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## Hooper's eucalyptus distillery



From left, looking north: Metal stack; remnants of brick boiler housing; gantry for truck-mounted vat; and rail carriage (former eucalyptus cutter's hut).



Brick housing for boiler, removed 2010.



In-ground brick vat.

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### Location

CA 44A Welshs Road, NEILBOROUGH VIC 3570 - Property No 201302

### Municipality

GREATER BENDIGO CITY

### Level of significance

Included in Heritage Overlay

### Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO850

### Heritage Listing

Greater Bendigo City

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### Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

Statement of Significance

What is significant?

Hooper's eucalyptus distillery, established in the 1970s south of Neilborough, extends over a large clearing in the Mallee scrub. The disused distillery, including a dam, metal gantry, metal stack and brick boiler housing, are located to the east of the road access. A large ash dump is to the south of the stack and boiler housing. To the west of the access road is a hut, which was most likely used for accommodation for eucalyptus cutters, and agricultural outbuildings, for the Hoopers' livestock.

Extant site elements include the former boiler housing, which is covered by an open-sided metal-framed enclosure with corrugated galvanized metal roof, a tall metal circular stack (presumed to be a relic of the gold mining industry) and a metal-framed drive-through gantry, as part of the mechanisation of the plant. The motor that powered the pulley is extant, as are timber and platforms to either side. Associated elements at the site include the condensing dam, a timber railway good truck/carriage and an in-ground brick-lined vat. The latter provides evidence of the pre-mechanisation origins of the plant. A large ash dump is to the south of the distilling plant, demonstrated by the absence of any natural growth, a result of the acidity of the burned eucalyptus leaves.

How is it significant?

Hooper's eucalyptus distillery is of local historical and technological significance.

Why is it significant?

Hooper's eucalyptus distillery is historically significant (Criterion A) for its capacity to recall an industry that played a significant role in the economy of the Whipstick, and broader areas of regional Victoria, from the 1890s to the late twentieth century. The harvesting and distilling of eucalyptus was an important source of employment for workers following the decline of mining and became particularly important during the Depression of the 1930s, when there were an estimated 50 distilleries in the Whipstick, the epicentre of the industry in Victoria. By 1986 there were an estimated four operational distilleries in the area. Today, Hooper's eucalyptus distillery is a rare (Criterion B) surviving example of its type. The Hooper's plant was established in the 1970s and adapted to a mechanised system of production in c. the 1950s. It was a long-running operation, being the last distillery in the Whipstick to close, in 2009. Technologically (Criterion F), Hooper's eucalyptus distillery is significant for its capacity to demonstrate aspects of eucalyptus distilling from the pre-World War I period through to the early twenty-first century. The site, with its remnant structures and machinery, and its evocative setting within the natural environs of the Whipstick, recalls the specific technologies developed for an industry based in isolated areas of Victoria, and often run by small-scale operators with limited capital (Criterion D). The site retains evidence of two types of distillation, the traditional approach of in-ground brick-lined vats, and the later post-World War II truck-mounted vat distillation. These two approaches are represented by the brick-lined vat and the gantry that carried the lid of the truck-mounted vat. Other significant remnant elements at the site include the tall circular metal stack, presumed to be a relic of the gold mining industry, the dam, ash dump and remains of the brick boiler housing.

## Theme

4. Transforming and managing the land 5. Building Victoria's industries and workforce

Heritage Study/Consultant Greater Bendigo - Heritage Policy Citations Review, Lovell Chen P/L, 2011;

Construction dates 1970,

Hermes Number 184940

Property Number

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## Physical Description 1

Hooper's eucalyptus distillery is located off Blandford's Road, south of Neilborough. The site extends over a large clearing in the Mallee scrub. The disused distillery, including a dam, metal gantry, metal stack and brick boiler housing, are located to the east of the road access (see aerial view, page 1). The Hoopers' operations were dependent on leaf collected from public land and in 2001 the *Final Report for the Box-Ironbark Forests and Woodland investigation* recommended that all licenses on public land be cancelled by 2007.<sup>19</sup> The Hoopers introduced modern machinery to the industry through the use of mobile steel steaming vat that were mounted onto a truck tray. These vats were driven to the cutting site, filled by mobile harvester and driven back to the still for steaming, where the lid of the vat was sealed and steam introduced from a boiler. The condensate was cooled in pipes that passed through the adjacent dam and the oil collected in a receiver.<sup>20</sup> The spent leaves were then tipped from the truck. A large ash dump is to the south of the stack and boiler housing. To the west of the access road is a hut, used as accommodation for eucalyptus cutters, and agricultural outbuildings - the Hoopers also kept livestock.<sup>21</sup> The emphasis of the following description is on the remains of the eucalyptus distillery.

The former boiler housing is covered by an open-sided metal-framed enclosure with corrugated galvanized metal roof. In 2010, the boiler was removed from the site resulting in the partial demolition of its brick housing. The works exposed the concrete flue that connected it to the tall metal stack. The circular stack, which is presumed to be a relic of the gold mining industry, sits on a brick base, and is supported by three metal props. Adjacent to the former boiler is the metal-framed drive-through gantry, as part of the mechanisation of the plant. As noted above, eucalyptus leaves were distilled in a purpose-built metal vat carried on the tray of a truck. The lid of the container was lowered onto the vat by a pulley system carried on the gantry. The motor that powered the pulley is extant, as are timber and platforms to either side.

Associated elements at the site include the condensing dam, a timber railway carriage and an in-ground brick-lined vat. The latter provides evidence of the pre-mechanisation origins of the plant. A large ash dump is to the south of the distilling plant, demonstrated by the absence of any natural growth, a result of the acidity of the burned eucalyptus leaves. There is no evidence at the site of the large truck-mounted vat.

*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/>*