

HERITAGE PLACE

NAME OF PLACE: NIGRETТА FALLS RESERVE

ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE: Nigretta Falls Road WANNON

STUDY NUMBER: 128

HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:

OTHER NAME/S OF PLACE: UPPER WANNON FALLS

PRECINCT: outside

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA: Southern Grampians Shire

PARISH: PARISH OF BOCHARA

ACCESS DESCRIPTION:

CFA 431 D-28; VicRoads 72 G4; located on the north side of the Nigretta Falls Road about 13.0kms west of Hamilton and 7.5kms east of the township of Wannon.

SIGNIFICANCE RATING: SLO & H.I SITE



Nigretta Falls Reserve, Nigretta Falls Road, Wannon.

Image Date: 15/11/01

EXTENT OF LISTING:

To the extent of: 1. All the reserve, its major plantings, works and improvements should be covered by a Significant Landscape Overlay. All of the remains of the original Nigretta Falls Homestead should be covered by a Heritage Inventory Listing.

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PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

The Nigretta Falls Reserve is located on the north side of the Wannon-Nigretta Falls Road off the Glenelg Highway, about 12.5kms north-west of Hamilton at the site of the former Nigretta Homestead and overlooking the Wannon river. The site of the original Nigretta squatting run homestead is located facing the Fisherman's bend, slightly upstream from the Nigretta falls. Although there is no physical fabric remaining on the surface, it is expected that the site will have rich archaeological potential. In the 1930s it was said that visitors on their way to the falls passed the ruins of an old stone house (probably that built by Thomas Murphy between 1848 and 1860). The lower walls were dressed sandstone and the upper walls were iron stone mortared together. At this time, the door and window frames were intact and part of a chimney stood. The site was also known for the Iris which flowered prolifically in Spring.

The total area reserved is about 10 acres or 3.75 hectares. The falls are generally in two main cascades emptying into a large pool. The flow is very variable according to the seasons. Access to the falls is provided in the form of paths and viewing platforms. Bush land is regenerating around the watercourse. The older exotics survive from the original homestead garden and include Pear trees (*Pyrus communis*) and a Radiata Pine (*Pinus radiata*). The newer exotics planted as part of the beautification of the reserve includes a grove of Golden Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and a row of Plane trees (*Platanus x acerfolia*). The planting of trees in a grove harks back to the Picturesque landscaping tradition of the eighteenth century. The amenities include picnic and barbecue facilities and a new toilet block. There is a circular drive through the reserve.

HISTORY:

The Nigretta run was first taken up officially by Henry Baynton, a Hobart butcher in 1841 (B&K, 23 & 260). The squatting lease was taken over by William Affleck in 1843 and by Trevor Winter in 1845. In May 1848, Thomas Murphy took over the lease and he took out the Pre-emptive Right. It seems likely that he built the first substantial homestead, a stone cottage, probably in 1848 or soon after. James Bonwick in 1857 mentions "Murphy's Falls" as "Five miles further" from the Wannon Falls (Bonwick, 164). Angus Kennedy held Nigretta from May 1860 until June 1861 when Donald Cameron took it over. In August 1862, Alexander Cameron took it over until 1866, when the lease was forfeited.

John Cameron and his family occupied the homestead. They were Scottish Presbyterians who had come from South Australia where Alexander Cameron held the Penola run and where their first two children, Ewen and Even were born. They had six more sons, the last of whom was born at 'Negretu' but he died as an infant in 1863 (VPI, Reg. No. 8225 & 4289). John's wife Isabella, who was born in Argyle Scotland, died there aged 40 years in 1864 (*ibid.*, 5889). Another son, Ewen Alexander died at the age of 14 in 1873 (*ibid.*, 9851).

When Nigretta was put up for sale in 1861 as Nigretto and The Upper Falls, the property was described in some detail. "The improvements consist of a five-roomed substantial Stone Cottage, with verandah; garden well stocked with fruit-trees; Woolshed; Stock and Sheep Drafting-yards; an excellent Sheepwash and dip; together with every requisite for the efficient working of the station. The House, situated on a grassy knoll, commanding the Cataract over which the Wannon tumbles one hundred feet or more, has a deep and long reach of the river in front, extending above the Falls for about half a mile, and for picturesque and romantic beauty the aspect of the Homestead is unsurpassed in this or any other country" (HS, 16/02/1861). The cottage had fallen into ruin by the 1930s. The management committee demolished it in the 1960s. The stone from the house was used to create fireplaces and children's play equipment near the existing pear trees at Fisherman's bend, within the Nigretta Falls Reserve. The garden around it is now the Nigretta Falls reserve with some exotic trees remaining.

The earliest parish plan of Bochara available, dated 1879, indicates the land which became the modern

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reserve as the eastern third of the Nigretta pre-emptive right, in the name of Thomas Murphy. It consisted of 160 acres one third of which was north of the surveyed road which became the Nigretta Fall Road. Subsequently, a small portion of this third with access to the road was excised as a 'public park and recreation reserve'. It is now 8.1 hectares. Another reserve on the south side of the river, upstream and to the east, of just over 41 acres became private land. The adjacent land on the south side of the river, including the former reserve, was purchased by the squatter, Alexander Cameron. The earliest parish plan of Toolka, dated 1880, indicates a reserve of exactly 30 acres to the north of the falls 'for public purposes'. It was noted in the parish plan of 1918 as 'water reserve'. The adjacent land on the north side of the river was purchased from the Crown by the squatter, William C. Messer. The falls were also known as the Upper Wannon Falls.

The Nigretta and Wannon Falls are amongst the most important cultural landscapes in Victoria. They have attracted many famous professional artists. Perhaps the first was Captain Charles James Tyers (1806-70), a sketcher, surveyor and public servant who became Commissioner of Crown Lands for Portland Bay District in 1842. He painted 'Lower Falls on the Wannon' in the same year, and probably at the same time 'Upper Fall River Wannon'. The goldfields water-colourist, S. T. Gill (1818-80) painted 'Falls on the Wannon'. The best known artist was Eugen von Guérard (1812-1901), who painted both the Nigretta and the Wannon Falls in the 1857. His colleague, Nicholas Chevalier (1828-1902) painted 'The Wannon Falls' in 1866. Louis Buvelot (1814-88) painted the falls at least six times in 1867-8. The local artist Thomas Clark (1814-83) also painted the waterfalls at least six times. The work of these artists ranged from the merely topographical to a deeply metaphorical understanding of the landscape.

At a different level, the waterfalls were represented in popular culture. Thomas Washbourne took a series of stereographic photographs between 1860 and 1888. In the twentieth century, the Rose Stereographic Company and others published postcards over many decades. These were usually colour-tinted. In 1888, Victoria and Its Metropolis stated 'On the Wannon River, at a few miles distant, are two very picturesque waterfalls which are favourite places of resort for excursionists and picnic parties.' It used an etching of the Wannon Falls to introduce the chapter dedicated to the Western District. Even after WW2, the Victorian Railways took professional photographs of the waterfalls which were installed in the Tait class 'red-rattler' train carriages.

The Dundas Shire Centenary history states that the Nigretta Falls Reserve was proclaimed on 23rd of January, 1912. At that time the Nigretta Falls Reserve consisted of 20 acres and 15 perches. It was placed under the control of a committee of management on 20th June 1919. This committee was known as the Wannon and Lake Linlithgow Committee of Management whose aim was to work towards various improvements in each reserve. The founding members were all members of the Hamilton Progress Association and included Mr. Edward White, MLC, Mr. James Young, JP and Thomas Francis O'Neill. In 1924, the name of the committee was changed to drop the Lake Linlithgow part of its title, to become the Wannon and Nigretta Committee of management.

To raise funds and to help pay for the improvements at the reserves, each year a gymkana was held at the Nigretta Falls reserve which was attended by people from the whole district. Photographs survive of large picnics organised by churches, commercial organisations or sporting clubs in areas of natural beauty which had been set aside for conservation purposes and which were often utilised as popular places for picnicking or painting, such as the Wannon and Nigretta falls reserves.

When the committee took control of the Nigretta reserve, they experienced great difficulty in achieving any improvements, especially to the surrounding roads. Until 1955, it was impossible to drive to the Nigretta Falls via the Nigretta Falls Road.

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There were six miles of track running beside the Wannon River connecting the Nigretta and Wannon Falls reserves. In 1965, the Shire Council obtained a grant to improve the road in order to attract more tourists with cars. In 1960, the committee raised funds from the community erected a long protective fence around the falls. At this time, large concrete steps were built to allow better access to the foot of the falls. Tables and seats were also installed amongst the trees for the picnickers and others further upstream at Fisherman's Bend.

The present mature plantings possibly date from this time, or earlier. They include Plane trees, Pines, Golden Ash and Pear trees. Most of the Planes form a drive. The poplars are distributed randomly. There is also a grove of five Plane trees planted in a pentagonal plan, reminiscent of eighteenth-century picturesque landscaping. The pears trees are over 150 years old and date from the late 1840s original site of the Nigretta homestead, since demolished.

Recently, the existing facilities have been upgraded with a new shelter and barbecue, new environmentally friendly toilets and better fences and paths.

THEMATIC CONTEXT:

Theme 3: Developing local, regional and national economies

3.23 Catering for tourists

Theme 8: Developing Australia's cultural life

8.1.1 Playing and watching organised sports

8.1.3 Developing public parks and gardens

8.1.4 Enjoying the natural environment

8.3 Going on holiday

8.5.4 Pursuing common leisure interests

8.10 Pursuing excellence in the arts and sciences

8.10.2 Creating visual arts

CONDITION:

The reserve remains relatively intact to its 1960s stage of development and includes new facilities. The original homestead site has significant archaeological potential.

INTEGRITY:

relatively intact

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

What is significant?

The Nigretta Falls Reserve is about 12.5kms north-west of Hamilton at the site of the former Nigretta Homestead overlooking the Wannon river. The total area now reserved is about 8 hectares and comprises some regenerated bushland, exotic trees and recreational facilities. The Nigretta run was typical for its sequence of ownership and the connections of its owners. The cottage, possibly built as early as 1848, was sited picturesquely. It fell into ruin by the 1930s is now gone. The older exotics survive from the original garden. The Wannon and Nigretta (or Upper Wannon) Falls have been the consistent subject of significant art including works by some of Australia's most celebrated colonial artists, such as Nicholas Chevalier, Eugen von Guerard, Louis Buvelot, S. T. Gill and Thomas Clark. From the earliest times, tourists would stay at nearby Redruth and visit both falls. The Nigretta Falls Reserve was gazetted in 1912. It has been managed jointly with the Wannon Falls Reserve under a committee of management. The Reserve has been developed over the years, with changes reflecting different values and fashions. A grove of Golden ash trees continues

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the Picturesque tradition. In the later twentieth century, there has been an emphasis on native plantings. Most recently, the facilities have been modernised with a contemporary concern for environmental values. The Reserve is substantially intact and in good condition.

How is it significant?

The Nigretta Falls Reserve is of historical, social and aesthetic significance to the Southern Grampians Shire.

Why is it significant?

The Nigretta Falls Reserve is of historical significance as the site of the former Nigretta Homestead and as an early beauty spot and tourist destination established in the Western District. It is of social significance as a recreation reserve. It is of aesthetic significance for its long association with Picturesque sensibility, the dominant aesthetic in colonial Victoria, which continued well into the twentieth century. It is the subject of much significant art. The Nigretta Falls Reserve is of significance as a comparative pair with the nearby Wannan Falls Reserve.

COMPARISON:

129 Wannan Falls Reserve, Glenelg Highway, Wannan
034 The Wilderness Homestead Complex, Wilderness Rd, Gritjurk
045 Park Hill (Original Site), Schuller's Road, Yulecart

ASSESSED BY: TFH

ASSESSMENT DATE: 2/12/2001

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
Alexander Sutherland	Victoria & Its Metropolis	1888	
Captain Charles James Tyers	'Lower Falls on the Wannan'	1842	
Department of Justice Victoria	Pioneer Index Victoria 1836 - 1888	2001	
Department of Lands and Survey	Parish of Toolka, County of Dudas	1880	
Don Garden	Hamilton, A Western District History	1984	var.
Eugen von Guerard	'Nigretta Falls'		
Hamilton Spectator, Saturday February 16th, 1861	Station on the Wannan for sale	1861	2
James Bonwick, and C E Sayers, ed.	Western Victoria, Its Geography geology and Social Condition	1857	164
James Smith, ed	The Cyclopaedia of Victoria	1905	
Nicholas Chevalier	'The Wannan Falls'	1866	
R V Billis and A S Kenyon	Pastoral Pioneers of Port Phillip	1974	
S. T Gill	'Falls on the Wannan'		
Shire of Dundas	Dundas Shire Centenary, 1863-1963	1963	108-9
Thomas Clarke	various works	1867	
		-8	
Thomas Washbourne	Rose Stereographic Photograph Postcard Collection		
unknown	Retrospect, Old House at Nigretta Falls		