

HERITAGE PLACE

NAME OF PLACE: UNEMPLOYED WORKERS' RELIEF CAMP

ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE: Henty Highway WOHLPOER

STUDY NUMBER: 324

HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:

PRECINCT: outside

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA: Southern Grampians Shire

SECTION: 21

PARISH: PARISH OF WOHLPOER

ACCESS DESCRIPTION:

CFA 389250 metres along dirt track off east side of Henty Highway

SIGNIFICANCE RATING: Heritage Inventory



Unemployed Workers Camp, Woolhpoer

Image Date: 6/07/02

EXTENT OF LISTING:

To the extent of: 1. All the immediate camp area of approximately 5,000sq m and the area of land within 100m of the camp's perimeter.

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PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

The archaeological site is located approximately 250 metres east of the Henty Highway, in the Woolpooper State Forest, about 2.5kms north of the intersection of the Woolpooper Road and the Henty Highway and about 50.0kms north-north-east of Hamilton. The camp site is situated on the north side of a well defined dirt track, within a fenced enclosure of about half a hectare.

Along the western fence line, the remains of a series of small huts can be distinguished. These remains consist of timber stumps and chimney bases of field stone rubble. There were at least 5 of these huts in a row along the western boundary. Close by are the timber stumps of other buildings, including an L shaped structure, and a concrete foundation. At the northern edge of the enclosure, the remains of a rubbish dump are visible, as well as a large underground cistern, with surviving roofing iron and timbers. The outline of a road sweeping in a broad curve through the camp site is clearly visible. To the east of the camp is a dam or reservoir, which appears to be of a later date. Scraps of metal, leather and glass can be seen among the rubble and timber stumps.

"Woolpooper State Forest is predominantly an even aged open woodland comprised almost exclusively of River Red Gum with a grassy understorey. The majority of trees in the forest are 100-year-old regrowth that originated following the removal of the grazing in 1890." (DNRE, 2002)

"All buildings from this FCV camp within a large fenced enclosure have been removed leaving a 30m long double row of wooden stumps with some small heaps of building material, a square concrete slab measuring 3.2 x 3.2m, two or three rectangular arrangements of wooden stumps and an interesting reservoir with ditches. There was also quite an extensive rubbish dump covering about 30sqm comprising bottles and cans on the N side of the fence near the reservoir." (Story, 1995)

HISTORY:

Sheep had grazed in the Woolpooper area as part of the vast Glenisla squatting run held by the Carter family from the early squatting period until the 1890s when forest regrowth occurred. According to the Parish Plan, the land was not thrown open for selection until the early twentieth century. Much of the land was then dedicated as the Woolpooper Reserved Forest and Section 21 of the Parish of Woolpooper, including the present site, was gazetted as State Forest in 1913. In 1918, the Victorian State government created the Forests Commission, which was to become an important 'employer' of men receiving unemployment relief or 'sustenance'. "The Victorian working class experienced a period of insecurity and near poverty in the 1920s as a result of a drop in the real value of wages and high unemployment" (Garden, 1984, 349). This was exacerbated by the Nationalist Government's migration schemes which "maintained a constant flow of new workers at a time when the economy was neither sufficiently productive nor prosperous to absorb them fully" (ibid.).

About 1930, at the beginning of the Great Depression, a camp for unemployed workers was established in the State Forest about 2.5kms north of Woolpooper, just to the east of the Henty Highway (LCC, HPS-WVFR, 105). From 1920 until 1940 "extensive ringbarking was carried out by relief gangs to thin the dense regrowth which [had] established once sheep grazing was removed" (DNRE, 2002). Other camps, specifically for unemployed boys, were established at Carapoee, south of St Arnaud and at Noojee, north of Warragul. Some unemployment camps, possibly including the Woolpooper camp, became prisoner-of-war and internee camps during the Second world war, although their locations were often kept secret "to avoid public anxiety about security" (DNRE, 2003). The use of the Woolpooper Unemployed Workers' Camp for these purposes has not been determined.

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As well as timber getting, there were other minor industries such as charcoal burning, wattlebark stripping and even eucalyptus distillation. Charcoal had been an important forest product used by blacksmiths up to the end of the First World War. During the Second World War, it was produced in kilns set up in state forests to provide for gas producers as an alternative fuel for cars when petrol was hard to obtain. "By mid 1942 the Commission had 221 kilns producing 1000 tons of charcoal a month. When petrol rationing ceased at the end of the war the charcoal industry collapsed" (DNRE, 2003). At least one kiln site existed about 3.0kms due west of the Woolpooer Unemployed Workers' Relief Camp.

After the Second World War, the Rowe family established a large commercial sawmill on allotments 21 and 23 of the Parish of Woolpooer off Mill Lane and immediately south of the State Forest about 2.0kms south-west of Woolpooer. It is not known if any of the unemployed from the Woolpooer camp worked at Rowe's sawmill. "Timber buildings (which may have been associated with later use of the camp) have been removed from the site leaving rows of stumps and slabs" (LCC, HPS-WVFR, 105). The camp appears to have been abandoned by the early 1950s.

THEMATIC CONTEXT:

5.2.1 Timber getting (sawmills, tramway, camps etc.)

CONDITION:

The remains of the camp site are in very good condition, and the archaeological potential of the site is high.

INTEGRITY:

low degree of integrity for above ground remains.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

What is significant?

The Forests Commission established Woolpooer Unemployed Workers' Relief Camp about 1930 against a background of increasing economic and social distress caused by the Great Depression. It is located off the Henty Highway, about 2.5kms north of the settlement of Woolpooer and about 50.0kms north-north-east of Hamilton. The Woolpooer Reserved Forest and Section 21 of the Parish of Woolpooer, including the present site, had been gazetted as State Forest in 1913. The land had previously been grazed as part of the vast Glenisla squatting run until about 1890. Consequently, by 1930, there was forty years of regrowth, which was available for harvesting and required management. Many camps were established across the state including special camps for unemployed youths. As well as timber getting, there were other minor but traditional forest industries such as charcoal burning, wattlebark stripping and even eucalyptus distillation. Charcoal was to become critical as a substitute fuel during the Second World War. Some unemployed workers' camps became internment and prisoner of war camps during the war. At its height, the camp appears to have consisted of a large square area defined by a fence with a row of at least five small timber cabins against the western boundary, an ablution block, two other larger timber buildings possibly used as a mess hall or for other communal purposes and a reservoir. The huts had chimneys built of field stone rubble. A road swept in a curve from the south-west corner to the north-east corner. The structures were removed after the Second World War. Other archaeological remains survive. There is also an earth dam, which appears to be modern. The camp appears to have been superseded by commercial operations and abandoned by the early 1950s.

How is it significant?

The Woolpooer Unemployed Workers' Relief Camp is of historical and archaeological significance to the Southern Grampians Shire as a Heritage Inventory Site.

Why is it significant?

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The Woolhpoor Unemployed Workers' Relief Camp is of historical significance as a representation of the state government's response to the various and sometimes conflicting political forces current during the Great Depression and afterwards. It is of archaeological significance for its potential to illustrate and explain that response.

COMPARISON:

172 Timber Kiln and Former Sawmill Site, Railway Street, Balmoral
226 Englefield Sawmill Hut (and School Site (former), Coleraine-Balmoral Road, Balmoral
323 Green Creek Road Sawmill, Green Creek Road, Mirranatwa
454 Rowe's Saw Mill, Mill Lane off Henty Highway, Woolhpoor
466 Fitzgerald's Sawmill, off Macarthur Street, Dunkeld
Noojee Unemployed Boys' Camp, Noojee via Warragul
Carapooee Unemployed Boys' Camp, Carapooee via St Arnaud

ASSESSED BY: TFH & MGT

ASSESSMENT DATE:

6/07/2002

EXISTING LISTINGS:

HERITAGE STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Include in VHR Include in RNE Include in Local Planning Scheme

No Recommendations for Inclusions

REFERENCES:

Author	Title	Year	Page
A. Story and P. Davies	Historic Forest and Forest-based Places in South-West Victoria	1995	
Andrew Story	"Woolhpoor Camp" Site Register Sheet in Historic forest and forest-based places in S-W Victoria	1995	
Dept. Natural Resources and Environment	Working in the Forest: wattlebark, eucalyptus oil, charcoal and forest camps.	2003	
Dept. Natural Resources and Environment	Timber Harvesting in Woolhpoor State Forest	2002	
Don Garden	Victoria, a History	1984	var.
