
BLACK SPUR KOONWARRA

Location

SOUTH GIPPSLAND HIGHWAY KOONWARRA, SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE

Municipality

SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE

Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H8020-0024

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - January 1, 1900

Unfortunately there are no currently excavated structural remains at the Black Spur ridge which would confirm the railway workers camp, such as post-holes or evidence of buildings. There is however written evidence describing the site in this location and a number of historical artefacts relating to railway camps present on site. The exact site usage and chronology has not been established at this point in time, however there is potential for further information to be gathered at a later stage through salvage excavations relating to CHMP 14990. Therefore the archaeological significance of this site is medium.

The cultural heritage significance of the site relates to it being one of the largest infrastructure projects in Victorian history. Implementing the 1884 Railway Construction Act involved the movement and accommodation of large numbers of rail workers. This camp therefore is significant to the railways expansion works as well as the development of Koonwarra as a town as a flow on effect of increased access to the area.

The scientific significance of the site lies in its relation to railway expansions throughout Victoria in the late 19th Century, as well as the interaction between indigenous Aboriginal people and European settlers in the South Gippsland region more widely. Currently there is documentary evidence indicating the relationship between Aboriginal and European people in the immediate Koonwarra area, particularly for the time period of the railway construction during the 1890's.

The site, being a spur bordered by Tarwin River West Branch, Black Spur Creek and swamp areas is covered by open grass areas and native vegetation, thus giving it aesthetic significance.

The site has social/ spiritual significance to both Europeans and Aboriginals due to its shared historical land use.

Hermes Number 201585

Property Number

History

Access to Koonwarra was transformed in the late 19th century with the construction of the Great Southern Railway, also known as the South Gippsland line, which was, at first, primarily a tourist route but which provided an important connection for small towns in southern Gippsland. This was an extension of the line built from Melbourne to Dandenong, which was progressively extended during the late 19th century, first to Cranbourne (1888), then to Nyora and Loch (1890), Korumburra and Leongatha (1891) and to Port Albert, passing Koonwarra, in 1892, with an additional branch line built to Woodside in 1921. The grades book for the Dandenong to Port Albert line contains details on the railway and its infrastructure, including the arrangement of trestle bridges at Koonwarra.

One of the camps associated with the railway's construction in 1891-1892 was situated at Black Spur. This site is said to have been located on the east side of the highway, opposite Caithness Road, in an area known as 'Camp Hill' (Murray 1988: 36, referenced in Clark 2001: 14). Approximately 200 men camped there in tents, and local businesses were established to provision the camp, for example, the hotel that opened in Koonwarra at around this time. The arrival of the railway line, which included a station at Koonwarra, was decisive in the establishment of the town. A store and mechanics institute were established in 1891 and 1892 respectively, a recreation reserve was opened in 1899, a timber church constructed in 1903 and a school was built in 1913; and Anglican church was built in 1930 (Victorian Places 2015). The village had a population of 176 in 1921, 200 in 1947 and 264 in 1961 (Victorian Places 2015). The railway was operational for almost a hundred years, but from 1981 regular passenger services to Leongatha and beyond ceased, although freight trains continued to operate into the 1990s. The Koonwarra section of the line was dismantled in 1994 and in 1998 the Great Southern Rail Trail, a walking and cycling track was opened.

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/>