BUCKLAND RIVER ALLUVIAL WORKINGS - OPEN CUT WITH TAIL RACE

Location

OFF BUCKLAND ROAD BUCKLAND AND BUCKLAND RIVER BUCKLAND, ALPINE SHIRE

Municipality

ALPINE SHIRE

Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H8224-0058

Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO14

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - June 28, 2005

The Buckland River Hydraulic Gold Sluicing Paddock consists of an area about 100 metres by 50 metres containing a small sluiced open cut, pebble dumps and a tail race. Water for sluicing would have been delivered to the site by a high pressure pipeline from higher up the river and then directed at the gold bearing deposits above the river. The technology was introduced into Victoria in about 1855 and this particular site, which is one of several along the Buckland River, probably dates from the mid 1860s.

The Buckland River Hydraulic Gold Sluicing Paddock is of historical, archaeological and scientific importance to the State of Victoria.

The Buckland River Hydraulic Gold Sluicing Paddock is historically and scientifically important as a characteristic and well preserved example of an early form of gold mining. Gold mining sites are of crucial importance for the pivotal role they have played since 1851 in the development of Victoria. Hydraulic sluicing of alluvial gold deposits

is an important key ingredient in an understanding of gold mining technology as it was employed in country where water was plentiful and perennial.

The Buckland River Hydraulic Gold Sluicing Paddock is archaeologically important for its potential to yield artefacts and evidence which will be able to provide significant information about the cultural history of gold mining and the gold seekers themselves.

[Source: Victorian Heritage Register.]

Hermes Number 10909

Property Number

History

Heritage Inventory History of Site:
The Buckland River was sluiced for gold from 1855. An estimated 6,000 diggers were swarming up the Buckland River valley by January 1854. Soon after, the rush was abruptly halted by an outbreak of 'colonial fever'. Within a few days, most of the diggers were either dead or had fled. For years afterwards, the Buckland was known as 'The Valley of the Shadow of Death' and was largely shunned by diggers until early in 1857 when there came a great number of Chinese.
On the Ovens River and Morse's and Growler's Creeks in 1860, the quartz mines were the focus of activity; but only nine of the more than 1,200 miners on the Buckland were reef miners. The rest were occupied in sluicing the beds, banks and flats of the river and its tributaries. A network of races wove along either side of the Buckland, and the river's course was already becoming choked with tailings from sluicing claims on the banks. The higher flats were worked by hydraulic sluicing, using large sluice boxes and a strong head of water (hence the water-races), while the waterways and the lower flats were 'paddocked' or stripped of their goldless overburden and the washdirt then raised to the sluice. Small waterwheels drove Californian or elevator pumps to drain the lower claims.
The vast majority of alluvial miners on the Buckland River were Chinese. In what became known as the Buckland Riot ('the most disgraceful of the Victorian riots'), an estimated 2,000 Chinese miners were driven out of the Buckland valley in July 1857 by a mob. Their camps, about 300 tents and 'tenements', stores, and a joss house, were looted and torched, and their possessions destroyed. According to official report next day, 'Broken shovels, cradles, picks, torn garments, ripped up bedding, half-burnt clothing, battered buildings, whole quarters of beef and mutton trodden into the mire, the earth bestrewed with rice, empty sugar bags, and broken tea boxes, were the chief features of the late home of the Celestials.' The Chinese miners were themselves beaten and some, it is claimed, were murdered as they were hounded up the river valley by the mob. Twelve men were charged over the riot: three were found guilty of unlawful assembly and one of riot. The Chinese were dismissed as 'deceitful' and their evidence discredited, as was that of the European wife of one of them, who had herself been beaten by the mob. It is said that the rioters were principally American and Irish miners, who bore the Chinese the strongest enmity, and that the escaping Chinese were aided, and the rioters condemned, by the English and Scottish of the district. After the discovery of reefs in the area in 1860, the Chinese began filtering back to the Buckland, being more confident that they would be left unmolested to work the 'exhausted' alluvial ground.
In 1864, there were close to 2,000 Chinese alluvial miners among a total mining population of 2,500 on the Upper Ovens/Buckland goldfield. Alluvial mining was at that time centred on the Buckland River (1,280 miners), especially the Lower Flat (680). At the end of 1866, the mining registrar wrote of shallow alluvial workings (i.e., sluicing) on the Buckland River: 'This branch of mining gives employment to nearly the whole of the local mining population, and through their labours is produced the larger portion of the gold sent from the entire division, although the Buckland has been opened since 1852, and has been looked on as being worked out.' Soon after, it seemed that the older Buckland workings were indeed becoming exhausted. Some Chinese were leaving, and water-races commanding the best sluicing grounds depreciated in value nearly 50 per cent in 1867. In 1871, more European miners were trying shallow alluvial mining, many Chinese co-operative parties (4 to 12 men) had broken up, and claims were increasingly being worked by cradle. 'In some instances on the Buckland,' wrote the mining registrar, 'the European owners of water-races take sleeping shares in Chinese claims, as compensation for use of water. Water-race property, once so valuable, is now almost worthless, no race would fetch £500 if

sold.' And so shallow alluvial mining on the Buckland wound down.
It is possible that large-scale hydraulic sluicing operations took place on the Buckland (as in other rich alluvial areas) during the last decades of the 19th century, but no record of such operations has been found. According to a report in 1903: 'When the individual miner ceased to make river bed mining remunerative, sand pumps were tried on the Buckland, not with much success, though. The Buckland River wash was unsuitable for the sand pump, 40 per cent of it being too coarse to go through the runner blades. On the other hand, being free of clay, the river turned out to be ideal for bucket dredging. From the turn of the century until 1920, the Buckland River, like all the upper Ovens waterways, was worked by dredge. No doubt hatters and small parties of miners tried their luck on the Buckland during the depression years of the 1930s. The last report found of alluvial working on the Buckland River dates to the late 1950s, when Corrigan and Co. were sluicing on high terrace ground above the river, about 11 km south of Porepunkah.