

---

# Big Hill Historic Area, Big Hill, Reefs & Scenic Roads, STAWELL



SL 001 - Big Hill Historic Precinct, Scenic Drive Road, STAWELL



SL 001b - 1870 Photograph, Stawell Historical Society.

---

## Location

Big Hill, Reefs & Scenic Roads STAWELL, NORTHERN GRAMPIANS SHIRE

## Municipality

NORTHERN GRAMPIANS SHIRE

## Level of significance

Recommended for VHR

## Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7423-0034, H7423-0058

## Heritage Listing

Northern Grampians Shire

---

## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - August 18, 2004

The Statement of Significance is taken from the Register of the National Estate.

Big Hill in Stawell is a cultural landscape that is characterised by its historical associations with gold mining, the supply of fresh water to the township, remembrance of the town's pioneers and the ongoing recreational activities of the community. Significant elements of the western portion of Big Hill comprise the hill itself, the Pioneer Memorial, all the remnants of the 1875-1881 water supply system, the Pioneer plantation, the Apex Arboretum and gates and the Quartz Reef Discovery monument.

The remnants of the 1875-1881 water supply system are important for their association with Stawell's establishment as a permanent and well serviced regional centre. A significant technical achievement in its day, the system provided Stawell's first permanent supply of fresh water. (Criterion A4. Historic Themes: 4.6 Remembering significant phases in the development of settlements, towns and cities; 3.11 Altering the environment [establishing water supplies]; 8.7 Honouring achievement).

Big Hill is a prominent and definitive feature of the Stawell townscape and is thus valued by the local community. It is also an important geographic focus for the community's appreciation of its own heritage, with a range of memorials and commemorative places (Criterion G1).

The Pioneer Memorial, with its domed copper roof and white Corinthian pillars is an outstanding example of the "early-settler" oriented monuments that are common to rural towns and centres. Its dominant position, at the most prominent point on Big Hill, gives it a powerfully symbolic dimension that enhances its relevance to the community.(Criteria D2, G1)

Big Hill is the most prominent and defining feature of the Stawell townscape. This aesthetic effect is further enhanced by the positioning of the Pioneer Memorial in the hill's most prominent place. It is also a highly valued lookout point, for the views that it commands of the surrounding landscape, including the town and the nearby Grampians. (Criterion E1).

Overall Big Hill, Stawell is of **STATE** significance.

Heritage Study/Consultant	Northern Grampians - Shire of Northern Grampians - Stage 2 Heritage Study, Wendy Jacobs, Vicki Johnson, David Rowe, Phil Taylor, 2004;
Hermes Number	111990
Property Number	

---

## Physical Description 1

The Description is taken from the Register of the National Estate.

Big Hill is a cultural landscape that has been shaped considerably by its mining past. Mining is also having a significant impact on the overall appearance of the hill, today. In more recent times (1930s-present day), the Stawell community has actively imbued the landscape with a sense of its own identity and heritage. This is reflected by the installation of various memorials and monuments, including the planting of commemorative trees. The western side of the hill contains the majority of the monuments, the arboretum, the plantation and the water supply remnants. It faces the main part of the town, bounded by Upper Main Street, Fisher Street and Crowlands Road, and is highly visible from many parts of the central business district. From the top of Big Hill, more particularly from the Pioneer Memorial, much of the town is visible and, beyond, one sees the surrounding ranges, including the Grampians. Moving east, the hill's profile becomes less prominent and features many of the archaeological traces of Big Hill's mining past, including mullock heaps and mine shafts.

Within the landscape at Big Hill several key historic themes may be discerned. These are described in turn below.

## Physical Description 2

## MINING

The western portion of Big Hill contains several archaeological features relating to the mining heritage of Big Hill. The Leviathan mine cyanide works, on the eastern periphery of Big Hill, has been assessed as having regional heritage significance by archaeologist David Bannear. Just north of the south-eastern end of Reefs Road on Big Hill is the Leviathan tramway, which once ran from the diggings to the Scotchman's Reef Quartz Crushing Company's battery (now called the Leviathan works). The tramway, possibly established in the late 1860s, runs about 250 metres along a 2 metre high embankment. Although no sleepers or rails are evident, the embankment is paved with stones to create a water resistant surface. While the Leviathan tramway has been recognised as regionally significant, it should ultimately be examined in context with the site of the original Leviathan works, which it serviced. It is located well outside the area denoted as the western portion of Big Hill.

The mining sites on the hill are physical relics that tell of the gold mining industry on Big Hill itself.

### Physical Description 3

#### WATER SUPPLY

While the remains of the early Stawell water supply still exist in places on a much wider scale (extending all the way to Fyans Creek), the evidence on Big Hill marks the ultimate end of the system: the production of a fresh and reliable water supply to the people of Stawell. The remains of the water supply here consist of a reservoir and related spoil mound, a valve house, and an overflow drain.

The No 1 Reservoir is located on the north-western periphery of Big Hill, behind buildings at the northern end of Upper Main Street. It measures 61.5 metres by 55 metres and is up to 12.5 metres deep, designed to hold about 2 million gallons of water. The walls were lined with puddled clay and then cemented. In its current state, the reservoir is empty, and its concrete lining is cracked.

The valve house is a small red brick building with a hipped iron roof, built into the embankment of the No 1 Reservoir. Inlet and outlet pipes run from the rear of the structure inside the reservoir wall. It contains a door and one window, and has a timber stair running up the slope parallel to the south wall, allowing access to the reservoir wall.

A 50 cm wide by 100 cm deep drain runs from the overflow at the western corner of the reservoir 60 metres towards the No 4 Reservoir. According to original plans this drain once ran even further to the south-east, but has since been subsumed by the No 4 Reservoir.

The No 1 Reservoir is now known as the John D'Alton Water Reserve, in recognition of the system's designer. The Stawell community is appreciative of the significance of D'Alton's system. It represents the lengths to which the town's early residents were prepared to go in order to ensure the town's survival.

### Physical Description 4

#### MEMORIALS

The most significant Big Hill monument is the Pioneer Memorial. Designed by Public Works Department architect Ross Farrow, it is characterised by its domed roof and Corinthian pillars. Constructed of concrete and white rendered brick, it has steps leading upward on four sides to a platform skirted with balustrading. The eight Corinthian pillars support the domed roof, which is copper sheeted. There are two memorial plaques within the monument, one commemorating the laying of the foundation stone by Lord Huntingfield, and the other reading:

Dedicated to the Pioneers of Stawell and District, by His

Excellency Sir Frederick Wollaston Mann K.C.M.G. Lieut.

Governor of Victoria August 6th 1938

A directional indicator plate, installed as a later addition, points out various landmarks in relation to Big Hill, affirming the memorial's popular use as a scenic lookout.

The importance of the Pioneer Memorial has also been enhanced by its position on the landscape - the most prominent point on Big Hill. Prior to the installation of the communications towers (from the 1970s on), it was the most visually dominant feature on Big Hill, acting as a central and defining feature in the broader townscape.

The Pioneer Memorial Plantation was planted on part of a reserve set aside for the Pioneer Memorial. The land, adjacent to Upper Main Street, was fenced off in 1939 and planted with a combination of evergreen and deciduous trees. The plantation was designed to reforest the landscape, and to honour Stawell's pioneers, with individual trees being paid for by descendants of pioneer families. (A list of the donors is held at the Stawell Historical Society.) The Stawell Progress Association installed a brick seat and drinking fountain there in 1949 to complement the commemorative aspect of the plantation.

The Apex arboretum and gates are another major cultural feature on Big Hill. The arboretum was established in the 1950s by the Apex Club. Apex is a popular volunteer organisation with a philanthropic focus, which established itself across Victoria in the 1930s, and then across the country, especially in regional centres. The arboretum is a good example of the types of projects undertaken by societies like Apex, Rotary, Lions and the Jaycees. The purpose of the arboretum was to provide a peaceful recreational venue on the hill for the community. The gates are brick, constructed and clad with shale, consisting of two high pillars with a timber cross beam bearing the words 'Apex Arboretum'. The arboretum itself is a plantation of native trees, infilled with light scrub, on the Western part of Big Hill, adjacent to Upper Main Street. A number of other memorials also exist on Big Hill. The Quartz Reef Discovery monument commemorates the first discovery of quartz gold. It was unveiled in 1953. Constructed of stone, it features two stone relief panels carved into the shape of two miners digging in a shaft. The Dane memorial seat was erected in the 1950s by Lillian Dane, granddaughter of one of Stawell's early reef miners, Robert Dane. Another memorial, celebrating the 1875-1881 water supply system, was constructed in 1975. It consists of a pillar of Grampians freestone on a concrete base, with an interpretive brass plate. Graves belonging to David Constable and his family are also located nearby.

The memorials on Big Hill are important illustrations of the Stawell community's ongoing recognition of the past. Just as residents chose to honour their pioneering ancestors through the construction of the memorials, so too today's community venerates both the pioneers and those who installed the memorials as important figures in their history.

Big Hill is a cultural landscape with a history of intensive land use and community focus. It represents aspects of Stawell's historic origins and the community's appreciation of its heritage.

*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/>*