# FOSTERVILLE MAIN WATER RACE

## Location

HUNTLY-FOSTERVILLE ROAD FOSTERVILLE, GREATER BENDIGO CITY

## Municipality

GREATER BENDIGO CITY

## Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

## Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7724-0646

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - April 14, 2023

**What is significant?**
The mapped extent is an undisturbed representative sample of the Main Water Race within the Fosterville mining lease. The water race is approximately 1m wide, with a depth of 20-30cm and is 336m in length. The site includes some bluestone and handmade brick elements.

The race was likely constructed in 1895, and originally connected Fosterville with the Bendigo Goldfields. The establishment of the water race resolved water supply issues in Fosterville with at least eleven batteries operating by 1897. By this time there were at least 300 residents in Fosterville. The batteries crushed ore for multiple mines including Thomas United, Stewarts Extended, Fosterville and Daley and Watsons.
**How is it significant?**
The water race site is of local historical significance.
**Why is it significant?**
It is historically significant for its association with the development of the Fosterville goldfield. The site provides information about water management in the Fosterville goldfield in the late nineteenth century.

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| Interpretation of Site | 19th century – The land on which the site is situated was designated as State Forest. Late 19th century - The water race was established in the mid-1890s and provided a sorely needed water source to the township of Fosterville and the mining operations. The water race facilitated the rapid expansion of gold mining activities in Fosterville, including the establishment of a series of large mining companies which replaced the smaller ad hoc mining that had occurred up until this point. The extant portion of the race is specifically associated with the historic Fosterville Gold Mining Company, which was a large and profitable mining company registered in 1897. Early 20th Century – The water race likely continued to be utilised for the cyanidation activities which continued throughout Fosterville following the decline in active mining at the beginning of the 20th century. Mid-20th Century to Present – Water races and dams originally associated with mining activities were repurposed for dairying and agriculture. Portions of the wider water race system were incorporated into modern drainage channels including the Ellesmere-Goornong Channel and roadside drainage associated with the modern mine. The extant portion of the historic water race may have been utilised for 20th century agricultural activities. The extant portion of the race appears intact, and if it was utilised for agriculture it was likely used as is. The extant portion of the water race is within a relatively undisturbed portion of the modern Fosterville Gold Mine mining lease. The uniform width and depth of the Ellesmere-Goornong Channel indicate it has experienced modern modifications. The historic water race terminates at the southern extent at what would have been its junction with the main water race and is now the Ellesmere Goornong Channel. Modern maintenance of the Ellesmere-Goornong channel has created an embankment between the historic race and the modern channel. Several fragments of handmade red brick and roughly hewn granite blocks (not in-situ) were observed during the site inspection at the junction between the historic water race and the modern channel (Figures 5-6). No domestic artefacts or evidence of associated sites, such as market gardens were observed along the historic water race. The junction between the historic water race and the modern Ellesmere-Goornong Channel has been incorporated into the proposed extent of the water race site. |
| Other Names | Site 9 - Water Race, |
| Hermes Number | 209528 |
| Property Number | |

## History

The majority of the following background history is drawn from the land use history developed for the Historical Heritage Technical Report (Geiberras and Hocking 2022) prepared for the Fosterville Gold Mine Environmental Effects Statement. European settlement in the area began in the late 1830s with squatters breeding sheep for their hides, wool and meat (Marshall 1996, p.3). Gold was discovered in Fosterville in the early 1850s, from this period alluvial mining, including gold panning and shallow diggings took place; however, land use remained predominantly pastoral until the 1890s (Marshall 1996, p.3). By 1894 the township of Fosterville had been formalised, and the small alluvial mining operations had given way to deep lead and open cut industrial scale mining (Ballinger 2020, p.44). The initial miners were instrumental in the development of the township of Fosterville and the surrounding goldfield, using the capital they raised from the small mines to expand their operations (Snoek 1988, p.11). The first large mining company, Ellesmere Gold Mining Company, was registered in 1895 (Snoek 1988, p.11). There were at least six batteries operating in Fosterville; however, due to lack of water only two were crushing at any given time (Bannear n.d., p.140). Following a visit to the goldfields in 1895, Mr Foster, the Minister of Mines initiated the excavation of the water race at the request of the local miners and battery operators (Snoek, 1988 p. 19). The water race comprised a 26 mile (41.8km) hand excavated channel from Bendigo to Fosterville. The water race was fed by the Coliban Water Scheme (Ballinger, 2020). Designed in 1863 by Irish engineer Joseph Brady, the Coliban Water Scheme had resolved earlier water supply issues in the Bendigo and Castlemaine goldfields (Coliban Region Water Corporation, 2014). A team of unemployed men from Melbourne excavated the water race from the Bendigo end, whilst at the other end, Fosterville miners were contracted to cut mile lengths. Mine owners contracted on this project included Hinton, Thomas, Hunt, Hamilton,

Commons and Code (Snoek 1988). The water race commenced in Bendigo, passed along the western edge of the township of Fosterville, and ended in Goornong with tributaries veering off to various mining operations (Snoek 1988) (Figure 7). Goornong was an agricultural area beyond the Bendigo goldfields (Ballinger, 2020). One small branch of the water race went to the Prideaux Machinery Site, another junction to Thomas Mill (Thomas' Mine Workings H7724-0099), and a third to the Fosterville Company (Site 16 - Stamp Battery, Winding Foundations, Cyanide Vats and Water Race, no longer extant (Geiberras and Hocking 2022)) and on to Robbins Hill (Site 2 – Stamp Battery and Site 3 – Cyanide Vats, site cards which have been submitted separately) (Figures 8 and 9). The water race also provided the main water supply to the Township of Fosterville (then Ellesmere) for domestic use alongside the use in mining operations for ore batteries and cyaniding (Bendigo Advertiser, 7 May 1897). The site is a remnant of this 1897 water race, the extant portion of the water race is within the State Forest Reserve to the north of the township of Fosterville (Figure 7). The extant portion of the water race comprises a tributary that went to the former Fosterville Gold Mining Company and is in proximity to the Prideaux Machinery site and Thomas' Mine Workings (H7724-0099). The historic Fosterville Gold Mining Company was registered on 10 March 1897 and was managed by James Heirs McColl (Snoek 1988, p.11). The largest individual shareholder in the company was Frederick Chambers. The Fosterville Gold Mining Company was considered one of the principal mining companies in the region and seemed to yield better results than other companies at the time (Snoek, 1988 p. 17). The establishment of the water race resolved water supply issues in Fosterville with at least eleven batteries operating by 1897 (Bannear and Watson 1994, p.38). By this time there were at least 300 residents in Fosterville (Snoek 1988, p.12). The batteries crushed 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 (Ballinger 2020, p.45). Following the expansion of the water races, mining companies were further expanded and established, including but not limited to: Daley and Watson's, F. Thomas, Bloomquist and Party, Brooks and Jones, Worcester Brothers, Thomas Brothers- H. Hunt, and Robbins Hill Mining Co; all of the companies utilised the batteries for crushing the quartz that they were mining. Private claims were common in the goldfields, with known workings by G. Brooks, Roberts and Collins, and Geirisch and Hinton operating along Hunt's line (Bannear n.d., p.149). There is very little literature published about the Fosterville mining activities that discusses Chinese participation on the landscape. Based on newspaper articles and rates books, there was a Chinese population mining and working in Fosterville, despite these individuals, and/or families not being listed on any plans (Geiberras and Hocking 2022, p.50). Chinese people were known to have worked as market gardeners along watercourses and water races in Fosterville, but little is written about their mining activities (Ballinger 2020, p. 51). Cyanidation processes were intensively utilised in Fosterville from the 1890s. The use of cyanidation on a commercial scale widened the possibilities for gold miners, as it enabled lower quality ores to be profitable with a 90% gold yield (Richie and Hooker 1997, p.18). Water provided by the water races was required to complete this process and allowed for extra gold to be recovered and old tailings to be re-processed in the early 20th century. Gold mining declined across Victoria in the early 20th century due to the price of gold, the intensive works required to obtain it and the onset of World War One (Ballinger 2020, p.45). The township of Fosterville began to decline in 1903 and mines began to close in 1906 (Snoek 1988, p.12). Mining in Fosterville had all but ceased in the early 20th century; however, cyanide works and ore treatment plants continued to operate until 1939 (Bannear n.d., p.197). In 1937, Fosterville was included on the list of closed mines that was to be subject of the shaft filling scheme (Bannear n.d., p.196). This scheme involved the filling and securing of dangerous open shafts and commenced in 1935, funded by grants to create work during the depression (Bannear n.d., p.196). Although mining ceased in the area, the cyanide works and ore treatment plants continued to operate until 1939 (Bannear n.d., p. 197). Following the cessation of mining in the area returned to primarily agricultural activities with the water races and dams constructed for mining repurposed to facilitate farming (Victorian Places, 2015). In the late 20th century, interest in Fosterville was renewed and in 1996 an Environmental Effects Statement (EES) was commissioned to assess a gold mining venture utilising open-cut mining methods at Fosterville. The Water Race site was first identified during a survey for a 1988 Archaeological Study of Fosterville, Central Victoria (Snoek), associated with the EES for the Fosterville Gold Mine (at the time Bendigo Gold Limited). Snoek also identified a continuation of the race to the north, which was part of a site he named Site 16 - Stamp Battery, Winding Foundations, Cyanide Vats and Water Race which was associated with the Fosterville Company (Figure 8). Site 16 was sought out during a 2022 survey by Andrew Long and Associates for the current Fosterville Gold Mine EES, it was determined that the former location of Site 16 has experienced significant disturbance and is no longer extant (Geiberras and Hocking 2022). The Water Race site was described in the Archaeological Study as follows; "The water race begins at Bendigo, in the survey areas at the Fosterville/Forest Road one small branch goes to the Prideaux Machinery Site, another junction to Thomas Mill, and a third to the Fosterville Company and on to Robins Hill, terminating at Goornong." (Snoek 1988) In a subsequent 1989 Supplementary Heritage Report Wright noted the water race to be of importance to the local social and mining history of Fosterville (p.9). The main portion of the water race was likely incorporated into the Ellesmere-Goornong Channel.