
Writing-on-Stone/ Áísínai'pi (Canada) No 1597

Official name as proposed by the State Party

Writing-on-Stone/ Áísínai'pi

Location

Province of Alberta
Canada

Brief description

Writing-on-Stone/ Áísínai'pi is located in a region of mixed prairie grasslands near the northern edge of the Great Plains. Milk River Valley and the tributary coulees dominate the topography of this cultural landscape, whose geological features include numerous pillars (hoodoos) with spectacular forms, sculpted by erosion.

This landscape is held to be sacred by the Blackfoot people (Siksikáitsitapi), which has left engravings and paintings on the sandstone walls of Milk River, bearing testimony to messages from Sacred Beings. Centuries-old traditions are still perpetuated today in ceremonies and in the respect in which these places are held.

The property consists of three components - the main component Áísínai'pi, and some 10 km away Haffner Coulee and Poverty Rock - and contains thousands of rock art images. Most of the dated archaeological remains cover a period from 1800 BCE up to the beginning of the post-contact period. The rock art has been made in the valley for thousands of years, and most of the images date from the pre-contact period, around 3000 BP.

Category of property

In terms of categories of cultural property set out in Article I of the World Heritage Convention of 1972, this is a serial property of three *sites*.

Under the terms of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (July 2017), section 47, it is also nominated as a *cultural landscape*.

1 Basic data

Included in the Tentative List

1st October 2014

Background

This is a new nomination.

Consultations and Technical Evaluation Mission

Desk reviews have been provided by ICOMOS International Scientific Committees, members and independent experts.

Comments on the natural attributes of the property, and their conservation and management were received from IUCN on 20 December 2018 and have been incorporated into relevant sections of this report.

An ICOMOS technical evaluation mission visited the property from 24 to 28 September 2018.

Additional information received by ICOMOS

A letter was sent to the State Party on 12 October 2018, requesting further information about documentation, research, the selection of components, dating, development projects, factors affecting the property, management and monitoring. A reply was received on 14 November 2018 and the information provided has been included in the following.

An Interim Report was provided to the State Party in December 2018, summarising the issues identified by the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel. Further information was requested in the Interim Report including: the rock art sites, Blackfoot cultural practices, the buffer zones, management and the relocation of the rodeo.

Additional information was received from the State Party on 28 February 2019, and has been incorporated into the relevant sections of this evaluation report.

Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

13 March 2019.

2 Description of the property

Note: The nomination dossier and additional information contain detailed descriptions of this property, its history and its state of conservation. Due to limitations on the length of evaluation reports, this report only provides a short summary of the most relevant aspects.

Description and history

Writing-on-Stone/ Áísínai'pi is situated in the Province of Alberta, in the north of the semi-arid Great Plains of North America, at the border between Canada and the United States of America. The property consists of three components: the main component Áísínai'pi, together with Haffner Coulee and Poverty Rock, lie along the Milk River, which forms part of the Missouri River drainage system.

One of the unusual geological features of Writing-on-Stone/ Áísínai'pi is the concentration of hoodoos. The topography and the associated elements are extremely significant for the Blackfoot people.

The landscape is held to be sacred, and centuries-old traditions are still being perpetuated today in a variety of ceremonies. The Blackfoot people believes that the region is inhabited by powerful spirits, which have left engravings and

paintings on the sandstone sides of the Milk River valley, setting out messages from Sacred Beings. The Blackfoot have a tradition of vision questing, and have returned to these sites for hundreds of years to seek spiritual guidance.

The 138 rock art sites listed are predominantly located at Áísínai'pi (122), with others at Haffner Coulee (12) and Poverty Rock (4), and include thousands of rock engravings and paintings. The oldest representations are believed to date from 2000 BP up to the end of the Middle Pre-contact period (ca. 7500–1800 BP). The material culture portrayed in most of the dateable images at Writing-on-Stone/ Áísínai'pi indicates that these images date from the Late Pre-contact period (1800–250 BP), the time after the introduction of the bow and arrow and before the arrival of items of European origin. Three great traditions of rock art have been identified at Writing-on-Stone/ Áísínai'pi. The *Plains Biographic Tradition* consists of a historical record of scenes of contact between humans who are riding horses and in most cases engaged in warfare. The battle scene at Writing-on-Stone/ Áísínai'pi is the most complex narrative rock art scene, with nearly 200 representational figures, detailed interactions between groups of figures, and numerous pictograms. Closely related in timeframe to the Biographic tradition, the *Plains Ceremonial Tradition* originated in the Pre-contact era, with scenes portraying, for example, a ceremony with warriors carrying shields and rectangular-body humans, some of whom wear large headdresses. The *En Toto Pecked Tradition*, which is only rarely represented at Writing-on-Stone/ Áísínai'pi, consists of enigmatic groups of pecked human and animal figures.

The archaeological sites are very numerous and are of different types. In all, 115 archaeological sites are recorded, covering several millennia. They bear witness to the past lifestyles of traditional hunter peoples living in the Great Plains, whose characteristic artefacts, primarily stone projectile points, have been found. Certain sites, such as bison jumps and bison kill-sites at the foot of cliffs, bear witness to the hunting of large herbivores, and primarily bison.

The earliest dated *in situ* archaeological evidence dates from 4500-3500 BCE. However, most of the dated archaeological evidence ranges from 1800 BCE to the early Post-contact period. At the foot of the decorated panels, excavations were made, unearthing a pointed bone implement that may have been used for carving, and which has been dated to about 2700 BP.

ICOMOS notes however that it would be important to better understand the past sacred practices of the Blackfoot people, and those sacred practices that are still carried out nowadays.

In the additional information provided in February 2019, the State Party indicates that the Blackfoot cultural practices that are still being perpetuated inside the nominated property include the transmission of oral history and traditional knowledge, the maintaining of links with the landscape and the spirits, offerings, traditional dances, the gathering of plants and ochres, the creation of rock formations and

effigies, sweat lodge ceremonies, sacred bundle opening ceremonies, vision-questing, the making of rock art images, and the completion of the birth ceremony. The State Party also notes that, in the past, the Blackfoot people deliberately went to the property to consult rock art images, pray and make offerings to the sacred beings, but that these visits could take place at any time of year. Most of the Blackfoot today visit the property in the spring, summer and autumn, and most of the cultural traditions are carried out in early summer and in the autumn.

ICOMOS underlines that it would be necessary to have details about the use of the property as a burial place, and about the importance of the sweet grass prairies for the Blackfoot.

The additional information provided in February 2019 indicates that the nominated property has been an important Blackfoot burial place for generations. Oral traditions indicate that, during the contact period and in the early 20th century, the traditional way of burying a body was to wrap the corpse in a bison skin, and to place it in a crevasse in the rock walls, together with funerary objects. When Christianity was imposed on the First Nations, possibilities of traditional burials outside the reserves were limited. No traces have been found of burial places since the nominated property became a provincial park in 1957. Today the Blackfoot are in favour of scattering incinerated remains in the park.

The State Party also indicates that the high prairies around the Sweet grass Hills form an integral part of the Blackfoot people's seasonal round and traditional way of life. They were an important place for camps, journeys, hunting and the gathering of plants. The Blackfoot today still gather plants for consumption and for ceremonial and medicinal reasons.

However, from the end of the 19th century, the permanent settlement of Europeans, combined with the introduction of oppressive governmental policies, reduced or even prohibited access to Writing-on-Stone/ Áísínai'pi for the Blackfoot people for traditional purposes. From the mid-20th century onwards, some of the more repressive regulations introduced under Canada's law relating to Indians were repealed. The Blackfoot were able to gradually resume their traditional activities at Writing-on-Stone/ Áísínai'pi. Over the last fifty years, traditional practices and ceremonies have taken place with increasing regularity, and the creation of rock art by the First Nations is no longer prohibited. Traditional practices are today being integrated into many aspects of the Park's management.

Efforts were made to protect the property before the Park was opened in 1957. In 1974, the Parks Division carried out the first archaeological survey. In 1977, a ministerial order implementing the Alberta Parks Act restricted access to a substantial proportion of the park, and the restricted access zone was designated. In 1981, the level of legal protection was increased when the bulk of the Archaeological Preserve was declared a Provincial Historic Resource. Writing-in-Stone Provincial Park, comprising the Áísínai'pi component of the nominated property and the associated buffer zone,

was officially designated Áísínai'pi Historic Site of Canada in 2005. In 2011, three other non-adjacent parcels of land along Milk River, west of the Áísínai'pi component, were added to the Park. These new parcels, and a small parcel added to the initial Park in 2011, mean that the total surface area of Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park is currently 2689 ha. The Blackfoot communities are stakeholders in the management of the park, and are consulted for all decisions that could change the cultural landscape. The traditional use of the site is carried out in conjunction with the park authorities, for offerings, sweat lodge ceremonies and vision-questing, and for gathering certain plants and fruits.

Boundaries

The area of the three components totals 1106 ha, with buffer zones totalling 1047 ha.

The nominated zone contains the various sacred valleys containing rock art, ending at the rim of the depression formed by the Milk River and its tributaries. The State Party indicates that the main rock art panels are located along the course of the river, which is situated exactly in the centre of the nominated zone. The buffer zones, consisting mainly of the grasslands of the plateau, coincide with the boundaries of the Provincial Park (except for Coffin Bridge, which forms part of the Park, but is not included in this nomination).

The additional information provided in February 2019 mentions 158 documented rock art sites, including 115 inside the nominated property, 43 in the surrounding area (with 1 site at Coffin Bridge). In response to the ICOMOS request, the State Party points out that the rock art sites located outside the boundaries of the nominated property represent the same rock art traditions, styles, techniques and scenes as those inside the property. The nominated property contains all the most significant examples of rock art motifs and scenes, with the exception of a single site outside the property boundaries. The State Party adds that the inclusion of the excluded sites would not significantly improve the proposed Outstanding Universal Value.

In the additional information, the State Party also indicates that the discussions and consultations about the nomination, which began in 2005, required public involvement on a vast scale, and wide-ranging consultations of the Blackfoot and of the local community. Only the Áísínai'pi component was being considered at the time. A larger zone, including privately and publicly owned land to the south of the park had been identified as a possible buffer zone. As other parcels were included in the park in 2011, the proposed Outstanding Universal Value and the buffer zone boundaries were revised. Although the current buffer zone is not as large as the options initially studied, the State Party stresses that it has been devised to provide the most effective buffer zone possible.

The State Party also indicates that two categories of viewsheds have been identified by referring to the Blackfoot people's traditional conceptions: viewsheds obtained from high vantage points in the direction of Katoyíssiiksi (Sweetgrass Hills) to the south and southeast, and viewsheds obtained from the main rock art sites and other

culturally important places. The State Party adds that the provisional management directive prohibits all new development inside the boundaries of the nominated property and its buffer zones, and that the Historical Resources Act of the State of Alberta applies to these areas to protect important viewsheds.

ICOMOS stresses the importance of the viewshed Katoyíssiiksi (Sweet grass Hills), located in the United States of America. ICOMOS recommends that collaboration should be set up with the United States government, in order to consider the protection of this viewshed.

State of conservation

The State Party indicates that the vast majority of the landscape has been maintained intact. Only a few hoodoos have been damaged by human action or by nature (natural collapse as a result of freeze/thaw, or undermining by the river). The State Party points out however that all these geological formations are constantly monitored by the park.

The State Party emphasises that the rock carvings and paintings are located in extensive cliff zones, usually beneath a small overhang, which has partly contributed to their conservation. The State Party also notes that tests have been carried out to consolidate the rock on surfaces without rock art images. The evolution of the tests has been monitored over a period of ten years or so, and the State Party notes that the product used seems to be working. Opinions vary amongst the Blackfoot community about the implementation of active conservation measures.

As for the archaeological sites, most are no longer visible, as they were filled in at the end of the excavations. The tipi stone circles are still visible, but are located in restricted access zones which the public is not allowed to enter.

The layout of the landscape prevents extensive views towards the north of the property, where facilities affecting landscape quality may be built. The panorama to the south enables the visitor to have a view essentially towards the park boundaries, with no obstruction from buildings. The State Party indicates however that the viewsheds inside the nominated property are affected by the development of facilities in the park, agricultural activities and habitat degradation (invasive species or overgrazing). The specific characteristics that affect the visual integrity of the cultural landscape include buildings, fences, roads, recreational developments and livestock grazing.

Writing-on-Stone/ Áísínai'pi continues to be a setting for the sacred ceremonies of the Blackfoot people. Vision-questing is a regular practice, as are sweat lodge ceremonies and offerings.

Based on the information provided by the State Party and the observations of the ICOMOS technical evaluation mission, ICOMOS considers that the state of conservation is satisfactory.

Factors affecting the property

Based on the information provided by the State Party and the observation of the ICOMOS technical evaluation mission, ICOMOS considers that the main factors affecting the property are development pressures in the areas immediately surrounding the nominated property. The State Party states that existing developments are limited to a single gravel pit, several oil and gas feeder pipelines, and 15 active and roughly 85 inactive wells in a radius of 10 km around the nominated property.

ICOMOS notes that Southern Alberta is subject to strong winds, which suggests that the development of wind turbines could be viable. ICOMOS considers that the potential impacts of oil and gas exploitation on the viewsheds must be examined in a more in-depth study, so as not to underestimate the potential negative impacts of these activities.

The additional information provided in February 2019 indicates that there are no active oil wells and that the number of gas wells has been reduced (to 11). The State Party indicates that the low level of resource extraction activity reflects the limited interest shown by the oil and gas industry in this region, despite the licences acquired.

The State Party also points out that, if any developments of this kind were proposed in the future, the Alberta Historical Resources Act stipulates that development projects on privately and publicly owned land outside the nominated property boundaries are subject to the same regulatory examination as the development of facilities inside the property. Anyone wishing to pursue an activity of this type must make an application which will be analysed by various commissions that will take into account the activity's visual impact. The State Party points out that, at municipal level, the area surrounding the nominated property is also protected by Regulation n° 930-17 of the County of Warner n° 5 Bylaw, which governs land use.

The State Party indicates that dams and irrigation diversions in the United States more than 165 km upstream from Writing-on-Stone/ Áísínai'pi affect stream flow in the Milk River. A preliminary study examining the feasibility of an additional upstream dam on the Milk River in Canada was conducted in 2004, but no decision has been taken on this matter to date. In the additional information, it is stated that the studies up to now have not supported the construction of a dam. ICOMOS considers that water discharge pressure at certain times of the year may, for the nominated property, causes increased erosion of some river banks and the undermining of sandstone cliffs, some of which may bear rock art images.

The nomination dossier also indicates the presence of rock art sites just next to the property and its buffer zone, and close to farmland. In the additional information supplied on 14 November 2018, the State Party points out that the rock art site and significant geological formations are monitored every year, or at least once every 5 years, in order to assess the potential impacts of farming or other factors.

Rock art sites in Alberta are also protected by the Historical Resources Act.

The State Party indicates that public access to the main rock art zones is restricted, which is not the case in other parts of the Park, where recreational activities are allowed (nature trails, rock climbing, horse riding). Erosion of paths and soil, the collapse of a small number of hoodoos, the development of unofficial paths, the trampling of vegetation, undesirable interactions with fauna, and the presence of graffiti on decorated panels, have been observed. The State Party notes however that the impact of visits has subsided over the last few years as surveillance team staffing has increased. Visitors are better informed about the site by means of explanatory panels, information sessions and educational programmes. The most sensitive part of the site, which contains the majority of the rock art panels of Áísínai'pi, is only accessible for guided tours.

ICOMOS considers that the pressures generated by powerful tourism attraction could potentially affect the nominated property's attributes. The site's visitor reception capacity should be calculated, and a viable visitor management plan should be drawn up, so as to attenuate the negative impacts of tourism. It is necessary to strike a balance between tourism and property conservation. An estimate of visitor numbers in the near future, after a possible inscription, would be useful in order to evaluate the proposed attenuation and conservation measures.

In the additional information provided in February 2019, the State Party indicates that the new provisional management directive provides for the drawing up of a revised visitor services plan which will include the provincial park's tourism strategy and visitor management plan. The park's tourism possibilities are considered in the context of the site's sustainable management, the conservation of cultural and natural values, and continuing respect and recognition for Blackfoot values and traditions.

A rodeo grounds, which the State Party describes as being "classified as a non-conforming use", is located in the park at the heart of the restricted access zone or archaeological preserve, in the Áísínai'pi component. In the preliminary version of the new management plan, the State Party stresses that the rodeo will continue to be a cultural activity that is highly valued, and could become a tourist attraction. The State Party also notes that the historical and current importance of the rodeo grounds must be recognised, together with the challenges that its location raises for the park's management.

In the additional information, the State Party indicates that the rodeo grounds are leased from the Writing-on-Stone Riding Association, and that the lease is to be renewed at the end of 2019. The State Party also indicates that the strategies to ensure the ongoing security of the rock art zones may include surveillance, signage, the education of rodeo participants, the presence of staff at the rodeo events, improving the fencing to reduce visual impact, and the possible relocation of the rodeo facilities.

ICOMOS and the IUCN recommend that the rodeo facilities be removed and relocated outside the nominated property boundaries. With this aim in mind, it would be necessary to obtain a schedule for the possible moving of the rodeo grounds, within a maximum timeframe of five years.

The additional information provided in February 2019 indicates that strategies to reduce the negative impacts of the rodeo grounds will be considered over the next 2 to 3 years, including the moving of the rodeo grounds outside the nominated property (to Coffin Bridge). An important stage in this process will be the modification of the rodeo grounds lease, which will be used to clarify the limits on use of the current site.

3 Proposed justification for inscription

Proposed justification

The nominated property is considered by the State Party to be of Outstanding Universal Value as a cultural property for the following reasons:

- The dramatic views and landforms, the extensive rock art, the oral traditions and the ceremonies still performed today constitute a protected and outstanding cultural landscape, intimately connected with the Blackfoot people's spirituality and traditions.
- The nominated property resonates with sacred meaning and powers for the Blackfoot. Hoodoos, cliffs and clay buttes are associated with Sacred Beings, and contribute to the sacred nature of the landscape.
- The nominated property is connected to traditional stories about the origins of the Blackfoot world, the role of Sacred Beings and ancestors, and the exploits of prominent chiefs and warriors, and these stories are illustrated by rock art.
- The nominated property includes a very large set of rock art sites located in the Great Plains of North America, which contain thousands of rock art images.
- The rock art records the visions and deeds of Blackfoot people over the centuries. Many images represent the individual abilities, personal achievements and significant events enabled through the intervention of Sacred Beings.
- The rock art is a testimony of the significant cultural changes that occurred in the Great Plains of North America during the transition from the Pre-contact to Post-contact eras.
- The archaeological remains at Writing-on-Stone/ Áísínai'pi stretch back at least five thousand years, and attest to the longstanding relationship of Blackfoot people to the nominated property.
- The nominated property remains a vital part of the Blackfoot world. Blackfoot people continue to come to Writing-on-Stone/ Áísínai'pi to honour and consult the Sacred Beings inhabiting the valley. Oral traditions, passed down from generation to generation, keep alive the cultural, historical, and sacred significance of Writing-on-Stone/ Áísínai'pi.

Comparative analysis

The comparative analysis is presented in three parts: a comparison with other properties in the geocultural area of the Great Plains of North America, a comparison with other rock art sites in North America (Canada, United States), and a global comparison covering sites inscribed on the World Heritage List, and other zones worldwide that are comparable on the basis of the proposed Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) and attributes.

The State Party also refers to the ICOMOS thematic study on rock art (*L'art rupestre: Une étude thématique et critères d'évaluation* (2002)). The nominated property has been identified as one of the most significant rock art sites in North America.

The first sites considered in the comparative analysis are those of the Great Plains of North America (North Cave Hills, Bear Gulch/ Atherton Canyon, Weatherman Draw/ Petroglyph Canyon, Purgatoire River/ Picture Canyon, Castle Gardens). Amongst the cultural areas of North America, ten geo-cultural areas have been defined on the basis of historical and anthropological considerations, and five properties have been chosen for purposes of comparison. Amongst them, Dinwoody/ Bighorn Basin and Coso Range, both located in the United States of America, are the two properties most directly comparable with Writing-on-Stone/ Áísínai'pi. The State Party stresses however that what distinguishes Writing-on-Stone/ Áísínai'pi from Dinwoody/ Bighorn Basin is its clearly defined and preserved cultural landscape, its comprehensive protection and management systems, the participation of the indigenous peoples in the management of the sites, and the relative absence of factors affecting the property. In the case of Coso Range, although it is well known for its rock art and the very good state of conservation of its landscape, its association with indigenous peoples is not as strong as in the case of the nominated property, and its protection and management are less comprehensive.

The global comparative analysis considers a number of sites containing rock art that are inscribed on the World Heritage List, including Tsodilo (Botswana, 2001, (i), (iii), (vi)), Petroglyphs within the Archaeological Landscape of Tamgaly (Kazakhstan, 2004, (iii)), Zuojiang Huashan Rock Art Cultural Landscape (China, 2016, (iii), (vi)), Gobustan Rock Art Cultural Landscape (Azerbaijan, 2007, (iii)), and Rock Shelters of Bhimbetka (India, 2003, (iii), (v)) .

The State Party stresses that, across the world and in different cultural areas, many rock art sites have lost their connection with living indigenous presence. This is a crucial criterion in the case of Writing-on-Stone/ Áísínai'pi. The State Party notes that the nominated property fills what is today a gap in rock art sites in the North American zone, and also embodies a close association with a living indigenous culture.

ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis is well-documented, that its methodology is rigorous, and that it is based on a list of numerous compatibility criteria similar to those of the nominated property. Three main categories (presence of significant cultural landscape characteristics, of a major rock art component, and of an ongoing relationship with indigenous peoples) and three secondary factors (state of conservation; research and documentation; protection and management) have been identified. In all, thirty-two comparative elements were used to determine a total score for each property, and then an overall ranking, in which the nominated property was ranked in first position.

ICOMOS considers that the rock art of Writing-on-Stone/ Áísínai'pi forms part of the diversity of North American cultural traditions. ICOMOS also stresses that the dimension that links the rock art of these sites to present-day cultural practices, thus forming part of living culture and not of fossilised culture, is a distinctive characteristic that marks it out from many rock art sites considered in the comparative analysis, particularly in the North American area.

ICOMOS notes however that it would have been desirable to have undertaken a more detailed study of this very important type of cultural landscape, and of the way in which rock art images are linked to the culture and beliefs of the communities that created them, and the meaning they continue to hold for present-day communities.

ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis justifies consideration of this property for the World Heritage List.

Criteria under which inscription is proposed

The property is nominated on the basis of cultural criteria (i), (iii), (iv) and (vi).

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

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that Writing-on-Stone/ Áísínai'pi is a 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.

ICOMOS considers that the nominated property contains one of the largest concentrations of indigenous rock art in the North American Great Plains, and that it represents an important testimony to the inhabitants of this region.

ICOMOS notes however that, to justify this criterion, it would be necessary to show the ways in which the representations manifest a specific form of creativity which is not usually associated with images of this kind. ICOMOS stresses that representations on sites are of more value for what they convey about the communities that have produced them than for the exceptional nature of their images. ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis

does not sustain a justification for the rock art as a masterpiece.

ICOMOS considers that criterion (i) has not been justified.

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

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the sacred landscape features and the rock art of Writing-on-Stone/ Áísínai'pi are an exceptional testimony to the living cultural traditions of the Blackfoot people. The views of the sacred valley also contribute to the sanctity of the property and influence traditional cultural practices.

The nominated property bears witness to a centuries-old tradition that is still being perpetuated today in various ceremonies, and in respect for the places and their sanctity, both in the oral tradition and in everyday practice. The unusual geological features are inhabited by sacred beings, and the rock art images are testimony to messages from the spirits.

The rock art panels tend to be oriented in a direction which does not seem to be connected to a cardinal point or any astronomical phenomenon, but to specific points in the landscape, and in most cases towards the grasslands. Undeniably, in accordance with Blackfoot traditions, this is a way of strengthening the sanctity of the site, as the direction is towards mountains known to be home to powerful spirits, such as the Thunderbird, and the place used still today for vision questing by Blackfoot adolescents.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has been justified, on the grounds that the sacred landscape and the rock art of Writing-on-Stone/ Áísínai'pi provide exceptional testimony to the remarkable longevity, over several centuries, of the cultural traditions of the Blackfoot people. The archaeological sites, spanning several millennia, reflect the ancient nature of this relationship between the First Nation peoples and the landscape to communicate with the sacred beings and to make rock art images.

ICOMOS considers that criterion (iii) has been justified.

Criterion (iv): *be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that 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.

ICOMOS stresses that a large proportion of knowledge about the colonisation of the Americas has been gathered from official histories, rather than from the social memories and ancestral teachings of indigenous groups. The traditional knowledge and archaeological knowledge provided by indigenous perspectives are invaluable in

order to complete the intersubjective understanding of persons, places, events and material cultures that are associated with colonisation.

ICOMOS considers however that criterion (iv), as it is justified, focusing on a historical period, may appear to contradict the justification of criterion (iii), emphasising the continuity of cultural practices. ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis does not support the justification of the rock art as an outstanding example of a landscape illustrating a significant period in human history.

ICOMOS considers that criterion (iv) has not been justified.

Criterion (vi): *be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi 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 Blackfoot people to the landscape.

ICOMOS acknowledges the nominated property is revered as a sacred place, and vision quests continue to be practiced. Modern rock art images with Blackfoot themes attest to a recent practice, in areas of low visibility. Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi is directly and materially associated with these ritual traditions practiced by the Blackfoot people living around the property today. Although it cannot be said that the Blackfoot have lived in Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai'pi for millennia, the strong and ongoing relationship of today's Blackfoot with Writing-on-Stone / Áísínai 'pi testifies to a long-standing living cultural tradition linked specifically to a sacred landscape and its rock art sites.

What has not been demonstrated is how these traditions can be seen to be part of the wider complex beliefs, values, knowledge, and practices of the Blackfoot people and how these relate to the many different aspects of the landscape in which they live. The rock art traditions are part of this wider system and, on their own and in these particular sites, it has not been demonstrated how they might be seen to be of outstanding universal significance.

ICOMOS considers that criterion (vi) has not been justified.

ICOMOS considers that the nominated property meets criterion (iii).

Integrity and authenticity

Integrity

ICOMOS notes that the site has long been protected (since 1957), and that only part of the property (3%) has been provided with infrastructures for visitor reception and visits

(paths, access roads, visitor centre and museum, interpretation panels and toilets). Only part of the site is freely accessible, and most is in a prohibited zone or an accompanied visit zone. The aesthetics and the cultural value of the geological formations (hoodoos, cliffs, canyons) have been maintained.

ICOMOS and the IUCN recommend however that the rodeo grounds be removed and relocated, so as to strengthen the integrity of the nominated property.

The IUCN also stresses the importance of the prairies where, before the arrival of the Europeans, thousands of bison roamed and grazed in the grassland plains. Priority should be given to the protection of the grassland prairies included in the buffer zones.

Authenticity

The nominated sites are authentic in terms of their conception and their materials, their situation and their setting, their function and the associated spiritual traditions, which are still alive today.

ICOMOS stresses that the motifs of rock art are well-known and recorded as regards the First Nations of the Great Plains. This pictographic system is found in abundance on other materials, such as tipis and painted hides. The composition of the scenes and the layout in historiated scenes also correspond to what is known of Blackfoot pictorial traditions.

ICOMOS also notes that authenticity has been respected, as the landscape has not changed, and there have been no major modifications of the cliffs (except those caused by natural erosion).

The nominated property, as demonstrated by archaeological excavations, has been used for millennia on a seasonal basis for temporary camps, the production of tools, ceremonies and funeral practices. Oral traditions, and historical and ethno-historical surveys, have confirmed the use and function of Writing-on-Stone down the ages as a sacred place and a gathering place for First Nation and primarily Blackfoot communities.

ICOMOS considers that the conditions of authenticity and integrity have been met. ICOMOS recommends that the rodeo grounds be removed and relocated, to strengthen the property's integrity.

Evaluation of justification for inscription

ICOMOS considers that the nominated property is a landscape that is rich in cultural significance for the Blackfoot people, which has inscribed in it part of its history and its religious and spiritual practices. ICOMOS stresses that a very large corpus of Blackfoot oral traditions attests and characterises the cultural and spiritual importance of the property. This set of values, practices and knowledge confers outstanding meaning to the property and to the rock art on which it is founded.

ICOMOS also considers Writing-on-Stone/ Áísínai'pi to be representative of the rock art in the northern part of the Great Plains of North America. ICOMOS stresses that this set of rock art today reveals the profound spiritual connections between the Blackfoot people and the sacred world.

Attributes

Writing-on-Stone/ Áísínai'pi contains outstanding landscapes, sacred places and archaeological remains. The rock carvings and paintings constitute an important part of this sacred landscape. 138 rock art sites have been recorded, consisting in all of some 250 rock art panels, containing several thousand images. The rituals practised and the oral tradition are traces of the integration of this landscape in the life and spirituality of Blackfoot people.

ICOMOS considers that the nominated property meets the conditions of authenticity and integrity, and meets criterion (iii).

4 Conservation measures and monitoring

Conservation measures

ICOMOS considers that the conservation measures are appropriate to preserve the values, authenticity and integrity of the property.

The State Party stresses that, as the Writing-on-Stone site has been under the legal protection of the Park for more than 60 years, conservation has been effective since the protection began. The State Party indicates that all geological formations, particularly the hoodoos, are permanently monitored by the Park. Access to most of them is restricted, which also enables more appropriate monitoring.

Conservation measures have been taken for some panels of rock carvings and paintings by installing drip lines to divert water from rock faces.

Tests have also been performed to stabilise rock on faces with no rock art panels.

The State Party also indicates that viewscape barriers have been installed to keep visitors away from the areas near the most representative panels, and to enable interpretation visits with groups. The State Party also indicates that most of the rock art sites are inside the restricted access zone, and that vandalism is limited because visitors are supervised by a guide.

As for the archaeological sites, the tipi stone circles are still visible, but they are located inside restricted access zones, and visitors are not allowed to enter these areas.

Monitoring

The State Party indicates that, since 2010, a rock art monitoring system has been introduced to ensure surveillance of the state of conservation. All the main panels are inspected each year, photographed (the photographs

are compared with those of previous years) and described using a standard form. The other rock art sites are also monitored regularly but not annually.

Regular monitoring processes for notable natural landforms are also currently being developed.

The State Party indicates that a rock art monitoring programme has been drawn up for the Áísínai'pi zone, and the additional information states that the rock art sites of Poverty Rock and Haffner Coulee were included in the rock art monitoring programme in 2013.

The nomination dossier indicates that laser scanner equipment has been used to measure microscopic and macroscopic changes in the rock faces, including those with rock art panels. Staff from the University of Calgary will also examine experimental panels that have been treated with stone strengthening chemicals in order to assess potential conservation measures.

The State Party stresses that, from 2018 to 2025, the rock art sites of Haffner Coulee, Poverty Rock and Coffin Bridge will be monitored every two years. No new anthropic or agricultural impacts have been recorded since the programme was introduced at Haffner Coulee and Poverty Rock.

ICOMOS considers that the conservation and monitoring measures are appropriate to preserve the values, authenticity and integrity of the property.

5 Protection and management

Documentation

The State Party indicates that the property has been studied as exhaustively as possible from an archaeological viewpoint. The thousands of carved and painted images have been recorded in successive campaigns. A data base contains all the photographs and records of the decorated panels. There are 138 rock art sites: most of them in the Áísínai'pi zone (122), with 12 in Haffner Coulee and just 4 in the Poverty Rock zone. Various rock art styles have been identified and the chronology of the rock art has been established on the basis of the morphology of the engravings, superimpositioning, patina, subjects represented and a comparison of other sites or art forms that are dated.

The State Party indicates that the richness and multiplicity of the historic sources referred to in the rock images since the mid-19th century are not anecdotal, but on the contrary, central to the site and to the history of the Blackfoot people. A large corpus of Blackfoot community oral traditions attests and characterises the cultural and spiritual importance of the nominated property.

Legal protection

The nominated property is protected by the Provincial Parks Act of the Province of Alberta. The three components and the buffer zones form an integral part of Writing-on-Stone

Provincial Park, which means that no industrial or commercial development may take place there. The Park is also subject to all the rules that govern the Parks of Alberta and of Canada as a whole.

All the cultural elements are also protected by the Historical Resources Act of Alberta, which provides the highest level of protection in Canadian jurisdiction. The State Party indicates that any development that might interfere with the cultural site will be prohibited, and this includes any visual impact.

Most of the lands surrounding the nominated zone are "crown lands". Because of the federal nature of the country's government, the lands in question may be the property of the federal state or of a province. Crown lands are governed by strict rules which limit the development of activities, and are protected by the Public Lands Act.

The governments of the Blackfoot communities are also consulted for all decisions that could lead to any modification of the cultural landscape.

The Writing-on-Stone site became a provincial park in 1957. Several other areas of land were added during the 1960s and in 1992. In 1977, to ensure more effective protection of remains of archaeological and cultural significance, the provincial government decided to create a restricted access zone. In 2011, three further parcels of land – Haffner Coulee, Poverty Rock and Coffin Bridge - were added when they were purchased from a landowner.

Management system

The property is administered by the Province of Alberta. The Alberta Environment and Parks Ministry has jurisdiction over the property. The Blackfoot governments and organisations officially participate in the management of Writing-on-Stone/Áísínai'pi, and thus ensure that traditional cultural values are incorporated and respected.

The State Party indicates that questions relating to World Heritage sites are directed and coordinated by Canada's National Parks Office. In the Province of Alberta, the Provincial Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the Travel Alberta Crown Corporation foster collaboration between the province's World Heritage sites, which they also actively promote.

The preparation of a revised management plan for the provincial park began in 2017, in collaboration with the Blackfoot communities. This process will be completed during 2019.

The management plan currently in force was officially approved in 1997, and was revised in 2008, 2014 and 2016. The plan divides the Áísínai'pi component and its buffer zone into three management zones: historic protection, natural environment and infrastructures. The historic protection zone encompasses the zone containing the greatest concentration of rock art and historic elements. Access to this zone is restricted, and infrastructures are limited. The natural environment zone ensures the protection of the

natural environment, while allowing recreational activities that are widely scattered and have a low impact. The infrastructure zone is the zone where visitor levels are highest, and which contains most of the visitor facilities and the park's infrastructures.

A resources management plan was drawn up in 1990 for the Áísínai'pi component. It is used to provide additional basic information about the landscape and archaeological attributes that contribute to the OUV of the nominated property. The most important aspects of this plan were incorporated in the 1997 management plan.

A provisional management directive, drawn up in 2014, applies to the Poverty Rock and Haffner Coulee components. It also identifies three management zones: natural landscape, special protection and infrastructure zones.

As the site is covered by the administrative system of the Canadian Provincial Parks, it has a team that handles the management and protection of the park. Staffing in 2016-2017 consisted of four permanent posts, a two-year indigenous trainee post in Alberta, and up to 18 seasonal employees.

Expertise and training in conservation and management are supported by the Parks Division of the State of Alberta. The archaeology programme of the Royal Museum of Alberta is responsible for the management and conservation of the archaeological collections in Alberta. The archaeological prospection section of the Historical Resources Management Department will be informed of all major development projects proposed for Writing-on-Stone/Áísínai'pi and its environs. The Indigenous Affairs, Heritage Conservation and Commemoration Department of Parks Canada is in charge of the national historic commemoration programme of Canada, and the Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI) is in charge of the upkeep and preservation of Canada's cultural heritage.

As regards the three management zones, ICOMOS stresses that Poverty Rock has no historic protection zone, even though rock art sites and archaeological sites have been documented there. In the additional information provided on 14 November 2018, the State Party indicates that the designation of the Poverty Rock and Haffner Coulee components as a provincial historic resource is currently being considered.

The State Party indicates that the Royal Museum of Alberta is actively participating in the archaeological projects, and the training and conservation projects at Writing-on-Stone/Áísínai'pi. In the additional information, it is indicated that the research programmes currently under way include the use of a laser scanner to measure microscopic and macroscopic changes in rock faces, and the documentation of rock images.

In the additional information provided in February 2019 concerning the finalisation and official adoption of the revised management plan, the State Party indicates that the

final phase of the planning process consists of a public consultation, followed by a final revision based on the comments of the public. The consultation was set to take place early in 2019, but because of an imminent provincial election in Alberta and a standardised protocol concerning public consultations during electoral periods, no public consultation has yet been approved. The government of Alberta has however approved the management plan as a provisional management directive, in accordance with existing policies which do not require a public consultation. The State Party stresses that the newly devised plan embodies the current orientation of the management of the nominated property, and that its application will be just as effective as a management plan. The provisional management directive will be used until the final stage of the public consultation is completed.

Visitor management

The State Party indicates that a majority of visitors stop at the visitor centre (permanent exhibition, projection room and shop). The State Party points out that the zone that is accessible to the public is limited in size. It consists of paths enabling access to viewpoints or hoodoos. The sports allowed are hiking, canoeing, swimming, nature observation, horse riding, and cycling (restricted to the park roads). To prevent damage, the park has developed several strategies such as information, the closing of non-official paths, and the creation of flora rehabilitation zones. Educational activities are also planned in the camping zone. The most sensitive part of the site, which includes most of the rock art panels of Áísínai'pi, is only accessible via guided tours. Visitor numbers in the Park amount to roughly 50,000 persons a year on average, with most of the visitors coming from Alberta.

Following on from the technical evaluation mission, the State Party indicates that there are no plans to develop existing infrastructures, as they are located in a loop of the river and the property cannot be extended. The towns nearby should be able to provide the necessary accommodation for visitors. In order to accommodate visitors, the campsite opening period is to be extended, and the number of visits (three a day) to restricted access zones during the summer period. There are also plans to further increase staffing of the visitor reception team so as to supervise visits.

In the additional information supplied in February 2019, the State Party indicates that, in the provisional management directive, the tourism possibilities of the park are considered in the context of the sustainable management of the site, the conservation of natural and cultural values, and ongoing respect and recognition of Blackfoot values and traditions.

ICOMOS stresses that controls are necessary on persons travelling along the river by canoe.

Community involvement

The Blackfoot people participate in the management of the property. The management plan, revised and now nearing completion, has been drawn up in conjunction with the Blackfoot communities. Blackfoot representatives are also involved in the conservation of the property, and can decide

on conservation measures taken on a case-by-case basis (e.g. interventions on graffiti). In addition, the park is staffed by Blackfoot people.

As the nominated property is still a sacred place, vision questing and ceremonies continue to take place there.

Evaluation of the effectiveness of the protection and management of the nominated property

ICOMOS considers that Writing-on-Stone is protected by the Provincial Parks Act of Alberta, which means that no industrial or commercial development may take place there. Furthermore, all the cultural elements, including viewsheds, are also under the protection of the Historical Resources Act of Alberta. This means that anything that could adversely affect the property will be prohibited, including any visual impact. The governments of the Blackfoot communities are also stakeholders, and are consulted for each decision that could lead to a modification of the cultural landscape.

The nominated property corresponds to the current Writing-on-Stone park, with the recent additions of Haffner Coulee and Poverty Rock. In view of the protection of the site as a provincial park, the site has had a management plan since its creation in 1957. The management plan is regularly revised, and a new edition, drawn up in collaboration with the Blackfoot communities, is nearing completion. The provisional management directive will be used until the final stage of the public consultation is completed, and the revised management plan is adopted. ICOMOS stresses however that it will be necessary to strike a balance between tourism, conservation and the Blackfoot communities' cultural practices within the nominated property.

As the rodeo grounds are located in the heart of the restricted access zone, ICOMOS and the IUCN recommend that the rodeo grounds should be removed and relocated outside the nominated property. Strategies to this effect, aimed at reducing the negative impacts caused by the rodeo will be considered over the next two to three years, including the relocation of the rodeo grounds (to Coffin Bridge).

ICOMOS considers that the management plan currently being revised should include the moving of the rodeo grounds to another location outside the nominated property. ICOMOS considers that the property meets the protection and management conditions.

6 Conclusion

ICOMOS considers that the nominated property meets the conditions of authenticity and integrity, and meets criterion (iii).

The cultural landscape of Writing-on-Stone/ Áísínai'pi brings together three components, where 138 rock art sites have been recorded, representing a total of 250 rock art panels and thousands of images. The nominated property is representative of the rock art expression of the northern part of the Great Plains of North America.

The property bears witness to the very long historical association of the Blackfoot people with the graphic expression of Writing-on-Stone/ Áísínai'pi. This ensemble of rock art today reveals and embodies profound spiritual links between the Blackfoot and the sacred world. This centuries-old practice is still a living tradition, perpetuated by various ceremonies, respect and the sacred nature of the places, both in the oral tradition and in everyday practice. The geological formations are inhabited by sacred beings and the rock art is closely linked to them. The Blackfoot believe that the region is inhabited by powerful spirits. They have left ritual engravings and paintings on the sandstone walls of the Milk River Valley to send messages to the spirits.

The rodeo grounds should be removed and relocated outside the nominated property, in order to strengthen its integrity.

7 Recommendations

Recommendations with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that Writing-on-Stone/ Áísínai'pi, Canada, be inscribed on the World Heritage List as a cultural landscape on the basis of **criterion (iii)**.

Recommended Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

Brief synthesis

Writing-on-Stone/ Áísínai'pi is a sacred site in a mixed grassland prairie region on the northern edge of the Great Plains. Milk River Valley and several "coulees" dominate the topography of this cultural landscape, whose geological features include a concentration of hoodoos, with spectacular forms sculpted by erosion. The Blackfoot people Nation (Siksikáitsitapi) has left engravings and paintings on the sandstone walls of the Milk River Valley, which bear witness to spirit messages. The landscape is considered to be sacred by the Blackfoot people, and centuries-old traditions are perpetuated today in various ceremonies and in the respect in which the place is held.

The property consists of three components - the main component Áísínai'pi, and some 10 km away Haffner Coulee and Poverty Rock - and contains thousands of rock art images. Most of the dated archaeological remains cover a period from 1800 BCE up to the beginning of the post-contact period. The rock art has been made in the valley for thousands of years, and most of the images date from the pre-contact period, around 3000 BP.

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.

Integrity

All the elements that are necessary to express Outstanding Universal Value are contained within the property boundaries, including a comprehensive representation of culturally significant landforms, a full range of characteristics of the two main documented traditions of rock art at Writing-on-Stone/ Áísínai'pi, and the viewsheds that contribute to their sacred character. The tangible and intangible attributes of Writing-on-Stone/ Áísínai'pi continue to be incorporated in the cultural and spiritual context of the Blackfoot people today. The rodeo grounds, located in the heart of the restricted access zone or archaeology reserve, should be removed and relocated in order to strengthen the property's integrity.

Authenticity

The authenticity of the form and conception of the property, of materials and substance, of situation and setting, of use and function, of traditions, of spirit and impression is well established, and is corroborated by large amounts of traditional, ethnographic and archaeological evidence. The authenticity of the form and conception of the rock art is evidenced by its subject, its formal and stylistic qualities, and its pictorial conventions and motifs, which correspond to well documented traditions of the indigenous peoples. The character of the landscape is intact and authentic, and has undergone few modifications since the beginning of European settlement. The archaeological excavations and the inventories have demonstrated the early date of settlement and use of the property by the indigenous peoples. The continuing traditional importance and ceremonial use of the property by the Blackfoot people bear witness to the authenticity of its intangible values, its situation and its setting.

Management and protection requirements

Writing-on-Stone/ Áísínai'pi is entirely protected and managed by virtue of the provisions of the Provincial Parks Act of Alberta. The three components of the serial property and the associated buffer zones are included in the provincial park of Writing-on-Stone. Industrial and commercial development inside the property is prohibited. More than 21% of the property is located in a restricted access zone, preventing unauthorised public access to the zones that are most sensitive in cultural terms, although the Blackfoot people is still allowed access for traditional purposes. All the property's cultural attributes are subject to the protection provisions of the Historical Resources Act of Alberta, the highest level of protection in this Canadian jurisdiction.

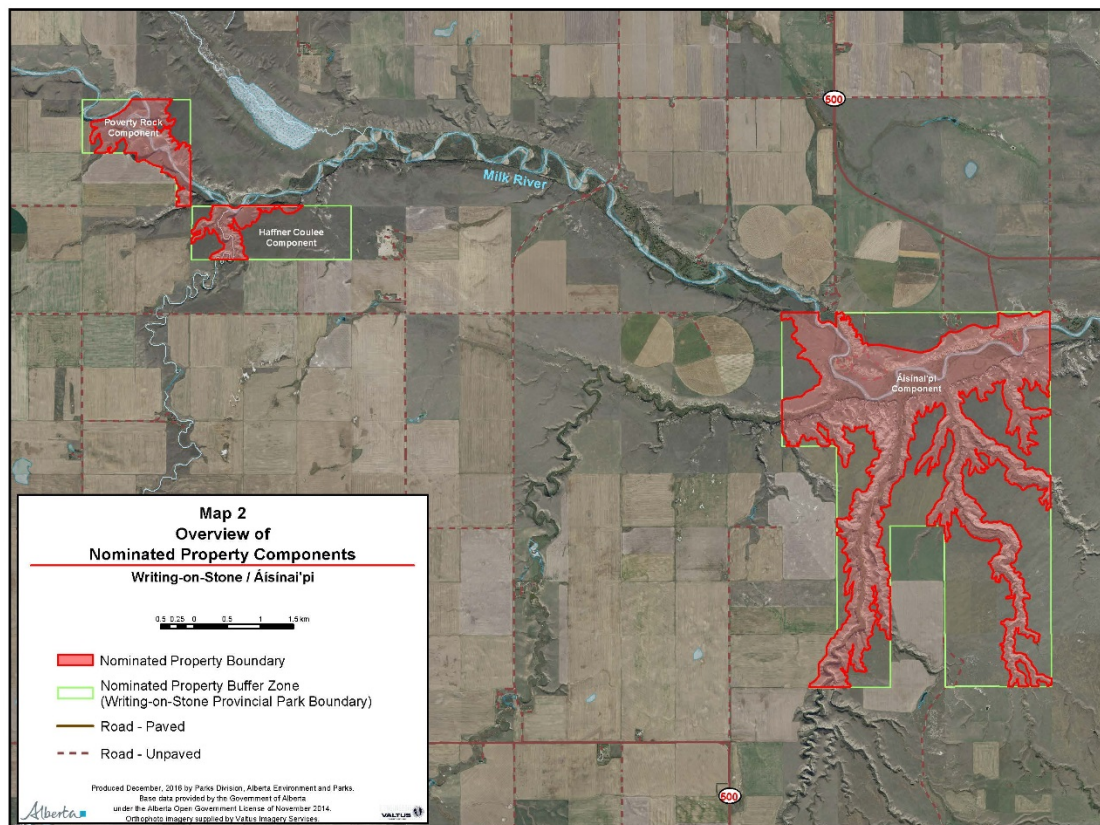
A comprehensive management system is in place, and a programme for monitoring the rock art has been implemented. The Blackfoot people are fully participating in the management of Writing-on-Stone/ Áísínai'pi, while ensuring appropriate management practices and continuous access for traditional and cultural practices. The management plan is regularly revised, and a new edition, drawn up in collaboration with the Blackfoot communities, is nearing completion. The provisional management directive

will be used until the final stage of the public consultation has been completed, and the revised management plan has been adopted.

Additional recommendations

ICOMOS further recommends 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,
- b) Finalising and officially adopting the revised management plan, including a visitor management plan;



Map showing the boundaries of the nominated property



Overview of the cultural landscape



Áisínai'pi component: hoodoos overlook the sacred landscape, with Sweetgrass Hills in the background



Rock art and cultural landscape



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