
ALLENS FLAT ALLUVIAL WORKINGS

Location

BUCKLAND VALLEY

Municipality

Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H8224-0074

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - July 11, 2024

What is significant?

Rich gold deposits were discovered in the Buckland Valley in North-East Victoria in 1853, and the subsequent rush drew some 6,000 miners to the field, almost depopulating the Beechworth field, and attracting diggers from all over the colony. In the crowded, narrow valley, unsanitary conditions led to an outbreak of 'Colonial Fever' or typhoid on the diggings in the summer of 1854, and the death toll of up to 1,000 or more led to the Buckland being referred to as "The Valley of the Shadow of Death". With large numbers of fresh burials, one visitor described the scene as like a river winding through a churchyard. The diggings were almost completely abandoned, until conditions improved. In the mid-1850s, large numbers of Chinese diggers began arriving on the field, and by early 1857 they outnumbered the Europeans by four or five to one. Great resentment was felt by sections of the European population, and after a few minor skirmishes, the valley erupted into violence on the 4th of July, 1857, in an event known as the Buckland Riots. A Chinese population of 2000 to 2500 were driven from the valley. Many were severely beaten, their huts and tents looted and burnt, and their claims jumped. Three Chinese died in the aftermath of the riots, but many more were said to have been killed, and their bodies hidden of before the police detachment arrived from Beechworth. After order was restored, the Chinese miners began trickling back to the field, and were eventually present in greater numbers than before the riots.

Gold was won over long distances along the main river and its tributaries of the river and a number of busy townships formed along the Buckland. Alluvial mining was influenced by the early introduction of Californian ground sluicing methods, and hydraulic sluicing began in about 1858. Alluvial mining received a boost in the late 1800s with the introduction of large-scale hydraulic sluicing using jet elevators, and again with giant bucket dredges in the very early 1900s. The surviving gold mining at Allens Flat provides evidence of the different stages of alluvial gold mining within the Buckland Valley, and the accompanying habitation sites close to these alluvial

claims.

How is it significant?

The Allens Flat goldfield landscape is of historical, social and archaeological significance to the State of Victoria. Criterion C – Potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Victoria's regional cultural history.

Criterion D – Importance in demonstrating the principle characteristics of a class of cultural places or objects.

Why is it significant?

The Allens Flat alluvial gold workings landscape is historically and socially significant to the State of Victoria because it provides tangible evidence of the changing methodologies applied for alluvial gold extraction from the earliest days of the gold rush in 1853, until the early 20th Century, including early shallow workings, shafts, adits, ground and hydraulic sluicing, and dredging. The archaeological features of this site are well preserved by a thick cover of regenerating riparian forest, and blackberries, which provides the physical context for understanding the difficult Alpine environment early miners had to contend with. This vegetation, within State Forest protects and preserves not only the alluvial mining landscape and associated technologies, but also the archaeological sites associated with habitation, human stories, tragedies and the severe racial conflict on the Victorian goldfields.

Regional Significance (Heritage Inventory): The Allens Flat alluvial workings contains evidence of the timeline of technological advancements in alluvial mining techniques from initial shallow workings, through to ground and hydraulic sluicing, to be then followed by the dredging era.

Technological Significance – High: The large and intact tail race cut through the bedrock through the sluicing paddock, and the associated arrangements of stacked cobbles provides an excellent surviving example of this highly destructive method of gold extraction and the technological advancements that were developing on the goldfields to maximise gold extraction of alluvial leads.

Archaeological Potential/Significance- High: The features associated with the repair and operation of the upper most dredge operating in the Buckland Valley, have high potential to reveal further artefacts and features associated with the operation of this steam-powered, bucket dredge in this narrow valley context.

The alluvial mining areas adjacent to the sluiced areas have a high archaeological potential to reveal artefacts that will shed light on the nature of temporary alluvial mining camps and their inhabitants. The site has good potential to reveal artefacts that may indicate the daily occupation of inhabitants, including;

- Personal items
- Tools or objects relating to outlying places of and types of work
- Daily domestic items, food storage vessels, diet, table and cooking ware items, etc

Interpretation/Presentation Values – High: The proximity of the workings to the Ah Youngs Camping Ground and the main Buckland Valley Road provides easily accessible opportunities for interpretation of the sluicing paddock and associated tail race and stacked cobbles. Views across the paddock allow for excellent interpretation of the scale of destruction and physical labour that has been applied for alluvial gold extraction in the Buckland Valley.

Interpretation of Site	<p>Early alluvial workings The areas of early alluvial workings are represented by the shallow network of tail races, head races and lead shafts that are located to the north and south of the large hydraulic sluice paddock. The lead shafts that indicate the use of a hand whip or shadoof are more suggestive of Chinese mining, with ladder ways or timber stiles more popular with European miners. They also provide tangible evidence of the early improvisations undertaken for extracting alluvial material from the shafts, whereby this ancient tool could be constructed from available timber without the need to carry machinery onto the field. The use of shadoofs were therefore popular when early miners could not afford to purchase equipment, or haul it the considerable distance to the goldfield (Smyth 1869, p. 79-80). Hydraulic sluicing The hydraulic sluicing area is approximately 450 metres long (north-south axis), and approximately 200 metres wide east-west, at its widest point, with a steep vertical face overlooking a vast, open area filled with cobble dumps. A main tail-race extends between the worked cliff face and the river. The tail race is cut down into the bedrock. The large moss-covered cobble heaps have stone-retaining walls in places, and the whole open area has a decaying, 'Aztec city' appearance. The Dredge era The Blacksmith forge is significant, along with the large length of cable at this location, it provides tangible evidence of bucket dredging along the river. Demonstrating ancillary activities and sites of dredging operations. Without significant research, it is not clear whether the Kia-ora No.2 or the Buckland South Extended dredge worked this stretch of river.</p>
Other Names	Ah Youngs Flat,
Hermes Number	210143
Property Number	

History

The location was occupied from the earliest months of the gold rush (from 1853), being in close proximity to the first gold finds in the valley at Maguire's Point. The camping ground itself, due to the proximity to the road and River would have been the location of residential and commercial business from the beginnings of the goldfield. The locality has probably been known by many names, though many references refer to it as Ah Young's, after Henry Ah Young, who lived on the flat and worked claims nearby. Mr H. Ah Young was born in the Buckland Valley in 1868, and resided in the district for many years, as evident by his engagement as Chinese interpreter in the Bright Magistrate Court on several occasions in 1899 (e.g. Ovens & Murray Advertiser 18th March 1899). Alluvial mining was carried on here from the earliest days on the Buckland diggings, when most miners were engaged in panning, cradling and small-scale ground-sluicing. Californians introduced various sluice washing techniques from early 1854, and cut many water-races to wash high points and banks all along the river. Hydraulic mining was said to have been first used on the Buckland by John Reid and party in 1858. This technique involved the use of canvas hoses to deliver water under pressure for the washing of alluvial gravels. This technology further developed into higher pressure sluicing operations with the introduction of improved nozzles, steel pipe and higher level water-races. By the 1890s, jet-elevator technology was in common use on the field. Allen's Flat "A rush of Chinamen at the back of Allen's store and along Maguire's Flat is still on the increase. The sinking is from 35 to 45 feet, the ground is pretty wet. In fact, it has hitherto baffled all attempts to bottom it, but the matter of a hundred holes all going down at the same time has enabled the parties to get to the bottom. It is rather difficult to give even an approximate value to the washing stuff. John Chinaman's no sabbe, so far as regards this particular spot, seems to have reached its culminating point. Some contrive to wash their stuff as fast as it is raised; while others set a watch day and night on their piles of washing stuff. It is true there are a number of European outsiders, so far as I can learn by them, they have not done much. It is, however, confidently reported that there runs the whole length of the ground – nearly a mile – a very rich vein of gold, yielding from ten to fifteen shillings to the pan. If not the richest, it is certainly the largest rush which has taken place here within the last 12 months." Ovens & Murray Advertiser, 24th April 1858. The locality saw a number of businesses established in the very early period of the diggings. The Caledonia Store, situated in this vicinity (situated one mile below the Camp), was a partnership between James Fairley and Brownlee Murray. The partnership was dissolved in 1858 with Fairley carrying on the store alone. The store appears to have been closed by the mid

1870s when Fairley gave his occupation as carter. Fairley's and Murrays' Creeks were possibly named after these early store keepers. Allen's store was referenced in this area in 1858, when a ruck to place to the locality. Allen's Flat is possibly named after this store. Another store, also known as Allen's was situated on the Lower Buckland. The history of these two sites has not been researched. Ah Man's Claim "The claim known as Ah Man's on Allen's Flat has been profitably worked for more than 20 years. During that period there have been many changes of shareholders; several having obtained what they regarded as a fortune, sold out, and returned to the Flowery Land. The longest shareholder, Ah Man, sold his in the property a few months ago to an enterprising countryman, Teck Shin. The necessary preliminaries have been taken by Teck Shin to secure by lease a large block of ground adjoining the claim now held. Unfortunatley for the owners water is only available on an everage about six months in the year." Ovens & Murray Advertiser, 24th July 1897. The site of the deep hydraulic sluicing pit may have been that held by Ah Man. Further light may be shed into this locality with a study of the claims registers.

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/>