The Significance of Old People to the Ngarrindjeri

The Ngarrindjeri Nation see their ancestral remains of great importance. It is a general community belief that Old People be laid to rest and left in peace as to prevent their spirits “wandering around”. Therefore, what happens after the burial process is of utmost importance to the spirit of the Old Person and the community as a whole.

For many years the Ngarrindjeri community has fought for the return of their ancestral remains with much success. As such, it is understandable that they would do everything in their power to protect sites that are in danger still in the CNP.

What can visitors do to aid in the protection of Old People in the CNP

It is a goal of the DEH and NHC to set up guidelines for visitors to the CNP to follow in the event of finding sites containing Old People.

Below are details that visitors should follow in the event of discovering such sites. It should be noted that the entry into restricted areas is an offence. However, it is of the upmost importance that all sites be recorded and the DEH notified of them to ensure their protection.

The information that is needed to be recorded by visitors to the CNP should be simple yet accurate. The information should include:

- An honest description on how to get to the site.
- A sketch or ‘mud map’ of the area and where the site lies in its context.
- A description of the site. For example, is it intact or damaged? Are there more than one Old Person? What type of vegetation is in the area?
- A Global Positioning System (GPS) reading including the datum and type of GPS used.
- A photograph of the site and its context.

With this information, it will then be the DEH’s responsibility to survey the site properly, alert the appropriate authorities of the finding of skeletal remains and take appropriate action.

Threats to Old People in the CNP

There are a number of threats that the sites of Old People face other than those inflicted by researchers and ‘collectors’ in the past. Although such threats may still be very real, below are some examples of how sites may be damaged in the CNP.

- Four wheel drivers not staying on designated tracks
- Animals, such as rabbits and fox that burrow into middens.
- Natural environment degradation including erosion.
- Government and progress, such as can be seen at Polltoloch Station.

Sites that have already been identified in the Coorong National Park (CNP) are currently being managed in a number of ways. Apart from legislation such as the Aboriginal Heritage Act 1988 and Environmental Protection Act 1993 that legally protect sites and the environment in which they are in, a number of methods are currently being practiced to protect such sites. The need for a range of methods directly relates to the diversity sites. For example, using sand bags may be effective near bodies of water or in dune systems, yet revegetation or fencing may be more appropriate in areas of dense scrub. In some cases, protection may not be enough and salvage attempts may need to take place.