



ACT Heritage Council

BACKGROUND INFORMATION RED HILL CAMPSITE

(Red Hill Campsite is located on the traffic island within the road easement bordered by Flinders Way, Durville Crescent and Hayes Crescent, Griffith).

At its meeting of 20 September 2018 the ACT Heritage Council decided that the Red Hill Campsite was eligible for provisional registration.

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

HISTORY

'The last campsite of the Ngunnawal'

The Ngunnawal people are one of several groups traditionally affiliated with the lands within the Canberra region. In this citation, 'Aboriginal community' refers to the Ngunnawal people and other Aboriginal groups, including the Ngambri, 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 connection to the area.

The Aboriginal history of the ACT extends from the present day back many thousands of years, and is evidenced by both the tangible and intangible aspects of Aboriginal culture and history. The earliest evidence of Aboriginal people in the region comes from Birrigai Rock Shelter in Tidbinbilla, dating back to over 25,000 years ago (Flood 1995:116; and Theden-Ringl 2016:26). Activity at Birrigai has been linked to seasonal gatherings of local and regional Aboriginal people who would come together along Aboriginal pathways, and participate in a series of meetings and ceremonies along the way.

The Red Hill Campsite is a late nineteenth to early twentieth century example of demonstrable Aboriginal occupation in the ACT and comprises part of a related body of evidence on local and regional patterns of Aboriginal land use practices and settlement patterns. To date, more than 800 Aboriginal sites of habitation have been identified in the ACT, with most near large rivers such as the Murrumbidgee and Molonglo. Open sites are the most common type of Aboriginal site found in the ACT, comprising surface scatters of stone artefacts (Bindon 1973).

Red Hill Campsite, sometimes referred to as the 'last campsite of the Ngunnawal', was utilised as a campsite by Aboriginal people until the late 1940s. A public park at the time, the site is now a traffic island at the intersection of Flinders Way, Hayes Crescent and Durville Crescent in Griffith. There is oral history relating to the place being used as a Ngambri-Ngunnawal camping ground prior to and following European settlement in the region. It is claimed to be one of the ACT's most recently used Aboriginal camping grounds. To date, it is the only known site of its kind in the ACT. In particular it serves as a significant example of how Aboriginal people lived and travelled throughout the ACT region as transient workers during the early to mid-twentieth century.

Oral History of the Red Hill Campsite

Knowledge of this campsite predominantly comes from the oral histories of Matilda House who camped at this site as a child in the 1940s, where Ms House would visit her grandparents from her home at the Hollywood Reserve in Yass. The Hollywood reserve was established in 1934 to rehouse the former Aboriginal residents of Edgerton (Read 1994). Ms House is an Elder of the Ngambri-Ngunnawal people and belongs to one of the four Representative Aboriginal Organisations (RAOs) of the ACT. She is an active advocate for improved relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the wider community (Russell 2013). Ms House served on the inaugural ACT Heritage Council and performed the first Welcome to Country at Federal Parliament in 2008, the Welcome to Country for Prime Minister

Kevin Rudd's Apology to the Stolen Generations, and started the tradition of Welcome to Country at the ANU. Her extensive contribution to the community is recognised by being named Canberra Citizen of the Year for 2006 and she was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Philosophy by the Australian National University in 2018.

Oral history recordings with Matilda House demonstrate that Red Hill Campsite is a place of strong intangible heritage that shows continuing Aboriginal connection to Country. Ms House has many memories of camping at this site as a child and has a long, multigenerational family association with this place. The campsite and its locality close to the Molonglo River is also important for its significance as a thoroughfare for Ms House's ancestors to move throughout the landscape. This means that for Ms House, this campsite serves as more than a meeting place for her and her family, but also represents the history of her people for thousands of years on the land which now forms part of the ACT.

Ms House recalls that her time spent at this campsite was in the company of her grandparents who were undertaking domestic work for people in the local area. Her grandfather worked for the Russells, who owned Russell Hill. Ms House and her family would travel from Yass to this campsite using a horse and sulky. Her grandparents called this place the Red Hill Campsite because of its proximity to Red Hill. Similar campsites were utilised by Ms House's family when they travelled out to Uriarra, camping on the outskirts of properties as they made their way across country.

There was a creek which ran near to the campsite and flowed from the direction of where Canberra Boys Grammar School stands today. This creek is most likely the creek referred to as Black Creek/Springs, which now runs adjacent to Flinders Way, through Telopea Park and into Lake Burley Griffin at Lady Bowen Park. Ms House remembers that it was its close proximity to water (and this creek) that made this campsite an excellent spot to stop and meant that their horses had access to drinking water. Coupled with access to the creek was access to the nearby Molonglo River and its accompanying food resources. Such resources included fish, shellfish and water fowl.

Ms House: *"We camped here because it was close to water, and that's what people wanted in them days, somewhere where you can always have a drink of water. And of course the Molonglo River, it wasn't far from here, it was part of the substance for Aboriginal people. It had shellfish, lots of fish in it, cod and crabs and ducks".*
(Skitmore & House 2017).

Ms House: *"We called it the Red Hill Camp...where we could water the horse, Poppy. We'd take her down there (to the agistment paddock) and she would have a drink and wander around".* (Skitmore 2016).

Ms House believes that she was likely two or three years old when she camped here with her grandparents, meaning that this site was still in use in 1947-1948. It is known that Red Hill Campsite considerably predates these years, as both Ms House's grandfather 'Lightning' Williams and his brother and his grandfather before him Onyong, travelled through this area on a frequent basis.

Ms House: *"The Red Hill Camp would have been a campground before the 1940s, if my grandparents, especially my grandfather, brought me here".* (Skitmore 2016).

Ms House: *"This was the Country of his (my grandfather's) father and his grandfather, Onyong. They went through all the time, as people of Country here".* (Skitmore & House 2017).

There is very little known of Aboriginal campsites that occur close to the Molonglo River as these places would have been flooded with the formation of Lake Burley Griffin (Goodan et al 2009:44). Many others were likely destroyed during the early construction and urban development of an expanding ACT, highlighting the importance of this place as an extant Aboriginal camping ground.

History of Red Hill Campsite

Archival material shows that after the first Europeans arrived and began to settle in the ACT in the 1820s, the land around Red Hill Campsite remained one of very few areas of Crown Land near the Molonglo River until the 1860s. It is probable that the marshy nature of the ground made this an unlikely area for pasture and therefore ill-suited to European farming practices. The creek line became an area where Aboriginal families would likely have camped when working with recently arrived settlers on the newly established homesteads that were being developed in the region. Aboriginal association with this place is lengthy with archaeological deposits excavated at Red Hill Campsite shown to include pieces of unworked chert; a material that is not found locally. This means that chert was most likely brought to the place by Aboriginal people. The chert pieces were unworked, meaning that they were not fashioned into stone tools.

The composition of chert makes it a material ideally suited to flaking and turning into stone implements. Chert fragments have been utilised by Aboriginal people as cutting implements for activities such as food manufacture.

Aboriginal occupation at this place is further supported by the early recorded name for the watercourse which ran near to the campsite as 'Black Creek' or 'Black Springs'. An early map from the Parish of Narrabundah, dating to 1904, shows a road running north to south that travels to Yass and a road running east to west that travels to Uriarra (image 2). The creek that crosses the road to Yass is labelled Black Springs. Red Hill Campsite is located between the place where Black Springs intersects the road to Yass and the crossroads to the north of that creek crossing. The NSW Department of Lands map (image 3) labels this same creek not as Black Springs, but as Black Creek. An interview recorded in the 1890s detailing the personal histories and upbringing of locals Enid Boyd and Arthur Sheedy (Boyd & Sheedy 1972) mentions the proximity of a local school in the area to a creek called Spring Creek. It is likely that Spring Creek and Black Creek/Springs refer to the same watercourse and it is likely that this is the creek that Ms House remembers from her childhood.

Beginning in the late nineteenth century the close interaction between squatters, pastoralists and Aboriginal people saw the growth of a shared economy in the region, with both Aboriginal and European communities becoming increasingly reliant upon the other (Harvard 1956; Mackaness 1941; Mowle 1899). The majority of interactions recorded during this time discuss relationships between Aboriginal people and Europeans as positive experiences (Robinson 1927; Wright 1923). Local Aboriginal leaders, including one very influential leader in the history of the ACT, Onyong, appeared to form close personal relationships with some of the squatters. These relationships resulted in Aboriginal people setting up camps close to the squatters' homesteads and conducting trade with the occupants (Mackaness 1941). Onyong's grandson went on to inherit the name 'Henry Williams' from a Coopers and Co. worker (Jackson-Nakano 2001). However, relations were to disintegrate as increased conflict between Aboriginal and European settlers intensified. The escalation of conflict focused on different approaches to cattle ownership and the use of cattle as a food resource (Brennan 1907). For example, records show that Onyong was shot in the leg as retribution for spearing one of Henry Hall's cattle (Bluett 1954; Wright 1927).

Aboriginal people, despite incorporating the newly established homesteads into their economies, continued to practice traditional laws (Australasian Chronicle 1842). Prior to the gazetting and fencing of properties, access to places and food sources went largely unimpeded (Flood 2010; Skitmore 2016). Squatters were keen to establish permanent campsites so that they had an easily accessible labour supply, but Aboriginal people continued to remain mostly seasonal workers, moving between traditional camping grounds and settler camping sites. This reflected what was going on in the wider Canberra region where traditional practices continued to be observed. Bogong moth hunts continued into the 1850s (Wright 1923) and a number of corroborees are recorded at campsites near what is now known as Black Mountain Peninsula and Queanbeyan (Wright 1923).

After the Robertson Land Acts of 1861, the area around and including Red Hill formed part of the Duntroon Estate of grazier George Campbell. By 1880, a Travelling Stock and Camping Reserve on the creek line gave rise to an official camping space, one of only two such Reserves located on the Molonglo River (Boyd & Sheedy 1972). This Reserve remained in use until the mid-twentieth century. Records show that stockmen and rabbiters used the reserve as a rest stop and a campsite at this time. According to oral histories, Aboriginal people also formed part of this transient workforce and utilised the area for the same purpose.

Prior to the creation of Canberra as the Nation's Capital in 1913, the area that incorporated Red Hill Campsite constituted an important intersection south of the Molonglo River. In 1926, the suburb of Blandfordia (now known as Griffith and Forrest) was established within and around this campsite. Blandfordia was one of the earliest residential suburbs in the ACT and it was at this time that Red Hill Campsite became classified as a park. Both formal and informal workers' camps became common during this period. The ACT Heritage Register for the Blandfordia 5 precinct includes Red Hill Campsite as an identified pre and post contact place between the Aboriginal community and the non-Aboriginal population of the ACT. Further to its inclusion in the Blandfordia 5 register, it is proposed that Red Hill Campsite be assessed for its potential as an individual entry to the ACT Heritage register based on its intangible heritage values. These intangible heritage values are related to the recorded oral history of the place.

The aesthetic form of the park was designated in the 1920s as part of the Blandfordia 5 Garden City residential development. The survival of Red Hill Campsite appears to be one of planning ideology rather than any presumed intent to preserve the site for its connection to Aboriginal people or its association with camping. Archival records show that the final layout of Griffith (which defined land around the outcrop as a park) was the result of planners avoiding geographical features such as floodplains and rocky outcrops.

Canberra continued to grow and rely on a steady stream of workers to build the Nation's Capital. Aboriginal people remained an integral part of this workforce, albeit in the form of 'informal' employment. Government regulations stipulated that workers needed to be enrolled to vote in Federal elections in order to secure work in the ACT, but this right was not granted to Aboriginal people until the 1960s. This meant that Aboriginal people seeking employment were not afforded secure work and often found themselves needing to camp in public places, such as parks and reserves, like the one at Red Hill. This need was highlighted during the Depression years of the late 1930s and 1940s when numerous informal camps were formed in vacant spaces throughout the ACT. Red Hill Campsite is likely the most widely known and recorded example of this type of gathering place for Aboriginal people.

Archaeological investigations

An archaeological excavation of Red Hill Campsite took place in 2016 in collaboration with students at the Australian National University and RAOs. During this exercise three one by one metre test pits were excavated within the circle of small boulders at the site. The location of these squares was influenced by Ms House's recollection that the campsite was associated with the dacite outcrop (image 5) at the southern end of the park (Skitmore & House 2017). Excavation methodology followed best practice protocols and continued in each square until reaching the end of habitable deposits (sterile layer).

In total, 324 artefacts were recovered, with the majority of finds consisting of glass fragments (n = 215). Other material consisted of plastic (n = 39), metal (n = 17), concrete (n = 16) and brick (n = 15) (Skitmore 2016). Building related materials (bricks and concrete) date from the 1930s onwards. From the 1960s, the majority of artefacts relate to the use of the park as a recreational area. This is a use that continues to this day.

Bottle glass forms the majority of recreation related material and was primarily recovered from the top layer of excavations. A fragment of brown glass was found with an Australian Glass Manufacturers' mark. It is known that this mark was produced between 1934 and 1968 (Bolton 2005). The sherd's serial number, of which only the first part of the number 'IS 1 ...' is present, was used on New South Wales bottles between 1941 and 1968 (Gugler 2016).

Several pieces of unworked chert were recovered. This material is not local in origin. Their stratigraphic position shows that these pieces were deposited prior to the 1920s gazetting of this place as a park. There were no diagnostic features to evidence their use as stone tools. Nonetheless their presence on site means that these pieces were most likely brought to the place by Aboriginal people.

The structure of the excavated deposit supports a situation where there was very limited use of the park prior to zoning the place as a precinct in the 1920s. However, as previously outlined, archival material suggests Aboriginal use of spaces along 'Black Creek/Springs' in Griffith prior to zoning. Additionally, four mudstone pieces were found below post-contact artefact layers during the excavation. The mudstone was without diagnostic features, but because this type of mudstone is not thought to be local to this area (Skitmore 2016), its presence strongly suggests that Aboriginal people brought this material with them to this place prior to European settlement.

DESCRIPTION

The site is located on the corner of Flinders Way, Durville Crescent and Hayes Crescent in Griffith, ACT. It is on a medium-sized traffic island with clear boundaries delineated by roads on all sides (image 1). The place spans roadway infrastructure between Sections 10, 8, 11 and 88. On this traffic island there is a circle of small boulders (a dacite outcrop) surrounded by trees. The ground within the circle of boulders and the area under the trees is covered by mulch. Outside of the boundary of the trees, the rest of the traffic island is covered in grass.

Ms House recalls that some of the boulders at the campsite appear to have been added since her days spent camping on site. She also notes that the main change to the area is the introduction of non-native vegetation. *Crataegus Laevigata* (hawthorn) and *Prunus cerasifera* (cherry plum) were planted in the 1940s as part of the park's registered treescape (Taylor and Boden 1994). Image 4 shows a photo of Red Hill Campsite taken in 1927 in which it is possible to see the traffic island and the circle of boulders that delineated the campsite.

Ms House mentions the importance of a nearby creek to Aboriginal people camping at the site. This creek is most likely the creek which runs across Flinders Way and Flinders Park to the southeast, running under and perpendicular to La Perouse Street. Though this creek is part of the general setting of the site, it does not form part of the proposed boundary of the Red Hill Campsite register entry.

Physical condition and integrity

The traffic island park is landscaped and well maintained at its northern end. The southern end, which is the focus of this assessment, is covered by wood chip and is landscaped to a lesser degree. The planting of European street trees in the late 1920s contributes to the protection of the southern part of the site.

Given the extent to which landscaping would have been undertaken in the suburb of Griffith in order to develop roads and housing infrastructure, it seems likely that the place has been heavily disturbed from its original state. This was confirmed during the 2016 archaeological excavation of the site, which saw a number of construction related material uncovered from the 1930s-1960s.

SITE PLAN



Image 1. Red Hill Campsite site boundary.

IMAGES

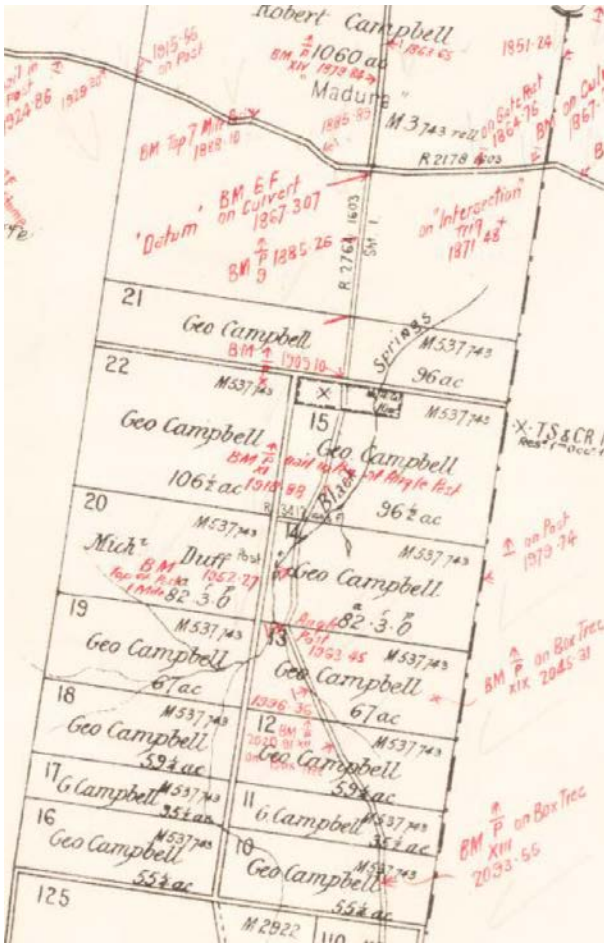


Image 2. Parish of Narrabundah map. A creek labelled Black Springs runs through the middle of the image. NSW Department of Lands, 1904.

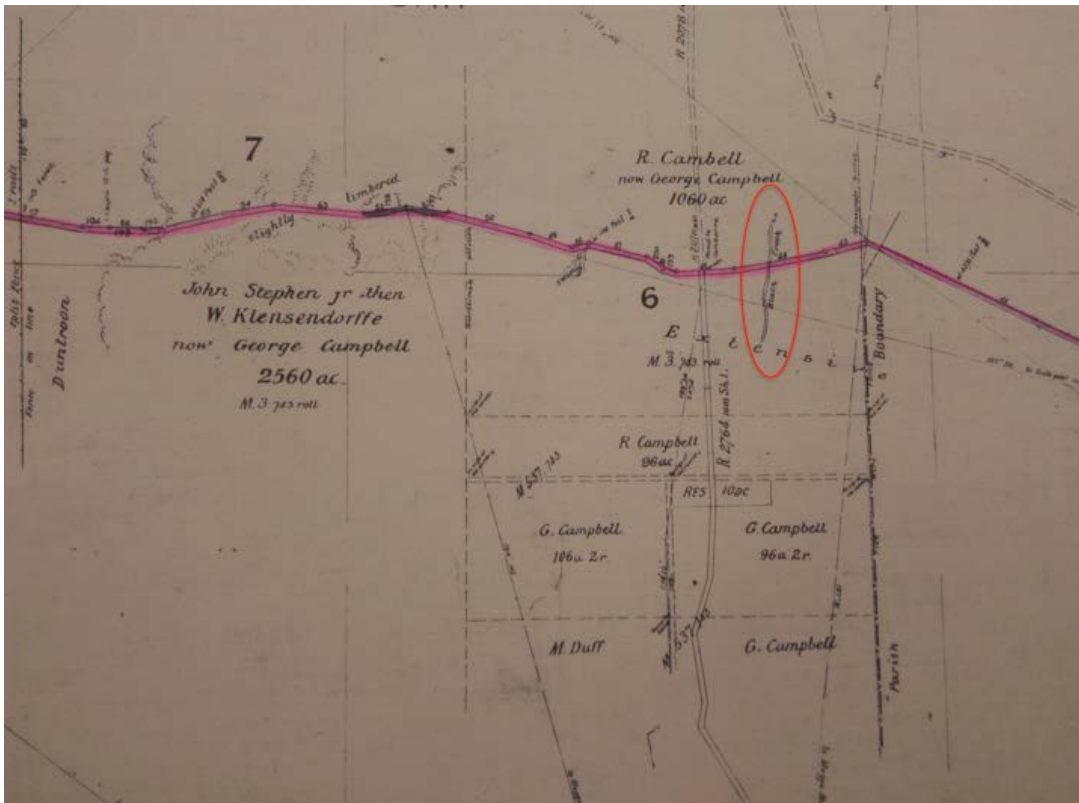


Image 3. Map of Queanbeyan/Uriarra Road. A creek labelled Black creek is circled. NSW Department of Lands, 1884.



Image 4. View of Flinders Way and houses near Monaro Crescent Red Hill, c.1927. Red Hill Campsite is outlined - note the circle of boulders. Image courtesy of the National Archives of Australia (NAA: A3560, 7616).



Image 5. Photograph of Red Hill Campsite, showing dacite outcrop at the southern end of the traffic island.

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