



Three young children 'hurrying' a loaded wagon in a mine
The men at the Coal Mines worked under the same conditions.
Report of the Children's Employment Commission, 1842
Collection: Science & Society Picture Library

SITE MAP

MAIN SHAFT (1843-45)

This is the largest shaft, originally around 92 metres deep. It flooded constantly and Thompson described how the water was pumped out. *At the bottom of the shaft there were three roads. One was called the Double Road; it lay right in front of you and ran steeply down for about 40 or 50 yards... at the bottom there was a pump which was continually kept at work pumping the water up to the bottom of the big shaft. At the mouth of the pit was a pump to drain the water that collected at the bottom, and this was continuously operated by about eight men or more.* Later a steam engine did this work, powered by the boiler beside this shaft. Thompson described how the coal was extracted: *The method of sending the men down was for one man to sit across the short iron bar, holding onto the chain which was attached to its centre, and another man sat on the opposite side across the first man's knee. They were then lowered by the windlass to the bottom. One miner got the coal from each face...*

The miner had a 'runner out' who filled the box and ran it out until met by another, who would carry it to the foot of the Double Road, where the donkeys [men who pulled the laden carts] would have it up to the shaft, the first man taking back the other's empty box... each box had four men, three pulling in front and one pushing behind... They wore leather harnesses attached to the box with chains. Jones described these 'donkeys', crouched almost on all fours, puffing and blowing and steaming from their exertions...

Accidents were uncommon according to official records; several men fell down shafts and another died when a mate accidentally dropped a pickaxe on his head. One of Jones' mates was killed in a blasting accident. *He was taken to the hospital... the doctor, knowing all was nearly over, ordered him to be carried out of doors. I waited by the poor fellow's side. The minute he felt the fresh air he passed away from mines and fellow-workers and all his earthly troubles.*

SHAFT

We do not know the purpose of this carefully constructed shaft.

SIGNAL STATION (c1836)

This lay on a branch line of the semaphore system that was devised by the Commandant of Port Arthur, Captain Booth. A chain of semaphores allowed Port Arthur to communicate with Hobart in 15 minutes. Branch semaphores connected Port Arthur with outlying stations such as the Coal Mines.

The mast was a tall tree, with three pairs of double arms. The position of each arm on the mast denoted a number; each number corresponded to a letter, a word or a group of words. A convict signalman lived in a one-roomed weatherboard hut nearby, with a telescope and the signal code book.

SEPARATE APARTMENTS (1846-47) & SOLITARY PUNISHMENT CELLS (1845-46)

A pair of two-storey blocks containing 108 separate apartments was built to try to prevent what official reports called 'the most horrid offence', homosexual activity. It was suspected at every convict station, but at the Coal Mines most of all because of the type of men who were sent here. They were regarded as hopelessly corrupt, and their work

meant that it was very difficult to supervise them at all times. Despite no evidence to justify this panic officials remained convinced that drastic action was needed.

Under these separate apartments are 36 stone and brick solitary cells, enclosed by a high wall. Men under punishment might spend as many as 30 days in one of these cells.

INCLINED PLANE

Thompson described how coal was brought out of the Main Shaft. There was a windlass arrangement for hoisting the coal, a full box going up and empty one going down. *A platform was built to the mouth of the shaft, and the boxes of coal were landed and placed on a tram, which ran out to a screen above the rails of the inclined plane... The [screened coal then] went into wagons underneath [which] were run down the hill to the jetty.*

The system worked by gravity. All the wagons were all connected to a cable and as the loaded coal wagons ran down the hill, the empty ones were pulled back up. Thompson said that *it required careful treatment to safely bring the wagon to the jetty. We used to stand on the brake behind, and guide the wagon to keep it on the road. The jetty was built so that [ships] could lie underneath; the wagons above, with flap arrangement below, could then quickly discharge their load into the hold of the boat.*



QUARRY

The marks of the convict picks can clearly be seen on the quarry face. Half-finished blocks of stone lie where men abandoned them when they downed tools on the day the Mines closed.

COMMISSARIAT STORE (1842)

The first commissariat store was under the men's barracks, and vulnerable to theft. A new, stone store was built at the water's edge on Plunkett Point. It was two storeys high and could contain provisions for 2000 men.

SHORE & JETTIES (1833-42)

Along the shore you can see small lumps of red and black material. The red material is coal slack, burnt by fires that smouldered for many years after the Mines were closed. The black material is coal that fell into the water during loading at the jetties.

There were four main jetties. Two were near the Settlement, a third serviced the inclined plane, and the fourth serviced the Commissariat Store.

SENIOR MILITARY OFFICER'S HOUSE (1837-42)

The officer in command of the garrison lived with his family in this brick building with six rooms, a stable, a garden and outbuildings. He was also the magistrate who heard all cases of misconduct. Under the sadistic Lt Barclay, men would receive 100 lashes after the briefest of trials for trivial

offences. The men at the Mines became known as Barclay's Tigers, because of the stripes on their backs.

On one occasion he flogged every prisoner to try to find out who had committed some trifling offence. Jones described the scene: *The men were brought in mobs into the office, crammed into the*

MILITARY BARRACKS (1837)

The military guarded the convicts, and ensured that the settlement remained orderly. Their barracks was a weather-board building with a veranda and outbuildings. About 30 men lived here at first but by 1844 numbers had risen to 80. According to their captain

SUPERINTENDENT'S HOUSE (1837)

The Superintendent managed everything except security. This was a very difficult place to manage. The convicts were habitual escapers, disorderly and rebellious. Several government reports criticised the state of the station – accommodation was inadequate, discipline was lax and the men lacked adequate boots, tools and clothes.

The tyrannical Superintendent Cook presided when Thompson and Jones were here. He refused to issue the men with new boots, even though their feet were so damaged that they were in agony, because new boots were not due.

THE SETTLEMENT OR 'SQUARE' (1838)

William Thompson described what he saw here when he stepped ashore in 1842: *The east side of the square consisted of a row of huts numbered 1, 2 and 3... underneath these huts were the Commissariat Store [and] the solitary cells, consisting of four cells on each side of the passage, 16 cells in all.*

Thompson spent many days in these solitary cells. *When the outer passage door was closed there was total darkness. Solitary prisoners were allowed two hours exercise per day... The rations were one pound of bread per day, with an unlimited quantity of water.*

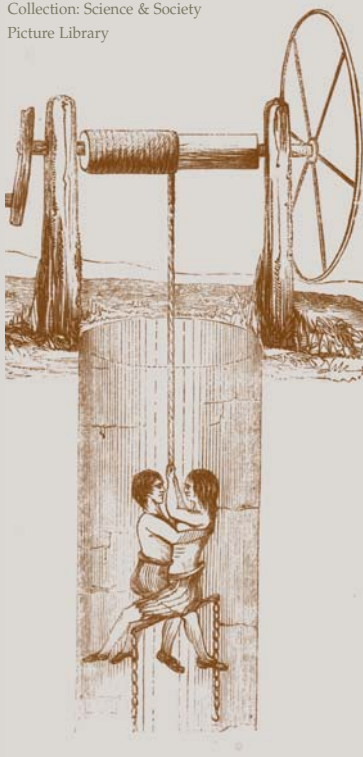
The miners occupied their own row of huts behind the chapel. The Second Class men slept in dormitories called 'huts' which were *well ventilated, kept well white washed with a clean and neat appearance.* Thompson described some illegal evening entertainments: *When all were in bed we had yarn-spinning. Walter Williams used to spin the longest yarns I ever listened to... To test the attention of the hut occupants he would occasionally shout out 'Boots', and the return from the*

docks, tried and sentenced in a bunch. When my batch was tried my shoestrings came undone and as I stooped in the dock to tie it, I remained at a critical moment unnoticed from the bench. My name was not called and I escaped without sentence... After all this sentencing and flogging the real culprit was never discovered.

the troops are infinitely worse quartered and more crowded than the convicts.
At its largest the garden covered 15 acres. Despite low rainfall and poor soil, convict gardeners grew potatoes, carrots, turnips, cabbages and leeks.

Under his successor, the more moderate Mr Purslowe, Jones said that *boots could be repaired when necessary, others being supplied, and there was no more complaining of torn and blistered feet.*
Purslowe also relaxed discipline. Jones said that *instead of having to rush for our loads, ironed as we were, we were now allowed to walk along in twos as quiet as at a funeral.* He even allowed the men to write letters to friends and family. But finally he went too far; he lightened the men's shackles, thus lessening their punishment, and was sacked.

Children being lowered down a coalmine shaft
Although children did not work at the Coal Mines, the methods used there were the same as those depicted in this report.
Report of the Children's Employment Commission, 1842
Collection: Science & Society Picture Library



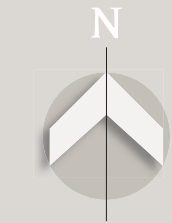
FINALLY...

So was the horrific reputation of the Coal Mines justified? Thompson and Jones describe the mines as though they were no worse than the other stations where they had been. Miners all over the world endured appalling conditions but most of the convicts here worked above ground. There were brutal overseers like Cook and Barclay at every station. Perhaps the fearsome reputation of the Coal Mines was manufactured to try to deter men from repeat offences?

COAL MINES

Historic Site

Visitor Guide



WELCOME TO THE COAL MINES HISTORIC SITE

The Coal Mines Historic Site is part of the epic story of the European settlement of this country.

The Pydairrerme people were the traditional owners of this land. Middens and other cultural sites from many thousands of years of occupation still remain in the area and we ask that you assist us in caring for them by not walking on them or picking up any associated material.

The Coal Mines formed part of the system of convict discipline and punishment on the Tasman Peninsula. During its busiest years almost 600 prisoners with their jailers and their families lived and worked at the Mines. While the underground workings are no longer accessible, you may visit the picturesque ruins of houses, barracks, offices and punishment cells. As you explore this evocative unspoiled landscape, you may catch a faint echo of those long departed men toiling in the dark, and experience something of the isolation and hardship that they endured.

The Coal Mines Historic Site is open daily. No bookings are required and entry is free.

PORT ARTHUR HISTORIC SITE

The Port Arthur penal station was established as a small timber station in 1830. By the 1840s it was both an industrial site and a prison, with over 1100 convicts. Shiploads of manufactured goods poured out of the settlement – everything from whaleboats to shoes – to government stores and private markets across Van Diemen’s Land and even to Britain. While all this industry served the government’s aim to make the settlement self-sufficient, it served a larger aim. Men were not only to be punished, they were to be reformed and turned into useful citizens.

By the 1870s Port Arthur was home to increasing numbers of men who were so mentally or physically damaged that they could not live independently. In 1877 the settlement was finally closed and its inmates were transferred to institutions in Hobart.

THE COAL MINES – A HISTORY

The Coal Mines opened three years after Port Arthur. By the late 1830s they produced most of the coal used in Van Diemen’s Land. It was used extensively in government offices, but householders did not like it because it emitted showers of sparks when it was first lighted, setting fire to carpets and ladies’ gowns. The Coal Mines also served as a punishment station for men who had committed a serious offence in the colony, or who continually committed relatively minor offences. By 1843 there were 579 prisoners here, with 27 soldier guards, 35 civilian supervisors and administrators, 14 of their wives and 90 children.

Only convicts who were skilled miners worked at the coal face. They dug an average of 3 tons per day; each miner had three convict labourers to take away the coal. Most convicts here, however, were employed in quarrying, lime or charcoal burning, building, gardening, splitting timber, or labouring above and below ground. Skilled convicts – carpenters, blacksmiths, shoemakers, tailors and tanners – worked at their trades.

The Coal Mines ran at a loss, and officials were very anxious about problems with discipline there, so the Mines were leased to private operators in 1848. With lower costs, the new owners managed to make a small profit until 1877. The Mines were finally abandoned in 1901.

Port Arthur was regarded as a harsh place, and the Coal Mines was said to be worse. But was its reputation justified?

Two convicts left us an account of their experiences here in the early 1840s. William Thompson was a young shoemaker and burglar, transported for life; he was sentenced to two years’ hard labour in chains at the Coal Mines for persistent absconding and theft.

William Jones was a teenage boatman and burglar, transported for 10 years and sent to the Mines for assault, absconding and disorderly conduct. Let them take you on a tour of discovery.

HOW TO GET THERE

The Coal Mines Historic Site is 25 minutes’ drive from Port Arthur.

From Hobart

Travel north along the Arthur Highway to the Tasman Peninsula; turn right at Taranna onto the B37. At the Premaydena shop, turn right onto C341 for approximately 13 kilometres and turn right onto the sealed road to the Coal Mines Historic Site.

From Port Arthur

Travel north along the Arthur Highway to Taranna; turn left onto the B37, then continue as above. Alternatively, continue past Port Arthur to Nubeena and Premaydena, then turn left onto the C341 at the Premaydena shop and continue as above.

SERVICES

Services on this site are minimal. Parking and toilets are provided. There are no shelters, water or other facilities.

DISABLED ACCESS

While the main settlement and Plunkett Point are accessible, the Inclined Plane and the track up to the Main Shaft are not recommended for those with mobility issues.

SAFETY ON SITE

The weather is changeable and there are no shelters. Be prepared with sun protection, water, warm clothing, a raincoat or umbrella. For your own safety, we ask you to stay on the paths. The ground is uneven in many places, so sturdy walking shoes are recommended. Watch out for snakes in the summer months. The ruins are unstable and fragile, so please do not climb on them.

CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES

The Coal Mines Historic Site is managed by the Port Arthur Historic Sites Management Authority. We undertake a range of activities here to preserve this fragile and special place, including the conservation of landscape and buildings, archaeological surveys, tours and educational programs.

WALK OPTIONS

Three different options cater for different levels of mobility and time availability.

Walk 1:

⌚ 2 hours return

Not suitable for those with limited mobility.

Start at the Settlement, walk up the hill to the Main Shaft and down the Inclined Plane to Plunkett Point, then return along the convict road to the Settlement.

Walk 2:

⌚ 1 hour 20 minutes one way

An easy walk but steep in places.

If your party has two cars, leave one at the lower carpark, then drive up to the Main Shaft, and walk down the hill to the settlement via a short side trip down the Inclined Plane. From there you could also visit Plunkett Point, see Walk 3.

Walk 3:

⌚ 50 minutes return

An easy walk suitable for those with limited mobility.

Start at the settlement and walk down the convict road to Plunkett Point, return by the same route. Another 15 minutes [30 minutes return] will take you around the coast from Plunkett Point to the convict quarry.



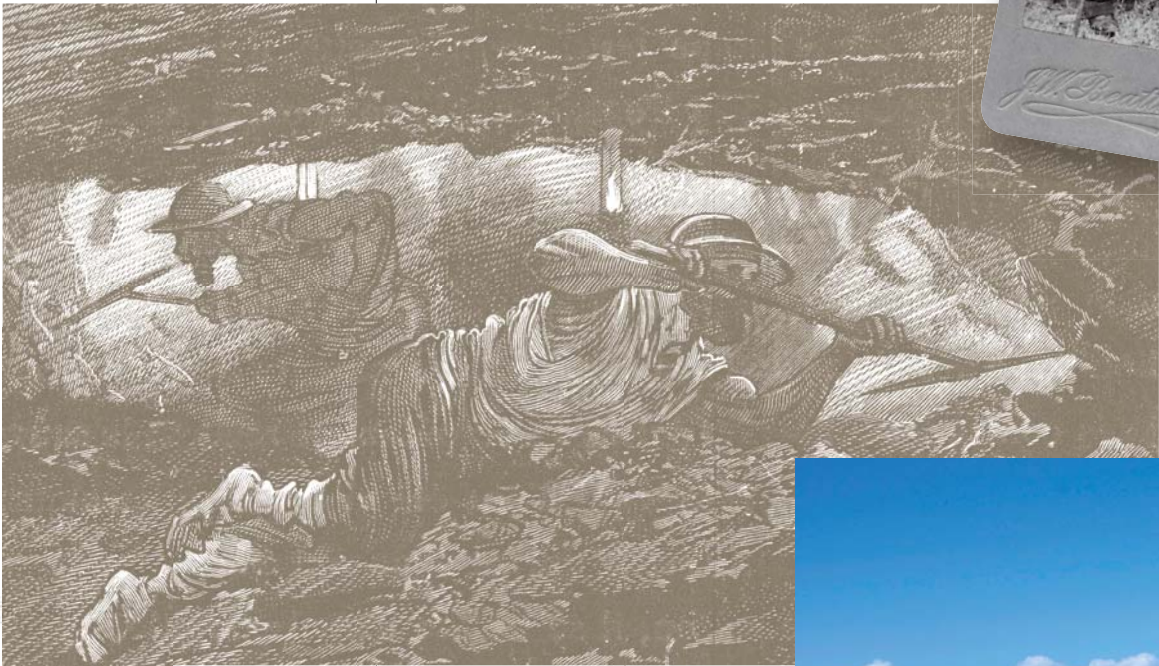
PORT ARTHUR HISTORIC SITES

CONTACT US

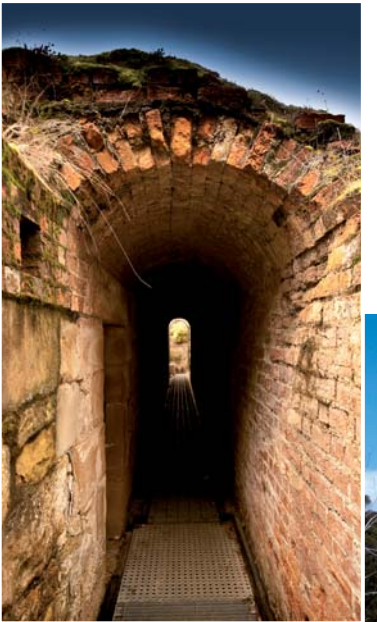
Port Arthur Historic Site Management Authority
Arthur Highway, Port Arthur
Tasmania 7182 Australia
Booking enquiries:
+ 61 (0)3 6251 2310
Administration:
+ 61 (0)3 6251 2300
Facsimile:
+ 61 (0)3 6251 2322
Freecall:
1800 659 101
(from within Australia)
Email:
reservations@portarthur.org.au
Website:
www.portarthur.org.au



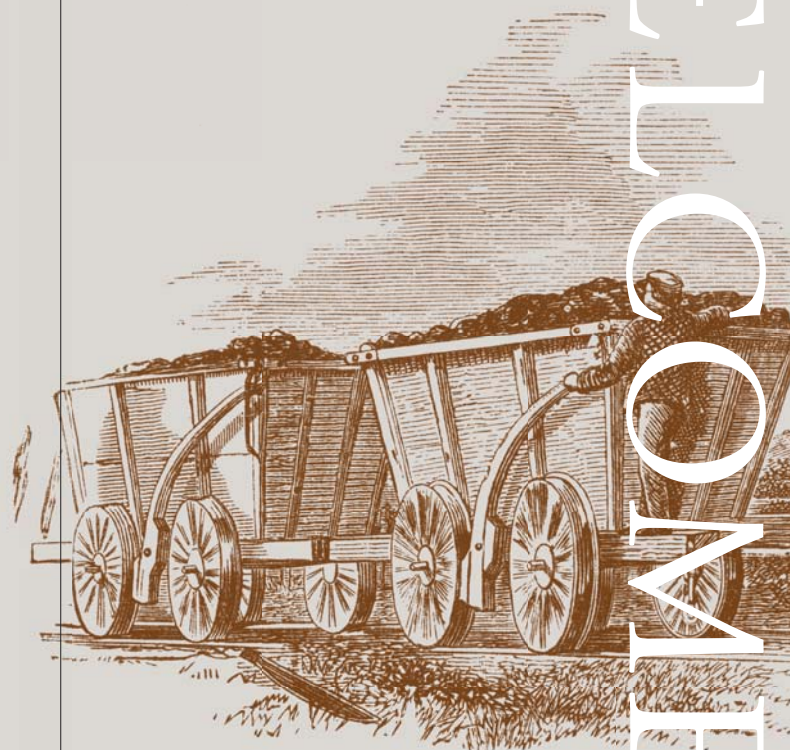
© Copyright 2011
Design: Lynda Warner
Production Assistant: Tracey Diggins
Photography: David Roe, Alistair Bett
Printer: Print Applied Technology



William Thompson poses outside the solitary cells, Coal Mines c1900
Collection: Allport Library and Museum of Fine Arts, Tasmanian Archive and Heritage Office



Coal wagons leaving a British mine
Wagons like these were used at the Coal Mines.
Collection: Mary Evans Picture Library



WELCOME

