (Bell et al. 2008:243, 245-246; Chambers and Blood 2009:268; Opp 2011:253, 260; Weasel Head 2015; Weasel Moccasin 2017, 2019). The Blackfoot are now engaged in many aspects of management and presentation at Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi, and cultural awareness, respectful interactions, and traditional protocols are an integral part of site administration (Weasel Moccasin 2019).

Some of the initiatives at Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi might have occurred even without pursuing World Heritage status, but there is no doubt that the nomination process strongly motivated and influenced many of these positive developments. The inscription also ensured that Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park has fared better in terms of funding and programs than many other protected areas in the province (Corrigan et al. 2021). Since inscription, staffing has been maintained at a fairly consistent level and Blackfoot park interpreters and information officers continue to be employed, although some positions such as the archaeologist and visitor engagement specialist (held by a Blackfoot person), which were temporarily created during the nomination process, have since been lost. Although the cultural feature monitoring program has focussed on informal methods since 2019, opportunities for formal monitoring, along with new conservation and inventory initiatives, continue to be actively pursued.

Overall, the inscription of Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi on the World Heritage List has been tremendously positive. It has raised the profile of the Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi within all levels of government, increased international awareness, and created a sense of pride among the public. Most importantly, the recognition of the sacred history and cultural significance of this place to the Blackfoot people is an important step on the path towards reconciliation. A public celebration of this remarkable achievement, postponed several times for varying reasons, would be an indication

of further support for this reconciliation, and it would once again draw together the Blackfoot with local residents and perhaps help bring the two communities closer together. And of course, such a celebration would be an opportunity for acknowledging Jack's role in this achievement.

13. Acknowledgements

Working with Jack on the nomination of Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi for inscription on the World Heritage List was one of the greatest privileges of my life. This inscription would never have happened if it weren't for Jack's vision and persistence, and I would never have had this amazing opportunity if it weren't for Jack's faith in me as a colleague and a friend. Writing this paper without Jack looking over my shoulder and gently correcting me along the way was at times difficult and emotional, but it also reminded me of what a remarkable man he was and how much fun we had on the long and winding road that we travelled together. I'd also like to thank Eric Damkjar, Aaron Domes, Marty Magne and George Nicholas for reviewing earlier versions of this paper. Their comments and suggestions greatly improved the result. However, all errors, omissions, and interpretations are entirely my own.

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