



# Lithgow Environment Group Inc.

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*Preserving the Balance of Nature*

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## **NEW ABORIGINAL HANDS SITE DISCOVERED**

Volunteers searching for rare plants discovered something even more extraordinary when they stumbled onto previously unrecorded Aboriginal Hand stencils in a cave over-hang near Lithgow.

Chris Jonkers and Julie Favell of Lithgow Environment Group (LEG) have been surveying native flora in Ben Bullen State Forest for a number of years, and have a particular interest in rock pagoda areas, where many rare and endangered plant species occur.

This day was no different - both had their heads down concentrating on the ground below when they came upon a stunning rock grotto. Looking up Chris quietly said to Julie, 'Does that look like aboriginal hand stencils to you'? Well the rest is history - they had indeed found a cluster of ochre aboriginal hand stencils in a cave overhang, and immediately contacted the DECCW Aboriginal Heritage Register with the GPS coordinates for verification.

This week LEG was informed that this site had not previously been recorded. LEG will now work with the DECCW to register this site and further investigate the surrounding area.

It was an incredibly moving experience to stand there and realise that our aboriginal ancestors had visited, valued and cared for this site for many 1000's of years.

But it was also very disturbing to realise just how close this site had come to being lost forever, as there have been literally 100's of cliff and overhang collapses in Ben Bullen State Forest over the last 30 years due to long-wall mining, which removes the coal from underneath leaving no support for the fragile sandstone above.

This site is within a mining lease and is only 800m from a previously mined long-wall panel. The area has been the subject of numerous environmental and archeological assessments over 30 years for various mining proposals – and yet this site remained undiscovered until now?

This find demonstrates that the current environmental assessment processes required by the NSW Government for mining proposals are inadequate. LEG members have similarly identified over 150 plant species occurring within Ben Bullen State Forest that were not recorded in Flora Assessments for recent mining proposals.

LEG believes that this site can best be protected by including it as a Conservation Area within the adjacent Gardens of Stone National Park, which is only 1.6 kilometres away.

Lithgow Environment Group would like to thank Ms Kathleen Schilling, Manager Central Region of the Country, Culture and Heritage Division of the Dept of Environment, Climate Change and Water for her assistance with registering this site.

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