



ACT Heritage Council

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Blue Range Internment Camp

(part Block 225, Coree)

At its meeting of 19 November 2015 the ACT Heritage Council decided that Blue Range Internment Camp was eligible for registration.

The information contained in this report was considered by the ACT Heritage Council in assessing the nomination for Blue Range Internment Camp against the heritage significance criteria outlined in s10 of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

HISTORY

Before European settlement the Blue Range and Uriarra areas were frequented by Aboriginal people, who gathered to consume Bogong moths at an area near the present day Uriarra Homestead. Some land in the Blue Range Creek catchment was taken up by the McDonald family in the 1830s and later was resumed for the Federal Capital Territory in 1912, then purchased by J.R. Hyles in 1926 for grazing purposes (ACT Heritage File 1980).

The Ngunnawal people are traditionally affiliated with the lands within the Canberra region. In this citation, 'Aboriginal community' refers to the Ngunnawal people and other Aboriginal groups within the ACT who draw significance from the place. Whilst the term 'Aboriginal community' acknowledges these groups in the ACT, it is recognised that their traditional territories extend outside contemporary borders. These places attest to a rich history of Aboriginal occupation. Ethnographic and historical information locates Aboriginal people within the region from the time of early European occupation through to the 1870s and 1880s. Traditional Aboriginal society in Canberra during the nineteenth century suffered from dramatic depopulation and alienation from traditional land based resources, although some important social institutions like intertribal gatherings and corroborees were retained to a degree at least until the 1860s.

Pine plantations were established in the ACT in the early twentieth century, the earliest being those at Stromlo, dating from 1914 and initiated by Charles Weston. The early plantations were established to provide softwood for the burgeoning Territory. In 1926 the Commonwealth Forestry Bureau (later the Forestry and Timber Bureau) commenced planting pines in the Blue Range and Uriarra areas to combat erosion problems within the Cotter Dam catchment caused by grazing and rabbit infestation. Fencing the area was considered to be too expensive and, as some success had been achieved on Mt Stromlo since 1914 with *Pinus radiata*, the area was largely planted to pine. Severe bushfires in 1939 destroyed much of the original 1927 to 1938 plantation. Blue Range Creek catchment was still natural bushland and also suffered severe fire damage at the time (ACT Heritage File 1999).

Planting of pines continued, including in the Blue Range Creek catchment area, from 1941 and a camp for the labour force of Italian nationals was established at Blue Range for the purpose. This post-dated the establishment of the Molonglo Internment Camp in Fyshwick which was built in 1918, but coincided with the establishment of Laurel Camp at Pierces Creek Forest for those of German origin (ACT Heritage File 1999). The former site no longer remains; the latter site was destroyed in bushfires in 2003. York (1989) notes that an internment camp for Italians was also established at Black Mountain, however nothing further is recorded about this place in key sources on the subject of camps in the ACT.

Wartime Internment Camps (see p. 2 below for reference for this section)

World War I

During World War I, for security reasons the Australian Government pursued a comprehensive internment policy against enemy aliens living in Australia.

Initially only those born in countries at war with Australia were classed as enemy aliens, but later this was expanded to include people of enemy nations who were naturalised British subjects, Australian-born descendants of migrants born in enemy nations and others who were thought to pose a threat to Australia's security.

Australia interned almost 7000 people during World War I, of whom about 4500 were enemy aliens and British nationals of German ancestry already resident in Australia.

World War II

During World War II, Australian authorities established internment camps for three reasons – to prevent residents from assisting Australia's enemies, to appease public opinion and to house overseas internees sent to Australia for the duration of the war.

Unlike World War I, the initial aim of internment during the later conflict was to identify and intern those who posed a particular threat to the safety or defence of the country. As the war progressed, however, this policy changed and Japanese residents were interned en masse. In the later years of the war, Germans and Italians were also interned on the basis of nationality, particularly those living in the north of Australia. In all, just over 20 per cent of all Italians resident in Australia were interned.

Australia interned about 7000 residents, including more than 1500 British nationals, during World War II. A further 8000 people were sent to Australia to be interned after being detained overseas by Australia's allies. At its peak in 1942, more than 12,000 people were interned in Australia.

Residents of Australia

Most internees during both wars were nationals of Australia's main enemy nations already living in Australia. During World War I Germans made up the majority of internees. During World War II, as well as Germans there were also large numbers of Italian and Japanese internees. Internees also included nationals of over 30 other countries, including Finland, Hungary, Portugal and Russia.

Not all internees were foreign nationals. Naturalised British subjects and those born in Australia were among those of German, Italian and Japanese origin who were interned. British-born subjects who were members of the radical nationalist organisation, the Australia First Movement, were also interned.

Men made up the majority of those interned, but some women and children also spent time in the camps.

Overseas internees

Included in the numbers of internees accommodated in Australia were enemy aliens, mostly Germans and Japanese, from Britain, Palestine, Iran, the Straits Settlements (now Singapore and Malaysia), the Netherlands East Indies (now Indonesia), New Zealand and New Caledonia. Most famous among these groups were the Germans and Italians who arrived on the *Dunera* from England in 1940. The overseas internees included many women and children.

Prisoners of war

During World War I and World War II, Australia held both internees and prisoners of war. Prisoners of war were members of enemy military forces who were captured or had surrendered, whereas internees were civilians. Most prisoners of war in Australia were sent from overseas, very few were captured in Australia.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION – Blue Range Internment Camp

Many records do not make a clear distinction between civilian internees and military prisoners of war. The terms 'prisoner' and 'internee' were often used for both groups. In many cases internees and prisoners of war were accommodated in the same camps.

There were differences, however, in the rights of these two groups and the way they could be treated by Australian authorities. For example, prisoners of war could be made to work while internees could not. Internees also had to be paid for any work they undertook.

Camp life

Internment camps were administered by the army and run along military lines. During World War I they were often referred to as concentration camps. Camps were established in repurposed institutions such as the old gaols at Berrima and Trial Bay in New South Wales. The largest camp during World War I was at Holsworthy (Liverpool), west of Sydney.

During World War II, internees were first housed in prisons, such as at Long Bay gaol in New South Wales, or impromptu accommodation such as the Northam race course in Western Australia and the Keswick army barracks in Adelaide. The first camps were set up at the Enoggera (Gaythorne) and Liverpool military bases in Queensland and New South Wales and at the Dhurringile Mansion in Victoria.

As the numbers of internees grew, the early camps became too small. The Australian Government then constructed purpose-built camps at Tatura (Rushworth) in Victoria, at Hay and Cowra in New South Wales, at Loveday in South Australia and at Harvey in Western Australia.

Life for the internees varied between the camps, particularly between those that were temporary camps and those that were purpose-built. The conditions also depended on the geographical location of the camp, its climate, the composition of the camp population and importantly, the personality of the officer in charge.

After the wars

At the end of each war the internment camps were closed down. After World War I, most internees were deported. During World War II many internees, particularly Italians, were released before the end of the war. Others were allowed to leave the camps after hostilities ceased. Internees of British or European origin were permitted to remain in Australia after the war, including those who had been brought from overseas by British authorities. Most of those of Japanese origin, however, including some who were Australian-born, were 'repatriated' to Japan in 1946.



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<http://www.naa.gov.au/collection/snapshots/internment-camps>

Between 1940 and 1945, the Australian Government pursued a policy of selective internment of Italians, regardless of whether or not they were naturalised. The limited nature of the internment policy, however, is indicated by the fact that 3651 were actually interned, out of a total Italian-born population in Australia of about 30,000 (York 1989: 38). Wartime internment during World War Two was governed under the *National Security Act 1939* (Commonwealth), under which the Federal Government could intern any person whose loyalty was suspect (Rando 2005). The land in the Blue Range Creek catchment area had been taken up by the Commonwealth, and, under the provisions of this Act, a camp for Italian Nationals was established in the ACT (ACT Heritage file 1980).

The obstacles that Italian migrants faced in the Federal Capital Territory's early years were significant. Apart from problems with the English language, working conditions and methods were very different from those in Italy. They also encountered an element of prejudice in Australia. An important element in the anti-Italian sentiment in the post-War years stemmed from the fact that Italy had sided with Germany and declared war on Great Britain and her Allies in 1940 (York 1989: 38).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION – Blue Range Internment Camp

The Commonwealth Minister for the Interior, whose department was responsible for the regulation of Aliens, including Aliens with war-time enemy status, identified thirteen Italian Aliens in Canberra in October 1942 (York 1989: 38).

There were two main camps in the Territory - at Blue Range and Black Mountain - but they mainly housed Italian internees from New South Wales. In January 1945, the Director General of Security, W.B. Simpson, advised the Department of Interior that, at the Pierce's Creek and Blue Range camps, there were thirteen Germans and eleven Italians. All were involved in forestry work. One of the Italians was believed to have had pro-Fascist sympathies. Another of the internees, with the memorable name of Caruso, had two sons in the Australian Army (York 1989: 38).

Internees at Blue Range Internment Camp

(Source: *Italians at the Blue Range Huts During World War II* by Rose Costello 2003). This document is an oral history project that made a study of ex-internees of the camp, and was completed in 2003 as part of an ACT Heritage Grant. In addition to Mr Ralph Panucci, the only contactable ex-occupant, the project was completed with assistance of the Council for Italian Organisations, Canberra and Queanbeyan. The project received considerable media and political attention.

During the course of the war, three groups of Italians were sent to work at the Blue Range Internment Camp. The first were transported in December 1942. According to one of the group, Ralph Panucci, there were about 27 men of mixed age and marital status, all from Sydney. The older men would not have been naturalised and so would have been internees. About 17 of the labour force were under the age of 21. The men were not prisoners of war. Some were enlisted in Australia's armed services, some were internees, however they were all employed on a wage and understood that they were entitled to 2 weeks annual leave. When denied the right to take Christmas leave, some of the men went on strike and for their refusal to work were sentenced to six months hard labour in Goulburn gaol.

A subsequent group was referred to as "Aliens" and the third group as prisoners of war. They were involved in a number of forestry activities including preparation of land, raising pine seedlings, planting, controlling weeds and cutting hardwood regeneration on nearby plantations. To the north of the camp Blue Range Arboreta No.8 and No.9 had been established, however these were tended by Forestry staff rather than the internees.

The first group to arrive lived in tents, although later about 20 two-man huts were installed. Supplies were brought in from Canberra by truck every two weeks. To provide fresh food, the men established garden terraces and diverted part of the creek for irrigation. A galley hut was constructed, beneath which the internees widened the creek to create a wash pool, which was later lined with stone and cement. Over time they planted fruit trees and walnuts.

During the war, petrol was in short supply. To overcome this problem, hardwood was cut and converted to charcoal in simple pits. The charcoal was then used for "producer gas" which was a substitute for petrol. At Blue Range Internment Camp the second and third groups of Italians dug and operated six charcoal pits to the north of the camp near the arboretum. The Italians also established pine plantations, although the adjacent 'Blue Range Arboreta No. 8 and No. 9' were scientific experimentation plots, and were not planted by the occupants of the camp.

When the war was over, many of the men stayed on and the numbers actually increased in the camp with the employment of other Italians from within Australia and later with immigrants directly from Italy. One of the last to arrive at Blue Range Internment Camp was Mr Padovan, who had arrived in Melbourne in 1952 and spent two months in a migrant camp at Bonegilla, near Albury, before coming to Blue Range Internment Camp. At that time there were about a dozen men in the camp and each had his own vegetable garden.

Padovan was the only one of approximately 75 immigrants employed by forestry during the 1950's to remain long term with ACT Forests. The Italians in particular provided good service to Uriarra, and were involved in a number of forestry activities which included preparation of land, pine planting, cutting hardwood regenerating in neighbouring plantations, and raising pine seedlings.

In 1954 numbers at the camp began to dwindle due to the improved transport facilities and the opening of other areas for plantation work, and a decision was made to close the camp. In about 1956 some of the men's accommodation huts were relocated to Uriarra Forestry Settlement and some to Green Hills scout camp.

In 1966 ACT Forests began to develop Blue Range Internment Camp site as a picnic and camping area. The wash

BACKGROUND INFORMATION – Blue Range Internment Camp

house was converted to a wood store, and the laundry demolished leaving the concrete slab. The galley, which had initially been divided into three, with a corrugated fireplace at each end, had its internal partitions removed, and a stone fireplace constructed at the south end.

The contribution of the Italian community to forestry in the ACT was commemorated on 2 June 1985, Italian National Day, when a marble plaque was unveiled at the site by the Italian Ambassador.

DESCRIPTION

The Blue Range Internment Camp comprises the remains of a forest workers camp located between a Blue Range Road and Blue Range Creek, within an enclosed part of the valley. A detailed site plan is at Image 1. The area was burnt by the bushfires of January 2003 and consequently some of the former fabric has been destroyed and the surface modified during restoration work. However, key significant features remain including:

The Blue Range Hut

The existing hut was the camp galley, which had initially been divided into three, with a corrugated fireplace at each end. It has since had its internal partitions removed and a stone fireplace constructed at the south end (see Image 2). It is a single room structure of wooden posts and beams, walled with galvanised iron. Most of the roof is also galvanised iron with several panels of modern corrugated plastic to allow in light. Several shuttered windows can be closed to exclude drafts and there is a door in both the east and west walls.

The floor is predominantly the original concrete, and the remainder of the hut has been rebuilt without internal partitions, using new materials, but retaining the original size and form. A wide verandah extends along the west side of the hut with a recent floor (see Image 3). A curved stone retaining wall and seat defines this area and several fixed barbecues are placed towards the north end of this space.

Two concrete slabs

Located to the south east of the hut are two small concrete slabs with remnant drainage. The most easterly is understood to have been the wash room, and the other may have been a laundry.

Fruit trees

In close proximity to the concrete slabs and hut several fruit and nut trees. Although burnt in the fires, some have survived intact and others are regrowing from the base.

Several other fruit and nut trees occur throughout the site and these are also considered to be significant as remnants from the occupied phase, and evidence of the commitment that the workers had to growing their own fruit and vegetables.

Stone lined bathing pool (see Image 4)

A section of the creek immediately below the hut was widened and lined with cemented stones as a wash pool. Part of it has survived, although it is now covered in sand and vegetation, and part was damaged during restoration work in the vicinity following the bushfires of 2003. Some dislodged stones and cement are nearby.

Remnant channels and terraces

Garden terraces were made to the north of the hut and the creek diverted to provide irrigation. Part of these terraces can still be discerned in the landscape.

Former tool shed (see Image 5)

The shed is located adjacent to a branch in the road and comprised a concrete slab with bush pole framing and corrugated iron walls and roof. The shed was extensively burnt in the fire.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION – Blue Range Internment Camp

Charcoal pits (see Image 6)

To the north-east of the former tool shed are a set of six charcoal burning pits set out in grid fashion, each approximately 5 metres by about 2.5 metres by about 1 metre deep. Some have remnant brickwork and pipes apparent. Wood was burnt in the pits to produce charcoal for "producer gas" which could replace petrol in cars during the war and post-war fuel shortages. Trees are growing back through this area.

Remnant group of *canariensis* pines

Across the track from the charcoal pits and tool store was an arboretum of exotic pines dating from about 1941 that was largely burnt to the ground during the 2003 fires. A small group of *canariensis* pines survived.

Modern items

A toilet block, carparks, barbecues, seats and rubbish bins that were introduced when the area was established for recreational purposes do not have heritage significance.

Physical condition and integrity

The fires in January 2003 impacted the former camp. Although the galley hut survived, the work shed adjacent to the charcoal pits was burnt, as was the wash room, which had been adapted as a wood store. Other significant features have survived, including the charcoal pits, and stone lined pool. Most of the pine trees were extensively burnt. The fruit and walnut trees were badly burnt, however some survived and others were found re-suckering in 2004 and in 2015.

SITE PLAN



Blue Range Internment Camp Boundary (part Block 225 Core)

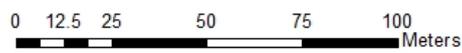


Image 1 Site Boundary

BACKGROUND INFORMATION – Blue Range Internment Camp

IMAGES



Image 2 Fireplace in the galley (ACT Heritage 2015)



Image 5 Former tool shed (ACT Heritage 2015)



Image 3 Verandah on galley (ACT Heritage 2015)



Image 6 Charcoal pit (Costelloe 2003)



Image 4 Stone lined pool (ACT Heritage 2015)

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