Location:
THOMSON RIVER WALHALLA, BAW BAW SHIRE

Heritage Status / Level of Significance:
Registered

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number: H1990
Listing Authority: VHR

Heritage Overlay Number: HO261
Statement of Significance:
What is significant?
The Thomson River Diversion Tunnel Site
including the 220 metre tunnel through Stockriders Spur, the 1.2km
section of river bed known as Horseshoe Bend between the tunnel's
inlet and outlet, the inlet and outlet pools, and the river banks
extending 20 metres either side of the Horseshoe Bend river
bed.
History Summary
The Thomson River Diversion Tunnel Site is
located near the Gippsland gold township of Walhalla. Gold was
discovered in the Thomson River valley in late 1862 and a rush to the
region began. Alluvial gold mining was carried out along the Thomson
River for several decades from the 1860s, although quartz reef mining
became the region's predominant mining industry. The Thomson River
Diversion Tunnel was constructed by the Thomson River Alluvial Gold
and Tailings Recovery Company between August 1911 and about October
1912. The tunnel was blasted through a slate ridge called Stockriders
Spur. The purpose of the Tunnel was to divert a portion of river flows
away from a 1.2 km section of the natural river bed on either side of
the tunnel known as Horseshoe Bend. The decreased flow of water around
Horseshoe Bend enabled the sluicing of the gravel deposits in the
river bed. From the 1850s diversion tunnels, cuttings and embankments
facilitated mining along rivers and creeks in a number of Victorian
goldfields in mountainous regions. Diversion mining was not common and
only carried out where the natural topography was suitable. The
construction of the Thomson River Diversion Tunnel was an ambitious
gamble and came at a time when Walhalla's quartz mining industry was
ending. The mining lease at Horseshoe Bend was declared void on 10
March 1914. Over time flooding and erosion have removed all traces of
mining activity in the Horseshoe Bend river bed. The diversion tunnel
is the last and longest of the thirteen river diversions tunnels
surviving from the Victorian gold rush period.
Description
Summary
The Thomson River Diversion Tunnel Site is located about
4km south-west of Walhalla in Gippsland 1.5km south of where Stringers
Creek joins the Thomson River. The tunnel has been excavated under
Stockriders Spur and is 220 metres in length. The Thomson River flows
to the south and the tunnel extends on a downwards incline between the
inlet and outlet and has a sharp change in horizontal angle prior to
both inlet and outlet. The tunnel diverts a portion of river flows
away from a 1.2km section of the river bed between the inlet and
outlet, which is known as Horseshoe Bend. There are deep pools of
water in the river near the inlet and outlet.
This site is part of the traditional land of the Gunaikurnai people.

How is it significant?
The Thomson River Diversion Tunnel Site is
of historical significance to the State of Victoria. It satisfies the
following criterion for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register:
Criterion A
Importance to the course, or pattern, of Victoria's
cultural history.
Why is it significant?
The Thomson River Diversion Tunnel Site is significant at the State level for the following reasons:
The Thomson River Diversion Tunnel Site is historically significant as one of the last and longest of the thirteen diversion tunnels constructed for gold mining purposes in the Victoria. The tunnel was constructed between 1911 and 1912. Through its design and form the tunnel demonstrates the diversion mining technology used to divert a portion of river flows away from natural waterways and enable the digging and sluicing of river bed deposits for alluvial gold. Water diversion systems were not common in Victoria and limited to gold mining regions with a mountainous topography and perennial waterways. The looping alignment of the Thomson River at Horseshoe Bend, being an already known gold bearing locality, and the presence of Stockriders Spur are also significant as they made this location particularly suitable and were in an already known gold bearing locality. Water diversion systems are important to understanding Victoria's gold mining history. [Criterion A]
The Thomson River Diversion Tunnel Site is also significant for the following reasons, but not at the State level:

There is evidence of 1870s-80s ground sluicing in various places around Horseshoe Bend on spurs (slopes) above the river bed.

The Thomson River Diversion Tunnel Site is a place of co-existing natural and cultural heritage values. The Thomson River is listed as a Heritage River under Heritage Rivers Act 1992.

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<td>Construction Date Range</td>
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This place/object may also be State heritage listed. Check the Victorian Heritage Database. For further details, contact the local Council or go to Planning Schemes Online.