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# ORIENTAL SLUICING CLAIMS

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## Location

ORIENTAL CLAIMS HISTORIC AREA AND GREAT ALPINE ROAD OMEO, EAST GIPPSLAND SHIRE

## Municipality

EAST GIPPSLAND SHIRE

## Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

## Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H8423-0001

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO234

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

The Oriental Claims Hydraulic Gold Sluicing Site consists of a vast network of sluicing faces, pebble dumps, tail races and water races. Water for sluicing would have been delivered to the site by high pressure pipelines and then directed at the gold bearing deposits. The technology was introduced into Victoria in about 1855. The name for the Historic Area comes from the name of a sluicing company which worked the area from 1876-1904; but the term also acknowledges the significant contribution of Chinese miners to the area's history.

The Oriental Claims Hydraulic Gold Sluicing Site is of historical, archaeological and scientific importance to the State of Victoria.

The Oriental Claims Hydraulic Gold Sluicing Site is historically and scientifically important as a characteristic and well preserved example of an early form of gold mining. Gold mining sites are of crucial importance for the pivotal role they have played since 1851 in the development of Victoria. Hydraulic sluicing of alluvial gold deposits is an important key ingredient in an understanding of gold mining technology as it was employed in country where water was plentiful and perennial.

The Oriental Claims Hydraulic Gold Sluicing Site is archaeologically important for its potential to yield artefacts and evidence which will be able to provide significant information about the cultural history of gold mining and the gold seekers themselves.

[Source: Victorian Heritage Register.]

Interpretation of Site      Nineteenth century and 1930s hut sites have been identified within Oriental Claims VHR site and indicate that the heritage site is more extensive than originally recorded.

Hermes Number      11046

Property  
Number

## History

Heritage Inventory History of Site: The Oriental Claims Historic Area encompasses a number of sluicing claims worked on a large scale in the Dry Gully area between 1855-1904. The name 'Oriental' comes from the name of a sluicing company which worked the area from 1876-1904; but the term also acknowledges the significant contribution of Chinese miners to the area's history. Champagne and Co. was the first party to establish a claim on the ground, in 1855, and they constructed a long sluicing race to feed their ground sluicing operations. In 1857, Fitzgerald and party took up ground they called the Pioneer claim at the junction of Livingstone Creek with Dry Gully and Mountain Creek. Fitzgerald gained a virtual monopoly on water supply—and, in effect, on sluicing—by taking up agricultural ground around Dry Hill and west of Livingstone Creek, preventing rival parties in the vicinity from constructing water races to their claims. Early sluicing claims were worked using sluice boxes and Californian pumps and wheels. The Pioneer Co.'s extensive water races enabled it to graduate to hydraulic sluicing in the early 1870s. The use of the high-pressure hose allowed the processing of far greater quantities of washdirt, and this was the first operation of its kind in the district. The high-pressure jet of water was trained on the lower section of a high face, undermining the upper section and causing it to collapse, thereby delivering massive amounts of washdirt to the sluice boxes with relatively little effort. In 1876, the Oriental Sluicing Co. was formed (the pioneering Champagne was a partner) to work ground south of the Pioneer claim by hydraulic sluicing. The company intended cutting a six-mile water race up the Livingstone Valley to their claim, but Fitzgerald objected to it crossing his private property, the only practicable route. Completion of the race was delayed until the introduction of the Mining on Private Property Act in 1884. In 1883, Fitzgerald and Co. sold the Pioneer claim to a party of Chinese for £1,000. In its first 25 years of operation, the claim had yielded an estimated 7,500 oz of gold. Under its new ownership and following a drought in the early 1880s, the Pioneer claim never regained its old vigour. By 1886, the Oriental Co. was in full operation at last and on its way to being the premier gold producer of the district. Its contentious water race was complete and capable of supplying water enough for two hydraulic hoses and twelve 36-inch sluice heads. In 1889, the Oriental Co. installed a Giant hydrant and nozzle—the latest sluicing technology—in the hope of doubling its gold production. The tail-race was deepened and extended to 600 feet in length. High-pressure water was delivered to the sluicing site through a line of iron pipes which gradually reduced in diameter—from one foot, to nine inches, to six inches, to a hose nozzle of only two or three inches' diameter. The result was the best yield for years. The Oriental Co. continued operating until 1904, when the Sludge Abatement Board halted all sluicing on Livingstone Creek. The company's total gold production was estimated at 12,500 oz, and other sluicing claims in the vicinity were thought to have yielded about 21,000 oz since 1857. Griffiths put the total production of the Oriental claims at close to 42,000 oz (or an average 5 grain per cubic yard), which made them 'without a doubt the largest and most profitable sluicing venture in Gippsland'. In 1911, a new Oriental Co. took up the old ground and installed new, up-to-date sluicing plant. A 120-foot face was sluiced, with the tailings deposited on ground already worked, so as not to pollute the creek. Low yields forced operations to cease within a year.

*This place/object may be included in the Victorian Heritage Register pursuant to the Heritage Act 2017. Check the Victorian Heritage Database, selecting 'Heritage Victoria' as the place source.*

*For further details about Heritage Overlay places, contact the relevant local council or go to Planning Schemes Online <http://planningschemes.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>*