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# CAMP NO.1 WWII INTERNMENT CAMP

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## Location

1320 STEWART ROAD TATURA, GREATER SHEPPARTON CITY

## Municipality

GREATER SHEPPARTON CITY

## Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

## Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7924-0083

## Heritage Overlay Numbers

HO55

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - November 27, 2002

### What is significant?

Camp No. 1 WWII Internment Camp is located on the eastern side of Waranga Reservoir, 20 kms south of Tatura. It was Australia's first purpose built internment camp for housing enemy aliens and/or prisoners of war. Camp 1 was established in 1940 and was closed in 1947. The camp housed male civilian internees, first of German origin and later of Italian origin which had been resident in Australia. The camp is a superb archaeological site with most of its features such as huts, ablution blocks, kitchens, tennis courts, gardens, ponds, skittle alley, cafe, hall, sewerage works and security fencing easily recognised.

### How is it significant?

Camp No. 1 WWII Internment Camp is of historic, cultural, social and archaeological significance to the State of Victoria.

### Why is it significant?

Camp No. 1 WWII Internment Camp is historically significant for its association with the Australian internment

policy of the first half of the twentieth century. Camp No. 1 was the first of eighteen purpose-built camps a number of which were constructed in the Goulburn Valley. Crucial to the significance of the camp is its capacity to demonstrate to all visitors a direct impact of World War II on Australia. Although many of the internees were Australian residents, they were thought to be a potential security risk to the nation because of the country of their birth or their affiliations. The ruins and the landscape illustrate clearly the physical environment faced by internees and the organisational arrangements of World War II internment camp.

Camp No. 1 WWII Internment Camp is culturally significant due to the impact it had on persons of German origin in Victoria. Germans represented one of the major national groups in the early waves of immigration to Australia. Although numerically fewer than British or Irish settlers, they nevertheless had a substantial impact in forming the Australian society. Internment demonstrated to them that they were not considered a part of Australian society, which was at that time dominated by British values and politics.

Camp No. 1 WWII Internment Camp is archaeologically significant because it contains an abundance of archaeological evidence on the layout and operation of the camp and life within the camp. Local historians have recorded the memories of former German and Italian Internees who have returned to revisit a period of their life which had a profound effect on them. The compactness of the camp, and the quality and depth of surviving sources of information (archaeological, historical and oral history) bestows the ruins with tremendous social significance as touchstones to the experience of wartime internment.

### **Further Comments**

Germans represent one of the major national groups in the early waves of immigration to Australia. Although substantially fewer than British or Irish settlers, they had a significant impact on the formation of Victorian society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

This contribution, however, did not prevent the rise of an anti-German movement during World War I, which resulted in the internment of hundreds of persons of German origin, including some who were born in Australia. During the inter-war period, 1918-1939, scepticism towards persons with a non-British Isles background was still present. As a consequence, during World War II, Australian residents of German origin were interned because Germany was at war with Great Britain. The numbers of civilian internees increased during the war. Australia also agreed to take in enemy aliens who had been interned by British authorities. Most of them were Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria. Australia also accepted a great number of Italian and German prisoners of war, who had been captured by the Allied Forces. This led to a total of approximately 26,000 prisoners of war being held in Australian WW II camps as well as approximately 7,000 civilian internees from overseas and 7,000 from within Australia. The prisoner of war camps and internment camps had a huge influence on persons of German origin in Victoria as well as those of other nationalities at war with Great Britain. It demonstrated to them that they were not considered part of Australian society. Australia was dominated by the British and British attitudes.

In Victoria, over nine thousand people, including women and children, were accommodated in seven camps. These were concentrated in the Goulburn Valley, located 160 km north of Melbourne. They were later referred to as the Tatura group.

The first people to be interned in 1939 were German residents, followed by Italian civilians in 1940. After Dhurringile mansion at Murchison had been occupied by internees in 1939, internment camps 1 and 2 (close to Tatura) and camps 3 and 4 (close to Rushworth) were established. In 1941, German and Italian prisoners of war who had been captured by the Allied Forces were brought to Victoria to Prisoner of War Camp 13 at Dhurringile and Dhurringile mansion. Some of them later worked at Graytown Forest Camp. The camps mainly consisted of rows of corrugated iron huts and communal buildings surrounded by barbed wire and guarded by the Australian Army.

After the war, some of the camps accommodated displaced Europeans who arrived under the post-war migration scheme. Eventually, all the buildings were removed from the sites. Today, mainly concrete foundations can be found of communal huts eg. mess huts, kitchen, latrines, showers etc. and selections of the barbed-wire and other remaining reminders of the previous use of the sites.

The sites of the former prisoner of war and internment camps in the Goulburn Valley are of cultural heritage significance to Victoria. All the sites relate to the experience of persons with a non British-Isles background (in particular Germans, Italians and Japanese) in Victoria during World War II, either as interned civilian enemy aliens or as members of armed forces who had been detained as prisoners of war. The group of sites as a whole also stands for a particular policy in Australia during World War II. They help us to understand the past of Victoria

when British influence was dominant. It is therefore important to preserve these sites as reminders of the values and attitudes expressed during the first half of the twentieth century

#### Assessment against criteria

*Criterion A. The historical importance, association with or relationship to Victoria's history of the place or object.*

The camp is significant for its association with the Australian internment policy during World War II. The camp was part of a wider network of internment camps, which included camps in Victoria (eg. camp 2 at Dhurringile, camp 3 and 4 at Rushworth) as well as in other Australian states (eg. Hay in New South Wales). The overall number of internment and prisoner of war camps constructed in Australia during World War II indicates the political and cultural ties with Britain, as additional camps would have had to be built to cater for the number of internees Australia agreed to accept from Great Britain.

*Criterion B. The importance of a place or object in documenting rarity or uniqueness.*

Camp 1 stands out because of its unique layout and design.

Camp 1 is significant as the first camp of a network of internment camps in the Goulburn Valley particularly designed to house internees. Camp 1 accommodated the first Melbourne German internees who were taken away from their homes at the beginning of World War I. They were held at Dhurringile mansion first and as soon as Camp 1 was ready for housing, brought to the site. Camp 1 differs in its layout from internment camps built later in Victoria in its layout (only two compounds, shape of outlines and sewerage system. Later camps had no sewerage systems.

*Criterion C. The place or object's potential to educate, illustrate or provide further scientific investigation in relation to Victoria's cultural heritage.*

The place could yield unique archaeological information for an important period of Australia's twentieth century development. Camp 1 has the potential to be used as an extension of the Tatura Irrigation & Wartime Camps Museum in Tatura. Movable objects from internment camps are displayed in the museum and tours of Camp 1 can be arranged as a continuation of this history in the district.

*Criterion D. The importance of a place or object in exhibiting the principal characteristics or the representative nature of a place or object as part of a class or type of places or objects.*

Camp 1 was part of a wider network of camps clustered in the Goulburn Valley.

Camp 1 is significant for its capacity to demonstrate to all Victorians the physical environment faced by the hundreds of internees who were held in various internment camps in Australia during World War II. They were thought to be a potential security risk to Australia because of the country of their birth or their affiliations.

The remnant structures illustrate the organisational arrangements of World War II internment and provide an understanding of the conditions under which the internees were accommodated.

*Criterion G. The importance of the place or object in demonstrating social or cultural associations.*

Former internees of Camp 1 or their relatives have an ongoing connection with the site which represents this historic period in their lives and their skills in coping with it. Former German and Italian Internees have returned to camp 1 to 'revisit' a period of their life which had a profound effect on them.

## Permit Exemptions

General Conditions: 1. All exempted alterations are to be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents damage to the fabric of the registered place or object. General Conditions: 2. Should it become apparent during further inspection or the carrying out of works that original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the place or object are revealed which relate to the significance of the place or object, then the exemption covering such works shall cease and the Executive Director shall be notified as soon as possible. Note: All archaeological places have the potential to contain significant sub-surface artefacts and other remains. In most cases it will be necessary to obtain approval from Heritage Victoria before the undertaking any works that have a significant sub-

surface component. General Conditions: 3. If there is a conservation policy and plan approved by the Executive Director, all works shall be in accordance with it. Note: The existence of a Conservation Management Plan or a Heritage Action Plan endorsed by Heritage Victoria provides guidance for the management of the heritage values associated with the site. It may not be necessary to obtain a heritage permit for certain works specified in the management plan. General Conditions: 4. Nothing in this declaration prevents the Executive Director from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions. General Conditions: 5. Nothing in this declaration exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits from the responsible authorities where applicable.

**Regular Site Maintenance :** The following site maintenance works are permit exempt under section 66 of the Heritage Act 1995, a) regular site maintenance provided the works do not involve the removal or destruction of any significant above-ground features or sub-surface archaeological artefacts or deposits; b) the maintenance of an item to retain its conditions or operation without the removal of or damage to the existing fabric or the introduction of new materials; c) cleaning including the removal of surface deposits, organic growths, or graffiti by the use of low pressure water and natural detergents and mild brushing and scrubbing; d) repairs, conservation and maintenance to plaques, memorials, roads and paths, fences and gates and drainage and irrigation. e) the replacement of existing services such as cabling, plumbing, wiring and fire services that uses existing routes, conduits or voids, and does not involve damage to or the removal of significant fabric. Note: Surface patina which has developed on the fabric may be an important part of the item's significance and if so needs to be preserved during maintenance and cleaning. Note: Any new materials used for repair must not exacerbate the decay of existing fabric due to chemical incompatibility, obscure existing fabric or limit access to existing fabric for future maintenance. Repair must maximise protection and retention of fabric and include the conservation of existing details or elements.

**Fire Suppression Duties :** The following fire suppression duties are permit exempt under section 66 of the Heritage Act 1995, a) Fire suppression and fire fighting duties provided the works do not involve the removal or destruction of any significant above-ground features or sub-surface archaeological artefacts or deposits; b) Fire suppression activities such as fuel reduction burns, and fire control line construction, provided all significant historical and archaeological features are appropriately recognised and protected; Note: Fire management authorities should be aware of the location, extent and significance of historical and archaeological places when developing fire suppression and fire fighting strategies. The importance of places listed in the Heritage Register must be considered when strategies for fire suppression and management are being developed.

**Weed and Vermin Control :** The following weed and vermin control activities are permit exempt under section 66 of the Heritage Act 1995, a) Weed and vermin control activities provided the works do not involve the removal or destruction of any significant above-ground features or sub-surface archaeological artefacts or deposits; Note: Particular care must be taken with weed and vermin control works where such activities may have a detrimental affect on the significant fabric of a place. Such works may include the removal of ivy, moss or lichen from an historic structure or feature, or the removal of burrows from a site that has archaeological values.

**Landscape Maintenance :** The following landscape maintenance works are permit exempt under section 66 of the Heritage Act 1995, a) landscape maintenance works provided the activities do not involve the removal or destruction of any significant above-ground features or sub-surface archaeological artefacts or deposits; b) watering, mowing, top-dressing and fertilising necessary for the continued health of plants, without damage or major alterations to layout, contours, plant species or other significant landscape features; c) pruning to control size, improve shape, flowering or fruiting and the removal of diseased, dead or dangerous material, not exceeding 20% of the crown of the tree within a period of two years; d) tree surgery by a qualified horticulturalist or tree surgeon necessary for the health of those plants.

**Public Safety and Security :** The following public safety and security activities are permit exempt under section 66 of the Heritage Act 1995, a) public safety and security activities provided the works do not involve the removal or destruction of any significant above-ground structures or sub-surface archaeological artefacts or deposits; b) the erection of temporary security fencing, scaffolding, hoardings or surveillance systems to prevent unauthorised access or secure public safety which will not adversely affect significant fabric of the place including archaeological features; c) development including emergency stabilisation necessary to secure safety where a site feature has been irreparably damaged or destabilised and represents a safety risk to its users or the public. Note: Urgent or emergency site works are to be undertaken by an appropriately qualified specialist such as a structural engineer, or other heritage professional.

**Signage and Site Interpretation :** The following Signage and Site Interpretation activities are permit exempt under section 66 of the Heritage Act 1995, a) signage and site interpretation activities provided the works do not involve the removal or destruction of any significant above-ground structures or sub-surface archaeological artefacts or deposits; b) the erection of non-illuminated signage for the purpose of ensuring public safety or to assist in the interpretation of the heritage significance of the place or object and which will not adversely affect significant fabric including landscape or archaeological features of the place or obstruct significant views of and from heritage values or items; c) signage and site interpretation products must be located and be of a suitable size so as not to obscure or damage significant fabric of the place; d) signage and site interpretation products must be able to be later removed without causing damage to the significant fabric of the place; Note: The development of signage and site interpretation products must be consistent in the use of format,

text, logos, themes and other display materials. Note: Where possible, the signage and interpretation material should be consistent with other schemes developed on similar or associated sites. It may be necessary to consult with land managers and other stakeholders concerning existing schemes and strategies for signage and site interpretation.

**Mineral Exploration :** The following Mineral Exploration activities are permit exempt under section 66 of the Heritage Act 1995, a) mineral Exploration activities provided the works do not involve the removal or destruction of any significant above-ground features or sub-surface archaeological artefacts or deposits; b) preliminary non-intrusive exploration, including geological mapping, geophysical surveys, and geochemical sampling and access to shafts and adits; c) advanced forms of exploration (drilling), including the location of drill pads and access tracks where this has been the subject of on-site negotiation and agreement with representatives of Heritage Victoria, DSE and Parks Victoria, and where all significant historic site features have been identified and protected as part of an approved work plan.

**Minor Works :** Note: Any Minor Works that in the opinion of the Executive Director will not adversely affect the heritage significance of the place may be exempt from the permit requirements of the Heritage Act. A person proposing to undertake minor works may submit a proposal to the Executive Director. If the Executive Director is satisfied that the proposed works will not adversely affect the heritage values of the site, the applicant may be exempted from the requirement to obtain a heritage permit. If an applicant is uncertain whether a heritage permit is required, it is recommended that the permits co-ordinator be contacted. Authorised uses of the site include pastoral activities such as grazing by stock. The site owners may use the site to obtain access to other parts of the property. Sub-surface disturbance of the site for purposes such as cultivation are not permit exempt.

Other Names      CAMP NO.1 WORLD WAR II INTERNMENT CAMP,

Hermes Number    12699

Property Number

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## History

### Background

Germans represented one of the major national groups in the early waves of immigration to Australia. Although numerically fewer than British or Irish settlers, they nevertheless had a substantial impact in forming the Australian society. This, however, did not prevent an anti-German movement during World War I, which resulted in the internment of hundreds of persons of German origin, some of whom were even born in Australia. In the inter-war period in 1918-1939, scepticism towards persons with a non British Isles background was still present.

During World War II, German nationals were forced to live in camps in Victoria. They were either prisoners of war, captured by the British Army, or enemy aliens, who were civilians possessing the nationality of a state at war with his Majesty.

Even before World War II began, the handling of 'enemy aliens' was discussed in Australia. This was put into action as soon as War was declared and civilians with a German background were the first to be arrested. The number of civilian internees increased during the war. Additionally, Australia agreed to take on civilians who had been interned by British authorities as well as a great number of Italian and German prisoners of war who had been captured by the Allied Forces. These added to a total of approximately 26,000 prisoners of war plus 7,000 civilians from overseas and 7,000 local residents held in Australian camps during World War II.

### Establishment of Internment Camps in Victoria

As early as November 1939, basic plans had been drawn up of the layout of future internment and prisoner of war camps. Army engineers were responsible for the design of the internment camps. They used standard plans for housing soldiers. The camps were basically designed to last a few years only.

The camps had various shapes (e.g. Camp 1 rectangular in shape and camp 3 and 4, square in shape) and various numbers of compounds (Camp 1: two compounds, Camp 2, 3, 4 and 13: four compounds). Generally, each compound contained an appropriate number of sleeping huts, mess halls, kitchens, laundry rooms, latrines, ablution blocks and large recreation huts. The Australian policy was to segregate nationalities and groups of

internees where possible; Japanese for example were never mixed with 'Europeans'.

In most camps, accommodation was first provided in tents until suitable huts could be built. In time, more permanent camps were established, with rows of army huts replacing the tents. Sleeping huts were usually 5-6m x 20m (16-18' x 60'), constructed of galvanised iron. They had to serve 16-20 persons. In addition, large recreation huts, kitchen and mess huts, and ablution blocks were provided. Internally, the sleeping huts varied in layout. For example, in the case of family camps, sleeping quarters were partitioned off with masonite to accommodate family groups. POW camps and internment camps for single males had barrack-style accommodation. Guards and other support staff were garrisoned outside the compounds.

## Camp No 1

The first camp to be built particularly for the purpose of internment was Camp 1. It was established in 1940 for the purpose of internment on land owned by John B. Noonan. The camp was established for males, the A Compound contained overseas Germans and Italians and the B Compound local Germans and Italians. The camp also included 14 acres of garden.

Camp 1 was to become the Chief Army Administration Camp. The camp eventually housed the hospital and dental headquarters for all camps of the Tatura group.

The first internees to come to the camp were 63 Germans who walked to the camp on 25 January 1940 from Dhurringile, which had served as internment accommodation first.

The internees were housed in army huts. At the beginning, there were 14 huts, with 16 men to each hut, in Camp 1 Compound A. Later 8 further huts were erected and 2 bath-tubs put in for 250 men. The huts were unlined. One room was converted into an orderly room and canteen, another into temporary camp hospital also mess halls, open shower rooms, open wash house and latrine. Later the conditions improved. By 1943, the latrines and ablutions connected to a sewerage plant and sanitation provided. Other camps used pan systems in latrines.

Compounds A and B were separated by barbed wire. Compound B was established in the eastern side when 640 local German internees were brought to Camp 1 from every part of Australia.

According to Barbara Winter, Camp 1 was unofficially called the "Nazi Camp" and authorities who were convinced of the "dangerousness" of an internee sent them to Tatura. Persecution of anti-Nazi internees was brought to the attention of the official visitors as early as December 1940 but it was not considered expedient to segregate a 'small number of Jews from the main body of Nazis'. Later, anti-Nazi internees were shifted to other camps.

When Italy joined Germany in the war against Britain in June 1940, 22 Australian Italian internees were also brought to Camp 1.

The Camp Commandant was in charge of the overall operation of the camp with delegated duties to army personnel. The guards at Camp 1 were generally returned World War I servicemen who had re-enlisted. The internee compounds were democratically run. Internees were responsible for their compound and managed their own administration. Compound Leaders communicated problems and requests to the army administrators with an implied understanding on both sides that 'very effective cooperation' offered the 'best chance of obtaining consideration for any suggestions on behalf of the internees'. The compound administration furthermore included Secretariat, Arrangements Service, Orderlies, Post, Gardens, Hygiene, Canteen, Finance and Selling, Kitchen, Messes, Welfare, Hospital, Sport, Culture, Music, Library, Workshops, Exhibition, Cinema and School Halls.

Camp 1 housed a hospital (also called Waranga camp hospital) which became the main hospital for all other camps in the area. The Waranga camp hospital dealt with all cases needing nursing attention from the entire Tatura group, as well as surgical and other serious cases from camp 13. Infectious cases were sent to Mooroopna or Bendigo base hospital. Adjoining the hospital compound, which was outside of the compounds A and B, and separated by a single fence, was a compound erected for isolating Tuberculosis cases. The compound contained 4 open air sleeping huts, a mess and a recreation room and a building containing laundry, showers, ablution facilities etc.

The Cafe Wellblech was described by W.H. Bossence as the last symbol of one of the strangest episodes in the camp's history. Originally it had been an army hut, used for storage. The Germans obtained permission to convert it to a cafe, built a four feet high stonework promenade around the front entrance. They opened it early in 1942.

Large tubs containing foliage and plants were placed on the promenade and tables and chairs. On summer nights an area was reserved for the orchestra. Waiters, smartly dressed, served black coffee and German cakes. Inside, the panelled walls of the cafe bore scenes of the Rhine valley and Berlin. Behind the counter shelves were heavily stocked with preserved foods and delicacies. In front of the counter were tables and chairs to accommodate some 30 diners.

About 1944 the Australian authorities sounded the alarm for the camp's first escape. Other escapes followed. The Welblech Cafe was not suggested to be the headquarters for the escape society, but there was evidence to indicate it was a clearing-house for illegally gained currency notes. The chief function of the escape society was to accumulate currency notes for careful distribution to genuine potential escapees. The Welblech Cafe was raided twice, but only at the second raid a member of the search party pulled a large almost loose nail partly from the flooring. The search party saw a small, square foot section apparently of solid concrete bordering the open fire-place slowly swing downwards, as though on a hinge. In the six-inch deep cavity revealed were a number of small compartments, empty. On further examination it was revealed that this small cellar, below floor level was completely enclosed by the chimneys foundation.

The internees were occupied with various tasks, including gardening, providing services such as cleaning clothes and washing, with firewood cutting and gathering, road making at the camp, drainage work or general maintenance at the camp. The internees were paid for their work, the standard pay rate being 3d per hour, with a maximum of 15/- per week.

Probably one of the main problems in the camp was boredom. To distract the internees, 2 tennis courts, a skittle alley, a small pavilion with a flat roof for sunbaking and 2 hobby workshops were eventually built. Leisure activities at the camp included exhibitions, library, regular picture shows and sporting festival. The German internees at camp 1 even published a little pro-Nazi fortnightly newspaper called Brennessel (stinging nettle), begun in 1941.

The camp was wound up after World War II. In August 1946 there were orders issued to concentrate all internees held at Camp 1 into one compound and transfer the Officers to another Camp. The final closure seems to have occurred between 1946 and 1947. By May 1947, the garrison at No. 1 camp was reduced to two men. At the end of the year twelve of the huts were sold to district returned soldiers. Other huts were purchased by firms and businesses or were acquired by the Forestry Commission.

#### **Notes on other camps: [43]**

Camp 1 was the first to be established with the first internees arriving in January 1940. It was situated in the Goulburn Valley at Dhurringile (Victoria)

Camp 2 was situated about 2 km north of camp 1, also at Dhurringile (Victoria).

Camp 3 was established nearer Rushworth (Victoria).

Camp 4 was 1 km from Camp 3 also close to Rushworth (Victoria).

Camp 5 was situated over 160 km away from Tatura at Whorouly, officially known as Myrtleford Camp in North Eastern Victoria.

Camps 7 and 8 were established at Hay in the Riverina (Southern New South Wales). Before that, the Army Camp at Liverpool and the showgrounds at Orange, Long Bay and Darlinghurst Prisons were used to hold internal and overseas internees.

Camps 9 and 10 were situated at Loveday in South Australia (the military camp at Kerwick was used first).

Camp 11 was established at Harvey (Western Australia). Freemantle Goal and Rottnest Island were used as well.

Camp 12 was at Cowra (New South Wales).

Camp 13 was established close to Murchison (Victoria).

Camp 14 was at Loveday (South Australia).

Camp 15 was at Yanco (New South Wales).

Camp 16 was at Marrinup (Western Australia).

Camp 17 was at Gaythorne (Queensland).

Camp 18 was at Brighton (Tasmania).

*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/>*