

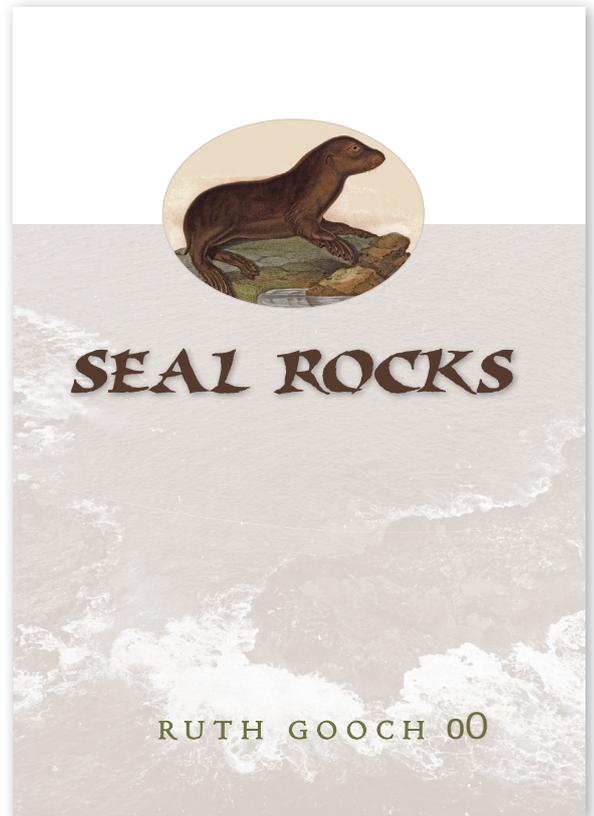
SEAL ROCKS

RUTH GOOCH

Seal Rocks is a wild, rocky outcrop on the margins of Western Port and Bass Strait. The two islands, pocket-handkerchief in size, are separated by a narrow channel, and the stories and myths that swirl about them are echoed in the turbulence of those waters.

Seals and sea birds visit the Rocks to breed, and it was the bounty of the seals that attracted early sealing gangs, just as Aboriginal hunters were drawn to nearby Phillip Island for game and shellfish. The sealers' campsites were an early place of contact between the two peoples, and this book questions the pervasive image of brutal sealer and exploited Aboriginal woman.

The heyday of sealing lasted barely three decades, and was succeeded by a flourishing fishing industry. Fishermen blamed the recovering seal population for reducing their catch, and a long and rancorous bureaucratic battle was waged. Again, this book sorts fact from myth – and in doing so it catches the local and personal detail within the broader currents of Victoria's coastal history.



Ruth Gooch researches and writes on topics related to Western Port and Bass Strait. Her previous book, *Frontier French Island* (2006), was a finalist for an FAW Melbourne University Publishing Award.



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