



**HERITAGE  
COUNCIL**  
OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

## **REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION**

### **11. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE**

The criteria adopted by the Heritage Council in November 1996 have been used to determine the cultural heritage significance of the place.

#### **PRINCIPAL AUSTRALIAN HISTORIC THEME(S)**

- 8.1 Organising recreation

#### **HERITAGE COUNCIL OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA THEME(S)**

- 405 Sport, recreation and entertainment
- 605 Famous and infamous people

#### **11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE\***

*Albany Snake Run Skateboard Park* is an evocative urban parkland containing a concrete downhill skateboard track that exhibits a wave like form, surrounded by grassed areas and mature trees on three sides. (Criterion 1.4)

#### **11.2. HISTORIC VALUE**

*Albany Snake Run Skateboard Park* is the oldest surviving skate park in Australia, and second oldest in the world. (Criterion 2.1)

*Albany Snake Run Skateboard Park* is representative of the early development of skateboarding in Australia in the mid-1970s, and particularly the downhill slalom style of skateboarding which was the earliest style to be adopted. (Criterion 2.2)

*Albany Snake Run Skateboard Park* is considered an excellent design of a Skate Park, which is believed to have influenced the basic concept for other skateboard tracks in the US. (Criterion 2.4)

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\* For consistency, all references to architectural style are taken from Apperly, R., Irving, R., Reynolds, P. *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture. Styles and Terms from 1788 to the Present*, Angus and Robertson, North Ryde, 1989.

For consistency, all references to garden and landscape types and styles are taken from Ramsay, J. *Parks, Gardens and Special Trees: A Classification and Assessment Method for the Register of the National Estate*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1991, with additional reference to Richards, O. *Theoretical Framework for Designed Landscapes in WA*, unpublished report, 1997.

*Albany Snake Run Skateboard Park* is associated with the earliest skateboarders in Australia, who fashioned their own skateboards by attaching clay wheels to wooden boards. (Criterion 2.4)

### **11.3. SCIENTIFIC VALUE**

*Albany Snake Run Skateboard Park* may be able to contribute to the understanding of the development and engineering of early skate parks, particularly in relation to the skill level of the equipment and skater at the time. (Criterion 3.3)

### **11.4. SOCIAL VALUE**

*Albany Snake Run Skateboard Park* is valued by the World-wide skating community as the second oldest surviving skate park in the World. (Criterion 4.1)

*Albany Snake Run Skateboard Park* is highly valued by the skating community of Australia as the oldest surviving skate park in the Country. It is widely regarded for its suitability for a variety of skill levels. (Criterion 4.1)

The construction of *Albany Snake Run Skateboard Park* exemplifies the community spirit and this continues to be reflected in the positive media coverage given to the interim registration of the place in 2016. (Criterion 4.1)

*Albany Snake Run Skateboard Park* is highly valued by the community of Albany, for its establishment by local high school students with the assistance of the local government, and as a place continuously used by local skateboarders for the past forty years. (Criterion 4.1 & 4.2)

## **12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE**

### **12.1. RARITY**

*Albany Snake Run Skateboard Park* is rare as the oldest surviving skate park in Australia, and the second oldest in the World. (Criterion 5.1)

*Albany Snake Run Skateboard Park* is thought to be the world's first community-built skate park, having been established by Albany High School students. (Criterion 5.1)

*Albany Snake Run Skateboard Park* is rare on an international level as a downhill slalom style skate park. Few skate parks of this design were constructed in the World as the downhill slalom style of skateboarding quickly fell out of fashion in the late-1970s. (Criterion 5.1)

As a downhill slalom style skate park, *Albany Snake Run Skateboard Park* is representative of a style of skateboarding that was prominent the early to mid-1970s, but which quickly fell out of fashion and was replaced with more vertically based styles and designs. (Criterion 5.2)

### **12.2 REPRESENTATIVENESS**

*Albany Snake Run Skateboard Park* is representative of the early development of skateboarding in Australia and Western Australia, which first became popular in the mid-1970s. (Criterion 2.2)

*Albany Snake Run Skateboard Park* is representative of a type and style of skateboarding that was prominent in the early to mid-1970s, but which quickly fell out of fashion. (Criterion 6.2)

**12.3 CONDITION**

*Albany Snake Run Skateboard Park* is in good condition.

The City of Albany administers a regular program of maintenance.

**12.4 INTEGRITY**

*Albany Snake Run Skateboard Park* has very high integrity.

It has been used as a skate park continuously since its construction in 1976.

**12.5 AUTHENTICITY**

*Albany Snake Run Skateboard Park* has very high authenticity.

Much of the original fabric of the skate park remains intact, the only alterations to the structure has been the addition of 'vertical walls' in some areas.

### 13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentation for this place is based on the heritage assessment completed by the State Heritage Office in August 2015, with amendments and/or additions by the State Heritage Office and the Register Committee.

#### 13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

*Albany Snake Run Skateboard Park (1976)* is a reinforced concrete downhill skateboard track, set within a 1.25 hectare park.

The origin of Skateboarding can be traced back to the 1950s in the USA, where it was developed as an alternative activity for times when the surf was poor. Surfers attached clay wheels to wooden boards and rode them down streets, slopes and embankments to emulate surf conditions. These new 'skateboards' enable them to make the same types of moves and turns on concrete that they would on the water.<sup>1</sup>

Although the popularity of the new sport grew in the early 1960s, by the mid-1960s it had all but faded. At the time it was considered an extremely dangerous activity and the boards were hard to control.<sup>2</sup>

This all changed in the early 1970s, following the invention of polyurethane wheels in 1972. These new plastic wheels were faster, increased traction, allowed for greater creativity and enabled a whole new set of moves to be employed.<sup>3</sup> As a consequence, skateboarding rapidly became a worldwide phenomenon and skateboard manufacturers were eager to promote the sport.<sup>4</sup> Popular skateboarders were sponsored by big brands such as Coca-Cola and Levis, and travelled the globe demonstrating the capabilities of the skateboard. Slalom and freestyle (acrobatics/ tricks on a flat surface) were the first styles of skateboarding to be adopted,<sup>5</sup> and competitions allowed the world's elite skateboarders to showcase their skills to the masses.

In Australia, skateboarding became popular in the early 1970s simultaneously with the USA. Sharing a similar surfing culture, its surfing youth were also seeking a new pastime for when the surf was not good.

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- 1 Skateboardingmagazine.com, 'The Evolution of Skateboarding – A History from Sidewalk Surfing to Superstardom', sourced from <http://www.skateboardingmagazine.com/the-evolution-of-skateboarding-a-history-from-sidewalk-surfing-to-superstardom/> Accessed on 4 May 2015. About Sports, 'A Brief History of Skateboarding', sourced from [http://skateboard.about.com/cs/boardscience/a/brief\\_history.htm](http://skateboard.about.com/cs/boardscience/a/brief_history.htm) Accessed on 4 May 2015. 'Tic Tac 2 Heelflip: Australia's skateboarding history [videorecording]', Mike Hill, Director, Stephen Hill, Producer (Australia, White House Productions: 2001).
  - 2 About Sports, 'A Brief History of Skateboarding', sourced from [http://skateboard.about.com/cs/boardscience/a/brief\\_history.htm](http://skateboard.about.com/cs/boardscience/a/brief_history.htm) Accessed on 8 July 2015.
  - 3 Skateboardingmagazine.com, 'The Evolution of Skateboarding – A History from Sidewalk Surfing to Superstardom', sourced from <http://www.skateboardingmagazine.com/the-evolution-of-skateboarding-a-history-from-sidewalk-surfing-to-superstardom/> Accessed on 4 May 2015. Public Skatepark Development Guide, 'Brief History of Skateparks', sourced from <http://publicskateparkguide.org/vision/brief-history-of-skateparks/> Accessed on 4 May 2015. 'Tic Tac 2 Heelflip: Australia's skateboarding history [videorecording]', Mike Hill, Director, Stephen Hill, Producer (Australia, White House Productions: 2001).
  - 4 'Russ Howell Skateboards, Biography', sourced from <http://www.skatewhat.com/russhowell/WebPage-Biography.html> Accessed on 8 July 2015.
  - 5 'A Little Skateboard History', sourced from <http://skatopia.org/2015/03/a-little-skateboard-history/> Accessed on 8 July 2015.

As the sport became more mainstream, the demand for purpose-built skateboarding facilities grew. The dangers of skateboarding in the streets and mixing with traffic was a real concern, and the alternative for skateboarding was often public places with steep walls and banks, such as boat ramps, irrigation channels and empty swimming pools.<sup>6</sup> Some of Sydney's' first skateboarders were known to use the boat ramp at Sydney Harbour.<sup>7</sup>

Australia's first purpose-built skate park was constructed in January 1976 in Western Australia's southern town of Albany. This skate park, now known as *Albany Snake Run Skateboard Park*, is thought to be the second oldest surviving skate park in the world.<sup>8</sup>

In 1975, students from Albany High School established a Skateboard Track Committee with the objective of building a skateboard track in Albany. The students, aged between 13 and 17 years, started raising funds with their parents help, and within three months had raised \$3,000. The Town of Albany was so impressed with the students, that they contributed an additional \$10,000 to the project, as well donating a sloping block of land near the High School.<sup>9</sup> The donated land was formerly the site of a series of old gravel quarries.

The layout of the 140 metre long track generally followed the excavation area of the main gravel pit. In some areas sandfill was introduced to build up the inside bank and increase the slope of the track. The track was specifically designed to suit a variety of skill levels, with an average slope of 1 in 10. The centre line of the track is a very modest slope which enables beginners to use to track and not travel fast. Steeper sections on either side on the central line allow the more advanced users to pick up speed. Three sharp bends in the track curve upwards to the vertical, and are used by skaters for a variety of tricks.

Construction of the downhill concrete track began in January 1976, and was completed by the end of the month.<sup>10</sup>

The track was officially opened in February 1976. The reigning United States National skateboard Champion, Russ Howell, was guest of honour at the opening and the publicity went worldwide.<sup>11</sup>

Howell was an American skateboarder who specialised in 'freestyle' skateboarding. He was most well-known for his gymnastic moves, including handstands, handstand jumps, and 360 degree spinning. In the summer of 1975-76, Howell toured Australia, including a visit to Albany for the opening of *Albany Snake Run Skateboard Park*. Howell is considered to be the most influential

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<sup>6</sup> Albany Advertiser, 25 June 1975, p. 16. Cited in Albany Historical Society letter to City of Albany, 24 October 2011. 'Tic Tac 2 Heelflip: Australia's skateboarding history [videorecording]', Mike Hill, Director, Stephen Hill, Producer (Australia, White House Productions: 2001).

<sup>7</sup> 'Tic Tac 2 Heelflip: Australia's skateboarding history [videorecording]', Mike Hill, Director, Stephen Hill, Producer (Australia, White House Productions: 2001).

<sup>8</sup> Snyder, Craig B., *A Secret History of the Ollie Volume 1: 1970s* (Black Salt Press, Florida United States: 2015), p. 77.

<sup>9</sup> 'Summary of History and Development of Albany Skateboard Track', by J.L Macaulay, President Albany Skateboard Club, May 1978.

<sup>10</sup> 'Summary of History and Development of Albany Skateboard Track', by J.L Macaulay, President Albany Skateboard Club, May 1978.

<sup>11</sup> 'Summary of History and Development of Albany Skateboard Track', by J.L Macaulay, President Albany Skateboard Club, May 1978.

skating personality to have visited Australia up to that point, demonstrating skill and tricks that had previously been unseen in Australia. Following his return to America, Howell won the World Invitation Championship in 1976 and World Open Championship in 1977, and became a world record holder of the most skateboard spins (35, although he had a personal best of 163) and the longest skateboard handstand.<sup>12</sup>

Howell considered *Albany Snake Run Skateboard Park* “the best track I’ve ever seen”, noting the variety of angles, lifts and drops a real challenge for its users.<sup>13</sup>

The track was ‘an outstanding success’.<sup>14</sup> Howell took photographs and recorded film while in Albany, and upon his return to the US, the design was believed to have been used as the basic concept for other skateboard tracks in the US.<sup>15</sup>

In January 1979, Australia’s first National Skateboard Championship was held at *Albany Snake Run Skateboard Park*.<sup>16</sup>

Although *Albany Snake Run Skateboard Park* continued to be well used, by the late 1970s, the slalom and downhill styles of skating had become less popular as ‘vert skateboarding’ (skating on a vertical incline) became the focus of the industry. This meant that very few slalom skate parks were constructed.

In the early 1980s, ramps and bowls became the more common and favoured type of skate park. These designs allowed more difficult tricks to be performed, as well as series of tricks to be executed.<sup>17</sup> An additional ‘vertical wall’ was later added to *Albany Snake Run Skateboard Park* to increase the height and make the track more difficult. The date of these works is not known.

In the 2000s, three new skate parks were built in Albany, starting with the Lake Weerlara Lockyer Bowl, a beginner’s style bowl, in 2004, followed by the more substantial Sanford Road Skate & BMX Park in 2007 and the Mill Park Skate Park (Little Grove) in 2008. The Sandford Road and Mill Park facilities were both modern facilities aimed at the more experienced skater. Sandford Road included tight configurations of bowls and quarter pipes and Mill Park included banks, grind rails and a grind box. Both Sandford and Mill Park were constructed in response to the increased number of skaters skating along roads and in car parks. Both parks were designed to replicate the ‘street style’ of skateboarding that was popular, and that *Albany Snake Run Skateboard Park* was unable to provide.<sup>18</sup>

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12 ‘Russ Howell Skateboards, Biography’, sourced from <http://www.skatewhat.com/russhowell/WebPage-Biography.html> Accessed on 8 July 2015. ‘Tic Tac 2 Heelflip: Australia’s skateboarding history [videorecording]’, Mike Hill, Director, Stephen Hill, Producer (Australia, White House Productions: 2001).

13 ‘The Champ’, *The Albany Advertiser*, 19 February 1976, p. 1.

14 ‘Summary of History and Development of Albany Skateboard Track’, by J.L Macaulay, President Albany Skateboard Club Albany Skateboard Club, May 1978.

15 ‘Summary of History and Development of Albany Skateboard Track’, by J.L Macaulay, President Albany Skateboard Club Albany Skateboard Club, May 1978.

16 ‘Addendum to Summary of History and Development of Albany Skateboard Track’, by J.L Macaulay, President Albany Skateboard Club Albany Skateboard Club, May 1978.

17 ‘Russ Howell Skateboarding’s First Champion’, Sourced from <http://www.skateboardingheritage.org/skateboardinghalloffame/russhowell/> Accessed on 8 July 2015. ‘Tic Tac 2 Heelflip: Australia’s skateboarding history [videorecording]’, Mike Hill, Director, Stephen Hill, Producer (Australia, White House Productions: 2001).

18 ‘SK8 & BMX Zone’ City of Albany. Sourced from <http://albany.wa.gov.au/your-community/youth-services/sk8-bmx-zone/> Accessed on 16 July 2015. Phone conversation between Tammy Flett, City of Albany and Sian Ferraz, State Heritage Office on 16 July 2015.

In 2015 *Albany Snake Run Skateboard Park* is entered in Guinness World Records as the oldest surviving skate park in the world,<sup>19</sup> however it is thought that the oldest surviving skate park is actually located in Cannon's Creek, Porirua, New Zealand, and was opened in 1974.<sup>20</sup>

In 2015, *Snake Run Skateboard Park, Albany* continues to be well used by the population of Albany. The track remains substantially unchanged apart from the additional 'vertical walls'.

### 13.2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

*Albany Snake Run Skateboard Park* (1976) is a reinforced concrete downhill skateboard track, set within a 1.25 hectare park located at Mt Clarence in Albany. It is surrounded all sides by residential development and is located near (approximately 500m) to Albany High School.

The one way track is approximately 140 metres in length, ranging from six to eight meters in width and ending in a circular bowl surrounded by low walls between three and four metres high.

The 100mm thick concrete track generally follows the excavation area of the old gravel pit that once occupied the site. Sandfill was introduced on the inside bank to increase the slope of the track.

The later 'vertical wall' addition is evident on the first bend in the track.

*Albany Snake Run Skateboard Park* appears to be in good condition, and is well maintained by the City of Albany. The place continues to be used for its original intended purpose, as a skate park, and much of the original fabric appears to remain intact.

### 13.3 COMPARATIVE INFORMATION

*Albany Snake Run Skateboard Park* (1976) is a reinforced concrete downhill skateboard track, set within a 1.25 hectare park. It was the first purpose-built skate park in Australia, and is thought to be the second oldest surviving skate park in the World.

Research to identify the world's first skate parks reveals very few results. The sport originated in the United State of America in the 1950s, so many of the earliest examples were located there. However, due to the popularity of the sport rising and falling during this early period, many of the earliest skate parks were also demolished within this same period.<sup>21</sup>

Numerous skateboard and skate park histories consider the world's first skate park to be *Surf City in Tucson, Arizona, USA*, opened 3 September 1965.<sup>22</sup> The

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19 Research, including correspondence with Guinness World Records, has been unable to confirm when the skate park was first entered in the Guinness World Records.

20 Snyder, *A Secret History of the Ollie* (2015), p. 73.

21 'Bro Bowl: Historic 1970s skatepark & Tampa Landmark', sourced from <http://www.brobowl.org/about/history/> Accessed on 4 May 2015.

22 Ben Marcus, *The Skateboard: The Good, The Rad, and The Gnarly. An Illustrated History* (2011), p. 90, sourced from <https://books.google.com.au/books?id=NxembYuScL8C&pg=PA90&lpg=PA90&dq=%E2%80%9Csurfing+%E2%80%93+tucson+style%E2%80%9D,+tucson+daily+citizen,+september+2,+1965&source=bl&ts=MJLBS1-uzE&sig=6AQz1qz4LAziSxxGs9tUyEhfeU8&hl=en&sa=X&ei=zgZHVe6pK8S1mwXFxoCQBA&ved=0CC>



138-foot (42 metres) concrete skateboard runway has some similarities to *Snake Run Skateboard Park, Albany* in that both are one-way downhill ramps.<sup>23</sup> Research has been unable to confirm whether this place is extant. No record of the place remaining operational or otherwise exists, which suggests that it is not extant in 2015.

It is known that other skate parks were built in the 1960s; however, it is difficult to identify specific examples for a number of reasons. Few early skate parks were well known enough to be recorded. Many were opened and closed within a year, and without much publicity, and with only the locals knowing of their existence, these places gradually fell into disuse and were demolished.<sup>24</sup>

One well known 1960s skate park was *Kelso, Washington, USA*, opened in April 1966. The 600-foot (183 metres) sloping and looping plywood track was built on stilts over a cushion of sand. The track wasn't very popular, and was open for less than two years before being torn down.<sup>25</sup>

During the 1970s, as the sport became popular again, more skate parks were established. A 2015 history of skateboarding study identifies 458 skate parks as being built in the 1970s in the United States and across the world. Only 30 of these parks are still extant today.<sup>26</sup>

The oldest surviving skate park is thought to be in Cannon's Creek, Porirua, New Zealand. This park was opened in 1974 and shares some similarities to *Albany Snake Run Skateboard Park* as a 'giant tar snake run'. It is accredited as the world's first public skate park, run as a free, unsupervised, skate-at-your-own-risk facility.<sup>27</sup>

The second oldest skate park in the world, and the first skate park to be built in Australia, was *Albany Snake Run Skateboard Park*.

According to a 2015 history of skateboarding, the skate park is thought to be the world's first community-built skate park (having been established by Albany High School students), and was the first known park to incorporate both a downhill snake run as well as some vertical areas.<sup>28</sup> The combination of these two elements have likely contributed to the parks continued popularity and ongoing success.

A search of the State Heritage Office database for skate parks, or similar facilities, produces no results. No other skate parks appear to be entered on heritage inventories or registers across Australia.

Research suggests that there are just two heritage listed skate park in the world:

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[kQ6AEwAg#v=onpage&q=%E2%80%9Csurfing%20%E2%80%93%20Tucson%20Style%E2%80%9D%20Tucson%20Daily%20Citizen%20September%20201965&f=false](http://www.servinghistory.com/topics/Skateparks::sub::History) Accessed on 4 May 2015. Serving History, 'Skateparks: History', sourced from <http://www.servinghistory.com/topics/Skateparks::sub::History> Accessed on 4 May 2015.

23 Image reproduced in Marcus, *The Skateboard* (2011), p. 90.

24 Marcus, *The Skateboard* (2011), p. 90.

25 The Daily News Online, 'Kelso was a skatepark pioneer in the 1960s', sourced from [http://tdn.com/news/kelso-was-a-skatepark-pioneer-in-the-s/article\\_8af59b06-6433-51db-8ea5-f99e4fbd00f0.html](http://tdn.com/news/kelso-was-a-skatepark-pioneer-in-the-s/article_8af59b06-6433-51db-8ea5-f99e4fbd00f0.html) Accessed on 4 May 2015.

26 Snyder, *A Secret History of the Ollie* (2015), pp. 852-859.

27 Snyder, *A Secret History of the Ollie* (2015), p. 75.

28 Snyder, *A Secret History of the Ollie* (2015), p. 77.



- *Bro Bowl, Florida, USA* - Added to the USA's National Register of Historic Places in 2013. Built in 1978, it is recognised as one of the last 70s era snake parks in the world, and is one of the only to remain completely intact.<sup>29</sup>
- *The Rom, London, England* - Grade II heritage listed in 2014, it is the first and only heritage listed skate park in Europe. This 8,000sq m park was constructed in 1978, based on Californian skate parks. It is recognised as being the best of a small number of British skate parks that still survive from the early heyday of the skating boom.<sup>30</sup>

*Albany Snake Run Skateboard Park* predates both of these places.

The above evidence suggests that *Snake Run Skateboard Park, Albany* is significant as the oldest skate park in Australia and the second oldest the world.

#### 13.4 KEY REFERENCES

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#### 13.5 FURTHER RESEARCH

Further research may confirm whether *Albany Snake Run Skateboard Park* was the first community-built skate park in the world.

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<sup>29</sup> 'Bro Bowl: Historic 1970s skatepark & Tampa Landmark', sourced from <http://www.brobowl.org/about/history/> Accessed on 4 May 2015.

<sup>30</sup> The Guardian, 'The Rom, Hornchurch, becomes first skatepark in Europe to get heritage status', sourced from <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2014/oct/29/the-rom-hornchurch-first-skatepark-europe-listed-status> Accessed on 4 May 2015.