

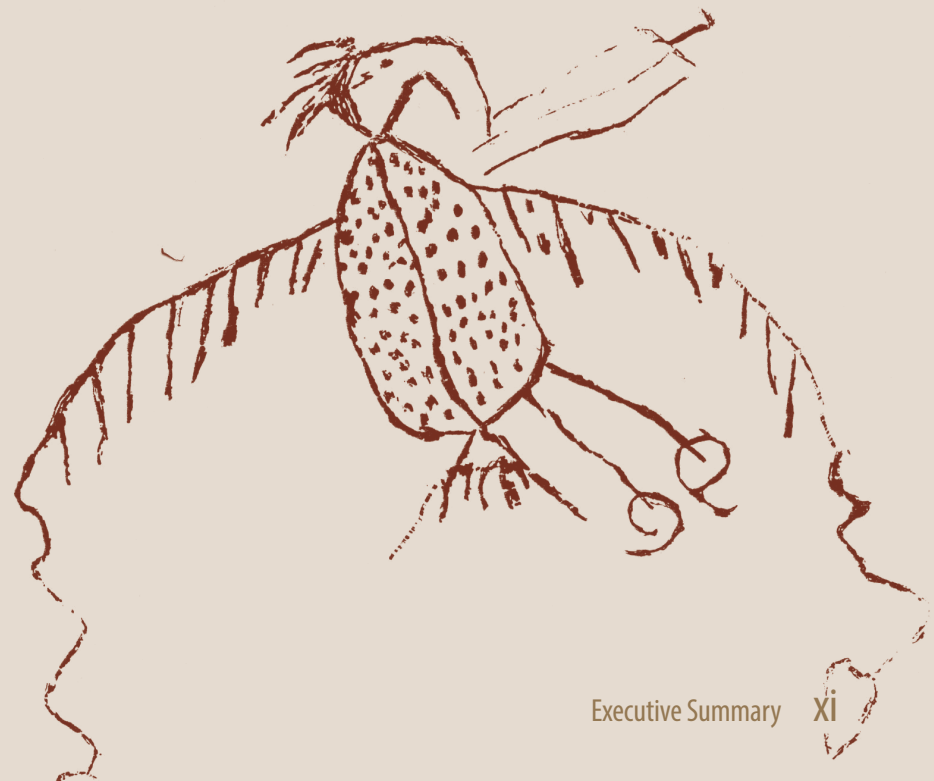
# Executive Summary

Áísínai'pi is a sacred place because Sacred Beings are present in the valley.  
The landscape and our traditions make Áísínai'pi significant to the  
Siksikaitsitapi (Blackfoot people).

—Mookaakin Cultural and Heritage Society

[facing page] The Milk River valley and Police Coulee in the Áísínai'pi component of the nominated property,  
with the Sweetgrass Hills in the background

[right] The Thunderbird pictograph is the largest and most elaborate depiction of this motif on the Great Plains



State Party:  
Canada

State, Province or Region:  
Province of Alberta

Name of Property:  
Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi

### Geographical Coordinates to the Nearest Second

ID No	Name of the component part	Region(s) / District(s)	Coordinates of the central point	Area of the Nominated component of the Property (ha)	Area of the Buffer Zone (ha)	Map No
1	Áísínai'pi	County of Warner	N 49° 04' 30" W 111° 38' 00"	948	850	1, 2 & 3a
2	Haffner Coulee	County of Warner	N 49° 05' 49" W 111° 46' 44"	50	144	1, 2 & 3b
3	Poverty Rock	County of Warner	N 49° 06' 37" W 111° 47' 45"	108	53	1, 2 & 3b
Total area in ha				1 106	1 047	



Blackfoot youth wearing traditional dance regalia at Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi



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.

Commemoration of Áísínai'pi as a UNESCO World Heritage Site is important to us. It will help increase awareness and understanding for this sacred place, which in turn will help to create greater respect and protection for Áísínai'pi.

—Blackfoot Confederacy

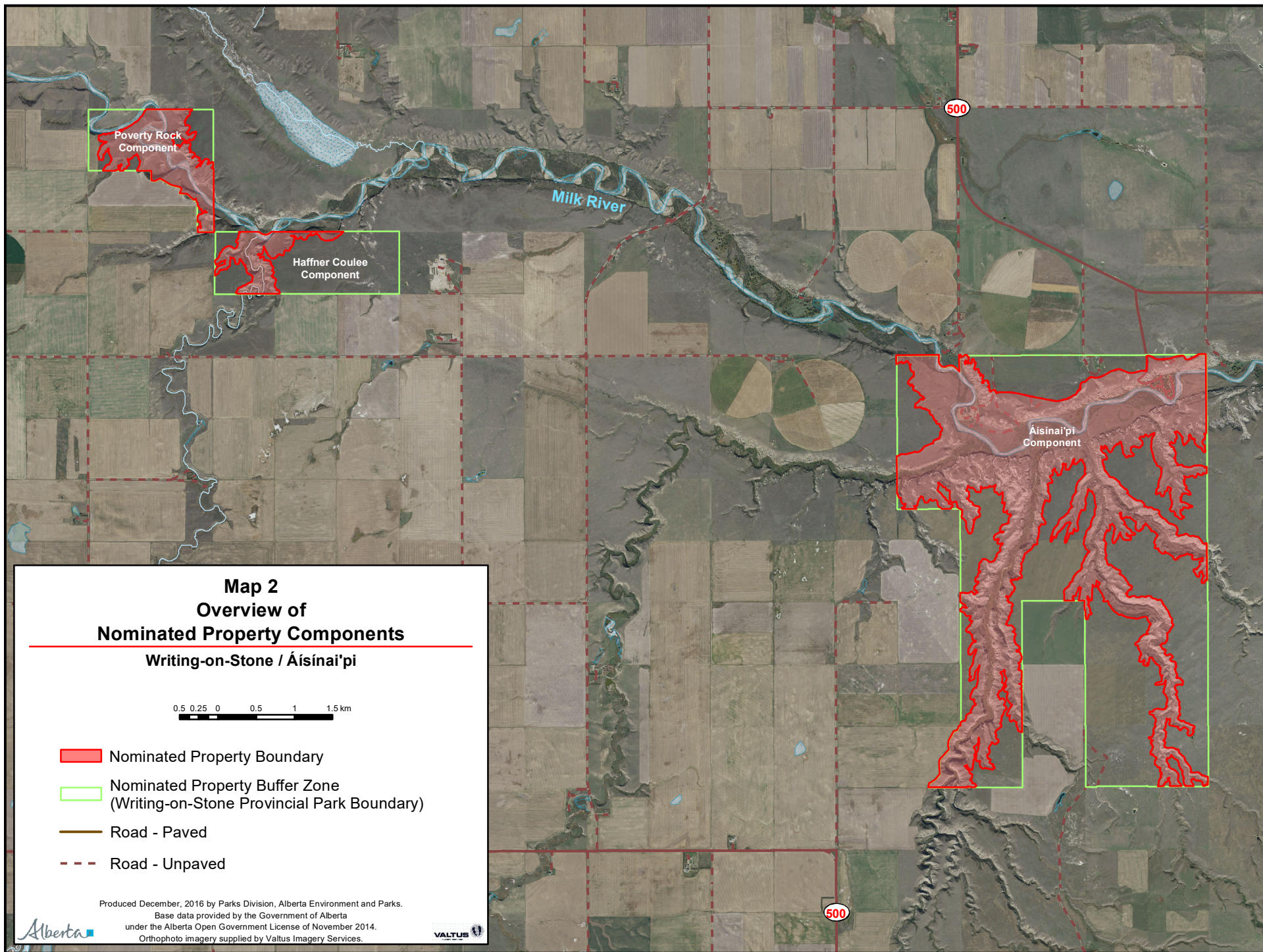
### Textual Description of the Boundaries of the Nominated Property

The nominated property is a serial nomination consisting of three components, referenced as Áísínai'pi, Haffner Coulee, and Poverty Rock. All three components are wholly encompassed within the boundaries of Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park (Map 1 [Annex 1]; Map 2, Maps 3a and 3b). Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi is located in south-central Alberta, Canada near the Alberta (Canada)–Montana (U.S.A.) border (Map 4).

The boundaries of the nominated property components are defined on the basis of a 10 m wide upslope setback from the 10 degree break-in-slope along the edge of the Milk River valley and associated tributary valleys (coulees) within the area of the provincial park, with the following exceptions: (1) where the break-in-slope intersects the park boundary, the nominated property boundary corresponds to the park boundary, (2) the northern boundary of the nominated property in Áísínai'pi is defined either by the southern edge of the 5 m wide east-west park access road corridors or the 10 m wide upslope setback on the 10 degree break-in-slope, whichever is greater in extent (Map 3a), and (3) the northern boundary of the Poverty Rock component corresponds to the south edge of the Milk River (Map 3b).

The boundary was designed to include all cultural features within the provincial park that contribute to the proposed Outstanding Universal Value of the nominated property. All culturally significant landforms, ceremonial and traditional use areas, and associated rock art sites are located below the level of the upland prairie, and therefore a consistent setback on the break-in-slope ensures that these features are included in the nominated property boundary. The buffer zone corresponds to the provincial park boundary. The buffer zone provides an additional extension of protection beyond the break-in-slope setback. Also note that existing provincial legislation and regulations provide a high level of protection to the area surrounding the provincial park (see Section 5).







## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





## Criteria under which Property is Nominated

Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi is nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List under the following criteria.

### Criterion (i)

Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi “represents a masterpiece of human creative genius”

### Criterion (iii)

Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi “bear[s] a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition which is living...”

### Criterion (iv)

Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi is “an outstanding example of a... landscape which illustrates a significant stage in human history”

### Criterion (vi)

Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi is “directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance”

Canada wishes Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi to be considered as an associative cultural landscape.

## Draft Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi is an ancient sacred place located near the northern limits of the semi-arid Great Plains of North America. Here, in a dramatic landscape of steep-sided canyons and coulees, sandstone cliffs, and eroded sandstone formations called hoodoos, Indigenous peoples have created rock art for millennia. Thousands of petroglyphs and pictographs at more than 138 localities graphically represent the powers of the spirit world that resonate in this sacred landscape. With an exceptional combination of culturally significant landforms, rock art, archaeological heritage, and dramatic views, Áísínai'pi (“it is written”) is a sacred place for the Blackfoot people. In Blackfoot traditions, Sacred Beings dwell among the cliffs and hoodoos, and the voices of the ancestors can be heard among the canyons and cliffs. To this day the Blackfoot feel the energy of the Sacred Beings at Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi, and ongoing ceremonial use attests to the living traditions of the Blackfoot people. The convergence of these intact and exceptional tangible and intangible attributes at Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi creates an outstanding example of an associative cultural landscape.

### Criterion (i): *represent a masterpiece of human creative genius.*

Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi is an extraordinary rock art locality that encompasses the greatest concentration of rock art on the Great Plains of North America, and contains the most artistically accomplished and historically significant examples of several North American Indigenous rock art traditions. In the Plains Ceremonial tradition, a wide range of outstanding iconic motifs represent the relationship between individuals and the spirit world, the acquisition of sacred powers, and the Sacred Beings inhabiting the landscape. In the Plains Biographic tradition, exceptionally detailed narrative compositions illustrating the acquisition of sacred powers and war honours are among the most complex found anywhere in the world. Repeated use of motifs and pictorial conventions is evidence of a unique proto-writing system developed by the Indigenous peoples of the northern Great Plains. These attributes attest to the creative genius of the Indigenous artists.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Criterion (iii):** *bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living*

The sacred landscape features and rock art are an exceptional testimony to the living cultural traditions of the Blackfoot people. In Blackfoot belief, the land is animated by spirit powers, and the landscape features and rock art of Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi reflect tangible, deep, and ongoing connections to this tradition. The strangely-shaped hoodoos are animate beings, caves and clay mounds are homes of Sacred Beings, and cliffs and crevices are resting places of the ancestors. The abundant rock art is also a tangible manifestation of the Blackfoot tradition of communicating with Sacred Beings through vision questing. Sacred Beings communicate with the Blackfoot through dreams and interventions, and the rock art is an evocative and compelling record of the messages and powers obtained through visions. The landscape is intrinsically linked to this practice, as rock art was specifically placed in locations with spiritual significance. The views of the sacred valley, with the distant Sweetgrass Hills as a backdrop, also contribute to the sanctity of the site and influence traditional cultural practices. These living traditions continue to be practiced here.

**Criterion (iv):** *be an outstanding example of a ... landscape which illustrates a significant stage in human history.*

The rock art is an outstanding chronicle of a critical phase of human history in North America, when Indigenous groups first came into contact with European people. It is all the more extraordinary for presenting this period of massive cultural change from an Indigenous viewpoint. The re-introduction of the horse, the introduction of European trade goods and weapons, the eventual arrival of Europeans, and even the first automobiles in the region are recorded in unparalleled detail and with remarkable creativity. A number of significant rock art panels at Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi can also be linked directly to specific oral narratives and historical events that occurred during the contact period—an outstanding example of an Indigenous pictorial documentation of their history. The enduring association of the nominated property to the Blackfoot people is affirmed through extensive traditional knowledge and

continuing ceremonial use, permitting a rare depth of understanding for an associative cultural landscape and its related rock art.

**Criterion (vi):** *be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs...of outstanding universal significance.*

This outstanding example of an Indigenous sacred place, where intimate knowledge of the natural world is reflected in a deep spiritual connection with the landscape and its tangible features, illustrates the universal connection of human cultures to the physical landscape. The nominated property is directly and tangibly associated with long-term and enduring Indigenous traditions, ideas, and beliefs, such as acquiring sacred powers through vision questing, seeking guidance from Sacred Beings, venerating and showing respect for Sacred Beings and ancestors through ceremonies and offerings, and using traditional stories to reinforce the relationship of the people to the landscape. The powerful links between Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi and these living cultural traditions is substantiated and brought to life by a superlative body of traditional knowledge, cultural practices, and oral histories that endure within contemporary Blackfoot society.



Shield-bearing warrior petroglyphs





Blackfoot guide leading a rock art tour



### Statement of Integrity

All the elements necessary to express its Outstanding Universal Value are found within the boundaries of the 1 106 ha serial property, including a full representation of culturally significant landforms, a complete range of pictorial elements characteristic of the two major rock art traditions represented at Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi (Plains Ceremonial and Plains Biographic), and the views that contribute to its sacred character. The cultural significance of the tangible elements within the nominated property is expressed through an extensive body of oral traditions, oral histories, ceremonial activities, and sacred connotations. The tangible and intangible attributes of Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi continue to be incorporated into the living cultural and spiritual context of the Blackfoot people.

Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi does not suffer from adverse effects of development or neglect. Less than 2% of the nominated property has been developed for visitor facilities. The overall state of conservation of the tangible elements is very good. These features fully retain their integrity, and in aggregate constitute an intact and inclusive associative cultural landscape. The buffer zones for the nominated property total 1 047 ha.

### Statement of Authenticity

The authenticity of the nominated property's form and design, materials and substance, location and setting, use and function, and traditions, spirit and feeling is well-established and is corroborated by a large body of traditional, ethnographic, and archaeological evidence. The authenticity of the form and design of rock art is evident through its subject matter, formal and stylistic qualities, pictorial conventions, and motifs, which correspond to well-documented Indigenous traditions. The rock art has been created on natural sandstone substrates, and has not been restored, enhanced or replicated *in situ*. The character of the landscape setting is intact and authentic, with only minimal

alteration since the onset of European colonization. The culturally significant landscape features remain in place and largely intact.

Archaeological excavations and inventories have demonstrated the depth of Indigenous occupation and use of the property. Continuing traditional significance and ceremonial use of the property by Blackfoot people testifies to the authenticity of its intangible values, location, and setting. Blackfoot oral traditions and histories, and the contemporary knowledge and perspectives of elders and community members, provide an exceptional level of knowledge. The contemporary sacred significance of the nominated property in Blackfoot society is an indication of the high degree of authenticity ascribed to the locality, and it remains a living cultural landscape.



### Requirements for Protection and Management

Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi is fully protected and managed under provisions of the Province of Alberta's *Provincial Parks Act*. All three components of the nominated serial property and the associated buffer zones are encompassed within Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park. Industrial and commercial development within the nominated property is prohibited. More than 21% of the nominated property falls within a Restricted Access Area, preventing unauthorized public access to the most culturally sensitive areas, although Blackfoot have continued access for traditional practices. Most of the remainder of the nominated property is rugged backcountry that is relatively inaccessible and infrequently visited. All of the cultural attributes of the nominated property are subject to the protective provisions of Alberta's *Historical Resources Act*, the highest level of protection in this Canadian jurisdiction.

A comprehensive management system is in place and a rock art monitoring program has been implemented. Blackfoot people are fully engaged in the management and presentation of Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi, ensuring appropriate management practices and ongoing access for traditional and cultural practices.

Long-term management and protection challenges include erosion and weathering of the rock art, pressure from increased visitation, cattle trespass in protected zones, unauthorized access, and vandalism. All of these challenges are dealt with in the management system currently in force, and will be further addressed in future updates to the Management Plan. The protective measures in place ensure that Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi will be forever safeguarded and conserved in perpetuity for traditional, educational, scientific, and presentation purposes.



### Name and Contact Information of Official Local Institution/Agency

#### Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park Alberta Environment and Parks

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