



REGISTER OF HERITAGE PLACES - ASSESSMENT DOCUMENTATION

11. ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

The criteria adopted by the Heritage Council in November, 1996 have been used to determine the cultural heritage significance of the place.

PRINCIPAL AUSTRALIAN HISTORIC THEME(S)

- 3.2 Surveying the continent and assessing its potential
- 3.15 Struggling with remoteness

HERITAGE COUNCIL OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA THEME(S)

- 102 Aboriginal occupation
- 105 Exploration and survey

11.1 AESTHETIC VALUE*

Gnarlbine Soaks are highly valued by the Coolgardie community as an identifiable built representation of early exploration and continued history of this goldfields region. (Criterion 1.1)

Gnarlbine Soaks are integral within the cultural environment of Gnarlbine Reserve, comprising the two wells, plinth, the Gnarlbine Rock and gnamma holes located in natural bushland. (Criterion 1.4)

11.2 HISTORIC VALUE

Gnarlbine Soaks were an important water source for early European explorers and travellers through the district dating from the 1860s, and were instrumental in the successful opening up of the Eastern Goldfields prior to the development of the Goldfields pipeline in 1903. (Criterion 2.1)

Gnarlbine Soaks illustrate the necessity of establishing a reliable water supply for the human occupation of this region. The place was an important source of water for the local Aboriginal population, and for Europeans dating from the 1860s to 1903. (Criterion 2.2)

The construction of the wells at *Gnarlbine Soaks* by Charles Hunt in the 1860s, and their subsequent development by the Public Works Department Water Supply Division in the 1890s, represents one of the earliest significant

* For consistency, all references to architectural style are taken from Apperly, R., Irving, R. and Reynolds, P. *A Pictorial Guide to Identifying Australian Architecture: Styles and terms from 1788 to the present*, Angus & Robertson, North Ryde, 1989.

developments of a groundwater source in the Eastern goldfields district. (Criterion 2.2)

Gnarlbine Soaks are associated with a number of European explorers and travellers through the area, including H. M. Lefroy (1863), C. C. Hunt (1864-6), and John Holland and his party (1893). (Criterion 2.3)

11.3 SCIENTIFIC VALUE

The wells and their surroundings are of considerable significance to inform of successive associations with early European explorers, gold seekers, travellers and people of the Coolgardie district since 1863, and the means of providing the public utility of water that is no longer practised. (Criterion 3.2)

11.4 SOCIAL VALUE

Gnarlbine Soaks are highly valued and contribute to the local and wider community for their associations with the development of the Eastern Goldfields, demonstrated by the erection of commemorative plaques at the place by the Eastern Goldfields Historical Society, the establishment of the York to Goldfields Heritage Trail which follows Charles Hunts track, and the interim listing on the State Register of Heritage Places. (Criterion 4.1)

Gnarlbine Soaks are valued by the Aboriginal community as evidenced by the registration of the site by the Aboriginal Affairs Department. (Criterion 4.1)

12. DEGREE OF SIGNIFICANCE

12.1 RARITY

12.2 REPRESENTATIVENESS

12.3 CONDITION

The structure of the wells is in good condition, however the condition of the site is poor. There is considerable debris and putrid water in the bottom of both wells. Well 2 has considerable amounts of dead wood in close proximity.

12.4 INTEGRITY

Gnarlbine Soaks no longer function as a supply of water for people or stock; however, the wells do still store water, and therefore have retained a high degree of integrity.

12.5 AUTHENTICITY

There is minimal evidence of any changes to the original fabric of the two wells. They have a high degree of authenticity.

13. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The documentary evidence has been compiled by Irene Sauman, Historian. The physical evidence has been compiled by Laura Gray, Conservation Consultant.

The recommended curtilage for this place is Reserve 2180.

13.1 DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Gnarlbine Soaks, originally Aboriginal wells that were developed for use by explorers and prospectors, were first discovered by Europeans in 1863 by H. M. Lefroy. The soaks were stoned and a shaft sunk in 1896 by the Public Works Department. Commemorative plaques were added in 1950 by the Eastern Goldfields Historical Society.

Gnarlbine Soaks were first discovered by Europeans in 1863, when Henry Maxwell Lefroy led an expedition inland in search of new pastoral country. The party consisted of four white men and two Aboriginal men, one of whom, Kowitch, had travelled with Lefroy on an exploratory trip twenty years earlier. On their 1863 expedition, which lasted from 7 May to the 31 July, they covered 950 miles and went through the areas of Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie.¹

As a result of Lefroy's report on the possibilities of the country, surveyor Charles C. Hunt was appointed to undertake further exploration of the area, in 1864, under the patronage of Governor Hampton and the York Agricultural Society. The aim of the expedition was to uncover possibilities for pastoral expansion and mining. The party led by Hunt consisted of John Seabrook, Richard Eaton, John Cowan, Police Trooper Edwards and Aboriginal guide, Kowitch. They had 23 horse and pack rations for 22 weeks.

Camp No. 22 was made on 16 August 1864, at a place the local Aborigines called Gnarlbine, which was an important water source. Hunt named the place Gnarlbine Rocks. (The name *Gnarlbine Soaks* is not an official name.) At Gnarlbine, he found the remains of a packsaddle left behind by Lefroy and noted that the water might prove to be very useful. He recommended a 20 acre reserve for the Aboriginal well at Gnarlbine Rock, and marked a tree about 20 chains to the east of it. Hunt went on to name Hampton Plains and reported on its potential for pastoral purposes.²

The following year, Hunt was sent out again, clearing the track and the Aboriginal wells and soaks, as well as sinking a few new wells as depots for a trip he hoped to do later. He was out again in 1866, with instructions to complete the track to Slate Well, his central camping place on Hampton Plains; sink more wells and build tanks; and to survey any block suitable for pastoral holdings. This was Hunt's last expedition. He had established a track of 26 wells, tanks and soaks providing a seasonably reliable supply of water. After preparing detailed plans of the country, Hunt died in 1868, at the age of 35.³

Other explorers followed Hunt's track through the area and camped at *Gnarlbine Soaks*. In late 1897, Gilles McPherson recovered at the soak after searching for alluvial gold on Hampton Flats and being unable to find water at Mt Burges. In 1890, George Withers, Henderson and Dick Greaves camped

¹ Harris, C. M. 'The Eastern Goldfields Early Explorers, 1863-1866: H.M. Lefroy - C.C. Hunt', *Early Days*, WA Historical Society Journal, Vol. 3, Pt. 4, 1942, pp. 35-39; Henn, Canon P. U. 'Memoirs of Henry Maxwell Lefroy, 1818-1879', *Early Days*, WA Historical Society Journal, Vol. 3, Pt. 4, 1942, pp. 20-24.

² *ibid*; C. C. Hunt, Field Book 1, p. 35; Water Authority of Western Australia, *The Wells of Explorer Charles Hunt: An assessment of their condition and historical significance as a groundwater resource*, November 1991, p. 17-18.

³ Harris, C. M., *op cit*; Henn, Canon P. U., *op cit*; Water Authority of Western Australia, *op cit*, p. 2.

there, and in 1892, Bayley and Ford stopped at the soak on their way to the gold find at Coolgardie, which eventually resulted in goldrushes to the region.⁴ A 640-acre water supply Reserve No. 2180 was gazetted on 19 January 1893 for Gnarlbine Rock.⁵

Later in 1893, a number of groups attempted to find a shorter, direct route to *Gnarlbine Soaks* from points further south along the Great Southern railway line. This was in order to assist travellers from Albany who were trying to reach the goldfields. Various railway towns vied with one another to be the starting point of such a track. On 26 April 1863, it was reported that John Holland, Rudolph and David Krakouer, and John Carmody had left Broomehill 'striking a direct route through the bush for the goldfields'. They reached Coolgardie on 3 July. The track they made was claimed to be of particular value in the winter months, when the old tracks from Northam and York were 'nigh impassable'. It also opened up the way to the goldfields markets for producers in the Great Southern area.⁶

Hollands Track, as it came to be called, was important for only a short time. The Eastern Goldfields Railway line reached Southern Cross in July 1894, and had been extended to Kalgoorlie by September 1896. *Gnarlbine Soaks*, however, had developed into an important water source for the goldfields. The Public Works Department Water Supply division reported in 1896, that:

Owing to the prolonged drought last summer, extending up to middle of March, and heavy demands due to constant and great influx of people to the Goldfields, large amounts of attention had to be given to the various soaks, gnamma holes, clay pans and other natural sources of water supply. At Gnarlbine Rocks various soaks were cleaned and stoned up, and a shaft was sunk to a depth of 100ft giving a supply of 800 gallons of fresh water in 24 hours, which will prove of great service to the increasing number of people who are working on the leases in the vicinity.⁷

The importance of *Gnarlbine Soaks* as a water source was superseded with the opening of the Goldfields pipeline in 1903.

In 1950, the Eastern Goldfields Historical Society erected two plaques to commemorate the importance of *Gnarlbine Soaks* to the development of the goldfields and to the district in general.⁸

Hunt's Track, and the features along it including *Gnarlbine Soaks*, from the York to Goldfields Heritage Trail, established in 1988. There is also a Holland Track Map Book, which follows John Holland's track from Broomehill to Coolgardie.

Gnarlbine Soaks is a registered Aboriginal Site: W0913. In February 2001, *Gnarlbine Soaks* is unused as a water source but remains as a tourist attraction in a poorly frequented area.

13. 2 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Gnarlbine Soaks, comprising two stone lined wells, is located in the Gnarlbine Rock Reserve, in close proximity to Gnarlbine Rock, approximately 30 kilometres south west of Coolgardie on unsealed Victoria Rock Road. Gnarlbine Rock is a large rocky outcrop with a number of gnamma holes and

4 Harris, C. M., op cit; Henn, Canon P. U., op cit.

5 Water Authority of Western Australia, op cit, pp. 17-18.

6 Ball, Julia *History of the Holland Track*, 1992. Quotations in paragraph are from an interview with John Holland in 1863, found in this source.

7 Public Works Department Water Supply division, Annual Report, 1896, p. 33.

8 Physical evidence; photographs taken in the 1950s.

natural water runoff. It is located within a reserve that is part of the water catchment area for Coolgardie.

The two wells are located approximately 200 metres apart, on different sides of Victoria Rock Road in the immediate vicinity of Gnarlbine Rock.

When approaching Gnarlbine Rock from Coolgardie, 50 metres prior to the clearing and the rock, there is a gravel track on the right (west) amidst natural bushy undergrowth. The track weaves around the bushes, and approximately 50 metres along, there is a stone lined well (well 1) on the left (south). A further 20 metres along the track, again on the left is a stone plinth with a plaque. Another 10 metres, there is a 'T' junction in the track where it follows the base of the rock to the north and north-west, and south and south-west. In that approximate vicinity there is a brass plaque fixed on the side of Gnarlbine Rock.

The plaque on the side of Gnarlbine Rock reads:

Holland Track Centenary
1893-1993
A tribute to the courage of
John Holland
Rudolph Krakouer
David Krakouer
John Carmody
Who left Broome Hill on 14 April 1893
To cut a shorter route to the gold rush
From the South West of the Colony.
They camped at Gnarlbine Rock on 16 June 1893
And reached Coolgardie on 18 June 1893
Funded by Heritage Council of W.A.

Well 1 has a rendered plinth with a 'Heritage Trails' brass plaque affixed. There are two sets of low-level treated timber fence structures also on the north side of the well.

The well is approximately 3 metres in diameter. It is estimated to be 3 metres in depth. There was shallow putrid water in the bottom of the well causing a constant stream of bees in and out of the well. The edge stones had been dislodged in some parts of the perimeter. The entire lining of the well is laid in random dry stone construction. Larger forms of rock are evident in the courses nearer the top of the well. The well is in fair to good condition.

The stone plinth further to the west, when compared with the historical photograph of 1950, shows that the stones have been re-laid sometime since that date. The rear of the plinth has a wall each side, and appears similar to a barbecue structure without the cooking plate. The plinth has no heritage value, although the plaque is an important historic record and does have heritage significance.

The brass plaque on the stone plinth reads:

Gnarlbine Soaks
Discovered by M.H. Lefroy 1863
Improved by C.C. Hunt 1864
Water at this soak was of great assistance to later Explorers and Prospectors
Forrest 1871, G.M. McPherson 88 '89
B.G. Withers '90, Bayley and Ford '92
Afterwards used by thousands living in the district.
Erected by
Public Subscription and Eastern Goldfields

Well 2 is on the east side of the road, approximately 200 metres south-east of well 1. It is concealed and surrounded by relatively thick scrub on the edge of a large cleared area. From the open area, a channel eroded into the otherwise flat earth, leads catchment water into the well and assisted in identifying the location of the well.

The well is approximately 4 metres in diameter, and the earth is mounded around the diameter of the well. It is estimated to be 3.0 metres in depth. There was shallow putrid water in the bottom of the well resulting in a constant stream of bees in and out of the well. The edge stones are still in place around the perimeter of the well. The entire lining of the well is laid in random dry stone construction. The construction of well 2 differs from well 1 in that the stone is smaller, more linear and more consistent in configuration and although the stones are laid with a strong horizontal emphasis, it is also more random. The well is in good condition.

The wells at *Gnarlbine Soaks* are in good condition although they have not been used for drinking or stock water for many years. The true depth of the wells is not known. There has been minimal intervention to the original fabric. The place has a moderate degree of integrity and high degree of authenticity.

13.3 COMPARATIVE INFORMATION

13.4 REFERENCES

13.5 FURTHER RESEARCH

Further research to uncover a possible third well in the vicinity.

Further research to be completed about the Aboriginal history of the place. More information may be obtained regarding the Aboriginal site from Tanya Butler, Aboriginal Affairs Department, on 9235 8113.

Rob McNally, the Works Foreman for the Shire of Coolgardie located Well 2 for Laura Gray. He also searched for the third well. He found a mound of earth mentioned on Ian Elliott's mud map, but it is not a well. The fence on Ian's map is no longer there.⁹

Rob McNally mentioned an old Coolgardie identity who might know something. His name is Cyril Kelly, now in Port Denison. His phone number is 9026 6266, but the researchers were unable to contact him.

⁹ Ian Elliot's mud map, January 2001.