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# O'DELL'S HUT



O Dell s Hut 2



O Dell s Hut



O Dell s Hut 3

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## Location

O'DELL'S TRACK BROOKVILLE, EAST GIPPSLAND SHIRE

## Municipality

EAST GIPPSLAND SHIRE

## Level of significance

Registered

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

H2411

## VHR Registration

April 21, 2022

## Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Register

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## Statement of Significance

Last updated on - September 8, 2025

O'Dell's Hutt is located on Gunaikumai Country.

# What is significant?

O'Dell's Hut is a single room, portable hut located on Odells Track in Brookville, East Gippsland. It is of a modest size and simple form with timber stud, weatherboard clad walls and arched corrugated iron roof with rare Morewood & Co Star Brand. It is set on skids enabling it to be pulled to different locations within the forest. It likely has its origins in the late nineteenth century and was possibly remodelled in the early twentieth century. It was likely used in goldmining and logging activities in the area.

# How is it significant?

O'Dell's Hut is of historical significance to the State of Victoria. It satisfies the following criterion for inclusion in the VHR:

Criterion B

Possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of Victoria's cultural history.

# Why is it significant?

O'Dell's Hut is significant as a rare example of an early portable hut. Its scale and form are uncommon amongst huts in Victoria. It contains unusual features of note that were not widely replicated, including its skids, straps and tow hitches which clearly demonstrate how it was transported to different locations. It retains a corrugated iron roof with the Morewood & Co Star brand which likely dates from between the 1860s and 1880s, adding to its rarity. There are other examples of portable huts in Victoria but most appear to be of later construction than O'Dell's Hut.

(Criterion B)

## Permit Exemptions

### General Exemptions:

General exemptions apply to all places and objects included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR). General exemptions have been designed to allow everyday activities, maintenance and changes to your property, which don't harm its cultural heritage significance, to proceed without the need to obtain approvals under the Heritage Act 2017.

**Places of worship:** In some circumstances, you can alter a place of worship to accommodate religious practices without a permit, but you must **notify** the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria before you start the works or activities at least 20 business days before the works or activities are to commence.

**Subdivision/consolidation:** Permit exemptions exist for some subdivisions and consolidations. If the subdivision or consolidation is in accordance with a planning permit granted under Part 4 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* and the application for the planning permit was referred to the Executive Director of Heritage Victoria as a determining referral authority, a permit is not required.

Specific exemptions may also apply to your registered place or object. If applicable, these are listed below. Specific exemptions are tailored to the conservation and management needs of an individual registered place or object and set out works and activities that are exempt from the requirements of a permit. Specific exemptions prevail if they conflict with general exemptions.

Find out more about heritage permit exemptions [here](#).

## **Specific Exemptions:**

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this information is to assist owners and other interested parties when considering or making decisions regarding works to a registered place. It is recommended that any proposed works be discussed with an officer of Heritage Victoria prior to making a permit application. Discussing proposed works will assist in answering questions the owner may have and aid any decisions regarding works to the place.

It is acknowledged that alterations and other works may be required to keep places and objects in good repair and adapt them for use into the future. However, under the *Heritage Act 2017* a person must not knowingly, recklessly or negligently remove, relocate or demolish, damage or despoil, develop or alter or excavate all or any part of any part of a registered place without approval. It should be noted that the definition of 'develop' in the Act includes any works on, over or under the place.

If a person wishes to undertake works or activities in relation to a registered place or registered object, they must apply to the Executive Director, Heritage Victoria for a permit. The purpose of a permit is to enable appropriate change to a place and to effectively manage adverse impacts on the cultural heritage significance of a place as a consequence of change. If an owner is uncertain whether a heritage permit is required, it is recommended that Heritage Victoria be contacted.

Permits are required for anything which alters the place or object, unless a permit exemption is granted. Permit exemptions usually cover routine maintenance and upkeep issues faced by owners as well as minor works or works to the elements of the place or object that are not significant. They may include appropriate works that are specified in a conservation management plan. Permit exemptions can be granted at the time of registration (under section 38 of the Heritage Act) or after registration (under section 92 of the Heritage Act). It should be noted that the addition of new buildings to the registered place, as well as alterations to the interior and exterior of existing buildings requires a permit, unless a specific permit exemption is granted.

## **Disrepair of registered place or registered object**

Under section 152 of the Act, the owner of a registered place or registered object must not allow that place or object to fall into disrepair.

## **Failure to maintain registered place or registered object**

Under section 153 of the Act, the owner of a registered place or registered object must not fail to maintain that place or object to the extent that its conservation is threatened.

## **Conservation management plans**

It is recommended that a Conservation Management Plan is developed to manage the place in a manner which respects its cultural heritage significance.

## **Archaeology**

There is no identified archaeology of State level significance associated with the hut in its current location. However, any works that may affect historical archaeological features, deposits or artefacts is likely to require a permit, permit exemption or consent from Heritage Victoria. Advice should be sought from the Archaeology Team at Heritage Victoria.

## Aboriginal cultural heritage

To establish whether this place is registered under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* please contact First Peoples – State Relations in the Department of Premier and Cabinet. The *Heritage Act 2017* and the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* are separate pieces of legislation. Please be aware that both Acts are required to be satisfied and satisfying the requirements of one Act may not satisfy the requirements of the other.

If any Aboriginal cultural heritage is discovered or exposed at any time it is necessary to immediately contact First Peoples – State Relations in the Department of Premier and Cabinet to ascertain requirements under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*. If works are proposed which have the potential to disturb or have an impact on Aboriginal cultural heritage it is necessary to contact First Peoples – State Relations in the Department of Premier and Cabinet to ascertain any requirements under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*.

## Other approvals

Please be aware that approval from other authorities (such as local government) may be required to undertake works.

## Notes

- As the hut is registered as an object, no permit or permit exemption is necessary for landscape works surrounding the hut.
- All works should ideally be informed by a Conservation Management Plan prepared for the place. The Executive Director is not bound by any Conservation Management Plan, and permits still must be obtained for works suggested in any Conservation Management Plan.
- Nothing in this determination prevents the Heritage Council from amending or rescinding all or any of the permit exemptions.
- Nothing in this determination exempts owners or their agents from the responsibility to seek relevant planning or building permits where applicable.

## General Conditions

- All exempted alterations are to be planned and carried out in a manner which prevents damage to the fabric of the registered place.
- Should it become apparent during further inspection or the carrying out of works that original or previously hidden or inaccessible details of the place are revealed which relate to the significance of the place, then the exemption covering such works must cease and Heritage Victoria must be notified as soon as possible.

## Permit Exemptions

The following permit exemptions are not considered to cause harm to the cultural heritage significance of O'Dell's Hut.

- Minor repairs and maintenance which replaces like with like. Repairs and maintenance must maximise protection and retention of fabric and include the conservation of existing details or elements. Any repairs and maintenance must not exacerbate the decay of fabric due to chemical incompatibility of new materials,

obscure fabric or limit access to such fabric for future maintenance.

- Works or activities, including emergency stabilisation, necessary to secure safety in an emergency where a structure or part of a structure has been irreparably damaged or destabilised and poses a safety risk to the public. The Executive Director, Heritage Victoria, must be notified within seven days of the commencement of these works or activities.
- Works or activities necessary to protect the hut if it is under imminent threat in an emergency, including application of fire retardant and wrapping with protective material. The Executive Director, Heritage Victoria, must be notified within seven days of the commencement of these works or activities.
- Cleaning including the removal of surface deposits and graffiti by the use of low-pressure water, neutral detergents and plastic brushes.
- Installation of temporary security fencing, signage, scaffolding, hoardings or surveillance systems to prevent unauthorised access or to secure public safety provided they are not affixed to the physical fabric of the hut.
- Installation of physical barriers or traps to enable management of animals such as rats, mice, wombats and possums.
- Application of termite treatment to timber.

## Theme

4. Transforming and managing the land 5. Building Victoria's industries and workforce

Construction dates 1900,

Heritage Act Categories Registered object,

Other Names O'DELLS HUT, ODELLS HUT, ODELL'S HUT,

Hermes Number 208262

Property Number

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## History

### Huts in Victoria

Timber or bark huts have been utilised by Aboriginal people throughout Victoria for many thousands of years. They were also the predominate form of housing used by Europeans during the early years of colonisation. While other building types rapidly developed in Victoria, huts continued to play an important role in rural and remote areas of Victoria such as Gippsland and the Alpine regions throughout the twentieth century. Many huts were associated with grazing or mining and were generally designed to provide only temporary, sometimes seasonal, accommodation.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, building materials for huts were generally gathered from the immediate vicinity. Huts were of usually of a simple gable roof form, with semi-detached stone or sheet metal chimneys frequently a feature. After World War I, a greater proportion of machine processed materials, including extensive use of corrugated iron, began to appear. Weatherboards were a less common material. Many huts of all types throughout Gippsland and the High Country were destroyed in the 1939 bushfires. A great many surviving huts are from the 1930s onwards, and particularly from the post-war era.

In the post-war era, huts were important to government forestry, road building, surveying and construction efforts. The State Electricity Commission (SEC) installed a large number of huts to provide refuges for workers, as did the Forestry Commission. Other huts were established for recreational use. Huts in the post-war era were often prefabricated and used material such as asbestos sheeting.

There has been a tradition of moving and repurposing of huts. For example, huts installed by the SEC surveyors or the Country Roads Board were at times re-appropriated by cattlemen. Huts continue to be utilised, often for recreational purposes, but continue to be under threat from bushfire, storms, vandalism and misuse.

## **Portable and pre-fabricated buildings in Victoria**

In the early nineteenth century in Britain, a substantial industry developed to support housing pre-fabrication that accompanied colonial expansion and meet the demand for housing in the colonies. Initially timber predominated as a building material, but by the mid-nineteenth century, technology in engineering and metal smelting had advanced to enable the easy production of iron buildings. During the 1850s, large numbers of prefabricated buildings were imported from Britain to Victoria. The goldrush saw a housing shortage resulting from a sudden increase in population and a rush of labour to the goldfields. Ordered from a catalogue, buildings ranged from modest cottages to government buildings and churches. The term 'portable building' covered all manner of pre-fabricated construction, from structures that were entirely pre-assembled and moved whole, to buildings shipped as series of separate, standardised parts. Timber buildings initially pre-dominated but pre-fabricated iron houses followed. Small huts that could be moved whole were utilised to accommodate mobile workforces, such as shepherds and road crews. These either had an obvious form of portability such as wheels included as part of the building structure or could be moved whole on a form of transport. Pre-fabricated and portable buildings played a key role during World War II in forms such as the Nissen Hut and again played an important role following World War II to address the shortage of housing and building materials.

## **Goldmining in the Brookville/Swifts Creek area**

Gold was officially recorded as being present in the area around Omeo in 1852 and alluvial mining at nearby locations like Sheepstation (later Brookville), Swifts Creek, Haunted Stream and Doctors Flat commenced through the 1850s and 1860s. The focus shifted to extraction of gold from quartz reefs and by the 1890s several large gold batteries and treatment works had been established in the area. Ore was heavily mineralised and elaborate chemical processes and large plants were required to extract gold. Mount Hepburn Treatment Works was a major mining operation from 1896 until 1907. The Cassilis Gold Mining Company was formed in 1897 and established a substantial gold treatment works utilising hydro-electric power. Large populations grew around the major mines and treatment works and the population of the Brookville area swelled to approximately 500 by 1895. Further to the south of Cassilis and Mount Hepburn, and in close proximity to the current location of O'Dell's Hut, a gold battery site utilising a portable steam engine was established at Odells Gully. Further to the south again a company was formed to mine the Highland Chief reef in the 1896 with around 30 houses and other buildings forming a small settlement around the mine. As accessible gold was quickly depleted, large mines were closed around World War I. Some mining, including reworking of existing mines, continued through the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s.

There are remnants of mining activities including batteries, steam engines, cemeteries, water races, mines sites and historic artefacts throughout the area. Several sites are included in the VHR and Victorian Heritage Inventory. The concentration of historic sites is recognised via a Heritage Overlay in the East Gippsland Planning Scheme (see below).

## **Logging in the Brookville area**

While commercial logging in East Gippsland dates to the late nineteenth century, logging activity in the region accelerated following the bushfires of 1939. During World War II timber getting in the Brookville/Swifts Creek area was taken over by military authority. Jack Ezard established a substantial new sawmill at Swifts Creek in 1943. The 1950s was an era when logging increased across Gippsland to keep pace with demand from the construction industry. Use of technology such as diesel tractor increased and the Forestry Commission encouraged forest management. The forests around Swifts Creek were logged intensively in the 1960s and 70s.

As well as Ezards, AV Jennings established a large sawmill near Swifts Creek to supply their construction operations. O'Dell's Hut may have been relocated to its current position and used in logging activities at some point during this intensification of logging activity in the area between 1940s and 1970s.

## O'Dell's Hut

Little is known about the history of O'Dell's Hut and no direct reference to the hut has been found in documentary resources. However, several indications of its history are evident in the physical fabric. Its overall form, particularly the arched roof, is similar to portable huts designed for workers such as shepherds which were popular in Britain and seen on pastoral properties in Victoria in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. These were, however, most often on wheels rather than skids.

It also exhibits several similarities to portable huts used by road crews in Victoria in the late nineteenth century. Requests for portable huts often appear in meeting records and tenders from the period. It may be possible that O'Dell's Hut is an adapted former shepherd hut or road crew hut.

The star on the underside of the arched roof appears to be the brand of Morewood & Co Star brand, advertised as being available in Melbourne in the 1860s and available no later than the 1880s. The smith-wrought iron of the skids and tow hitches is likely also nineteenth-century material. Possible early twentieth century material include the steel narrow-gauge rail supporting the chimney and nails to the weatherboards and roof. Welding to the rail is most likely post-1920.<sup>[1]</sup> The combination of materials may indicate that the hut was originally constructed in the mid to late nineteenth century and then adapted and remodelled in the early twentieth century.

The hut is located in the midst of this area of intensive late nineteenth century and early twentieth century goldmining activity. Given the date of some of the materials used in the hut's construction it seems likely it has an association with mining in the area – perhaps at either the nearby Odells Gully Gold Battery site or the Highland Chief Mine site. As Miles Lewis notes, the hut is well designed and neatly constructed, and in this way contrasts with other huts associated with mining in the area which are roughly constructed and not designed to be portable. This may be an indication that it was brought fully constructed from elsewhere for an important function such as a site office or as sleeping quarters for the likes of a mine manager.<sup>[2]</sup> The hut is also located in an area associated with timber getting to supply local sawmills – which was particularly intensive in the decades following World War II. It seems likely it would have been re-used and possibly adapted as accommodation or refuge for logging crews working in the forest. As seen in the comparisons below, there is a history of sawmills supplying portable huts to support logging activities in remote locations. Skids such as those found on O'Dell's Hut were commonly used in logging activities in Victoria and would have enabled it to be moved to different locations within the forest and would have suited logging activities.

## Selected bibliography

Butler, Graeme., *The Victorian Alpine Huts Heritage Survey*, 1996 & 2005.

Boucher, Laurie T., *Whispers from the Mountain*, Bairnsdale: 1997.

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Lewis, Miles., 'The Diagnosis of Prefabricated Buildings', *Australian Historical Archaeology*, 3, 1985.

McDonald Fairweather, Keith., *Time to remember: the history of gold mining on the Tambo and its tributaries*, Doctors Flat: 1975.

McHugh, Peter., 'Forest Camps', Victoria's Forestry Heritage website <<a href="https://www.victoriasforestryheritage.org.au/activities1/building-infrastructure/181-forest-facilities-tbc.html">https://www.victoriasforestryheritage.org.au/activities1/building-infrastructure/181-forest-facilities-tbc.html>.

Victorian Heritage Register, 'Mount Hepburn Company Gold Treatment Works' <<a href="https://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/11870">https://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/11870>; Cassilis Gold Mining Company Treatment Works ; Odells Gully Gold Battery Site < https://vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/places/4997>.

[1] Lewis, *O'Dell's Hut*.

[2] Ibid., p. 3.

## Extent of Registration

### NOTICE OF REGISTRATION

As Executive Director for the purpose of the Heritage Act 2017, I give notice under section 53 that the Victorian Heritage Register is amended by including a place in the Heritage Register:

Number: H2411

Category: Registered Object

Place: O'Dell's Hut

Location: Odells Track, Brookville

Municipality: East Gippsland Shire

All of the object known as O'Dell's Hut currently located on Odells Track near the junction with Bayliss Spur Road, Brookville, Victoria.

Dated 21 April 2022

STEVEN AVERY

Executive Director

*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/>*