

Heritage Values

Coal Mines Historic Site

Historic Values

The place has heritage value because of its importance in the course, or pattern, of Australia's or Tasmania's natural or cultural history.

The Coal Mines Historic Site was established in 1833 to mine coal and to provide secondary punishment for re-offending convicts. It is an outstanding example of the 19th-century European global strategy of using the forced labour of convicts in the establishment of overseas colonies. Convicts transported to Australia are acknowledged as the principal labour force in securing a reasonably successful British outpost. The hard physical labour and the infrastructure for delivering punishment at the Coal Mines represent the extreme hardships that many convicts experienced.

The Coal Mines was developed as the most severe place of secondary punishment in the Colony of Van Diemen's Land, but it was also hoped that sufficient coal would be produced for all government needs in the colony. The extent of the former industrial operations is demonstrated by the extant ruins, surface and subsurface remains—both terrestrial and maritime—which complement the extensive archival records. The Site illustrates the importance of convict labour and productivity, classification, punishment and surveillance in the penal system, and the role of convicts in helping to establish new colonial economies.

With other convict places in Tasmania and on Norfolk Island, the Coal Mines Historic Site illustrates the adaptation of the British penal system to colonial conditions and an aspect of the evolution of the secondary punishment system into the Probation System. The hard and dangerous

work that official and unofficial sources record as performed at the Coal Mines, and the solitary cells in which the most recalcitrant prisoners were housed, are emblematic of the lowest tier on Lieutenant-Governor Arthur's progressive scale of convict punishment and reform. They were designed to deter offenders from further crime through the promise of extreme severity.

The historical record and the presence of outstandingly preserved extant examples of solitary cells at the Coal Mines Historic Site express an aspect of 19th-century intolerance of the practice of homosexuality in Britain and Australia.

The Coal Mines Historic Site is a very early industrialised mine site in Australia, and the first in Tasmania. The Coal Mines Historic Site represents an important step in the progress of Australia's mining industry.



Scientific or Research Values

The place has heritage value because of its potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Tasmania's or Australia's natural or cultural history.

The terrestrial and maritime archaeological deposits of the penal colliery have national and international research potential. The Coal Mines contains largely unexplored archaeological evidence that—because of its integrity—may provide a unique insight into convict mining operations, penal settlements and colonial industry in general.

In combination, documentary evidence, collections, structures, engineering relics, cultural deposits, and terrestrial, underground and maritime landscapes of the Coal Mines Historic Site have unparalleled potential for archaeological research. They represent evidence of labour organisation, construction technology, industrial production, use of locally available materials and adaptation of imported traditions to suit local conditions.

Potential research topics include issues relating to the European exploration of the Australian continent and identification and exploitation of resources, settlement planning, technological adaptation and innovation, and environmental impacts.

The Coal Mines Historic Site has potential for scientific research and education concerning the habitat ecology of the Forty-Spotted Pardalote (*Pardalotus quadragintus*) and Hairstreak Butterfly (*Pseudalmenus chlorinda myrsilus*).

Aesthetic Values

The place has heritage value because of its importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by a community or cultural group. These relate to sensory perception, i.e. consideration of form, scale, colour, texture, material, smell or sound.

The Coal Mines Historic Site is a complex cultural landscape of outstanding natural and historical values. It has a sense of serenity, remoteness, mystery and discovery that makes the Site special to visitors.

The Site's forested hills and marine landscape formed the bars of the prison and are still dominant features of the Site and its setting. Since the early 20th-century the Site has been valued for its romantic qualities as 'picturesque' ruins surrounded by native bush within a setting of bays and headlands. This enduring sense of remoteness and isolation is still valued by visitors. It has also been valued for the Gothic atmosphere of confinement and suffering, evoked by the cells in particular. The regenerating bushland provides a naturalised context for the cultural relics, imbuing the site with a sense of antiquity and transcendence not present at more intensively managed and manicured sites.

The Coal Mines Historic Site has been the subject of art work by several professional and amateur artists, including Conrad Martens, Owen Stanley and Bishop Francis Nixon.



Technical Values

The place has heritage value because of its importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period.

The convict period remains of the Coal Mines Historic Sites demonstrate different technical aspects in the extraction and transportation of coal in the early 19th-century, from relatively simple manual techniques to which were added the more mechanised systems of the steam age.

The industrial operations, using a combination of convict labour and mechanical devices, were unique in Van Diemen's Land, representing a novel blend of human punishment and technical innovation. The surviving industrial landscape elements clearly illustrate the application of British models of mining adapted to suit the available labour source, local environment and colonial economy.

The spatial layout of its elements in the landscape of the Coal Mines Historic Site demonstrates convict-settlement design practices; these were essentially military in character, with the organisation of the buildings allowing vistas for surveillance and the separation of classes and functional operations. The presence of examples of fine architectural detailing on some structures illustrates the role of craftsmen within the industrial enterprise and demonstrates the presence of skilled stonemasons at the settlement.

The alternating underground vaulted brick separate cells of 1845–46 are the only surviving example of this type of prison accommodation, which was introduced into Van Diemen's Land during 1844–46 and never used elsewhere in the colonies. The cells demonstrate innovation in the practice of isolating convicts at night from even the most minimal contact with their fellow prisoners, while still providing adequate ventilation.¹

Social Values

The place has heritage value because of its strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons.

The Coal Mines Historic Site is important to the community's sense of place and of its own history. It has a long history of use by the local community for recreation, as well as by other visitors. It has long been a favourite place for bushwalking, fishing, birdwatching and other forms of environmental recreation, including camping at the nearby reserve. Many locals take visitors there to show them a very different kind of convict site from the more closely managed and developed Port Arthur.

Visitors from other places also find their way there in small numbers and, according to anecdotal evidence, express their enthusiasm for the unmediated and 'romantic' experience that it offers.

The Coal Mines Historic Site and the associated convict records evoke powerful associations for the descendants of all those who passed through here, whether convicted or free people.



Special Association Values

The place has heritage value because of its special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Tasmania's and Australia's natural or cultural history.

The Coal Mines Historic Site has outstanding heritage value to the nation because of the place's special association with administrators and convicts from the British Empire in the period 1830 to 1848.

People of outstanding significance with whom the site is associated include:

George Arthur: Lieutenant-Governor of Van Diemen's Land under whose auspices Port Arthur was established as a penal settlement and the person after whom it was named. He was instrumental in framing the disciplinary regimens that gave notoriety to the Van Diemen's Land convict system.

The Corps of Royal Engineers were responsible for planning, designing and constructing buildings at the Coal Mines after assuming responsibility for structures located at penal stations throughout the Tasman Peninsula in 1835.

Commandant Charles O'Hara Booth and Commandant William Champ were significant in either the development or the management of the Coal Mines as a penal settlement. William Champ became Tasmania's first Premier.

Polish-born naturalist John Lhotsky was charged by Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur with planning the development of the Coal Mines. He also made a complete geological map of the Tasman Peninsula.

Jane, Lady Franklin, visited the Coal Mines in 1837 and wrote a review of operations at the penal settlement.

Acclaimed 19th-century artists and writers who visited and left a record of their impressions include Bishop Francis Nixon, Conrad Martens and Owen Stanley.

Indigenous Values

The place has heritage value because of its importance as part of Indigenous tradition.

The Tasman Peninsula region generally has significance to Tasmanian Aboriginal people because it contains abundant traditional Aboriginal resources. The landscape, which around this site appears little changed, was important to Aboriginal people in the past and provides a connection of importance to Aboriginal people today. There is one recorded Aboriginal site at the Coal Mines Historic Site.



Rarity

The place has heritage value because of its possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Tasmania's or Australia's natural or cultural history.

The Coal Mines is the first mechanised mines in Tasmania and one of the first in Australia, and played an important role in building the economic confidence of the new colony. The Coal Mines Historic Site contains the engine beds and footings of the winding and pumping machinery installed in 1845, which represent the earliest recorded pit-top workings in Australia.

The dual role of the Coal Mines as a secondary punishment station and an ambitious industrial venture is rare in Australian convict history. The Coal Mines Historic Site has more surviving above-ground evidence of mining activity than the Coal River site at Newcastle and it is likely that the subsurface evidence is also more intact—including evidence of how the coal was extracted, handled, processed and shipped.

The Coal Mines Historic Site possesses elements of geodiversity and biodiversity that are uncommon at a local level. The coal-bearing lithology of the Site, while not unique in Southern Tasmania, is uncommon insofar as the seams were sufficiently robust to permit commercial exploitation.

The Coal Mines Historic Site is one of the last refuges of two threatened or endangered species—the rare Forty Spotted Pardalote (*Pardalotus quadragintus*) and the vulnerable Hairstreak Butterfly (*Pseudalmenus chlorinda myrsilus*). Both are found in the site's *Eucalyptus viminalis* (White gum) forest where both *Acacia dealbata* (Silver Wattle) and *Eucalyptus viminalis* provide vital habitat for part of the butterfly's life cycle.²

Representativeness

The place has heritage value because of its importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a broader class of cultural places.

Australia's convict sites share a suite of attributes that stem from their peculiar philosophical, economic, social, strategic and geographic contexts. They exhibit features that reflect the imperatives of convict management, including: secure stores; accommodation for the civil, military and convict populations based on principles of hierarchy, classification and surveillance; places of health care and punishment, administration and industry, and facilities for religion. The Coal Mines Historic Site is outstanding in demonstrating the principal characteristics of an Australian Convict Site because:

- the form and location of elements at the Site display deliberate design and arrangement, reflecting the order and hierarchy of a penal settlement; and
- the Site represents important aspects of Australia's convict industry, including principles of labour organisation and punishment, introduction and adaptation of technology, and the role of convict labour in building colonial economies.

