

The Rock

Glastonbury, Qld.

A thirty-minute drive west of Gympie, on an elevated bank by the gravel track that follows the almost dry, pebble-strewn bed of Glastonbury Creek, stands a rock which embodies a wisdom, and exudes a sense of the sacred, that is almost beyond words. "Glastonbury" promised me magic, myths and legends, but nothing could be further removed from the mythology and cosmology, or the lush landscapes, of the ancient Britons than Queensland's Glastonbury Creek. Nevertheless, the rock I encountered on that dusty roadside had a dignity and a mystique that owed nothing to history, literature or legend.

It was not classically beautiful. Standing perhaps five metres high, the dominant rock was firmly balanced on a base of smaller stones, each cracked and crumbled, weathered and worried by eons of heat and cold, wind and rain, drought and flood. It was the brown-red of old blood, streaked with white quartz and a deep midnight blue I have never before seen in any rock. Weeds, native grasses and tiny purple flowers grew at the base of the stones. Cow pats dotted the surrounding area. It was a typical Australian outback scene.

Paradoxically, it felt both familiar and other. Familiar: comfortable, embedded in my genes, inscribed on my psyche, part of my life's story. Other: inscrutable, unknowable, its existence and its meaning beyond my understanding. I walked slowly around the rock, stepping delicately between the fallen stones that encircled it. Apart from the dusty road - and the cow manure - there was no evidence of white settlement. It was as if time had stood still in that place. I wonder, with hindsight, if that was why the rock touched me so powerfully: it was a physical and tangible link between the prehistoric and the present historic. It had been on this site since time immemorial, birthed by the movement of the earth's plates, a silent testimony to the generative might of nature. It had endured impassively the freezing and thawing of the earth; watched disinterestedly as giant wombats stripped the bark from the overhanging trees; stood unflinchingly as huge winged creatures perched on its crest. It had seen the arrival of the black skinned people long ago, and the more recent advent of the pale ones. It embodied a knowledge that I longed to share.

I placed my hand on the rock. It was warm from the afternoon sun, dry and very dusty. I leaned my forehead against the surface of the stone; its roughness chafed my skin. I stood there trying to hear, or to feel, its mood. I thought (or imagined, or hoped) I could sense a vibration deep in the heart of the rock, the echo of those primeval memories.

This huge stone could have been the inspiration for Judith Wright's poem "Rockface". Her poem, intentionally or unintentionally, provides an Australian response to the European stones erected long ago by humans in search of meaning. She writes: "Of the age-long heave of a cliff-face, all's come down except this split upstanding stone, like a gravestone ... I've no wish to chisel things into new shapes. The remnant of a mountain has its own meaning."

Perhaps in those words I have found an answer to my desire for connection with ancient mythical frameworks and modes of understanding. In Australia meaning is inscribed on the land, rather than shaped by human words and actions. The earth

whispers its stories and its secrets to all who will hear. The Aboriginal people have known this for thousands of years. More recent Australians are coming to this insight, as we learn to listen to the wisdom of the earth, to read the mysteries of the land, and to know the meaning of a rock.

- Patricia Rose -