

DJARRAK (BELLS BEACH)



Picture2



Picture7



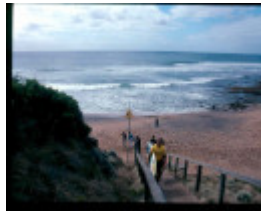
Picture8



H02032 bells beach 4 spirit of surfing



Picture3



H02032 bells beach 1



H02032 bells beach 2



BELLS BEACH SURFING RECREATION RESERVE SOHE 2008



Picture5



H02032 bells beach 3



Picture9



Diagram 2032 v2



extent of registration - aerial diagram

Location

COASTAL RESERVE BELLS BEACH, SURF COAST SHIRE

Municipality

Level of significance

Registered

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H2032

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO88

VHR Registration

July 10, 2003

Amendment to Registration

June 19, 2025

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - June 23, 2025

Djarraak (Bells Beach) comprises land and waters of the Wadawurrung people.

What is significant?

Djarraak (Bells Beach) is a 2-kilometre stretch of coastline of 112 hectares to the south-west of Torquay and Jan Juc, comprising 38 hectares of coastal heathland and beach; three Spirit of Surfing sandstone markers, the Wave sign; and 74 hectares of sea.

How is it significant?

Djarraak (Bells Beach) is of historical and social significance to the State of Victoria. It satisfies the following criterion for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register:

Criterion A

Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history.

Criterion G

Strong or special association with a particular present-day community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons.

Why is it significant?

Djarra (Bells Beach) is historically significant as the location of the world's longest running competitive surfing event and the first beach internationally to be designated as a surfing reserve in 1973. Its environmental qualities contribute to its significance as a surfing location. 'Bells' became popular with surfers during the 1950s, and in 1962 the Bells Beach Easter Rally was held. By 1973 this annual event had been included on the World Competitive Tour and a large Wave Sign had been installed. The beach is now the location of the 'Rip Curl Pro', one of the most prestigious and iconic surfing events globally, commonly referred to as the 'Wimbledon of surfing'. The place is also significant for its associations with the development of Victoria's surfboard and wetsuit industries from the 1960s, as a location where innovative designs and materials were tested by local companies, some of which, including Rip Curl and Quicksilver, have become global brands.

(Criterion A)

Djarra (Bells Beach) is socially significant for its strong and enduring connection with Victoria's surfing communities. Sometimes described as a 'Mecca' or 'spiritual home' of surfing, this place continues to draw surfers from around Victoria and beyond to enjoy the landscape and waves. For generations, Bells Beach has offered one of Australia's most awe-inspiring surf breaks, due to its exposure to Southern Ocean swells and seabed topography creating powerful waves which can exceed six metres. The three Spirit of Surfing markers (2002) are reminders of the traditions of free surfing, respect for the ocean, the land and Wadawurrung culture, as well as a harmonious relationship with the natural environment. The beach is valued nationally and internationally as part of Australia's surfing culture.

(Criterion G)

Permit Exemptions

General Exemptions:

General exemptions apply to all places and objects included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR). General exemptions have been designed to allow everyday activities, maintenance and changes to your property, which don't harm its cultural heritage significance, to proceed without the need to obtain approvals under the Heritage Act 2017.

Places of worship: In some circumstances, you can alter a place of worship to accommodate religious practices without a permit, but you must [notify](#) the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria before you start the works or activities at least 20 business days before the works or activities are to commence.

Subdivision/consolidation: Permit exemptions exist for some subdivisions and consolidations. If the subdivision or consolidation is in accordance with a planning permit granted under Part 4 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and the application for the planning permit was referred to the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria as a determining referral authority, a permit is not required.

Specific exemptions may also apply to your registered place or object. If applicable, these are listed below. Specific exemptions are tailored to the conservation and management needs of an individual registered place or object and set out works and activities that are exempt from the requirements of a permit. Specific exemptions prevail if they conflict with general exemptions.

Find out more about heritage permit exemptions [here](#).

Specific Exemptions:

Exempt works

1. Removal of the Koori Mural painted on the toilet block in the main carpark.
2. Removal of the toilet block in the main carpark.
3. Internal alterations to the toilet block in the main car park.
4. Repair and resurfacing of road surfaces and paths in the same or similar materials.
5. Installation, repair or removal of regulatory signs, warning signs and directional signs.
6. Removal, maintenance, repair or replacement of fencing, gates and posts in the same or similar materials.
7. Planting, pruning, maintenance and removal of vegetation.
8. Ground level works to maintain, repair or reconfigure the existing carparks provided that the area is not expanded. This includes the repair or resealing of carpark surfaces; the repair, removal, installation or maintenance of kerbing, drains, bollards, and speed humps; and the repair, removal or installation of directional signage and line marking.

Exempt activities

Surfing Victoria Rip Curl Pro Bells Beach annual surfing event

9. All works and activities related to this event as specified in the Rip Curl Pro Management Plan by Surfing Victoria in consultation with the World Surf League.

Theme

9. Shaping cultural and creative life

Construction dates	1961,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place,
Other Names	Centreside, BELLS BEACH SURFING RECREATION RESERVE, BELL'S BEACH, The Bowl, Winki Pop, Southside, Steps Reef, SURF COAST, SURF COAST, Rincon,
Hermes Number	12711
Property Number	

History

This history is based on work completed by Dr David Rowe for the Surf Coast Shire, in consultation with the Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation (WTOAC).

Djarrak (Bells Beach Reserve)

The Bells Beach Reserve is known to the Wadawurrung people as Djarrak (the place of the bent arm and possibly the Tjorriiong/Djorriiong, the Southern Rock Lobster). The place was first recorded by Europeans on a

'Survey of Rivers and Creeks from The Barwon Heads to Point Roadknight' by the English surveyor, GD Smythe, in 1847. The location is part of the Country of the Tjuraaltja clan, their territory (as presently understood) extending along the rugged coastline to Painkalac Creek, Airey's Inlet to the south-west, to Spring Creek to the north, and to Lake Modewarre.

The Bells (1850s – early 1900s)

European pastoralists who took up land in Victoria from the 1830s dispossessed the Wadawurrung of their Country. In 1840, a license was issued to Elias Harding for a large tract of land that took in Torquay and Jan Juc, together with a narrow portion that extended to Point Addis. From 1857, William Bell acquired subdivided allotments directly behind Bells Beach and built 'Bells Homestead'. This allotment and those adjacent changed hands several times. In April 1905, John Calvert Bell (no relation to William Bell), purchased several of these together with the license of 700 acres of coast reserve.

John Calvert Bell's family lived on this coastal reserve and grazed sheep. Recreation on their 'private beach' formed part of the unique experiences for the family. Bell's Beach was soon accessed by the public with Calder's Reef being reported in 1914 as 'one of the best fishing spots on the Torquay coast.' In 1917, a flight of steps was proposed to be constructed.' In 1918, the southern portion of the Bells Beach Reserve was leased to mine Jarosite (a red oxide used in paints) but the company went into liquidation in 1927. After the death of Bell in 1937, the coast reserve leasehold was bequeathed to his daughter.

Surfing at Bells (1940s-1970s)

The road to a competition

By the mid-1940s, Bells Beach became a popular surfing location, but the roads were winding sand tracks, and impossible for the heavy cars and long boards of the day. Pioneer surfers struggled to access it from both land and sea. In 1960 Joe Sweeney, ex-Olympic wrestler and Torquay Surf Lifesaving Club member, organised the construction of an access track. The first Bells Beach contest was supposed to be held in late 1961 but was delayed until the Australia Day weekend of 1962. From then the contest was held every Easter taking advantage of the consistent autumn conditions and the full moon high tides.

In 1965 Bells Beach came to the attention of surfers across Australia after photos of the huge waves were published in the magazine *Surfing World*. Surfers from Australia and around the world flocked to catch a 'Bells Boomer'. In 1966, the Council set up a Committee of Management for Bells Beach and acquired 42 acres to allow construction of a through road from Bones Road to Jarosite Road. In 1967 the Victorian Surfing Championships were held at the beach, attracting 10,000 spectators.

Powerful surf

Bells Beach produces exceptionally powerful surf due to its unique geographical positioning and bathymetry along Victoria's Surf Coast. Facing southeast, Bells is exposed to powerful, long-period Southern Ocean swell which originates from massive storm systems in the Southern Ocean thousands of kilometres away. The break's strength comes from an underwater ridge that extends southward directly offshore from Bells that acts as a focal point, refracting and concentrating the incoming southwest to south swells as they bend toward shallower water. Wave faces can reach upwards of six metres.

Local surfing industry

From the 1960s, Bells Beach became a place where new surfboard designs and advances in wetsuit technology were tested by surfers. By then Torquay and Bells Beach had become major surfing locations in Australia, which created a demand for surfboards in the area. A surfboard shop owned by Fred Pyke opened in Torquay in 1967, followed by others owned by Pat Morgan, Rip Curl, Klemm-Bell and Quicksilver.

World surfing titles

In 1970 Bells Beach became the venue for the World Surfing Titles. A year later the area was designated the 'Bells Beach Surfing Recreation Reserve', the first reserve of its kind in the world. In 1973 the event was included on the professional World Competitive Tour and has since been known as the 'Rip Curl Pro Bells Beach'. In 1971 the local council contacted the Gordon Institute of Technology in Geelong to ask whether its art students could develop a design for a sign at the reserve, and the 'Wave sign' was installed in 1972.

Growing recognition (1990s-2020s)

In 1991 the Bells Beach competition was recognised as 'the longest running national surfing event on the world calendar' (1962-1991). It also included the richest women's surfing tournament in Australia. Infrastructure had been built to accommodate the growing number of national and international visitors.

The mural

In 1996 a mural was painted on the toilet block in the main central car park by Glenn Romanis and Mark Trinham. It sought to raise awareness of Aboriginal culture. The mural draws upon a number of Aboriginal legends, stories and symbols, not all are directly associated with this part of Wadawurrung Country. For example, the location and size of some of the figures in the artwork (such as the wedge-tailed eagle and the bat) do not align with the Wadawurrung Creation Story, and some imagery relates to Bengala Country (the Wadawurrung clan territory of the Bengalat, the Bellarine Peninsula), rather than Bells Beach. In light of these concerns, the Surf Coast Shire in collaboration with the Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation has applied to remove the mural as a significant feature in the VHR extent. See Appendix 1 for more detailed information.

Spirit of Surfing stone markers

In 2000, the Spirit of Surfing Trust initiative was launched at Bells Beach promoting 'the traditions of free surfing, respect for the ocean, the land and indigenous culture, and a harmonious relationship with the natural environment.' In consultation with the Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative, local artists Glenn Romanis and Mark Trinham proposed the installation of tablets with key messages leading down the steps at Bells Beach. Three stone cultural markers entitled Respect the Ocean, Respect each Other and Respect the Land were unveiled on World Environment Day 2002 by Joe Sweeney.

Rip Curl Pro

In 2024 the annual Rip Curl Pro at Bells Beach is part of the World Surf League (WSL) world championship tour and is highly regarded by the professional surfing fraternity. Surfers travel from around the world to attend the event, and it is managed in a way that leaves minimal impact on the place. Measures are taken to protect the cliffs, beach and sea, and flora and fauna. During 2020 and 2021, the Rip Curl Pro contests were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, breaking its continuous run since 1962. The contest resumed in 2023.

Environmental significance

Djarra (Bells Beach) has both environmental (natural) and cultural heritage values. Until 1971, when the Shire of Barrabool was appointed as the Committee of Management, the beach and foreshore were unregulated areas. There was no infrastructure or rubbish collection to support daily visitation by surfers, some of whom camped overnight, and annual surfing contests resulted in damage to the fragile cliffs and trampling of vegetation. There were issues with parking and waste disposal as visitor numbers increased.

Over time, the collaborative efforts of community groups, local surfing businesses and local and state governments have improved the ecological condition of Bells Beach. The Australian Surfriders' Association started a Conservation Contest in 1971 where entry involved planting a native tree or shrub to address 'bare' areas. Since 1988 members of SANE (Surfers Appreciating Natural Environment) have ensured that the vegetation is healthy, and the place retains a high ecological integrity. Rip Curl have held many of their Planet Days there for more than 20 years where up to 200 staff volunteer with local conservation groups. Accordingly, the physical development of Bells Beach has remained low-key, and a high value placed on the protection and regeneration of the landscape.

Social significance

Djarra (Bells Beach) is socially significant to the surfing community in Victoria and Australia. 'Bells' is not just a tourist destination but is the 'spiritual home of surfing' in Victoria, much like the MCG is the 'spiritual home of football'. It is an iconic place with its own history and folklore. Expressions of surfers' enduring connection to it are widely available on the Internet: 'This reserve is unlike anywhere else in the world - the first surfing reserve ever created and the spiritual home of all our local surfers and a Mecca for surfers worldwide'.

In 1993 the Australian National Surfing Museum opened in Torquay. Its collection documents over 100 years of the surfing story along the Bells coast and celebrates Australia's surfing heritage and rich beach culture. It also charts Australia's significant contribution to the development of surfing around the world.

Extent of Registration

Heritage Act 2017

NOTICE OF REGISTRATION

As Executive Director for the purpose of the **Heritage Act 2017**, I give notice under section 53 that the Victorian Heritage Register is amended by modifying a place in the Heritage Register:

Number: H2032

Category: Registered Place

Place: Djarra (Bells Beach)

Location: Coastal Reserve, Bells Beach

Municipality: Surf Coast Shire

All of the place shown hatched on Diagram 2032 encompassing parts of Crown Allotments 2014, 2001, 2059 and 2064 Parish of Jan Juc and parts of Lot 1 on Title Plan 106529 and Lot 1 on Title Plan 857350 and a coastal strip from the Local Government Boundary 300m seaward.

19 June 2025

STEVEN AVERY

Executive Director
[General Gazette G25 19 June 2025]

This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.

For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>