

HERITAGE PLACE

NAME OF PLACE: FIGHTING WATERHOLES BURIAL SITE

ADDRESS/LOCATION OF PLACE: Konongwootong Reservoir KONONG WOOTONG

STUDY NUMBER: 149

HERITAGE OVERLAY NUMBER:

PRECINCT: outside

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA: Southern Grampians Shire

PARISH: PARISH OF KONONG WOOTONG

ACCESS DESCRIPTION:

CFA 430A, at Konongwootong Reservoir, on the Coleraine-Nareen Road.

SIGNIFICANCE RATING: Local



Fighting Waterholes Burial Site, Konongwootong Reservoir.

Image Date: 26/03/02

EXTENT OF LISTING:

To the extent of: 1. All the Konongwootong Reservoir, the embankment, burial site and an area of land around the reserve, defined as 250m frontage to Coleraine Road, 300m along the eastern boundary, 250m southern boundary and 320m along the weestern boundary.

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PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

At the base of the embankment of the Konongwootong Reservoir, the remains of numerous Aboriginal people are buried, beside the overflow creek, formerly Denhills Creek. The bones were exposed after exceptionally heavy rains in 1946, and have been reburied on the site.

HISTORY:

The Konongwootong Reservoir was once a chain of billabongs along the Denhills Creek. In the 1840s these billabongs were the site of an Aboriginal massacre by a 'hunting party' of white employees from nearby Konongwootong Station.

The Jardwadjali people of Konongwootong Gundidj are believed to have occupied the Coleraine and Konongwootong area prior to white settlement. As was the case throughout Australia, Indigenous populations were denied access to their traditional lands as a result of white settlement, particularly the taking up of large runs. As their traditional food sources were displaced, they often fed on sheep which were held on pastoral properties. In retaliation for 'theft' of sheep or other stock, massacres were often committed against whole tribes (Clark, 1995). George Robinson, the Protector of Aborigines, remarked in his journals that the majority of stories about Aboriginal 'theft' in the area were 'grossly fallacious or shamelessly exaggerated'.

On 1st April 1840, at a series of waterholes on Denhills Creek, later the Konongwootong Reservoir, a massacre was inflicted on members of the Konongwootong gundidj clan by the Whyte brothers of Konongwootong Station. Although the exact number of Aborigines killed is not known, numerous men, women and children were murdered.

This was the second massacre of local Aborigines by the Whyte brothers and their employees, coming only one month after the murder of over 40 Aboriginal people at the Hummocks, Wando Vale, a short distance to the west of this site. According to a contemporary account from William Moodie of Wando Dale homestead, up to 200 people were shot, although he did not consider the figure to be completely reliable.

It is believed that the justification given for the massacre was that the Konongwootong gundidj stole several sheep belonging to the Whyte brothers. After unsuccessfully looking for the perpetrators, the hunting party separated; the Whyte brothers rode to the nearest station to rest, while their station hands returned to the home station at Konongwootong. En route, the station hands passed the waterholes, at which were camped some old men, women and children. They shot the entire camp. When word of this massacre spread, there was an outcry, and although the Whytes dismissed the employees responsible, there was no official inquiry (Clark, 1995).

After this second massacre the Konongwootong gundidj remnant left their country and went to Murndal station on the Wannon river, where they joined with the Wanedeet gundidj clan from the neighbouring Dhauwurd wurrung. Eventually the survivors of these two clans went to the Lake Condah mission in the late 1860s.

The bodies of those killed at the Fighting Waterholes were buried in a mass grave on the banks of the creek. This site is now below the embankment of the reservoir. In 1946 a number of skulls and other bones were uncovered when, after heavy rain, the creek scoured its banks. The bones were re-buried in the same area.

THEMATIC CONTEXT:

Theme 2: Peopling Australia

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2.6 Fighting for land

CONDITION:

To be discovered after further investigation

INTEGRITY:

Unknown

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

What is significant?

The Konongwootong Reservoir is the site of the previous chain of waterholes which were linked by Denhills Creek. It was here that in 1840, a hunting party of employees from nearby Kononwootong Station massacred a party of Aboriginal elders, women and children. The bones of those who were killed were buried in the embankment wall of the creek, but were uncovered one hundred years later in major floods. The remains of those who were massacred have since been reburied.

How is it significant?

The Fighting Waterholes Massacre Site is of archaeological and historical significance to the Southern Grampians Shire.

Why is it significant?

The Fighting Waterholes Massacres Site is of historical significance for the associations, and as the physical remnant of the final act of dispossession of an Aboriginal clan, the Konongwootong gundidj, from its ancestral lands by squatters in the earliest phase of settlement in the Western District. The burial ground is of particular archaeological significance as physical evidence of the massacre which took place on the site in 1840.

COMPARISON:

No comparative examples identified.

ASSESSED BY: AEN

ASSESSMENT DATE:

30/11/2003

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
E R Trangmar	The Aborigines of Far Western Victoria	c. 1956	
Ian Clarke	Scars in the Landscape, a register of massacre sites in western Victoria, 1803-1859	1995	