
CAMP FLAT

Location

CAMP FLAT BUCKLAND, ALPINE SHIRE

Municipality

ALPINE SHIRE

Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H8224-0075

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - October 11, 2023

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 township remains and gold mining at Camp Flat provides evidence of an early remote mountain diggings residential, commercial and government administration centre. It was an important place of the outbreak of typhoid in the summer of 1853-54 and during the anti-Chinese riot of 1857.

The site of Camp Flat is a tangible link to an early goldfield digging gold rush center. The history of the subsequent township demonstrates the physical and social requirements and needs of goldfields a population through the range of stores, services, business. It also highlights the spiritual and tragic stories of the harshness and isolated nature of a remote mountain goldfield.

The government administrative precinct of police barracks, stables, lock up, Court House and Mining Warden's Office, demonstrate the challenges of an early Victorian government outpost of a vastly diverse and transient mining population in endeavouring to establish and administer law and authority.

The outlying mining features and history also demonstrates 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?

Camp 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.

Criterion G - The importance of the place or object in demonstrating social or cultural associations.

Why is it significant?

Camp Flat goldfields landscape is historically and socially significant to the State of Victoria. It is a key area in the history of mining in the Buckland Valley providing evidence of the rapid growth and decline of a remote mountain goldfield and government administration outpost. It's broad ranging significance covers many facets of remote goldfields life; from social, economic, community, commercial government administration and the many aspects of early alluvial and quartz reef mining.

Some of the features and archaeology of the former township have had significant disturbance, whilst other areas of archaeological features are preserved by a thick cover of regenerating riparian forest, and blackberries. 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), Strong potential for State significance (VHR):

The Camp Flat township site and mining landscape contains evidence of the timeline of the growth and decline of an early, remote and mountainous goldfields diggings population, closely administered by the early Victorian government outpost.

Historical Significance – High: the site is of important historical significance in demonstrating the growth and decline of a remote mountain goldfield population and challenges by the government to administer a transient and diverse goldfield population. The site is also significant for its association with the outbreak of typhoid and/colonial fever in the summers of 1853-54 when the location was referred to 'the Valley in the Shadow of Death'. The site is also significant for the association of the government camp at the time of the anti-Chinese riot of 1857.

Technological Significance – Medium: the locality contains a range of early intact alluvial ground and bank sluicing sites and associated features of cobble heaps, sluice banks, water races, tail head and tail races. These features provide good examples of this form of mining as well as the destructive nature of mining.

Archaeological Potential/Significance- Medium to High: Areas of the Camp still retain high archaeological values. The tailing over the on the north side of the river have good potential to reveal aspects of the early commercial centre of the settlement. Good archaeological potential also exists within the broad area of shallow bank and ground sluicing areas to reveal early habitation and refuse/tips sites, 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 site is currently a relatively high use visitation area associated with the camping and day visitor areas. This provides easily accessible opportunities for interpretation of the many aspects of the early Buckland goldfield.

Interpretation
of Site

Early Township Site – north and south of river The principal areas of the former commercial and residential areas of the township are situated in and adjacent to areas adapted for more recent activities, including road creation and recreational facilities. Outlying these more recent corridors and activity areas, pockets of early features still remain. These early features contain a range of building footings, archaeological sites and surface artefact scatters . Only the cutting relating to the chapel site a and the Miner's Right Hotel can be specifically attributed to these features through the historic record. Other sites such as the police camp, post office, etc., cannot be directly attributed to a specific location due to lack of a specific historic record/plans and post occupation disturbance of likely positions. Government Administrative precinct Although the area of the Government administration has largely been destroyed and altered by later mining activity, the locality has important historical values. The site was an important government administrative link between the remote mountain goldfield and the Beechworth (Mining District) administrative centre. Some isolated instances of archaeological evidence may remain in the southern and eastern portions of the south flat amongst the shallow ground sluice workings. Early alluvial workings – north and south of river The areas of early alluvial workings are represented by cobble heaps, sluice banks, head races, water races. Amidst these workings can be found evidence of occupation or building sites as identified by features such as fireplace mounds or artefact scatters. The location of these features amidst alluvial workings may suggest different periods in the mining and occupation history of the Camp Flat area; such as the mining of areas once buildings became abandoned, or isolated dwelling still occupied with areas being mined during the periods of building occupation. Alluvial Tailings/occupation area – north of river Buried archaeological occupation/building site(s) may be evident on the north side of the river, adjacent to the day visitor area, buried beneath post occupation mining activity. Tailings from a sluicing pit near the Miner's right Hotel site have been discharged over an area that may contain early archaeological remains of the early Camp occupation areas. Bridge Sites The location of the timber bridge abutments, combined with the historic record or earlier bridges shows an evolution of crossing types and define the locality as being an important place in the history movements of population on the Buckland Valley goldfield. The history and remaining fabric emphasise the extremes in weather and the importance of access and public safety. Burial ground & Chapel site – north of river The site of the Roman Catholic Chapel and burial ground emphasise the importance of community spirituality and religion in the remote and isolated mountain goldfields. The burial ground is an important link to the tragic and harshness of life in the remote mountain goldfields; the deaths of children, mining accidents, the lack of good medical practitioners, and the high death tolls associated with the typhoid/colonial fever outbreaks of the summer of 1853-4 and 1854-5, when the Buckland diggings were known as 'the Valley of Shadow of Death'. The cemetery emphasises that many deaths occurred within such a small part of the goldfield. At least part of the cemetery appears to have been on the new road alignment. Part of the cemetery may extend into undisturbed ground on the south/east side of the road. There may also be an extension of the burial ground into the adjacent private property. The chapel site appears to be adjacent to the new road alignment. A small benching has been slightly disturbed by roading works. Chinese Camp site – north of river The site of the Chinese camp after the riot of July 1857 was situated on the higher sloping ground above the Buckland Road on the north/west side of the river, behind the principal commercial area of this sector. Today it is situated on freehold, private property. Rows of Chinese hut sites were apparently still clearly visible in the 1970s and the locality was a popular location for bottle hunters. Large numbers of Chinese artefacts were collected from the area. The site was heavily landscaped in the early 1980s when the block was developed. The Dredge era – Buckland South Extended Dredge The dredge evidence of dredging through the LiDAR imagery and the tailings and possible discarded buckets and pins is important archaeological evidence of the last main phase of mining in the Buckland. It also accounts for the absence of any archaeological remains in the once heavily populated southern area of the Camp.

Other
Names

Twelve Mile,

Hermes
Number

210146

History

Henry Pardoe and party are credited with the discovery of gold in the Buckland River during the winter of 1853. They were said to have obtained over 360oz of gold within a few days. By December, the increasing population was estimated at 3,000, with as many as 6,000 by January 1854. This represented half the population of the Ovens (Beechworth) mining district. Pans and cradles were initially used to work the gold-deposits in the banks and beds of the river. Water-races and sluice-boxes would soon become the principal means of gold extraction. The mining of gold took many forms over the decades, including, hydraulic sluicing, bucket dredging and quartz reef mining. Camp Flat 'The Camp' was the first main commercial centre on the Buckland goldfield, established near richest gold discoveries at Maguire's Point. Stores and hotels were trading in this locality during the summer of 1853-54 when the surrounding population was estimated as being in excess of 1,000. The site of the Camp was on a bend in the Buckland River, the last of the small open areas of the upper Buckland diggings. The roads and river crossings beyond the Camp became rough and unsuitable for horse drawn vehicles. The generally narrow valley slightly widened and offered a gently sloping flat on the north side overlooking the river, whilst on the south side a lower slightly broader river flat. The locality was central to the rich alluvial river and bank claims. In January 1854 the area of the police camp and immediate surrounds was referred to as St Giles, whilst the area on the opposite side of the river was named Smithfield. St. Giles consisted of the police barracks and yard as well as numerous tents and stores. Whilst on the northern side of the river, on the higher ground overlooking the river, Smithfield was well laid out with a main road lined with several general stores, a bakery, dairy, butcher shops, auction house, hotels, a post office, bank, a church, burial ground and school. "The appearance of the stores and refreshment tents at the Buckland forms a great contrast to other diggings. All these erections are well arranged on either side of the road, and very great care and taste have been displayed in their construction. No names have yet been given to the various flats where gold has been found, but the locality where the auctioneers and principal stores and banks are situated has been named. "Smithfield," while the Government Camp and cluster of tents around it on the opposite side of the river, have received the aristocratic title of St. Giles's". Typhoid/Colonial Fever – The Valley in the Shadow of Death By January 1854 the population of the field had reached 6,000, with significantly more than 1,000 in vicinity of the Camp. Cramped within a narrow stretch of the valley, hygiene and refuse management were not a priority amongst the population. On the 25th April 1854. The Morning Herald reported, "The constant immersion of the lower extremities in the cold water, while the upper part of the body was exposed to the burning rays of the sun, the large consumption of highly adulterated spirits, sold by the villainous sly grog dealer, and the unrelenting pursuit of an arduous toil, brought out, in the majority of instances, violent attacks of dysentery accompanied by low fever. Will it be believed that last summer under this system of iniquity, in one day, and in one neighborhood of that valley, the number of funerals amounted to seventeen, from eight to twelve were common." The Camp was central to the outbreak, and within a very short time much of the Camp was all but deserted, with Phelan Brother Great Britain Store one of the few left trading. The Buckland Riot, 1857 On the morning of 4th July 1857 a person left the agitated meeting of Europeans at Tanswell's Hotel at the Junction and went to the Police Camp to warn the authorities that trouble was brewing. Despite building tensions between European and Chinese miners and a number of isolated incidents, there were only two officers stationed at the Police Camp, Constables Gilroy and Duffy. Gilroy was left in charge of the Camp while Duffy hurried up to the Junction. From his post at the Camp Gilroy had a clear view of the violence and destruction going on, particularly at the nearby Brown's Hotel. Chinese Camp, Post 1857 Riot In the lead up to the July riot and as a result of smaller incidents against the Chinese population Warden Gaunt visited the Buckland in an attempt to establish some law and order. Part of this was to protect the Chinese from any further attack by organising to Chinese to move into new designated camps one at the Junction and the other near the Police Camp. The camp at the Police camp failed to eventuate until after the riot. The camp at the Police camp was the initial camp where the main population of Chinese settled under the direct protection of the authorities. By the 1860 the Chinese had ventured away from this site to other localities. . The Police Camp Drinking and sly grog on the early diggings saw Sub. Inspector Samuel Furnell request that a party of foot police be immediately sent to the Buckland. The Sub Inspector was the first government official to the new diggings, Arriving on the 15th December 1853 the where he established the police camp and administrative precinct on the inner bend of the Buckland River about fourteen miles from the Ovens River. The locality at the time would be sometimes referred to as the 'Government' or 'Police' Camp. In late December Acting Inspector of Police in Charge of the Ovens District, Matthew Price visited the diggings. He noted the daily increasing population was reported to be 3,000, with the population in

vicinity of the Camp about 1,000. At the time of the outbreaks of typhoid/colonial fever in the summers of 1853-54 and in 1854-5, the notification of the deaths of individual may have occurred with the officials. In March 1854 a lock-up and stockade was erected, with the lock up proclaimed a public goal in 1859. In September 1858 construction for the new Court House was underway. The earlier building measured 10 feet by 12 feet and was of slab and bark construction. The new building was 33 feet long by 19 feet wide, fitted with varnished cedar bench, jurors' box and witness box. The cost of the building was £500. In the early years the Buckland Court was the only place where legal matters could be attended. With a population shift to new gold discoveries at Growlers Creek (Wandiligong) and Morse's Creek (Bright), the public had to travel great distances to have legal matters attended to. A similar inconvenience occurred to miners whom had to travel from far outlying goldfields to register their claims with the Mining Warden. In August 1861 the pressure on the Buckland Court was relieved when the first Court of Petty Sessions was held at Morse's Creek with the building of a new Court House. By 1862 the Court of Mines was transferred from the Buckland to Bright and a Warden's Office opened. In June 1865 the police buildings and stables at the Camp were shifted to the Lower Buckland. Businesses in the Township From late 1853 into the early 1860s the Camp Flat settlement saw the rise and fall of many businesses with the numerous challenges of a remote mountainous goldfields. On the north, Smithfield side, some of the businesses included; Phelan brothers Great Britain Store, Bernard's New York eating House (which closed and never reopened after the typhoid epidemic), Bell's Buckland Bazaar, (owned by Thomas Bell, was open until the early 1860s when Bell moved to Wandiligong and opened a Bakery), Captain Chalk's Store and Dairy, a branch of the Oriental bank, and Lynch's Miner's Right Hotel operated by James Lynch. On the south side of the river in the Government precinct was James McKay's weatherboard and shingle roofed news agents was also the Buckland Post Office. Situated opposite the Police Camp, McKay was also Deputy Registrar of Births, Deaths and marriages until 1858, when the Post Office and store was auctioned as an insolvent estate. Across the road from the Post Office was Bradley's Buckland Hotel. Also, within sight of the Police Camp was Brown's Hotel. A private school house also existed on this flat for a short time. Other business at the Camp included; the Glasgow Bakery, a home decorating and sign writing store, a chemist, cordial maker, blacksmith, butcher, auctioneer and dress shop. Chapel and Burial Ground (Great Britain Hill) At the back of the Miner's Right Hotel was the Roman Catholic chapel. Described as 'a neat, although plain chapel'. A new chapel was built on the Lower Buckland and the one at the Camp fell to ruin. Behind the chapel was the earliest known burial ground of the Buckland. Many burials would have occurred here in the early years of the diggings, particularly with the typhoid/colonial fever outbreaks of 1853-4 and 1854-5. "-there is a great deal of sickness here. Though the diggings are but a few weeks old, there is a considerable burying-ground already, where you can see numbers of fresh graves surrounded by rude paling, and on the post of each corner placed a square turf, the digger's monument." This burial ground may have been called the Great Britain Hill cemetery. This name is mentioned in many death certificates and in the historic record. It is possible that this hill was named after Phelan's Great Britain Store which was in close proximity to the Miner's Right Hotel. This burial ground may have had more burials than any of the other Buckland burial grounds. The In the 1950s, a new road was cut through the burial ground to eliminate the river crossings at Camp Flat and the Junction. Bridges and Crossings The crossing at the camp was the weak link between the lower and upper Buckland during periods of wet weather and high river flows. It was treacherous crossing in winter and several lives were lost in attempting the crossing in the early years. A simple log bridge, suitable for pedestrians was the first official river crossing. Attempts were made to construct a bridge suitable for vehicles in the early days, however floods made short work of these structures. In 1858 the "rickety bridge" at the camp could not be crossed without "imminent risk of life". Newspaper reports lobbied the Government to erect a serviceable bridge in its place to allow the public safe access to the Court House, Police, Post office and school. The following year, further floods rendered the Camp inaccessible, a temporary bridge erected by local parties was entirely submerged. In March the surveyors were at work and by October 1859 the new bridge was near completion. It appears the bridge was largely, if not completely built of stone. With many contemporary comments stating a timber bridge would have been significantly cheaper than the one chosen. The new bridge appears to have remained for some years, at least into the early 1860s, where contemporary sketches show it clearly. At some point the bridge may have succumbed to floods and was replaced with a timber structure down-stream from the original site. The timber bridge remained in use for many years until it was destroyed in the 1939 bushfires. Welcome Quartz Reef Workings Situated on the eastern side of the river at Camp flat, claims registers show that a number of claims were held along the line of reef from 1865. Principal claim holders were Nicholas Paulussey & party. Large parcels of low-grade ore were crushed from the six foot wide reef, including one 800 ton parcel in 1866 which produced 284 ounces of gold. The initial workings appear to have occurred from a deep vertical shaft. It appears a quartz mill was erected at the mine in 1866, after some mechanical difficulties the mill was operating by October 1866. After a brief period the new company was made insolvent and the mine and plant were sold in April 1868. The mine was tired under several other names over the years, including the Try Me Again in 1882, the Homeward Bound in 1889 and the Blue Peter, held by the Fairley's Creek Gold mining Co. Buckland South Extended Dredge Pontoons for the Buckland South Extended dredge were launched in August 1902, with machinery expected to be placed on board shortly. The plant started operations in the vicinity of

Fairley's Creek, and had commenced dredging by the end of November. The dredge would have made its way upstream and worked the flats of the Police Camp in about 1903-04. Works were held up in September 1908, owing to the boiler "blistering"; three weeks were lost while waiting for a new boiler to be procured and delivered to the dredge. On the boiler's arrival it was reported that; "No time will be lost in putting it into position." In September 1909, William O'Shea, a seventeen-year-old a box-boy, drowned while attempting to cross the river onto the dredge via the cable tow-line. Pulling himself hand-over-hand he lost his grip and fell 16 feet into the river. His body was recovered 350 yards downstream. The Buckland South Extended worked a section of the river downstream of the Junction and then later appears to been dismantled and reassembled in the west branch of the Buckland River. It ceased operations just below the junction of Scotch Bill's and Nelson creeks.

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/>