

# MURCHISON PRISONER OF WAR CAMP



Description diagram.JPG



2017\_Figure eight pond\_F15.jpg



2017\_Collapsed latrine pits\_F8.jpg



2017\_Concrete floor slabs\_F8.jpg



2017\_Figure eight pond\_F15.jpg



1949 aerial overlaid with present day image.jpg



2017\_Italian memorial relocated from Camp 13.jpg



2017\_Kormoran memorial\_F11.jpg



2017\_Sentry box\_F2.jpg



Sketch by Hans-Wolter von Gruenewaldt.jpg



Sketches by Hans-Wolter von Gruenewaldt.jpg



2017\_Southern Gaol\_F17.jpg



2017\_Water treatment  
plant\_F4.jpg



2017\_Guards Quarters  
steps\_F13.jpg

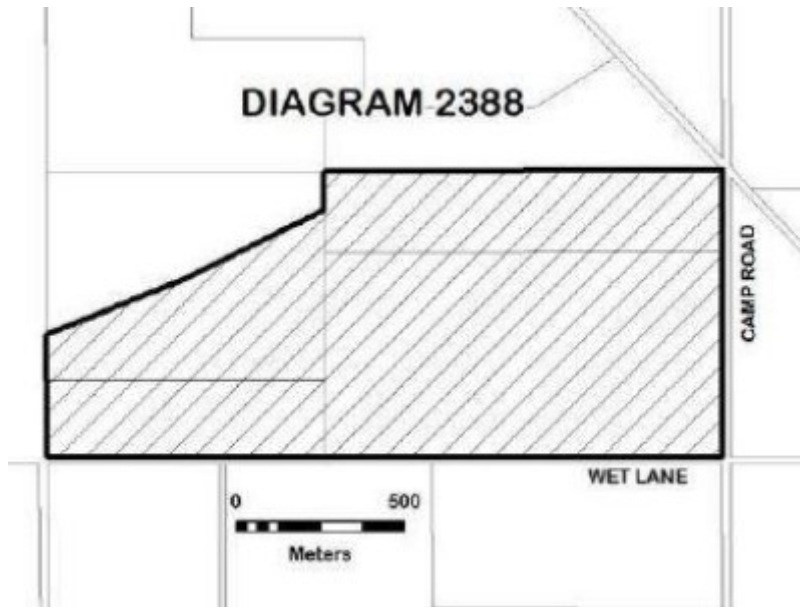


Diagram 2388.JPG

## Location

410-510 WET LANE MURCHISON, GREATER SHEPPARTON CITY

## Municipality

GREATER SHEPPARTON CITY

## Level of significance

Registered

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H2388

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO57

## VHR Registration

October 11, 2018

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

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### Statement of Significance

Last updated on - October 12, 2018

#### WHAT IS SIGNIFICANT?

Murchison Prisoner of War (POW) Camp including all above ground and subsurface features, deposits and artefacts and plantings.

#### HOW IS IT SIGNIFICANT?

The Murchison POW Camp is of historical and archaeological significance to the State of Victoria. It satisfies the following criterion for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register.

##### Criterion A

Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's cultural history.

##### Criterion B

Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Victoria's cultural history.

##### Criterion C

Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Victoria's cultural history.

#### WHY IS IT SIGNIFICANT?

Murchison POW Camp is significant at the State level for the following reasons:

Murchison POW Camp is historically significant as the primary POW facility located in Victoria during the Second World War. The camp was established in 1941 and held some 2,000 Italian, 1,300 German and 185 Japanese prisoners captured during the conflict. The Murchison POW Camp demonstrates the strong commitment by the Australian government to upholding the rules of the Geneva Conventions. The Camp is associated with significant Second World War events, including the sinking of the HMAS Sydney by the German Raider Kormoran, the North African campaign, and the Japanese escape from Cowra in NSW. [Criterion A]

Murchison POW Camp is uncommon, being one of a small number of facilities established to detain Prisoners of War in Victoria during the Second World War. [Criterion B]

Murchison POW Camp is significant for its potential to contain archaeological remains, features and deposits relating to the operation of the camp. Valuable information is likely to be yielded about the lives of the prisoners and their guards; construction and phases of the buildings; and the operations of the camp. [Criterion C]

## Permit Exemptions

### General Exemptions:

General exemptions apply to all places and objects included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR). General exemptions have been designed to allow everyday activities, maintenance and changes to your property, which

don't harm its cultural heritage significance, to proceed without the need to obtain approvals under the Heritage Act 2017.

Places of worship: In some circumstances, you can alter a place of worship to accommodate religious practices without a permit, but you must **notify** the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria before you start the works or activities at least 20 business days before the works or activities are to commence.

Subdivision/consolidation: Permit exemptions exist for some subdivisions and consolidations. If the subdivision or consolidation is in accordance with a planning permit granted under Part 4 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and the application for the planning permit was referred to the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria as a determining referral authority, a permit is not required.

Specific exemptions may also apply to your registered place or object. If applicable, these are listed below. Specific exemptions are tailored to the conservation and management needs of an individual registered place or object and set out works and activities that are exempt from the requirements of a permit. Specific exemptions prevail if they conflict with general exemptions.

Find out more about heritage permit exemptions [here](#).

### Specific Exemptions:

Permit Exemptions

#### Theme

#### 7. Governing Victorians

Construction dates	1941,
Heritage Act Categories	Registered place, Registered archaeological place,
Other Names	MURCHISON POW CAMP 13,
Hermes Number	5592
Property Number	

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### History

#### Establishment

In May 1941 the Australian Government agreed to accept Prisoners of War (POWs) from Middle East, and in May 1943 approved plans to accept further POWs from India. Over the course of the Second World War a total of 25,720 POWs were detained in Australia, including 18,432 Italian, 1,651 German, 5,637 Japanese. In this time Australian residents and overseas civilians were also detained. A total of 16,798 aliens were interned, of whom 8,921 were Australian residents. The remainder of the internees were held on behalf of other Allied Governments and included Italians, Germans and Japanese civilians.

During the Second World War there were nineteen camps throughout Australia housing POWs and civilian internees. Seven camps were established in North Central Victoria, and of these three housed POWs. Murchison was the largest POW camp in Victoria and Australia and was purpose built.

The Murchison POW Camp was established in 1941 by the Australian Government on pastoral land owned by the Hammond family. The detention of POWs in Australia was governed by the Geneva Conventions, which

dictated that ranks were treated on the same basis as Australian garrison troops, and prisoners were provided with access to their national food and supplied equipment for boot making, tailoring, laundering, and haircutting.

The site for the camp was chosen because of its rural location, proximity to water, and access to a branch of the Shepparton railway line from Murchison East. Prisoners arrived by train and were marched from Hammond siding to the camp.

#### Construction of the camp

Prisoners were held in a twelve-sided complex divided by bisecting roads into four compounds - A, B, C & D. Each compound was encircled by two rows of barbed wire with coiled barb wire between. Elevated guard towers were manned by armed soldiers, with search lights patrolling the perimeter at night. The administration headquarters were situated on the east side of the prison complex and the guards' quarters on the western side. Two cell blocks were situated outside of the Prisoner Compound.

Each prison compound was built to a similar pattern. The wedge-shaped centres contained the amenity buildings - workshops, recreation halls, mess huts, kitchens, canteens, offices, laundries, communal showers and latrines. Prisoner accommodation was located near the outer perimeters of the compounds. The prisoners were initially housed in tents, and later built huts themselves - 20m x 6m timber framed buildings clad with galvanised iron. The camp had three sports fields. After the Cowra outbreak in August 1944, over a hundred Japanese prisoners were transferred to Murchison. In response security was increased and two concrete machine-gun emplacements were built.

The Prisoners at Murchison POW Camp constructed numerous structures and features. Italian prisoners constructed two stone gateway piers and a stone sentry box at the entrance to the administration headquarters. German prisoners constructed two memorials - one in Compound B (an Iron Cross on top of a stone cairn) in memory of battalion commander who fell in action at Tobruk; and the other, a stone cairn with iron cross and eagle, was constructed in Compound C by survivors of the Kormoran. This cairn was later relocated elsewhere in the camp, and was restored in 1995 by the German community.

The Italians erected a memorial (a stone cairn with Fascist cross and eagle) to their fallen comrades in Compound C which was taken down in 1968 and moved to the Italian Ossario (Australia's official Italian war cemetery) at Murchison. Prisoners also constructed garden plots in geometric shapes, ornamental wells, and a figure eight fish pond. When a former German POW visited his compound B in 1987, he found small Eucalypt trees he had planted in straight rows had grown in height to about 10 metres.

#### Operation of the camp

Behind the wire, the prisoners managed their own affairs. There were numerous escapes, shootings, a drowning, a knife murder, a hanging, bashings, attempted suicides, and an attempted massive Nazi outbreak. The latter incident occurred in mid-1942 and involved nearly 2,000 Nazis who intended to establish a second front in Australia for infiltration and sabotage. The escape failed after the discovery under a store hut of a 15ft shaft with a ladder descending to a 240 yards long tunnel lit by electricity.

German officers were transferred to Dhurringile and Italian officers to a new camp (Myrtleford Camp No. 5) built at Whorouly. In 1942, Camp 5 had 589 officer POWs and their orderlies in two compounds - Compound A holding Fascists and Compound B, was for the non-Fascists. Located on freehold land, current aerial photographs show there are still extant building slabs, exotic trees and a circular sewerage treatment plant.

Guarding duties were carried out by men drawn from local Citizen Military Force reservists. An article in the Shepparton Advertiser suggests that at least one Aboriginal man was involved in the guard force. On average, there was one guard to every five or so inmates, working around the clock, on shifts of two hours on and four hours off. The Australian authorities also placed great emphasis on rehabilitation rather than suppression. Prisoners were to encourage working parties, sports, hobbies and gardening in camps.

At the Murchison Camp, prisoners grew vegetables for their own and their guards' meals on irrigated land. The Geneva Convention prohibited the employment of prisoners in works associated with military operations or of a hazardous nature. Accordingly, prisoners were employed in forestry work, food production and the maintenance of transport infrastructure. A logging camp employing 250 Italian POWs, known as Camp No. 6, was established at nearby Graytown. In late 1943, Italy surrendered and joined the Allies. In March 1944, Italian POWs were fingerprinted before being released from camps throughout Australia for rural employment on farms, orchards

and rice growing areas. Italian POWs worked over a large area of Victoria. Prisoners were driven to work on farms and returned to transit camps at night. They were given a midday meal and paid 1/3d per day. Many returned after the war and became naturalised citizens.

### Winding up of the Camp

Germany surrendered on 7th May 1945 and Japan on 2nd September 1945. Japanese POWs were the first to leave in early 1946. On 21 January 1947, a shuttle service of trains to and from Hammond Siding took away 2,400 POWs and internees, mostly German, to board the Orantes leaving Port Melbourne for Germany. The German Afrika Corps Memorial in Compound B was demolished by the German POWs in 1947 when they were leaving the camp.

The camp was re-used to house contractors working on the Cattinach Canal. After this use, all the huts, mess halls and hospitals were moved away to be used in surrounding towns as dance halls, homes, sheds. The land was sold, returned to farm land, and today is subdivided into four blocks, with three different owners.

### War Cemeteries for POWs

The importance of the area to Australia's war history is demonstrated through the creation of two of the nation's three foreign war cemeteries. The Italian War Cemetery (or Ossario) is at Murchison. Italian prisoners who died in Camp 13 now lie in the Murchison Ossario. Camp deaths include Italian prisoner No. 47037, Capitano Antonio Colletti and Carmelo Caraccioli. The Italian memorial erected in POW Compound C moved to the Ossario in 1969. Its rebuilding was done with changes - the original Fascist Cross was replaced with a map of Italy and the Fascist Eagle with a more neutral ornament.

The German War cemetery (VHR H2347) is located at Tatura. German prisoners who died in Camp 13 were initially buried in the Murchison cemetery, but later the burials were relocated to the Tatura German War Cemetery. Deaths at Camp 13 included Obergefreiter Tobias Tschurtschenthaler who was shot by a guard, and two suicides Obergefreiter Adolf Heintz and Feldwebel Johannes Haubold.

### Key references:

Joyce Hammond, *Walls of Wire Tatura*, Rushworth, Murchison, 1990

David Mitchelhill-Green, *POW Camp No. 13 at Murchison*

Arthur Knee, Notes prepared for a Heritage Council inspection

## Plaque Citation

Built in 1941, the Murchison POW Camp was the largest POW camp in Australia during the Second World War. It is historically and archaeologically significant as a place which provides insight into the experiences of the over 3,000 prisoners who were detained here.

## Assessment Against Criteria

### Criterion

The Murchison POW Camp is of historical and archaeological significance to the State of Victoria. It satisfies the following criterion for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register

### Criterion A

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## Extent of Registration

### NOTICE OF REGISTRATION

As Executive Director for the purpose of the **Heritage Act 2017**, I give notice under section 53 that the Victorian Heritage Register is amended by including a place in the Heritage Register:

Number: H2388

Category: Registered Place; Registered Archaeological Place

Place: Murchison Prisoner of War Camp

Location: 410-510 Wet Lane, Murchison

Municipality: Greater Shepparton City

All of the place shown hatched on Diagram 2388 encompassing all of Lot 2 on Lodged Plan 113159, all of Lot 1 on Lodged Plan 113159, part of Lot 4 on Plan of Subdivision 439182, and Part of Lot 1 on Plan of Subdivision 439182.

Dated: 11 October 2018

STEVEN AVERY

Executive Director

[Victoria Government Gazette G 41 11 October 2018 2163]

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*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/>*