
YANAKIE AIRFIELD SITE

Location

WILSONS PROMONTORY ROAD, WILSONS PROMONTORY NATIONAL PARK

Municipality

Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H8120-0029

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

Statement of Significance

Last updated on - February 8, 2024

What is significant?

There are remnants of the WWII Advanced Operational Base but an airfield has been in place on this site since at least 1930.

How is it significant?

The main significance of the site would appear to be found in its transformation into an Advanced Operational Base during the Second World War. The civil airfield would however be of at least local significance under #3 of Victoria's Framework of Historical Themes Connecting Victorians by transport and communications).

Why is it significant?

Though it does not appear to have played a major role in defence, it does serve as a reminder of the disruption caused by the war and the works and operations required on home soil as a result of it.

Interpretation of Site

The site has functioned as an airstrip since at least 1930 (and possibly earlier). The most intensive use of the site was during WWII when it functioned as a RAAF Advanced Operational Base. At this time it acted as an airfield but was camouflaged from above so as not to be seen by enemy aircraft. This camouflaging included the creation of hideouts for aircraft in the areas to the south and southwest of the landing strip. A number of temporary buildings were also in place on the site during WWII.

Hermes
Number 211147

Property
Number

History

The area was formed into a Civil Aviation 'landing ground' in 1930. This was reportedly done in preparation for using the site as a component of a proposed weekly air service from Victoria to Tasmania: The route will be via Yanakie, on Wilson's Promontory and the Furneaux Group to the Western Junction Aerodrome at Launceston...In readiness for the service, the Civil Aviation Department has had prepared a first-class landing ground at Yanakie, 21/2 miles east of the Government Chalet...The aerodrome is reported to extend from 500 to 600 yards in all directions and the surface is even and well made (Areas Express 12/12/1930). According to Synan (2009: 126) the Royal Australian Airforce (RAAF) used Yanakie as a landing for 'during training flights from Point Cook) in the 1930s. The airfield was 'taken over from the Department of Civil Aviation by the Department of Air in 1940, for use by the RAAF as an Advanced Operational Base' (NAA A14487, 56/AB/7196). From December 1943, the aerodrome land was leased by the Commonwealth from the State of Victoria under a 21-year lease (memo 17/1/1946 in NAA A707, 7/1/1157). A plan of the airfield in the 1940s is shown in Figure 2. At this time the airfield appears to have consisted of three landing strips that were demarcated by boundary marks. Other structures and features present on the plan include: • A pyrotechnic store • A workshop • Accommodation huts • Machine gun posts • Transmitting and receiving stations • Showers • Sleeping huts Bomb dumps, and • A dispersal hangar An 18-foot well was also dug on the site and lined with concrete pipe (NAA A705, 7/1/509). Around the southern and southwestern sides of the airfield were tracks leading to aircraft 'hideouts'. These were twelve in number and each was specified to be 75 feet (22.9m) wide and 65 feet (19.8m) long with 20 feet (6.1m) of overhead clearance. These appear to have been placed at the edge of surrounding sand hills and disguised with brush to hide the aircraft from above. The hideouts appear to have been constructed in 1942 or 1943. Taxiways to the hideouts were formed by clearing and grubbing vegetation, filling resulting holes, grading and rolling and surfacing with gravel. The hideouts themselves were to be for 'medium bomber aircraft' (NAA A14487, 24/AB/4062). They were built of a timber framework of hardwood beams, with galvanised iron painted black folded over framework (Heale 2018). Responsibility for the Yanakie aerodrome site was returned to the Department of Civil Aviation at the end of January 1946 (memo 8/2/1946 in NAA A707, 7/1/1157). Following the end of WWII this area continued to operate as an airstrip under the control of the Department of Civil Aviation. A caretaker was appointed in 1946 who 'lived in the former RAAF accommodation' and was charged with 'keeping the airfield operative' (Synan 2009: 127). In 1969 the airfield was added to the national park along with surrounding lands (Synan 2009: 127). The airstrip continued to be maintained into the late twentieth century. National Parks Service files indicate that it was considered 'necessary to maintain the airstrip in a usable condition to provide for the landing of aircraft in the event of the following emergency circumstances: - i) Loading of aircraft with 'phoscheck' fire retardant. ii) Aircraft in trouble. iii) Injury to a member of the staff or park visitor (12/5/1977 in VPRS 11553/P0001 unit 102). Maintenance of the strip appears to have consisted primarily of periodically topdressing the airstrip with soil (VPRS 11553/P0001 unit 102), and presumably keeping the landing strips clear of encroaching vegetation. The area now functions primarily as a walking track, where visitors can view native animals attracted to the open grassed area created by the clearing and levelling that was necessary for airstrip construction. A helipad is situated near the northeastern corner of the proposed walking track and modern sheds associated with park, and presumably airstrip, maintenance are also situated nearby.

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/>