

VICTORIA'S HERITAGE

GRAMPIANS NATIONAL PARK (GARIWERD) – ITS CULTURAL HERITAGE

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Grampians National Park (Gariwerd is the Indigenous name for the ranges) in western Victoria has a rich and diverse cultural heritage. Aboriginal occupation of Gariwerd dates back more than 20,000 years and the park contains the largest number of Indigenous rock art sites in south-eastern Australia.

The award-winning **Brambuk the National Park and Cultural Centre** at Halls Gap, a first stop and source of information for most visitors to the Grampians, was designed in conjunction with five Koori (Aboriginal) communities from the Wimmera and south-west Victoria. Brambuk takes its name from the *buludji brambimbula*, the two Bram brothers, ancestral beings responsible for the creation and naming of many landscape features in western Victoria.

For more information about Brambuk and the area's Aboriginal heritage see the Brambuk website www.brambuk.com.au

Grampians National Park has European cultural significance as a site of exploration and discovery, and in relation to squatters and selectors, water supply, mining, timber production and tourism. Signs of many of these 'layers' of settlement and land use can still be seen in the landscape.

EXPLORATION AND DISCOVERY

The first European to see the mountains was NSW Surveyor-General Major Thomas Mitchell during an 1836 expedition to what is now western Victoria. He named the ranges



The Survey Camp, late nineteenth-century. From Janet Witham H. G., courtesy of DSE.

after the Grampians in his native Scotland. Major Mitchell's party climbed (and named) Mount Difficult, Mount William and Mount Abrupt, and his published journal contains information about the flora and fauna they saw.

Reports of excellent pasture quality and readily available water in what Mitchell named 'Australia Felix' ('Happy' or 'Blessed' Australia) were a magnet for squatters in the early 1840s. The first pastoral run in the area was occupied by Lieutenant Robert Briggs Ledcourt in 1841. Many more runs were established in the following years, mainly for grazing sheep. However, the mountains themselves were generally unsuitable for grazing and were more valued for their resources of water, stone, timber and gold.

Generally, settlements in the Grampians

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developed to support the mining or timber industries. These resource-based industries continued into the 20th century but were supplemented by a thriving tourist industry. This continues to be the mainstay of the local economy today.

MINING AND QUARRYING

Gold mining

Mafeking, also known as Mount William, is significant as the site of the last major gold rush in Victoria. Tens of thousands of prospectors flocked to the area to try their luck after Phillip and Frank Emmett discovered gold there in June 1900. The government encouraged the rush by issuing free rail passes to the area.



The first Grampian tour on the road from Stawell, 1913. From Irene Reid, Courtesy of DSE.

Sluicers and fossickers made good money while water was plentiful. At other times they worked in local sawmills. In total, around 25,000 ounces of gold were produced.

Today, visitors can see evidence of alluvial sinkings and extensive sluicing cavities on the Mafeking heritage walk. The walk goes by two large sluice holes with 20 ft vertical faces – Poverty Gully and Browning open cuts. Both have large dumps of pebbles and are overgrown with trees and ferns. There is a

deep tailrace running from the end of the Poverty Gully hole. Around the open cuts are sections of water races, dams and open shafts. Forest has re-covered much of the site.

A granite memorial erected in 1964 marks the site of Mafeking township. The site was burnt in the Grampians fires of January 2006.

Stone quarrying - Heatherlie (Mount Difficult) Quarry

This quarry is off the Hall's Gap-Mount Zero road, 13.5 km north of Halls Gap. It is at the base of Mount Difficult Range, on the eastern side. Visitors can explore the site along trails with interpretive signs.

The story goes that some of the Victoria's most beautiful and durable building stone was discovered by chance by Francis Watkins, a stonemason from nearby Stawell, while out on a shooting trip at Mount Difficult in the early 1860s. Recognising the commercial potential of his find - a beautiful even-grained sandstone which was easily worked and weathered well - Watkins secured a lease to quarry the area.

Heatherlie Quarry yielded large amounts of high-quality stone for public buildings during the latter part of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Notable examples are Melbourne's Parliament House and Town Hall.

By the 1870s the stone was being quarried for use in Stawell as headstones and to re-build Main Street buildings after a fire. But local use did not fulfil the potential of the quarry, and Watkins had his sights on more prestigious projects. He submitted samples to the Public Works Dept for use in government buildings. By the 1880s the stone was widely accepted to be of high quality – a fact later confirmed by tests conducted by Professor H.C. Richards of Melbourne University in 1926 and described in an article that year in *The Pinnacle* (pp 4-5).

Professor Richards carried out a number of tests, including resistance to crushing and to carbon dioxide corrosion, on Victorian

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sandstones. He found that "...in practically all cases Stawell stone was placed at the top [of the list]." The same article relates how the stone came to be used for Parliament House in Melbourne:

"Fortunately, a parliamentary party was passing through Stawell ...and noticed with delight the Stawell Court House [built from Heatherlie stone]...So impressed were the cabinet ministers of the day with the delightful appearance of the building that, on the spot, they decided that ...the Victorian Houses of Parliament [would] be built of Stawell stone."

These glowing accounts omit the setbacks in Watkins' negotiations with the government. He had to supply numerous stone samples and use considerable persistence to get a contract signed in 1881.

In the same year, 1881, a contract for building the Stawell to Heatherlie branch railway was signed. This contract details the length to be built as 15 miles using 50 lb rails. Victoria Railways laid sidings at the quarry in October. For many years after its construction tourists and day-trippers also used the line.

The first four rail trucks of stone from Heatherlie Quarry arrived at Stawell on 23 February 1882, en route to Melbourne.

In Melbourne the consignment was met by a furore over the quality of the stone, which was said to be inferior to the samples sent by Watkins. An expert committee was immediately despatched to visit Heatherlie and inspect the stone on site. They confirmed the original decision and recommended that the government pay the quarry in advance so that they could dig into the mountain and extract the best quality stone.

Between 1886 and 1887 the quarry was in peak production. More than 100 men, mostly from Italy, were employed at Heatherlie and lived in stone and timber huts beside the quarry. The township of Heatherlie was declared in 1888 and, in August that year, a

schoolhouse was moved from Darra near Ballan for the 33 children in the town. But by October of the following year there were only four children and the school closed. The reason may be that living conditions were poor and quarry workers preferred to base their families in Stawell and travel home on weekends.

In 1893 Heatherlie Quarry closed after the Public Works contract expired. It was re-opened by a private firm at the turn of the century but closed again in 1938 due to lack of orders. The railway line was closed in 1949 and dismantled in following years. There are a few remnants still visible - raised earth, some of the sleepers and a few rails still in place at the end of the line, plus the remains of a timber trestle bridge at Back Creek off Osleps Track.

Today, stone is extracted only for repair and conservation of historic buildings built from stone quarried at Heatherlie.

Heatherlie Quarry – what you can see there today

Through the evidence that remains at Heatherlie, in the form of buildings, machinery and worked rock faces, we are able to piece together how the quarry would have been worked 100 years ago. Signs along the heritage walk at the quarry also help explain its story.

Three stone cottages – built by Italian masons about 1888 and lived in by workers – have been re-roofed and repaired. There was also a stone bath made by the Italian workers that has been pilfered from the site (*The Mail-Times* June 29, 1984).

The quarry itself has clearly-visible vertical faces with a lot of stone debris and easily-seen bore holes. Other features include winches, hoppers, a boiler and steam engine, a compressed-air storage tank, a steam air compressor, the remains of a crane, a boom, a trolley, rail siding for loading stone, explosives

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magazine built into the embankment and dry stone walling

WATER SUPPLY

As Europeans settled the area the Grampians became a vital source of water for a large part



Stawell Water Supply Fluming.
Courtesy of DSE.

of western and north-western Victoria. Today the ranges are still a key water catchment for the surrounding area, much of the water being channelled to the Wimmera and Mallee via one of the most ambitious supply schemes in the world.

Stawell water supply system

The Borough of Stawell was the first authority to harness Grampians water with the Stawell water supply system built between 1875 and 1881. This was one of the most ambitious town water supply systems ever undertaken in Victoria. Innovative and pioneering in its approach, it involved building more than 12 km of fluming, a tunnel and a pipeline. The original weir is still in use to supply water to the town of Stawell.

A weir at Fyan's Creek diverted a stream via above-ground fluming over 12 km of mountainous country.

One of the most important features is the tunnel, which passes through 1 km of solid rock beneath the Mount Gar (Mount William) Range and still carries the pipeline for the Stawell water supply today. Blasting this tunnel involved one of the earliest uses of dynamite.

Other important features that can be seen today include long and largely intact sections of iron fluming raised on dry stone supports -

which replaced the original timber fluming - and associated syphons.

Wimmera-Mallee stock and domestic water supply system

Lake Bellfield
Lake Lonsdale
Lake Fyans
Glenorchy Weir
Rocklands Reservoir and outlet channel
Toolondo Reservoir
Lake Wartook
Moora Moora Reservoir and channel
Pine and Taylors Lakes
Green Lake
Natimuk and Arapiles channels
Burnt Creek-McKenzie River Diversions
Swedes Creek cutting

This is believed to be the largest water supply system of its kind in the world, carrying Grampians water to 28,500 square km of country and 51 towns.

Twelve major storages and 16,000 kilometres of distribution channels have been built since the 1890s. Early weirs across the Wimmera River at Ashens and Longerenong (1850s) and upstream at Glenorchy (1870s) diverted flows for private use into Ashens and Yarriambiack Creeks, and for Shire use to Dunmunkle and Swedes Creeks.

Public water supply was initiated by the Wimmera United Waterworks Trust with the building of Wartook Reservoir, the Natimuk Channel and others. Droughts, disputes and the economic depression and debt of the 1890s put them out of business, and in 1909 the Wimmera United Waterworks Trust was replaced by the government's State Rivers and Water Supply Commission.

Lake Lonsdale was built by the government in 1902 and other Wimmera storage facilities were built up to 1928. More followed. In 1934 the Moora Moora Reservoir and channel diverted water from the upper Glenelg River north to the Wimmera-Mallee system, and in

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1953 the system's biggest storage, Rocklands Reservoir, was built. This also stores and diverts Glenelg water.

TIMBER PRODUCTION

Mining activity in the Ararat and Stawell area in the 1860s and 70s created a huge demand for timber, and sawmills were set up in the Grampians at Fyans Creek, Stony Creek, Borough Huts, Zumstein, Wartook, Cranages, Ledcourt and Halls Gap. These were mostly mobile steam-powered operations. Up to the 1920s horse- and bullock-powered tramways were used to transport the timber.

In the 1940s most sawmills moved out of the Grampians but the forests continued to be logged to meet demand for the post-war building boom. In 1984 Grampians National park was declared and timber production in the park was phased out.

Reference: Historic Places Special Investigation: South Western Victoria Descriptive Report, January 1996 (Land Conservation Council) pages 64-65.

Borough Huts charcoal kilns

Another forest industry in the Grampians was charcoal production. At Borough Huts there are three well-preserved cylindrical charcoal kilns about two metres in diameter and 2.6 m high. They were used during World War 2 in the 1940s, when petrol was in short supply, to make charcoal which was in turn used to produce gas for use in internal combustion engines. The process involved placing wood in the kilns and letting it burn slowly. The fire was regulated by a venting system.

TOURISM

In the second half of the 19th century, the spread of railways and a developing interest in natural landscapes meant the beginnings of a tourist industry in the Grampians which continues to this day.

The spectacular scenery of the Grampians attracted people, and as numbers of visitors increased, infrastructure developed to meet their needs. This included roads such as the Mount Victory and Silverband roads, walks, picnic sites including the reserve at Halls Gap, camping areas and lookouts, plus hotels, guest houses, kiosks and tea-rooms.

The Picnic Reserve at Halls Gap was particularly popular. From here, tourists set off on hikes to peaks such as Mount Rosa and Chatauqua Peak, and visited features in Wonderland and local waterfalls such as Silverband and Clematis falls.

Facilities for tourists grew along with growing interest in the outdoor life, and several Grampians 'holiday settlements' were created in the 1920s and 1930s. These included Cranage's tourist accommodation near MacKenzie Falls, and Walter and Jean Zumstein's pise (rammed earth) cottages. The cottages are still standing, looked after by Parks Victoria and accessible to visitors. They represent a rare surviving form of vernacular building where the builder had to use local materials because of the lack of traditional materials and high cost of transport.

Reference: Historic Places Special Investigation: South Western Victoria Descriptive Report, January 1996 (Land Conservation Council)