
OLD COACH ROAD, DEANS MARSH-LORNE ROAD.

Location

PENNYROYAL-WYMBOLIEL RD BENWERRIN, SURF COAST SHIRE

Municipality

SURF COAST SHIRE

Level of significance

Heritage Inventory Site

Heritage Inventory (HI) Number

H7621-0010

Heritage Listing

Victorian Heritage Inventory

Statement of Significance

Last updated on -

SiteCard data copied on 04/06/2025:

What is significant?

The original route from Deans Marsh to Lorne, 'Old Coach Road' is significant.

How is it significant?

Old Coach Road is of archaeological and historical significance.

Why is it significant?

Old Coach Road has low archaeological potential due to previous disturbance associated with the installation of the fibre optic cable. Trenching for this cable is likely to have destroyed or at least significantly impacted any areas where the alignment was installed directly along the Old Coach Road. For this reason, and the fact that the track is reported as a 'roughly graded dirt track', without a gravel surface typical of water-bound macadam roads, Old Coach Road is unlikely to retain meaningful archaeological deposits related to the former road.

Despite the low archaeological potential of the site, the alignment of Old Coach Road retains historical significance as a representation of colonial movement throughout the state and into western Victoria. As the earliest way for wheeled traffic to travel from Deans Marsh to Lorne, the route is associated with the increase in industry and tourism along the Victorian coast. The various iterations of the road from the late 19th and early 20th centuries speaks of the importance of the route prior to the construction of the Great Ocean Road and demonstrates how changes to travel and the introduction of cars altered roads and pathways through the state.

Interpretation of Site

The history of the route between Deans Marsh and Lorne indicates that there were at least three roads (Figure 10): 1. Old Coach Road 2. The 'all weather road' 3. The current roadway. These routes did not follow each exactly, rather, changes in the course, curve and grade that occurred in response to changes in transport meant that the routes did not run parallel and often crossed over one another. The route was first identified in 1997 and formally surveyed in 1998 as part of investigations for the proposed fibre optic cable (Murphy 1997 and 1998; Figure 11). The survey found that the original route was gravelled with any rock material as typical water-bound macadam, but rather was only roughly graded dirt track approximately 3.5 metres wide (Murphy, 1998, p. 9). The survey found the earliest Deans Marsh to Lorne Road was preserved between Seaview Road and Benwerrin, where it retained its original profile. The route is described as being in a good state of preservation until it intersects with the transmission line, where the route's profile was disturbed. The condition of the road route was described as improved when the transmission line shifts to a more direct way to Lorne. The road was said to be in-tact until it ended at the Lorne cemetery. The 1997 and 1998 investigations state that Old Coach Road was the preferred alignment for the installation of the fibre optic cable (Murphy 1997; Murphy 1998). It is also understood that Heritage Victoria issued Consent 001, relating to the destruction of over 50% of the site to facilitate the installation of the fibre optic cable in 1999. The installation of this cable would have involved significant trenching and would have likely impacted the majority of the track identified during the survey (Murphy 1998). It was recommended that opportunities to limit impacts to the former road by trenching through the middle of the 3.5 metre track and retaining the outer edges should be considered, however, there is no evidence of this methodology being employed (Murphy, 1998, p. 25). There is no question that a fibre optic cable was installed. Evidence of the cable was identified during site inspections where telecommunication markers were identified. Rectification of the alignment of the cable from Before You Dig data (BYD, 2025) indicates that the cable follows a very similar alignment as the surveyed track Murphy (1998) identified as Old Coach Road. While slightly offset from Murphy's survey of Old Coach Road, this divergence is likely the result of errors and inaccuracies from the geo-rectification of hand-drawn plans into modern GIS systems. It is more likely, based on the reporting associated with Old Coach Road, that the cable was installed directly along Old Coach Road. Reporting associated with Old Coach Road, and evidence of the installed fibre optic cable would indicate that much, if not all, of the original route was destroyed when trenching for the cable occurred. The current extent of Old Coach Road is intended to represent portions of Deans Marsh-Lorne Road where historical plans and survey results indicate that the modern road intersects with Old Coach Road and other historical tracks through the Otway Forest. Former tracks veering from the current road are visible in these locations, as are fibre optic cable markers, which lends to the idea that these locations are associated with the original road.

History

Known as Loutitt Bay, the Lorne area was first settled by Europeans in the mid-1850s, when a small pastoral holding was established in the area in 1852 (Victorian Places, 2015). The primary industry of the region was timber-cutting and logging, however, the area's natural appeal was quickly renowned and by 1869, a guest house was opened to accommodate the growing number of visitors (Victorian Places, 2025). Subdivision of the town and surroundings also began at this time, with the township being named Lorne in 1871. During this period, the only access to Lorne was by boat along the coast, or via Deans Marsh and down through the mountains, as the Great Ocean Road would not be constructed until the 1920s. The first track used by Europeans to Lorne from the 1840s was by foot. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that this track followed an Aboriginal pathway through the Otway Forest, as it followed ridgelines to the coast (Murphy, 1998, p. 5). By the 1860s, the track was a well-established bridle track. Coinciding with the subdivision, in 1869, the Winchelsea Shire sought funding to widen and upgrade the track to make it suitable for wheeled transport (Murphy, 1998, p. 5). In 1872, the track was surveyed and cleared for wheeled traffic. Cobb & Co. and Mountjoy coaches were operating between the railway station at Winchelsea to Lorne by 1880 with the journey through the Otway Ranges taking around 6 hours (Lorne Historical Society). Until 1879, the road between Deans Marsh and Lorne was a cleared track (Murphy, 1998, p. 5). In 1879, the area was surveyed and the route formally defined. The surveyed route was then upgraded. Typically, early roads were graded using horse-drawn graders and then gravelled, which would have been left and tampered down by traffic (Murphy, 1998, p. 5). The gravelled surface would then have been watered down and hand-raked to a smooth finish. This style of road is known as a 'waterbound macadam' and is understood to have performed well until the introduction of cars (Murphy, 1998, p. 5). There is no evidence, however, that this method was implemented along Old Coach Road. The road would have been maintained along the original route until around WWI, when the road was upgraded again for cars. These upgrades saw the route deviate, as cars meant that the road could have less curves and steeper grades (Murphy, 1998, p. 5). The road was also asphalted for cars and was classed as an 'all weather road' by 1926. It is assumed that this route is depicted in the 1933 tourist map of Lorne as 'road from Dean Marsh to Lorne'. The road was again re-aligned in the 1950s, which represents the current road route.

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/>