

Jackson Allan
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To Whom It May Concern,

I'm writing to share my perspective on the recent climbing bans and management plan for Dyurrite (Mount Arapiles). As a climber with over a decade of experience climbing at Arapiles, I've met many of the Australian climbers who have devoted years of their lives to this landscape, and through producing an Australian rock climbing podcast, I've conducted extensive research on the history and significance of climbing at Dyurrite. This experience has given me insight into both the climbers' connection to this landscape and the cultural considerations currently being prioritised by the Barengi Gadjin Land Council and Parks Victoria.

Firstly, I fully acknowledge and respect the traditional owners' connection to Dyurrite. For the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia, and Jupagulk Peoples, Dyurrite is an ancient and sacred cultural landscape, deeply connected to their heritage. Recent archaeological surveys have revealed tangible elements of this history, from stone tools to rock art, which underscore the landscape's cultural and spiritual importance. I understand the need to protect these sites and respect the value they hold for the traditional owners and the Indigenous community at large.

At the same time, the climbing community has also built a strong connection to Dyurrite. Although this connection may not span millennia, it is no less profound for climbers. Over decades, areas like The Pharos and Yesterday Gully have become culturally significant in their own right, representing places of shared challenges, community, and growth. Dyurrite is more than a recreational space; it is a sanctuary where climbers come to connect with themselves, each other, and the landscape. Specific climbs, like Tiptoe Ridge, Lamplighter, Punks in the Gym, and Masada, carry immense cultural value within the climbing community, symbolising collective achievements, community milestones, and rich histories. Some of these climbs, like Punks in the Gym, were among the most challenging climbs in the world during the 1970s and 80s, underscoring their significance within both Australian and global climbing history. Preserving access to these iconic routes is as crucial to maintaining the climbing heritage of Dyurrite as protecting Indigenous cultural sites is for honouring traditional heritage.

Not all climbs at Dyurrite hold the same value within the climbing community, and this is why genuine consultation is essential. Meaningful consultation would enable climbers and traditional owners to collaboratively identify routes and areas of high significance to both communities, ensuring that each group's connections to the land are considered and respected. However, the closure of these significant climbs indicates that this approach has not been taken, leaving essential aspects of the climbing community's heritage unacknowledged. Moreover, the lack of consultation with peak climbing organisations such as Climbing Victoria, Outdoors Victoria, and other community representatives has left climbers feeling excluded from the process. These bodies report that they were not consulted in the planning stages, despite representing a large, invested community that has a stake in the future of Dyurrite.

This situation raises a broader question of fairness. The climbing community feels it is bearing a disproportionate burden in providing restorative justice for traditional owners, due to the unique way that climbing intersects with Indigenous cultural values at the rock face. Unlike urban areas, where heritage considerations often cause minimal disruption, climbing takes place in remote locations that hold little economic value for the general population. As a result, climbers—typically strong allies and advocates of reconciliation—are being asked to make significant sacrifices while other communities face fewer, less impactful changes. We ask for fair treatment that acknowledges the diverse ways Australians connect to the land and honours both Indigenous and climbing heritage in a balanced way.

The traditional owners have expressed a desire to feel a sense of ownership and welcome in this landscape, without the apprehension that sometimes arises when climbers are present. For this to become a reality, it's essential that climbers also feel respected and fairly treated in the reconciliation process. Without meaningful consultation, the current tension will likely persist, creating a negative atmosphere that will only strain relations further and work against the very reconciliation that both Indigenous communities and climbers seek. Through open collaboration, climbers would better appreciate the traditional owners' sacrifices to keep certain areas open for climbing, fostering a greater understanding of shared responsibility.

In light of these perspectives, I urge you to consider a more inclusive consultation process that involves both Indigenous custodians and the climbing community. An open dialogue respecting the high cultural value specific areas and routes hold for both communities would be a critical step forward. By allowing climbers and Indigenous communities to come together to share their connections and collaborate on sustainable access, we can foster a balanced stewardship of Dyurrite, ensuring that it remains a place of meaning for future generations.

Thank you for considering this perspective.

Sincerely,

Jackson Allan