ACT Heritage Council

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

South Lanyon Sawmill

(part Block 1188 Tuggeranong)

At its meeting of 28 July 2016 the ACT Heritage Council decided that the South Lanyon Sawmill was not eligible for provisional registration.

The information contained in this report was considered by the ACT Heritage Council in assessing the nomination for the south Lanyon Sawmill against the heritage significance criteria outlined in s10 of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

HISTORY

Little information exists on the South Lanyon Sawmill. What is known about the site comes from a 1981 archaeological assessment by Barz and Winston-Gregson, Volume 4 of the National Capital Development Commission's Sites of Significance in the ACT (1988), and recollections from Mr Patrick Jeffery kindly provided to ACT Heritage in 2016.

Context

Broadly speaking, the timber processing industry in Australia saw three periods of development, closely related to available energy sources and development of logging technologies:

1. Pit saws/manual production (1788-1850). Between these dates red cedar, eucalyptus, and native softwoods were commonly harvested and milled, and the demand for timber was confined largely to pastoral and residential requirements (Fenner School N.D). Initially, convict labour was used to complete felling and sawing, especially where materials for building residences and penal institutions were required for the new colony (Dargavel 1995). During this period trees were felled by axe or cross saw and cut into lengths using pit saws, with timber transported by animal power (Fenner School N.D; Dargavel 1995; McCarthy 1987: 3).
2. Steam power and larger sawmills (1850-1945). In this period the felling and milling of eucalypts, rainforest timber and native hardwoods was the focus of the industry. Prior to discovery of gold in Australia, demand for timber was confined to those purposes outlined above. However, by the 1850s, gold mining consumed large amounts of timber for the lining of shafts as well as building equipment and on-site housing, and as boiler fuel for the industry. This period saw the development of steam power, specifically the advent of steam powered mills and road transport enabling higher productivity and access to areas previously uneconomic to harvest. Eventually the gold rush subsided, but by the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, timber harvesting grew into a more prolific and regulated industry. This was aided by the improvement and expansion of road transport as mentioned above, which consisted of narrow gauged tramways which could be constructed deeper into forests, allowing transport of timbers in and out of mills (Fenner School N.D; Dargavel 1995; McCarthy 1987: 3-4).
3. Electrification and diesel power (1946-1990). This period saw the development of wood-chipping plants, pulp and paper, where plantation softwoods, eucalypts, cypress pine and rainforest timbers were processed. During World War II the demand for timber increased dramatically, and as such, so did the number of timber mills, including those near townships, such as the South Lanyon Sawmill. The post-war period also saw an economic boom and increased demand on the timber industry (Fenner School N.D; Dargavel 1995; McCarthy 1987: 3-4).

Timber for building purposes was being cut locally from an early date in the area now occupied by the ACT. Nineteenth century timber homesteads were nearly always constructed from local materials, the timber often being cut at sawpits which have since disappeared. Soon after the Territory was established, the Commonwealth began undertaking forestry surveys to establish the timber resources of the ACT region**.** Encouraged by the Commonwealth, one Mr C. Rayner and his partner, Mr D. Peterson, established a steam operated sawmill on the range in the upper parts of Lees Creek. The remains of this mill appear on the ACT Heritage Register as the Lees Creek Sawmill Ruin. This example of sawmilling during the interwar period represents the only registered sawmill in the ACT (ACT Heritage Council 1998).

Sawmill sites containing any sort of residual fabric are very rare in rural ACT as almost all of the early sites have either been removed or are no longer extant. At Tidbinbilla and Gudgenby for example, several known sites have disappeared. At Tidbinbilla the only remaining indicators of sawmilling are tree stumps at Raynor's Mill site located adjacent to the Walking Trails car park. A mill apparently operated in the Uriarra area but remains are not known to exist. The only rural sites with visible remains include relics of a saw bench in the District of Stromlo, and the ruins of the South Lanyon Sawmill (ACT Heritage Council 1998).

The South Lanyon Sawmill was probably built around the middle of the twentieth century, contemporaneous with World War II demand for timber resources and the subsequent favourable post-war industrial economy. The 1981 archaeological survey (Barz and Winston-Gregson) identified a fuel stand at the site that would have gravity-fed a diesel combustion motor, which in turn probably fuelled the sawmill's blade, although this may not have been the original power source. Patrick Jeffery (pers. comm. 9 May 2016) recalls that during his time working at the mill the power source came from a heavy leather belt attached to the flywheel of a tractor.

Mr Jeffery also recalls a direct association between the mill and the Lanyon estate. Bert Edwards installed the sawmill. Edwards was the well-regarded station manager of Lanyon Homestead from 1940 to 1953. Mr Edwards is credited with major improvements of the Lanyon estate with extensive clearing in hilly areas, pasture improvements, growing wheat crops, windmill installation, dam building, irrigation of the Murrumbidgee River flats for lucerne, and the construction of new outbuildings and workers cottages (Marshall et al 2010).

Edwards also built a small sawmill to cut timber for the property, for, as mentioned above, building timber was scarce during and shortly after World War II. The timber was used for houses, sheds, gate posts, fence posts and railings, and consisted of yellow and red box trees which were taken from the hills forming the eastern boundary of the property. The sawmill also cut timbers that were used to build cattle yards at the Queanbeyan Showground, and some of those timbers are still in place today (Patrick Jeffery pers. comm. 9 May 2016).

The National Capital Development Commission's *Sites of Significance* (1988) claims that the South Lanyon Sawmill was abandoned soon after 1945, although neither the exact date of disuse, or the information that led to this conclusion are provided. Indeed, it seems to have had a lifespan into the 1950s, as Patrick Jeffery was employed at the sawmill at least until 1952 (Patrick Jeffery pers. comm. 3 May 2016).

DESCRIPTION

The South Lanyon Sawmill is located beside a modern shed on a private lease, about 500m north-east of the village of Tharwa, ACT. It comprises parallel sets of rails separated by the remains of a gantry and platform. Three wheeled axles and the base of a winch are in situ, as is a small trolley, which was probably about large enough to transport timber away from the mill on one of the sets of rails (Barz and Winston-Gregson 1981). It appears the mill, or at least the gantry, was constructed of bush logs.

The mill was evidently in much better condition during the 1981 archaeological survey than in 2016. In 1981 the South Lanyon Sawmill could be rendered in a field drawing with enough detail to enable interpretation (see Image 1).

Feature 1 was probably the loading point, where logs were deposited onto a cart for transportation via the rail (Feature 2), towed with the aid of the winch (Feature 3) towards the gantry (Feature 4). Indeed, Patrick Jeffery recalls that the timber to be milled was shifted in steel trollies on the miniature railway line to the cutting saw. From the gantry, logs would have been set down and milled inside a shed or shelter, the location of which is indicated by the post holes at Feature 5. Once milled, the timber was probably placed on a trolley like the one mentioned above and transported off-site along the second set of rails (Feature 6) into a waiting vehicle (wheel ruts at Feature 8). The fuel stand (Feature 7) which gravity-fed the mill's motor at one stage was elevated above the rail tracks.

It is probable that the log at Feature 9, adjacent to the entry rails indicates the location of a discard area for scraps and off-cuts, as Patrick Jeffery remembers that waste was transported away from the site via the same route logs were brought in. The 1981 Barz and Winston-Gregson report notes a stockpile of partly sawn timber adjacent to the site, and indeed, satellite imagery taken between 2002 and 2015 seems to show the stockpile (see Image 2). However, as of 2016, the stockpile is no longer extant.

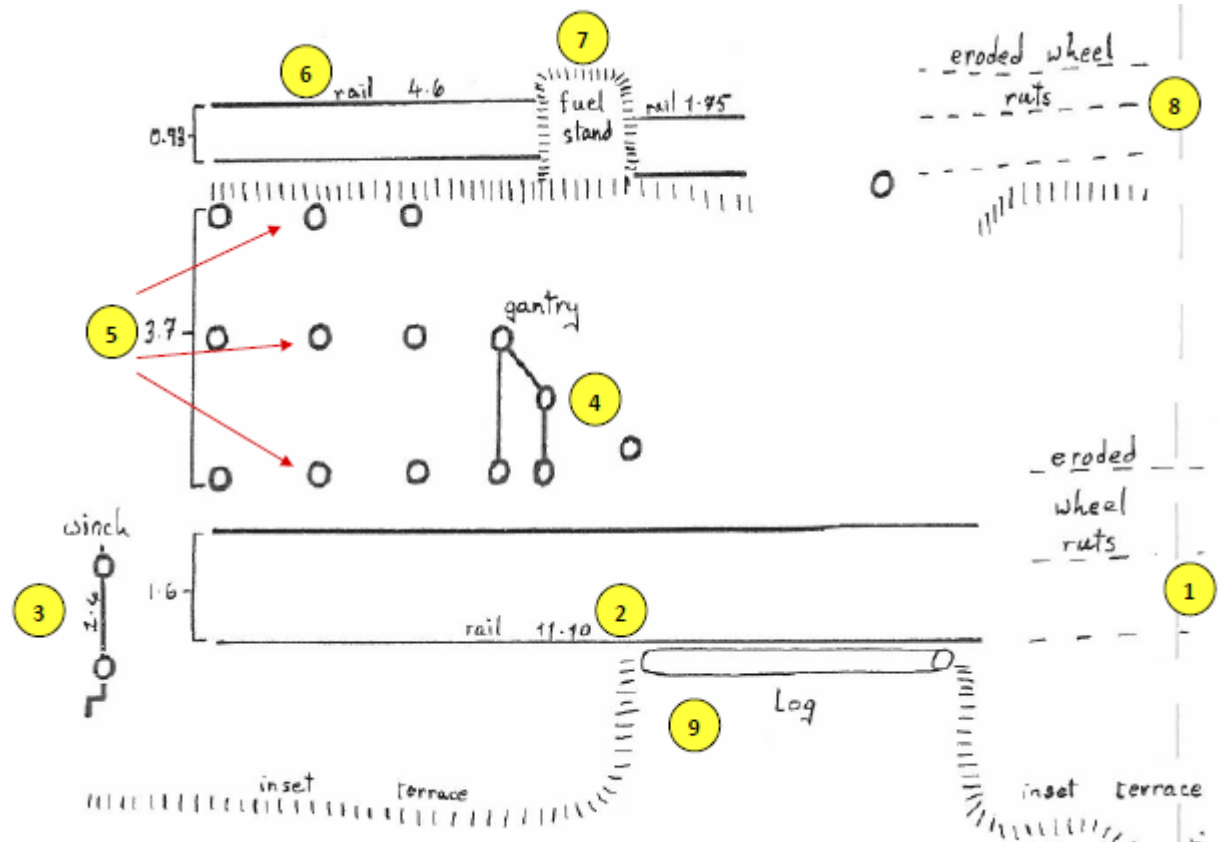

Image 1 Site plan of South Lanyon Sawmill from 1981 archaeological survey by Barz and Winston-Gregson.

Physical condition and integrity

The South Lanyon Sawmill is in very poor condition, and only the following features remain:

- Collapsed remains of the gantry (Feature 4), see Image 3.
- Segments of the two rail lines (Features 2 and 6), see Image 4.
- Three axles from transport cart see Image 5.
- Base of the winch (Feature 3), see Image 6.
- Metal fittings, see Image 7.
- Small trolley, see Image 8.

While *Sites of Significance* (1988) asserts the site's interpretive value, this has significantly deteriorated as of 2016.

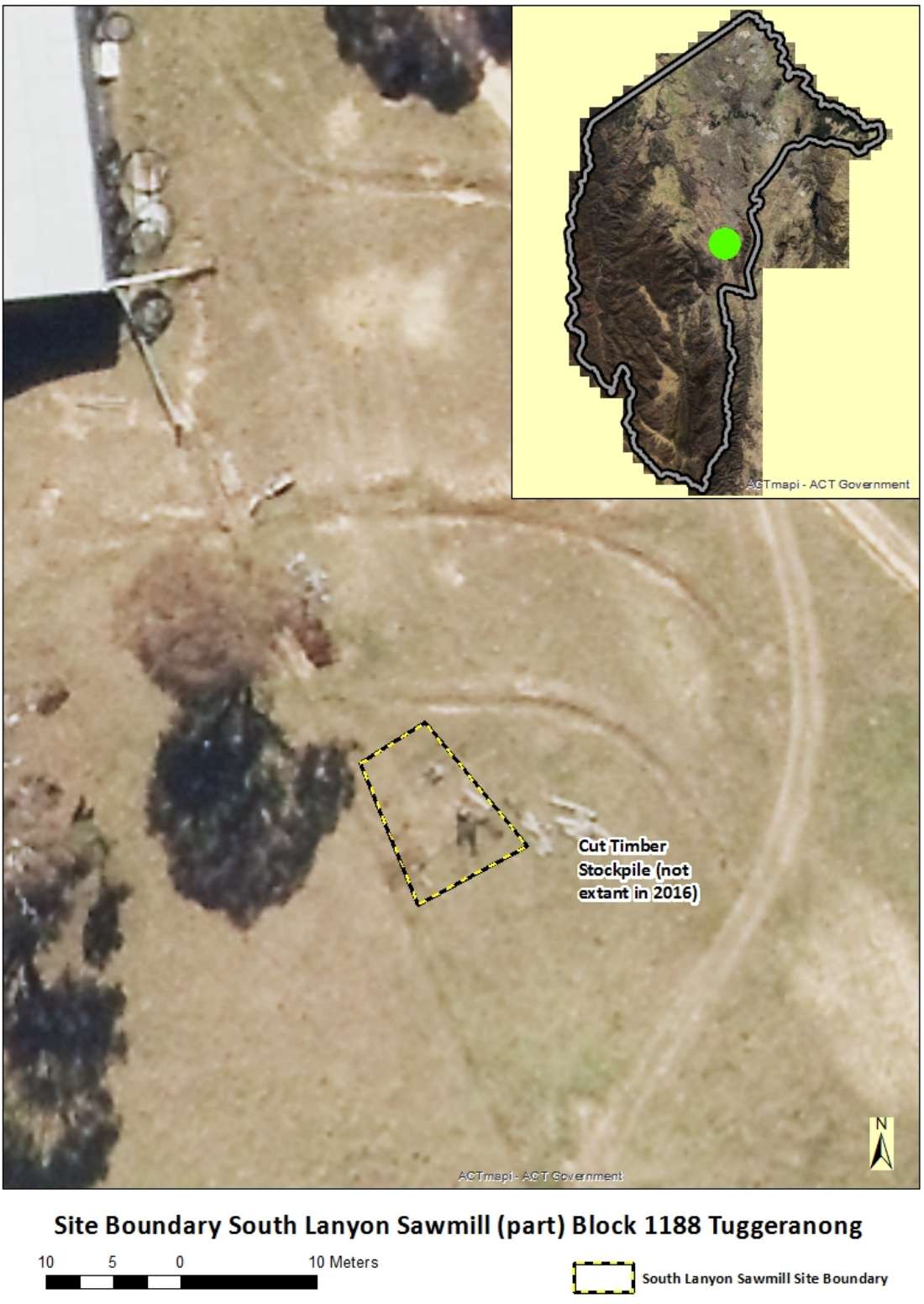

Image 2 Site Boundary, South Lanyon Sawmill

Image 3 Remains of gantry (ACT Heritage 2016)

Image 4 Remnant rail lines (ACT Heritage 2016)

Image 5 Axles from transport cart sitting on rail lines (ACT Heritage 2016)

Image 6 Base of winch (ACT Heritage 2016)

Image 7 Metal fixtures in situ (ACT Heritage 2016)

Image 8 Transport cart (ACT Heritage 2016)

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