
CORNISHTOWN CHINESE CAMP

Location

INDIGO POST OFFICE ROAD AND CORNISHTOWN ROAD CORNISHTOWN, INDIGO SHIRE

Municipality

INDIGO SHIRE

Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H8225-0140

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

Interpretation of Site

According to oral history this is the former location of a Chinese mining settlement and gardens. Despite the lack of evidence for surface features, the area is relatively undeveloped, which strongly suggests that the area and the site have further archaeological potential.

Archaeological Significance

The site is of medium significance as comprising a complex remains associated with a former mining settlement associated with Chinese immigrants of the late 19th century. While much of the site comprised ephemeral, iron structures that have been demolished and removed, the absence of development in the town means that there is a potential for archaeological remains.

A detailed survey and excavation of the Cornishtown may therefore, allow an opportunity for further analysis of the material culture and structural remains associated with one of the most significant ethnic groups (said loosely) on the Victorian goldfields, a group that remains poorly documented.

Historical Significance	The site is significant through its association with 19th century mining in the north-east and more broadly with the history of non-European groups in Australia.
Hermes Number	162340
Property Number	

History

As part of the Indigo Mining Division, encompassing Chiltern, Indigo and Rutherglen, settlement did not commence until the gold rush finally reached the north-east part of Victoria. Here Woolshed diggings were worked first, as early as 1853. As the first easy alluvial diggings were exhausted, new fields were opened up at Indigo at Chiltern in 1858; followed by the rush to Rutherglen in 1860.

By the end of the year 1860, seven deep leads and seven reefs were being worked. Thomas Thornely reported that the population of the Indigo Mining Division in December 1860 was 12,905, including 1925 Chinese (Lloyd and Kennedy 2007: 28 and 29). Parish and geological plans of the period (i. e. Everett 1868) refer to mining settlements such as Durham, Indigo, Cornishtown, each separated by 12 kilometres or so. However, mining on the Indigo was mostly shallow alluvial mining and/or search for gold found in deep leads that was easily exhausted. Places such as Indigo quickly declined after the 1860s and the Chinese men who stayed in the region, diversified to work in the winery and other local industries (Lloyd and Kennedy 2007:155).

Indigo was one of the few places set up away from the main mining area. Chinese settlement here seems to have been relatively long lasting however, if itinerant. According to R. Fuge, this location comprised a government established camp dating to the 1860s and utilised until the 1950s by mining men and their families. Most of the miners were Chinese men assumed to have been working within larger company mines. They built a joss house, a public hall and cultivated market gardens in the location. There was also an iron shed with a peaked roof and fire in the centre where workers families lived and cooked. The shed was demolished and replaced by a modern example in the 1950s, after which the Chinese community left and moved mostly to Corowa.

The Chinese camp is said to have been government run, being first set up in the 1860s and then utilised until the 1950s. The settlement contained a Chinese joss house, market gardens, workers sheds and a post office, which have been either demolished or removed, although archaeological traces of footings are likely. Some of the fruit trees planted by Chinese miners and gardeners remain (source R. Fuge).

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/>