



ACT Heritage Council

BACKGROUND INFORMATION EARLY CANBERRA WORKERS SETTLEMENTS (BLOCK 2 SECTION 128, YARRALUMLA)

At its meeting of 10 February 2022 the ACT Heritage Council decided that the Early Canberra Workers Settlements related to Block 2 Section 128, Yarralumla were not eligible for provisional registration.

The information contained in this report was considered by the ACT Heritage Council in assessing the nomination for the Early Canberra Workers Settlements (Block 2 Section 128, Yarralumla) against the heritage significance criteria outlined in s10 of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

HISTORY

The Early Canberra Workers Settlements, particularly the tent camps, were temporary settlements that were only in use for a relatively short during the 1920s. During the 1920s there were a number of camps in the area of Stirling Park covering several current land blocks but, of these, only Block 2 Section 128 Yarralumla comes under the jurisdiction of the *Heritage Act 2004*.

Temporary Workers Camps

Within Stirling Park and some of the nearby embassy lands, a series of camps and a later settlement for the workers employed in the construction of Canberra were established from 1922. There were three government camps in this general area managed by the Federal Capital Commission: No. 1 Labourers, Old Tradesmen's Camp, and No. 3 Sewer Camp. These camps were functional for five years between 1922 and 1927. Another camp, Howies' Settlement, was established by the private contractor John Howie and lasted from 1922 until 1930. The construction of a settlement of 62 small timber cottages, designed by HM Rolland, commenced in 1924. These were originally known as 'The Gap Cottages,' but were later referred to as 'Westlake.' The, comparatively more permanent, structures in the Westlake settlement were removed in 1965. Although these workers camps and the Westlake settlement are historically related, only the No. 1 Labourers Camp was potentially associated with Block 2 Section 128 Yarralumla.

No. 1 Labourers Camp

The No. 1 Labourers Camp housed single men, including married men living in Canberra without their families, working as labourers in the construction of Canberra. The men were housed in canvas tents. The workers camps were temporary and consequently the No. 1 Labourers Camp moved several times. The No. 1 Labourers Camp was sometimes referred to as "Daniel's Mess" after Herbert Daniel who was the Mess Caterer for the camp. While stationed at 'Westlake', the single men accommodated in the No. 1 Labourers Camp were working on the construction of the Provisional Parliament House and its surroundings.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION – EARLY CANBERRA WORKERS SETTLEMENTS (BLOCK 2 SECTION 128, YARRALUMLA)

According to Ann Gugler¹, who has researched the history of the Westlake settlements, a number of residents of Canberra, including Dorothy Maxwell, Ken Dinnerville and Arthur Freeman, recounted that the No. 1 Labourers Camp was located below what is now Casey House.² Consequently, it was thought for some time that the location of the No. 1 Labourers Camp was on the ridge to the south of what is now Lotus Bay (Figure 1). This would place it at the eastern end of what is now Stirling Park, potentially including land within Block 2, Section 128 Yarralumla. However, subsequent research has shed doubt on this as the location of the No. 1 Labourers Camp.

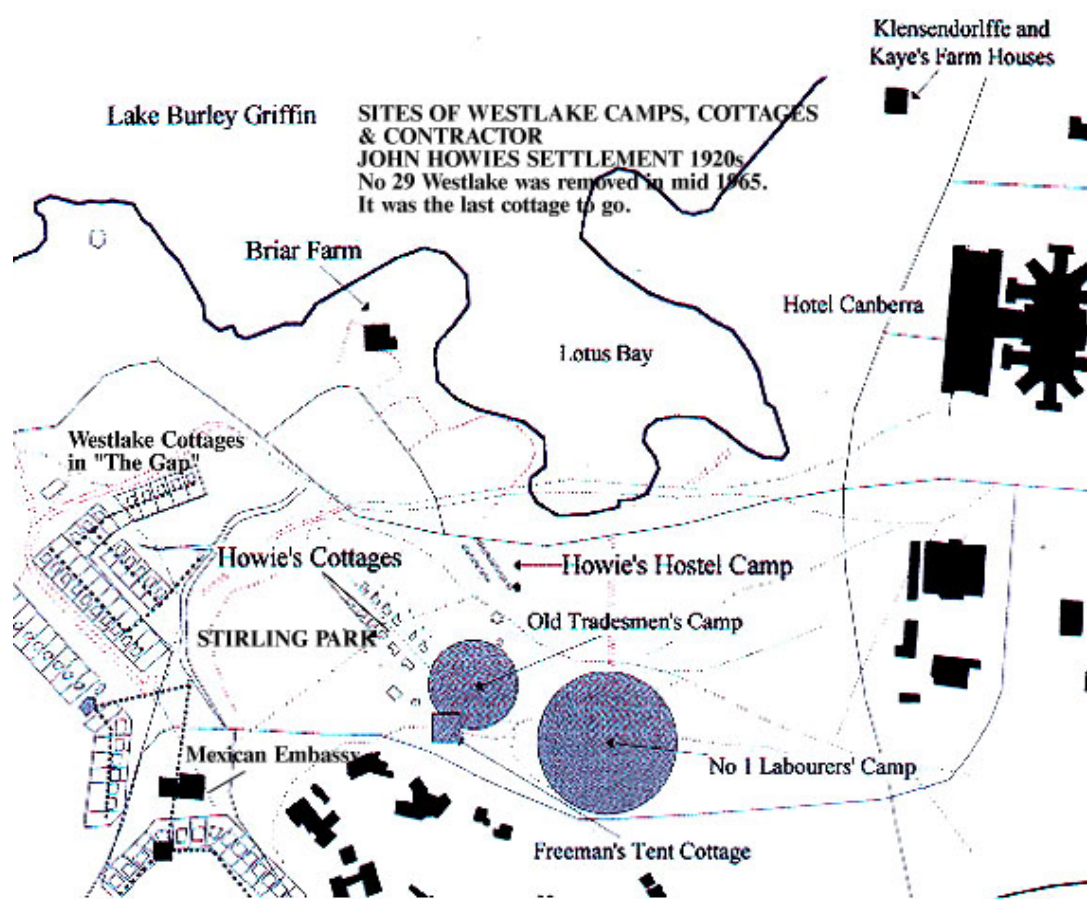


Figure 4: Position of No. 1 Labourers Camp (Gugler 2004, p.31).

¹ Ann Gugler wrote a number of publications about the camps and early Canberra settlement, as well as compiling a series of interrelated websites on these topics. The websites contain more recent information on the historical research, as compared to the earlier publications, although dates on the websites vary, it seems that they were generally updated until about 2014. The websites are:

- <https://hiddencanberra.webs.com>: This includes assorted information about the temporary camps and settlements in Canberra, as well as some personal family history related to the author.
- <https://earlycanberra.webs.com/>: This includes newspaper articles focusing on the federal aspects of the beginning of Canberra. In addition to some information about the camps and general times, it has detailed information about Westlake.
- <https://canberracamps.webs.com/>: This includes content from A Story of Capital Hill and drafts for revised edition of Builders of Canberra 1909-1929.
- <http://canberragl glimpses.webs.com>: This contains updated stories and information that was obtained after the publication of "The Builders of Canberra 1909-1929". The blog contains posts from 2011 and 2012. It contains the early ariel view that was the basis for the revised position of No. 1 Labourers Camp.

Because information, collected by Gugler, about the No. 1 Labourers Camp is not collated in a single source, where specific information from the websites is discussed, a footnoted link to the sub-page will be provided.

² <https://earlycanberra.webs.com/no1labourerscamp.htm#438097541>

BACKGROUND INFORMATION – EARLY CANBERRA WORKERS SETTLEMENTS (BLOCK 2 SECTION 128, YARRALUMLA)

In 2008, Gugler updated her research to argue that the No.1 Labourers Camp was on Capitol Hill.³ After the removal of the No. 1 Labourers Camp, this was the location of the Hillside Hostel and was later developed for Parliament House, which occupies the site presently.

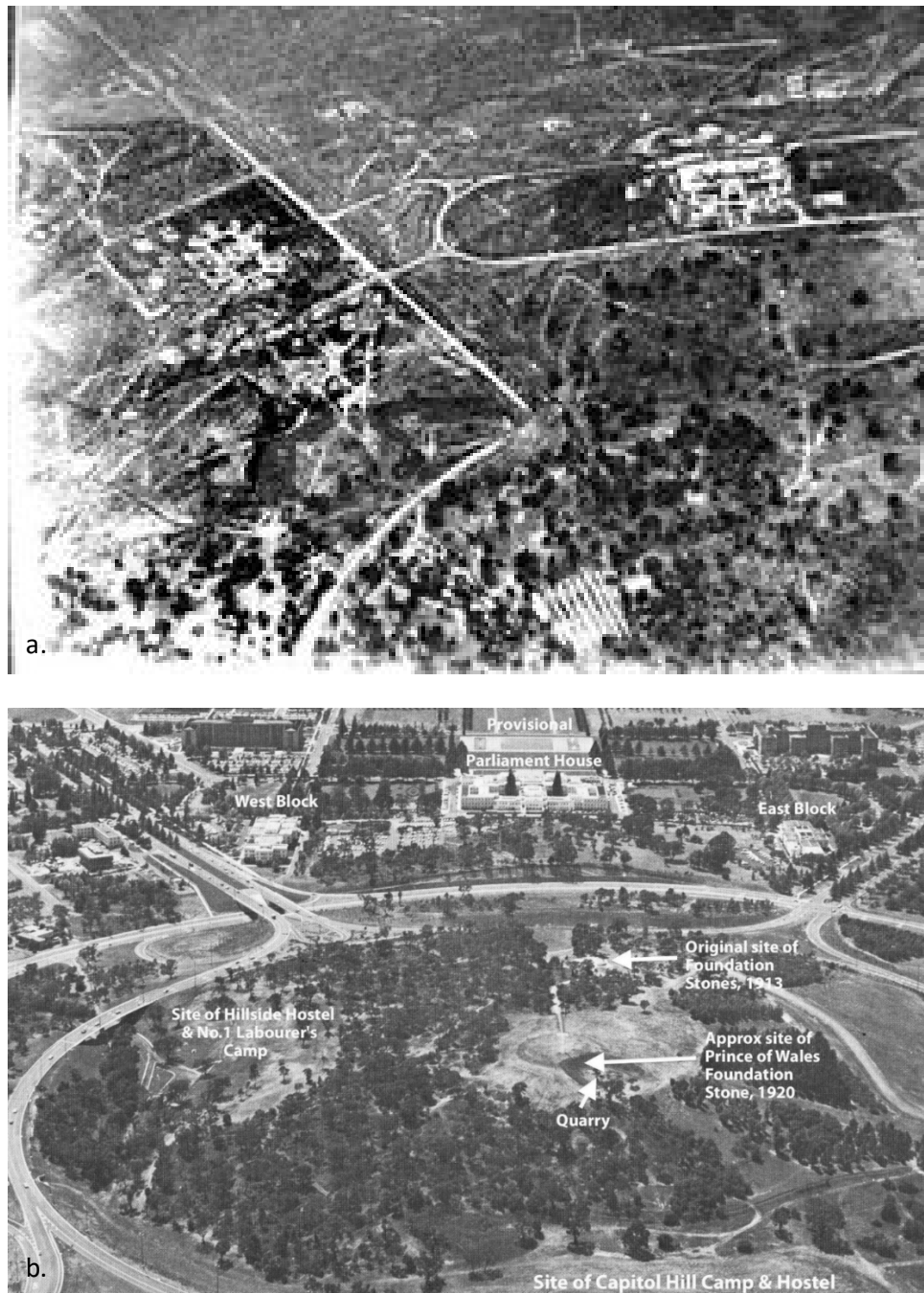


Figure 5: No. 1 Labourers Camp: (a.) Aerial photograph from 1927 showing Capitol Hill, the Provisional Parliament House, and Hotel Acton. The rows of white dots in the lower, centre of the image is thought to be the No. 1 Labourers Camp.⁴ (b.) An aerial image of Capitol Hill and surrounds, before the construction of Parliament House, annotated by Gugler to show the location of the Hillside Hostel and the presumed No. 1 Labourers Camp⁵

³ <https://canberracamps.webs.com//stirling%20park/THREE%20The%20Land.pdf>

⁴ <https://canberraglimes.webs.com/westlakestirlingpark.htm>, also at <https://earlycanberra.webs.com/no1labourerscamp.htm>

⁵ hiddencanberra.webs.com/apps/photos/photo?photoid=179137839

BACKGROUND INFORMATION – EARLY CANBERRA WORKERS SETTLEMENTS (BLOCK 2 SECTION 128, YARRALUMLA)

With regards to the location in Stirling Park originally thought to be the site of the No. 1 Labourers Camp, Gugler now claimed that it was the May 1927 camp for servicemen.⁶ These tent camps were even more temporary in nature than the workers camps, only established in association with the opening of the Provisional Parliament House. A 1927 aerial photograph of the opening of the provisional parliament house (Figure 2) shows an orderly series of canvas tents in the mid-ground of the image. This camp may well have been in the proximity of Block 2, Section 128 Yarralumla but, based on Gugler's description and the photos, was more probably in the neighbouring area where the Embassy of the People's Republic of China is now located.⁷



Figure 6: Aerial view of the opening of the Provisional Parliament House, 7 May 1927: (1) Capitol Hill with workers tents visible, (2) The temporary servicemen's camp (NLA n.d.).

The No. 1 Labourers Camp existed at Westlake/Capitol Hill for three years (Figure 3). The images taken during that time show a location surrounded by trees, which based on the aerial view shown in Figure 6, makes it doubtful that Block 2 Section 128 was the location of the workers camps. This block was probably located just behind the temporary servicemen's camp on land that is largely cleared of trees. Even had the No. 1 Labourers Camp been located on land associated with this block it was dismantled and removed on completion of the Provisional Parliament House, which was officially opened on 9 May 1927. By November 1927, the last men moved to the Red Hill camp and the camp infrastructure was removed (Canberra Times 1927).

⁶ <https://canberracamps.webs.com//stirling%20park/THREE%20The%20Land.pdf>

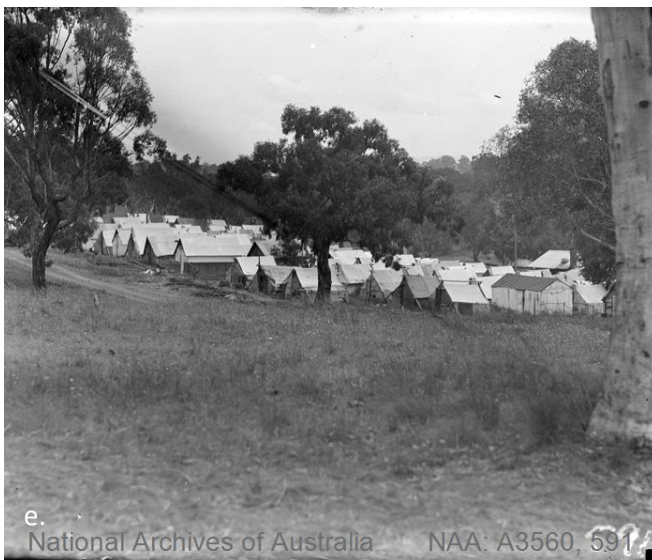
⁷ <https://canberracamps.webs.com/othercamps.htm>

BACKGROUND INFORMATION – EARLY CANBERRA WORKERS SETTLEMENTS (BLOCK 2 SECTION 128, YARRALUMLA)



COOKS AT NO. 1 MESS

Photo "Mail"



NO. 1 CAMP. Photo "Sun"

Figure 7: Images of No. 1 Labourers Camp: (a.) Tent camp and gardens, which Gugler claims is No. 1 Labourers Camp (NAA: A3560, 870; Gugler n.d., p.38); (b.) Cook's tents at No. 1 Labourers Camp (Jones 1925, p.37); (c.) Men of No. 1 Camp (Gugler n.d., p.39); (d.) Men of No. 1 Camp (Gugler⁸ from CDHS collection); (e.) No. 1 Labourers Camp from Mildenhall Collection (NAA: A3560, 591); (f.) No. 1 Camp (Gugler⁹ from Canberra Community News)

⁸ <https://earlycanberra.webs.com/canberratimesarticles.htm>

⁹ <https://hiddencanberra.webs.com//Westlake%20Camps%20Stirling%20Pk/FIVE%20%20Temporary%20camps%20on%20hillside%20opposite%20Lotus%20Bay.pdf>

BACKGROUND INFORMATION – EARLY CANBERRA WORKERS SETTLEMENTS (BLOCK 2 SECTION 128, YARRALUMLA)

Land Administration in Stirling Park

The area of Yarralumla now known as Stirling Park (Gura Bung Dhaura) covers a number of blocks, including Block 4 Section 22, Block 4 Section 128, Block 3 Section 128, and Block 2 Section 128 (Image 1).

Formerly, Block 1, an area at the eastern edge of this range used to be part of Stirling Park, but this is now obsolete. In place of Block 1 there are now three blocks (5, 8, 6). Block 5 is used by the Embassy for the People’s Republic of China. Blocks 6 and 8 are roadside verges and designated lands, specified as urban open space.

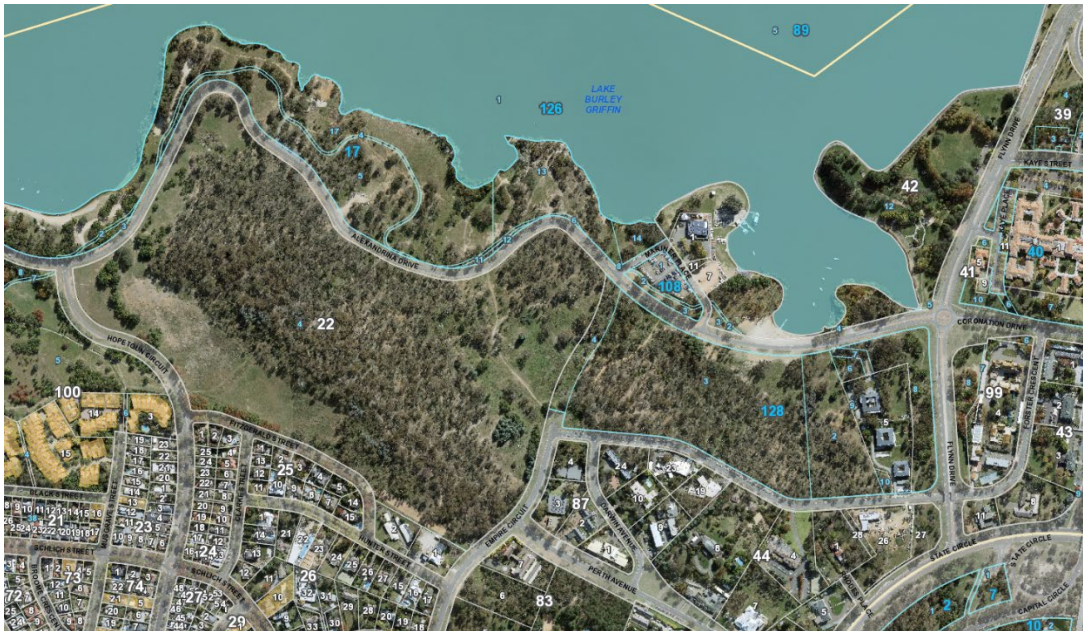


Figure 1: Stirling Park: Block 4 Section 22, Block 4 Section 128, Block 3 Section 128, and Block 2 Section 128 (ACTmapi, accessed 1/12/2021)



Figure 2: Stirling Park land management: Pink indicates national land managed by the National Capital Authority; Purple/blue indicates designated lands under the ACT Government's jurisdiction, administered by TCCS – City Presentation; Grey indicates leased lands (ACTmapi, accessed 1/12/2021)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION – EARLY CANBERRA WORKERS SETTLEMENTS (BLOCK 2 SECTION 128, YARRALUMLA)

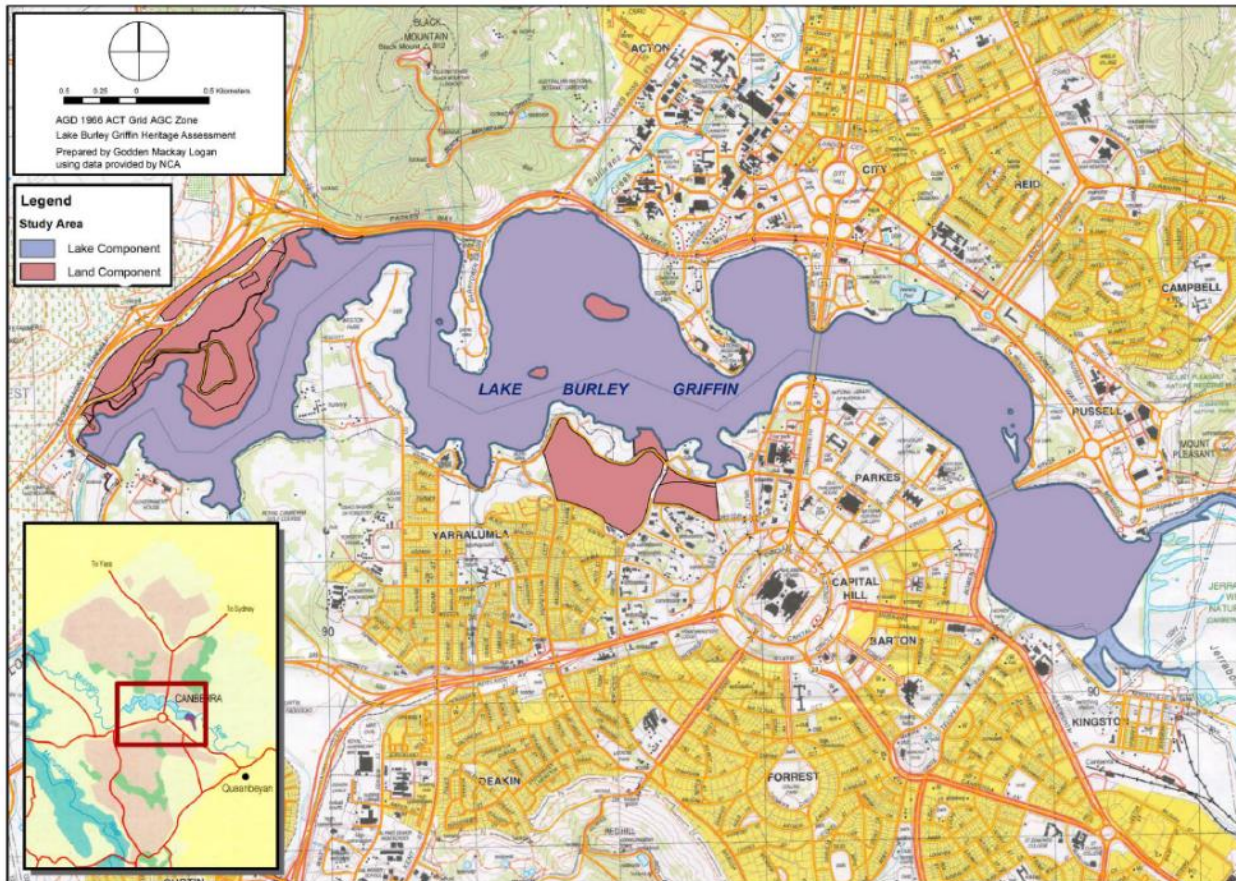


Figure 3: Area covered by Lake Burley Griffin Heritage Assessment commissioned by the National Capital Authority (GML 2010, p9)

A Heritage Assessment and Heritage Management Plan¹⁰, encompassing Block 4 Section 22, Block 3 Section 128, has been completed and implemented by the National Capital Authority. The NCA assessments cover the majority of Stirling Park, but they do not consider the heritage values associated with Block 4 Section 128 or Block 2, Section 128. This is because, although a part of Stirling Park, these blocks are designated land administered by the ACT Government.

At present there are two places on the ACT Heritage Register associated with Stirling Park:

- Canberra's Main Outfall Sewer, which includes but is not limited to: Block 4 Section 22 (part), Block 2 Section 128 (part), and Block 3, Section 128 (part); and,
- Button Wrinklewort Habitat, which includes but is not limited to: Block 4 Section 22, Blocks 1 and 2 Section 128, and Block 3, Section 128 (part).

There are also a number of nominations to the ACT Heritage Register associated with the blocks in Stirling Park:

- Aboriginal Scarred Tree, this nomination includes but is not limited to Block 4 Section 22;
- Stirling Park, Block 4 Section 22. Nominated for Aboriginal and European Heritage (Early Canberra Workers Settlements);

¹⁰ The Heritage Assessment is available on-line at:

https://www.nca.gov.au/sites/default/files/Lake%20Burley%20Griffin%20Heritage%20Assessment%20Report%20May%202010_0.PDF?acsf_files_redirect

and the Heritage Management Plan is available on-line at:

<https://www.nca.gov.au/planning-and-heritage/heritage/heritage-management-plans/lake-burley-griffin-and-adjacent-lands>.

There are four volumes in the heritage management plan, with Volume 2 specifically addressing Stirling Ridge and Attunga Point.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION – EARLY CANBERRA WORKERS SETTLEMENTS (BLOCK 2 SECTION 128, YARRALUMLA)

- Stirling Park Endangered Plant Sites, Block 4 Section 22; and,
- Early Canberra Workers Settlements, Blocks 1, 2, 3 (part).

Recent advice from the ACT Government Solicitor indicates that the Heritage Council cannot consider heritage values associated with National Land. Therefore, nominations relating to Block 4 Section 22 cannot be further considered. This background document and the associated assessment will only consider potential heritage values arising from the registered places or current nominations associated with Block 2 Section 128 Yarralumla, specifically the extent to which the Early Canberra Workers Settlements form a place of heritage significance within this block.

Native Species Habitat

Block 2 Section 128 Yarralumla is an identified ACT Conservation Area. It is a habitat for the endangered Button Wrinklewort (*Rutidosia leptorhynchoides*). The endangered status of this species is recognised at a local, national and international level. At the local level the *Nature Conservation Act 2014* applies.¹¹ Button Wrinklewort habitats, including this block, were added to the ACT Heritage Register in 2011 but would no longer be considered eligible for inclusion due to subsequent amendments to the *Heritage Act 2004* (see Section 42A) which avoid duplication of places that are protected by the *Nature Conservation Act 2014*.

DESCRIPTION

No Early Canberra Workers Settlements were located on Block 2 Section 128 Yarralumla. However, even if an encampment did occur on this block in Canberra's early years, such as that for servicemen associated with the opening of Parliament House, the fact that all of these camps were dismantled, not abandoned, and were only used for a short time limits the possibility of finding any significant heritage remains on the site. After any potential camps were removed there may have been remnant footings to the more permanent structures, trenches used for drainage around the tents and urinals visible, as well as discarded goods such as bottles and other materials, but no evidence of these has been identified.

Physical condition and integrity

A site inspection of Block 2 Section 128 Yarralumla by members of the ACT Heritage Council (Dr Ken Heffernan) and ACT Heritage (Dr Mary Clare Swete Kelly) found no evidence of the Early Canberra Workers Settlements. Although there are many items of rubbish and debris visible on Block 2 Section 128 Yarralumla, these items are associated with more recent dumping events, such as the construction of nearby roadways and neighbouring buildings, and none could be clearly associated with worker's settlements from the 1920s. There have also been many evident ground disturbance episodes since the 1920s.

¹¹ Further information can be found at: <https://www.environment.act.gov.au/nature-conservation/conservation-and-ecological-communities/threatened-species-factsheets/button-wrinklewort2>

BACKGROUND INFORMATION – EARLY CANBERRA WORKERS SETTLEMENTS (BLOCK 2 SECTION 128, YARRALUMLA)

SITE PLAN



Image 1: EARLY CANBERRA WORKERS SETTLEMENTS (BLOCK 2 SECTION 128 YARRALUMLA) site boundary (ACTmapi, accessed 12/7/2021)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION – EARLY CANBERRA WORKERS SETTLEMENTS (BLOCK 2 SECTION 128, YARRALUMLA)

IMAGES



Images 2: General views of Block 2 Section 128 Yarralumla and its surrounds (ACT Heritage): (a, b, c) North end looking towards Lotus Bay; (d.) North-east corner; (e., f.) Looking south, uphill; (g., h.) Vegetation on southern end; (i.) Rows of trees planted on the north-west side. Dr Ken Heffernan, Chair ACT Heritage Council, is seen surveying the site in several of these images.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION – EARLY CANBERRA WORKERS SETTLEMENTS (BLOCK 2 SECTION 128, YARRALUMLA)

REFERENCES CITED

ACTmapi. (n.d.). *Development Map*.

<https://app.actmapi.act.gov.au/actmapi/index.html?viewer=development>

Canberra Times. (1927). *Tent Camps, Two More to Go*. Friday 4 November 1927, page 1.

<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article1219091>.

Gugler, A. (2004). *A History of Human Habitation of Stirling Park, Yarralumla 2003-2004: A study of the cultural landscape of the land also known as Canberry, Guru Bung Dhaura and Westlake* (2 Volumes).

Unpublished report held at ACT Heritage.

Gugler, A. (n.d.). *Temporary camps on hillside opposite Lotus Bay, Westlake (now Stirling Park), No 1 Labourers (1924-1927) & Trademen's Camps (1923-27)*. Unpublished report held at ACT Heritage. Also available on-line at:

<https://hiddencanberra.webs.com//Westlake%20Camps%20Stirling%20Pk/FIVE%20%20Temporary%20camps%20on%20hillside%20opposite%20Lotus%20Bay.pdf>

GML. 2010. *Lake Burley Griffin Heritage Assessment Final Draft Report*. Godden Mackay Logan Pty Ltd, unpublished report prepared for National Capital Authority (May 2010). Accessible on-line at:

www.nca.gov.au/sites/default/files/Lake%20Burley%20Griffin%20Heritage%20Assessment%20Report%20May%202010_0.PDF?acsf_files_redirect

NAA: A3560, 591. *No. 1 Labourers' Camp (Daniel's No. 1) opposite present Yacht Club Yarralumla*.

NLA (National Library of Australia). (n.d.). *Aerial view of the opening of the Provisional Parliament House, Canberra, 9 May 1927* [picture]. Accessible on-line at <https://nla.gov.au/tarkine/nla.obj-162933684>