MCCORMICK’S ROAD HISTORIC DAMS

Location

HUNTLY-FOSTERVILLE ROAD FOSTERVILLE 3557

Municipality

Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7824-0109

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - April 5, 2023

What is significant?
The site has the potential to inform on the process of cyanidation in relation to the gold mining that was taking place in Fosterville between the late 19th century until 1939.
How is it significant?
The dam site is of local historical significance and archaeological significance.
Why is it significant?
This site is representative of the goldmining and gold processing history of the area from the late 19th century to the early 20th century. The site has potential to yield information about the process of gold mining during this period prior to the decline of the industry. The dams are also of scientific significance as its use for cyanidation is representative of an adaption of new technology in the goldfields and may yield more information on this process.

Interpretation of Site	Pre- 19th Century: Traditional lands of the Dja Dja Wurrung people. Early 19th Century: Agricultural lands occupied by European squatters farming sheep, cattle, pigs and rabbits and growing rape. Mid-19th Century: Gold discovered in 1850s and private prospecting and alluvial mining commences on a small scale. Fosterville remained a farming community until the 1890s. In 1897, the dam site was in close proximity to claims belonging to Worcester, Bloomfield and Party and Government Deep Shaft and the dams may have been utilised by these companies for cyanidation (Figure 6, Figure 8). Late 19th Century: Industrial deep lead and open-cut mining begins throughout Fosterville. The Fosterville township is formalized in 1894 and large-scale mining begins in 1896. Early 20th Century: Mining begins to rapidly decline, and Fosterville Gold Mining Co. stops work between 1897-1902. By 1903, the township of Fosterville also began to decline, and the mines began to close in 1906. Races and batteries in the area were repurposed for faming industries. Smaller estates are utilised for farming and the soldier settlement scheme. It is likely that the dams continued to be used for cyanidation into the 1930s as cyanidation continued until well after mining in Fosterville had ceased. The dams site was owned by C W Bronsdon in 1938 until at least 1943. Late 20th -Present: Interest in Fosterville is renewed, and an Environmental Effects Statement (EES) was commissioned in 1996 to assess a gold mining venture utilising open-cut mining method. Current underground mining operations commenced in 2005. The dams have been inspected three times to date, in 1988, 1989 and 2022. In 1988, the site was described as consisting of only two dams with an ‘historical note’ reading “These dams are located near the claims owned by Worcester and Bloomfield and party” (Snoek 1988, p. 23). The results of the 1989 site inspection describe the site merely as a “deteriorated site” with no recommendations presented (Wright 1989, p. 10). The 2022 inspection described the site as consisting of three in situ dams with overflow catchment channels connecting them. Based on the configuration and shape of these dams, they were likely used for cyanide evaporation in the goldmining industry and are likely associated with nearby mining claims including Worcester, Bloomfield and Party, Government Deep Shaft, Thomas’s Mining Workings and Hunt’s Reef Cyanide Works (Geiberras and Hocking 2022). The process of cyanidation was utilized widely across Fosterville to increase the yield of gold from lower quality ore. Cyanide works operated in the area from the late 19th century until 1939 and serviced many nearby mining companies.
Other Names	Site 31 - Dams,
Hermes Number	209512
Property Number	

History

The site is located on the lands traditionally occupied by the Dja Dja Wurrung people who were displaced from their lands when European settlers arrived in the late 1830s. The land had great farming potential and attracted squatters who bred sheep for hides, meat and wool (Ballinger 2020, p.14). Squatters and their workers built huts, outstations, yards, hurdles, shearing sheds, fences and sheep dips throughout the area. The approximate location of Fosterville can be seen in Figure 4. Gold was first discovered in Fosterville in the early 1850’s; however, Fosterville remained a farming community until the 1890s (Marshall 1996, p. 3). Between the 1850s and 1890s, mining in Fosterville had become more industrialised and gold was collected by private alluvial gold prospectors. These small mining operations continued until 1896 when the first large company was registered, and the area was colloquially referred to as the “Poor Man’s Goldfield” (Snoek 1988). The reefs were opened in 1894, the township of Fosterville had been formalised and large-scale mining operations began across the gold fields (Ballinger 2020, p.44). At least six batteries were known to be operating in the area but due to lack of water, only two were crushing at a time until 1896 (Bannear n.d., p.140). By 1896, in an effort to solve their limited water supply issues, miners were contracted to dig a 26-mile (41.8km) channel by hand from the Wellsford State Forest to the Fosterville goldfield (Ballinger 2020, p.40). In 1896, 600 men were employed at Fosterville, with batteries crushing ore for multiple mines, including Thomas United, Stewarts Extended, Fosterville, and Daley and Watsons. Miners laid primitive tracks so mine carts could be used to transport large quantities of ore to the

batteries and/or cyanide works for processing (Figure 5). By 1897 at least eleven batteries had come into operation ranging up to 20-head of stamps and the races had been expanded (Bannear and Watson 1994, p.38). Multiple companies had been established or expanded, all utilising batteries for crushing their mined quartz. According to Snoek (1988, p. 23) the dam site is near to the location of claims owned by Worcester, Bloomfield and Party. In an 1897 newspaper article, Worcester, Bloomfield and Party were located “lower down the hill, past the township” and were reported as producing “payable results down to water level” (Bendigo Advertiser, 22 Jan 1897, p. 4). The location of Worcester, Bloomfield and Party’s claim can be seen on an 1896 plan of the Ellesmere Goldfield (Figure 6). The dams were likely used by this company for cyanidation. Private claims were common in the goldfields, with known workings belonging to G. Brooks, Roberts and Collins, and Geirisch and Hinton operating along Hunt’s line (Bannear n.d., p.149). It is likely that there were many more small-scale companies operating throughout Fosterville but there is limited accessible documentation describing the history of the area. This is likely due to the short-lived nature of mining in this area, as the mines began to rapidly decline in the early 1900s. The area east of Hunt’s line began to decline in 1897 and the O’Donnell and O’ Dwyer claims were consolidated, and the company’s shares floated on the market (Bannear n.d., p.149). Between 1897 and 1902 work had stopped at the Fosterville Gold Mining Co., with some prospecting recommencing in August of 1902 (The Bendigo Independent 1902, p. 4). Works were confined to a single crosscut, targeting a quartz reef that ran parallel with Hunt’s line (The Bendigo Independent 1902, p. 4). Gold mining in general across Victoria declined in the early 1900s due to the price of gold, the large scale operations required to access deep quartz reefs, and the onset of the World War 1 among other factors (Ballinger 2020, p.45). By 1903, the township of Fosterville began to decline, and the mines began to close in 1906 (Marshall 1996, p. 3). It was during this decline that the races once used for batteries were repurposed for dairying and agriculture for the farming region (Victorian Places, Fosterville, 2015). It is likely that the dams were repurposed for agricultural use during this time. In 1937, Fosterville was listed as a closed mine that was to be subject of a shaft filling scheme (Bannear n.d., p.196). Commencing in 1935, this scheme involved the filling and securing of dangerous open shafts and was funded by grants to create jobs during the depression (Bannear n.d., p.196). Although mining had ceased in the area, the cyanide works and ore treatment plants continued to operate until 1939 (Bannear n.d., p. 197). An approximate location of the site can be seen on the 1943 Ellesmere County Map just outside the Township of Fosterville (Figure 7). According to this map, the land on which the site is located was within Allotment 28 and was owned by C W Bronsdon. A C W Bronsdon and family is reported to be residing in Fosterville according to engagement announcement for their only son Phillip Charles Bronsdon in 1938 (Herald 2 March 1938, p. 16). The 1943 Ellesmere County Map indicates the Bronsdon’s also own Allotment 15 of B in the Parish of Weston (County of Rodney, Bendigo). By 1940 Mr and Mrs C W Bronsdon are described as residing in Rowan St, Bendigo with the announcement of the engagement of their second daughter Judith Lesley Bronsdon (Argus, 4 September 1940, p. 8). The Bronsdons are also recorded as residing at Rowan St, Bendigo in 1944 (Argus, 5 February 1944, p. 8) despite also appearing on the 1943 Ellesmere County Map. It is possible they retained their property in Fosterville, which was likely farmland, when they moved to Bendigo between 1938 and 1940. Cyanidation processes were utilised intensively throughout Fosterville. The use of cyanidation on a commercial scale had widened the possibilities for gold miners as it enabled lower quality ore to be more profitable with a 90% gold yield (Richie and Hooker 1997, p.18). The process required ore to be crushed and added to a diluted potassium cyanide solution which was agitated for five days (Richie and Hooker 1997, p. 18). The solution was then drawn off and passed through wooden boxes where the gold content was precipitated on zinc shavings (Richie and Hooker 1997, p.19). This allowed for extra gold to be recovered and the process was used to re-process old tailings during the early 20th century. The dams were likely used for the cyanidation process. Interest in Fosterville was renewed by the late 20th century and in 1996 an Environmental Effects Statement (EES) was commissioned to assess a gold mining venture utilising open-cut mining methods at Fosterville. By 1998, the mine was producing approximately 40,000 ounces of gold a year from oxide mineralization with the prospect of further gold from sulfide mineralization (Victorian Places, Fosterville, 2015). The current underground mining operations commenced in 2005 and focused on near-surface, low grade mineralization. Between 2015 and 2017, high grade visible gold mineralization was intersected at depth leading to underground expansion doubling the underground mineral reserves. The mine is currently the largest gold producer in Victoria.