LEAD WORKINGS, SOUTH WEST ZONE, HORSESHOE BEND

Lead workings, South West Zone, Horseshoe Bend - Exit race from sluiced bench

Lead workings, South West Zone, Horseshoe Bend - Sluiced trench following incised gutter (lead)

Location

COOPERS CREEK ROAD WALHALLA, BAW BAW SHIRE

Municipality

BAW BAW SHIRE

Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H8122-0116

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

Local significance. Historical & archaeological significance, associated with a site showing well-preserved gold mining features of a type that are commonly represented in the mountain goldfields of Eastern Victoria.

Heritage Study/Consultant	Heritage Victoria (Projects) - Horseshoe Bend Gold Mining Area : Historic Heritage Survey, Rob Kaufman / LRGM Services, 2010;
Archaeological Significance	Archaeological significance is associated with the site showing well-preserved gold mining features of a type that are commonly represented in the mountain goldfields of Eastern Victoria. Potential for further surface and sub-surface remains to be found, including a reported hut site.
Historical Significance	The sluice and tunnel workings on the leads are fairly well-preserved examples of their type, but are commonly represented in mountain goldfields throughout Eastern Victoria and elsewhere. They are of local historical and archaeological significance. It is likely that similar lead workings and remnant cultural features exist in similar environments all along the Thomson River.
Interpretation of Site	The leads at the base of spurs and above the river level appear to be principally stranded leads representing former river channels. They are of limited volume and their exploitation favoured small-scale operations. In general, they could be easily located by river wash and alluvial gold spilling from where they were cut off by the more recent valley. Where shallow, the leads could be extracted by surfacing, trenching or narrow open cut (pit) methods, using ground sluicing. This involved turning auriferous (gold-bearing) ground into narrow trenches containing running water, the gold being extracted in sluice boxes near the heads of the tail races or in the tail races themselves using a carefully stacked rock base that simulated the riffles of a sluice box. The evidence that ground sluicing was favoured for shallow deposits is clear at Horseshoe Bend. Water was brought to the top of the workings in small water races, and traces of some still exist. In addition, several deeply-incised tail races are preserved amongst the diggings, including a substantial rock-lined race in the south zone. Where the leads were more deeply buried, tunneling was the favoured method, considerably reducing the amount of overburden that had to be handled. Auriferous gravels could be barrowed out and treated in adjacent tail-races, or carted down to the river bank for washing in sluice boxes. Waste rock and earth was often stacked underground in disused drives as workings progressed, to reduce the amount that had to be removed to the surface. It could also be used to form pillars to support open ground within the workings. The shafts that exist in most lead diggings at Horseshoe Bend appear principally to have been test holes along the presumed lines of the leads, or prospecting holes outside them. However some may have been working shafts, and some may have been put in to provide ventilation to the tunnel workings below. No underground inspections were undertaken during the field work for this heritage survey. Because the leads were limited in extent, represented a one-off mining resource, and were effectively mined-out in the 1870s, there was no inducement to apply bulk mining methods such as hydraulic sluicing in later eras. But later prospecting or limited mining activities via the adits cannot be ruled out.
Hermes Number	155670
Property Number	

History

SUMMARY HISTORY:

The history of the Horseshoe Bend diggings is unknown, but their story is wrapped in the general accounts of gold mining on the Thomson River. The diggings were mentioned in the Mining Surveyors' Reports of March 1864, following the first rush to the river in early 1864. The report was a good one, with numbers of miners increasing and good wages being made. In October of that year, Constable Michael Feely reported that the Thomson River miners were doing better than their Stringers Creek counterparts. He said they were a -

"*.fine, respectable and agreeable lot of men and won't allow strong drink among them. They have nice gardens well cropped with vegetables on the bank of the river and their huts are quite comfortable*."

In 1870 the diggers struck a lead on the river, near the Thomson River Bridge. Payable results were obtained. In 1871 the Mining Surveyor reported that "*At Cooper's Creek a party are engaged in tunnelling in the bed-rock, to form a tail-race for the purpose of draining the flat, which is supposed to be the old bed of the Thomson River*". By mid-1872 alluvial mining in the district was said to be confined to scattered miners, getting fair returns. In 1877, the bed and banks of the Thomson River were reported to be providing a fairly good living for the miners. The following year creek and river sluicing in the district increased and several parties on the Thomson River were making better than wages. The number of miners on the river increased again in 1879, some parties earning £4 per week per man.

The Mining Surveyor reported in 1880 that "*alluvial mining consists wholly of creek and river mining*". In 1885 the Surveyor reported an increase in alluvial gold production in the district owing to systematic sluicing of the bed of the Thomson River by several parties. Between 1885 and 1887, three companies were sluicing the Thomson River.

The information above presents only a sketchy outline of alluvial mining in the Thomson, but sufficient to see that re-working of the river bed provided consistently good if intermittent returns for decades. However the lead workings are poorly chronicled - only two mentions of leads have been found, in 1870 and 1871, but it is likely that some may be included in the generic 'bank workings'. More information may possibly be hidden in the pages of local newspapers of the time.

The mention in 1879 of a 'deep lead' under a basalt sheet extending away from the Thomson River is unrelated to the leads at Horseshoe Bend.

Principal References: "Gold in the Walhalla Region", Lloyd & Combes, 2010; "Old Walhalla", J Paull, 1963; "Walhalla Goldfield Notes", D Bannear, 1998.

AGE OF WORKINGS:

The small-scale lead workings that exist at the base of all the spurs in this area can be fairly positively dated to the 1870s:

(a) Historical record - the first record found of lead mining on the Thomson River comes from 1870, when a lead was opened near the present bridge on the Walhalla road. By the end of the 1870s and on into the late 1800s, the reports on alluvial mining on the Thomson seem to be about re-working river deposits. Given that the leads were limited in extent, predictable in location and represented a one-off gold resource, a fairly rapid exhaustion of the deposits would be expected, consistent with being mined-out in the 1870s.

(b) Archaeology - artefacts (bottle glass) found around camp sites within the sluice workings are consistent with occupation in the 1870s. The applied finish on a bottle neck found at the camp site in the NW Zone is consistent with the 1870s, but not with the late 1800s, early 1900s or Depression era of the 1930s.

(c) The workings are typical of early lead workings in the 1870s. The method is tunneling and ground sluicing by small parties - faint traces of small head-races are visible in some places, and a nice example of a rock-lined tail race exists in the South Zone. There is no evidence of hydraulic sluicing at these sites.

(d) According to Departmental records, no Gold Mining Leases were taken out over the leads, indicating that works were carried out on claims or amalgamated claims. This is consistent with nineteenth century works, but not necessarily with twentieth century works where leases were often taken out.

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/