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# RUSSELLS' WATER RACE

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## Location

LINCOLN GULLY ROAD AND BUSH INN ROAD CABBAGE TREE, HEPBURN SHIRE

## Municipality

HEPBURN SHIRE

## Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

## Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7623-0327

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

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### Interpretation of Site

The race was constructed in the early 1860s to service Russells' alluvial mining claims at Lincoln Gully and Humbug Hill. Water from the race was sold to other miners along the race route and also serviced the domestic needs of miners at Cabbage Tree Flat. The race was reused in the mid 1870s by the Creswick Council to augment the town water supply, and by miners at Mill's Reef in the 1880s. The race continued in use at least until 1913 when it was used by the Russell family for hydraulic sluicing on Slaty Creek. The race is no longer in use, but the original Russells' dam constructed in 1862 has been enlarged and currently contributes to the Creswick water supply.

This site has a high level of archaeological significance.

#### Archaeological Significance

The race is well preserved for its entirety and is a representative example of an 1860s water race that was utilised over several decades for both mining and water supply purposes. Archaeological features include the race alignment, negative cut features, spoil and sediment deposits, dams, diversions, sluice points and potential gauges, flume remains, pipes, and sluice lining materials.

Although water races are common on Victorian Goldfields very few races in Victoria have been documented and mapped in detail and the integrity of remaining goldfield water management complexes is largely under researched.

#### Historical Significance

The site has a HIGH level of historical significance at a local level. The race is associated with the Russell family, prominent figures in the local mining scene and has a rich documentary record. Due to the excellent preservation of a large part of the Creswick goldfield, the intertwined narratives of mining, water supply, environmental consequences and rapidly evolving legislation can be read in the landscape. At a state level the site contributes to broader narratives of water supply and mining (Victorian Historical Theme 4.5 & 4.6) and informs the development of both mining and water management laws for the State of Victoria.

The race system is one of many on the Creswick alluvial goldfield that together make up an important and well preserved cultural landscape of water management. Combined with Creswick's strong forestry education facilities and proximity to Melbourne and Ballarat, an increased awareness in this well preserved mining complex could provide Creswick with excellent educational and tourism opportunities illustrating mining techniques and how mining shaped Victoria's water laws.

Hermes Number

195084

Property Number

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## History

The Russell family played an important role in the early development of water resources on the Creswick alluvial goldfields, and were among the first builders of water races in the district. The two brothers had mining and water interests on numerous creeks and gullies in the area, which often caused conflict with other parties. Substantial archaeological evidence of their activities remains intact, including lengthy races, dams and areas of sluicing. A well preserved race extends from Russell's Dam on Ashwell's Gully around Lincoln Gully and Longs Gully to Humbug Hill. George Russell was born c. 1815 in Dublin, and arrived in Adelaide in 1855 with his wife Maryanne (nee Martin) and their six children. In February 1856 he was elected as a member of the Creswick Local Court, a body which regulated mining disputes under the *Gold Fields Act 1855* (Birrell 1998:34). He promoted social stability on the goldfields, urging other miners to resist the 'migratory fiend that whips you about from diggings to diggings' (*Ballarat Star* 4 Nov. 1856:1). Two years later he was appointed as territorial magistrate for Creswick, serving regularly as a Justice of the Peace (Clarke 1994:34; *Government Gazette* 15 Oct. 1858:1986). He was a socially conscious, forward thinking man. In August 1856 he chaired a meeting of 400 men protesting against the further release of public land to wealthy squatters and on the 4th November 1856 he sent a letter to the *Ballarat Star* regarding miners' apathy and mindless opposition to capitalism and land ownership. Both George and William Russell were blacksmiths by trade, and the brothers worked together for 14 years on their alluvial claims at Creswick, aided by their older sons. George Russell died in Melbourne in 1889 at the age of 74, while his wife Maryanne died at Warrnambool in 1875, aged 61 (Clarke 1994:136- 53).

William Russell, younger brother of George, was born 1817 in Dublin, Ireland, and was transported to Sydney as a convict in 1835. He came to Creswick in late 1852 - early 1853, and married Sarah (Forward) Jeffery at Creswick in 1856 (Clarke 1994:30). The family had 12 children. He was elected as a member of the Creswick Local Court in February 1857. Sarah died of pneumonia at Back Creswick Creek in 1867, aged just 44, while William died two years later, aged 52. William and George Russell purchased shares in the first water privilege on Back Creswick Creek from Davis & Co in 1854, and worked a large claim downstream of the Eaton brothers. They were involved in a major dispute over water privileges on Back Creek involving J. B. Bragg and the Eaton brothers (see Appendix 1 for more detail). Minor disputes were also very common. In 1857, for example, the Russells were involved in a dispute in the Creswick Local Court over the Back Creek race. Mr Guscott argued that the Russells' tail water was filling up his race, but George Russell argued that the portion of race being used by Guscott actually belonged to him (Russell) and was only being lent to Guscott. The latter claimed he had obtained the right to this portion from a party of Germans, previously owned by Edward Mitchell. The portion of race where the damage was done, however, was in fact Russell's portion, which he merely let Guscott use whenever he had sufficient water for his own use, but Russell had never forfeited his right to it. The court ordered both parties to contribute to repairing any damage (*Ballarat Star* 14 November 1857:2). In May 1861 the Russell brothers were in dispute with John Roycraft over Back Creek water privileges was accused of stealing water from Roycraft and Ralph Camden's race by cutting into it at night and draining it into Russell's sluicing works and No. 1 race.

Benjamin Eaton was the manager of the race and used half the water himself and let half to Chinese for £5 per week. George Mason was employed to look after the race for 30 shillings per week due to it being frequently cut off. The case was considered very serious but the charges could not be proven. Bragg and his partners were again in dispute with the Russells in 1864 at the Creswick Warden's Court. They claimed the Russells had interfered with their (Bragg's) Adekate Creek water right, but the case was struck out. The Back Creek area was shared with many Chinese miners. George Russell's attitude to Chinese miners at Creswick was ambivalent. In 1857 he moved a motion in the Creswick Local Court objecting to Chinese applicants for claims, until the Government could give an assurance of preventing an influx of Chinese (Semmens Box 7, Notes on Mining, p.21). Some years later, however, he appealed on behalf of a Chinese party working on Back Creek against accusations that they were damaging the Borough water race. It was agreed to use boxes to convey the Chinese water over the borough race (*Ballarat Star* 22 Sept. 1864).

In the early 1860s the Russells expanded the family mining enterprise by building Russell's Dam in Ashwell's Gully, a minor tributary of Back [Creswick] Creek. It is listed on the Victorian Heritage Inventory as HI 7623-0246. A short race from the headwaters of Slaty Creek fed into the dam from the south-east (VPRS 3730 Unit 14 10 Jan. 1890), while a delivery race brought water to the Russells' alluvial mining claims at Lincoln Gully and Humbug Hill, where they had another dam for sluicing. The race probably also supplied fresh water to Russell's residences at Cabbage Tree Flat. In 1863 George

Russell wrote a long letter to the Argus bemoaning the insecure state of tenure for establishing reservoirs but with good faith announced he has built Russell's Reservoir. Only a few weeks later (unbeknown to Russell at the time of writing) regulations giving security of tenure were passed (The Argus 8 April 1863:6). George and William Russell applied for a 15-year licence for the races and reservoir in 1864, under the 1862 Amending Act. The reservoir covered about 5 acres, and the height of the dam wall from the surface was 18 feet, with a capacity of 11 million gallons (50 ML). The daily inflow was approximately 2 million gallons (9 ML). The brothers claimed to have been in possession of the race for the past four years and the dam for the previous three years, suggesting Russell's Dam was built around 1861 (Creswick Advertiser 2 Dec. 1864:3). The modern Russells Reservoir, which has a capacity of 64 ML and forms part of the Creswick town supply, was built in 1930.

Russells' water race passed around Lincoln Gully, where it entered a small reservoir at around 510 metres asl. The dam was originally part of Bishop's claim around 1857. It was made of clay, about 15 metres long and 2 metres high, and at some time has been breached in the centre. Russell had an alluvial claim here, as well as others at Humbug Hill and sluicing operations on Back Creek. The race then continued along the west side of Lincoln Gully and rounded the spur overlooking Humbug Hill to the west. From this point the construction and flow of races is complicated and uncertain. A likely interpretation, however, is that the Russells sought to bring water to their alluvial claims below Humbug Hill. An initial attempt to direct the water northward straight down the spur may have resulted in a fast flow and erosion. A long detour race was constructed instead, directing water southward into Long Gully, where it entered a dam around 490 metres asl, and then another race flowed north at a lower level (c. 480 metres asl) to bring the water closer to their mining claims and dwelling south of Humbug Hill. The sequence is also confused by the presence of an Italian mining group (Polinelli) working a claim in this area, and the need to accommodate each party's water needs. The dam on Long Gully was a substantial

construction of clay, about 12 metres wide at the base and up to 5 metres in height. The wall is about 50 metres long, and has been breached in the centre. At the base of the breach an iron pipe remains in situ in the rocky bed of the creek. The pipe has an internal diameter of 24 cm (c. 9 1/2 inches), with sections between flanges being 2.76 metres (9 feet) long.

George and William Russell developed a number of sluicing claims at Creswick. One of the largest and earliest of these was at Back Creswick Creek in 1860, near the junction with Lincoln Gully, where an alluvial claim of more than 44 acres was granted to Russell and Party, providing work for 65 men (Semmens, Box 7, Notes on Mining, p.139). The *Ballarat Star* (26 Nov. 1860) reported that Russell had obtained the largest alluvial claim on Creswick, for sluicing purposes at Back Creek; the area for 65 men being 1,947,747 feet (17 ha) and in 1864 Russell's sluicing on Back Creek was causing the Lincoln Gully bridge to sink (*Ballarat Star* 9 June 1864). It is likely that this was known as the Perseverance Sluicing Company (*Creswick Advertiser* 21 June 1861:2). They also had a small alluvial claim on the headwaters of Lincoln Gully, just below Halfway Dam although it is unclear when this dates to. Another area of significant works was on the west side of Humbug Hill above Slaty Creek where the family had connections into the 20th century. Remnants of dams, races and sluiced areas are preserved immediately to the south of Ah Young's gardens, while Henderson (nd:2) refers to a blacksmith site and office nearby, along with a cottage site associated with Mary Metzner, wife of Christie Russell (fourth child of William and Sarah Russell; Clarke 1994: 136). In later years the Russell family were engaged in dredging along Slaty Creek, with a large dredge pit preserved near the Slaty Creek Road. George and William Russell also acquired land in the area during this period. William Russell obtained 20 acres of land south of Back and Adekate Creeks in 1865, while George and his sons took up three adjoining blocks of 20 acres each between Wattle Flat and Dean (Clarke 1994:44). Water was a source of contention between the Russell brothers and the Creswick Council. The Council invited suggestions for a water supply from the community in 1859. Eight suggestions were received, including one from William Russell who urged 'the council to arrange with the owners of water rights at Back Creek, especially those of No 1 and 3 races which alone are supplied with pure water. Either could be extended to the township, and it is probable that the proprietors would supply the town from a mere nominal sum per house per week' (VPRS 3730). It appears the Council ignored this suggestion and in 1864 the council obtained a source of water from Bullarook (Dean) Reservoir. Detailed plans were released and protested by William Russell, as the proposed Government race would run through his lease and would prevent him from mining (Council Minutes 26 April 1864). Russell successfully negotiated alterations to the council race, provided he pay some of the cost. The location of the council race caused further issues and in 1864 Russell appealed on behalf of a Chinese party working on Back Creek against accusations that they were damaging the Borough race. It was agreed to use boxes to convey the Chinese water over the Borough race (*Ballarat Star* 22 Sept. 1864).

According to family historian Gladys Clarke (1994:45), by 1868 George was in poor health and his income from gold mining had diminished so much that he had been unable to earn a living from it since 1864. In 1880 Russells race was being used by the Council, having been given permission to use it from William Howard. The history of the race and dam is not known between 1864 and 1879; however the dam and race were in need of repair by the 1880s so it may have fallen out of use during this time.

A diversion channel is preserved which extends from Russells' race down a spur to the Lincoln Gully Reservoir. This appears to be part of the link between the Russells' water system and that of Bragg and the Creswick council. By 1880 the Council had also obtained Bragg's Dam and races, and they were selling surplus water from Bragg's and Russell's Dams back to Chinese miners. Water from Russell's Dam and the St George's water right was leased in December 1880 to Ha Son (aka Ah Soon) for three years for the sum of £20 cash advance.

In the 1890s the sons of William and George Russell continued to work mining claims around Creswick. A partnership between Chris and Edward Russell, Arthur Wade and John Hutchinson in 1891, for example, worked the Back Creek area near Bragg's race, with permission from the Borough Council (Clarke 1994:70-71). Edward Russell took out lease No.2695 in late 1894 for 15 years, with scope to employ 11 men (*Government Gazette* 5 Oct. 1894). In 1905 the Register of Surveys at Creswick lists Chris Russell and James William Russell applying for surveys of leases No.1276, 4043 and 119 in Jackass Gully, a tributary of Back [Creswick] Creek just west of Eaton's Dam (VPRS 3562). A map from the Register of *Surveys* at Creswick from 1913 also shows clearly that the Russell family still had sluicing interests on Slaty Creek at this time.

In 1928, Albert Russell, the grandson of William Russell, was killed when working on the family's hydraulic sluicing claim at Cabbage Tree Flat. He had put down the nozzle to retrieve a pick when the face of the cut fell and fatally wounded him (*The Argus* 25 Oct. 1928:16).

*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/>*