Victorian Heritage Database Report

William Ricketts Sanctuary

Location:
123-125 Ridge Road MOUNT DANDENONG, YARRA RANGES SHIRE

Heritage Status / Level of Significance:
Included in Heritage Overlay

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number:
Listing Authority: HI

Heritage Overlay Number: HO76

Statement of Significance:
William Ricketts Sanctuary is a Sculpture Garden set in 15ha of native forest. It is important for demonstrating the creative portrayal of mythical Aboriginal figures placed in a forest setting and sculptured by William Ricketts, a musician and artist in 1935. The Sanctuary was established by William Ricketts so that he could express his philosophy about the ideal relationship between Aboriginal culture and the natural world. By his legends in clay he sought to make the Aborigines the missionaries to Europeans, reteaching them the brotherhood of all living things (Criterion F.1). (RNE, 015527)

The Sanctuary is highly valued by the community and visitors for aesthetic reasons as it exhibits intimate scenes of wet sclerophyll forest landscape with large mature trees, steep slopes and sharp crests combined with unusual evocative mythical clay sculptures (Criterion E.1). (RNE, 015527)

It is possible that cultural values, both indigenous and non-indigenous, of National Estate significance may exist in this place. As yet, the Australian Heritage Commission has not identified, documented or assessed these values. (RNE, 015527)

Description

Established in 1934 by Ricketts who created over 200 sculptures of Aboriginal people there. Managed by government from 1960 onwards.

In 1935, Mr William Ricketts, a young musician and artist, with a passionate love of nature and an intense desire to discover his true vocation in life, came to the Dandenong Ranges, where he purchased an area of steep forest land and set about the task of sculpting in clay Aborigines that he felt so close to in spirit. Through his creations he hope to pave the way to a new world, where European and Aborigines, would advance together in understanding. It is through the spiritual life expressed in his works that William Ricketts endeavoured to impart his conception of the ultimate in the human's true place in wildlife conservation. Aboriginal mythology belongs to a timeless future and the only answer to the unexplainable that William Ricketts is able to offer you is reverence for life. In 1961, in recognition of his selfless endeavour and the importance to future generations of his interpretative creations, the Victorian Government accepted his offer of the property and declare it a special sanctuary. (RNE, 015527)

The property has since been extended by the acquisition of additional land on its northern boundary. At the same time the rough shack in which all his early work was undertaken and the oil fired kiln in which the works were fired, were replaced by a new building including an electric kiln, studio and dwelling. Alterations and works were also undertaken on a gateway, gatehouse, paths, positioning of rocks, water supply and other aspects.

The Sanctuary comprises steep to very steep slopes, sharp crests, narrow drainage and deep red mountain soils. This is highly characteristic of the Dandenong landform. The area is largely forested, predominantly mountain ash (EUCALYPTUS REGNANS) forest. The overstorey consists of mountain ash in pure stands, between 55m and 60m tall. On some drier slopes there are messmate (E OBLIQUA), grey gum (E CYPELLOCARPA) and in some gullies manna gum (E VIMINALIS). The understorey is composed of species such as the silver wattle (ACACIA DEALBATA), blackwood (A MELANOXYLON), rough tree fern (CYATHEA AUSTRALIS), soft tree fern (DICKSONIA ANTARCTICA), common cassinia (CASSINIA ACULEATA) and southern sassafras (ATHEROSPERMA MOSCHATUM). The Sanctuary consists of a maze of small intimate fern lined tracks which meander peacefully through the towering mountain ash and tree ferns. The beautiful clay sculptures are sensitively placed within and between the plants and trees in such a way that the visitor is greeted by Aboriginal figures and faces which appear to arise and merge into the forest setting. The sculptures incorporate a recurring theme of concentric circles. Often the circles have hands and strong rhythms flowing from them and water issuing from the centre. The pattern symbolically represents the Central Australian Aboriginal sacred sites and indicates the source of life at the time of creation. (RNE, 015527)

Good

Heritage Study / Consultant	Yarra Ranges - Shire of Yarra Ranges Heritage Study, Context Pty Ltd, 2000
Construction Date Range	
Architect / Designer	
Municipality	YARRA RANGES SHIRE
Other names	
Hermes number	115952
Property number	

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