Place: Canon Gully

Type: Track; Part of 'Jacksons Creek' Cultural Landscape (qv).
Location: East escarpment of Jacksons Creek, about 2 miles upstream from *Rupertswood*, Sunbury
Critical Date(s): Constructed 1866.
Historical Theme(s): 'Stage'; 'Civic and Social Life'.
Previous Heritage Registration(s): None.
Recommended Level of Significance: State.

Statement of Significance:

The zig zag track up the eastern escarpment of Jacksons Creek, formed in 1866 to facilitate the movement of the many thousands of visitors to the Clarke property for the Easter Volunteer Militia Encampments, is of State historical significance as the only substantial relic or work associated with these historic 1860s and 70s events. It also expresses the nature of the event as a major contemporary spectacle, and something of its conduct. With the undeveloped valley site of the encampments on the west side of Jacksons Creek, it constitutes the only evidence of perhaps the major encampment site in Victoria. It may be the only evidence of the Volunteer Militia Encampments to remain in Victoria.

The track was cut to ensure that visitors were kept away from the mock battle, and to lead them to the best position from which to observe the brilliant spectacle in the valley below, as if in a natural amphitheatre.

Until their disbandment in 1883, the Volunteers were a key part of Victoria's defence capability. The annual encampments were the major exercise of the Volunteers, and Sunbury was one of the most suitable and frequent venues for these events. The site was suitable for maneuvers, provided shelter for the volunteers, and exceptional views of the event for the spectators.

The beauty of this valley was especially remarked upon during the encampments, and featured prominently in artistic representations of the Encampments. At present this landscape remains quite intact and extremely beautiful.
Description:

The place is a zig zag track leading up a gully in the steep east embankment of Jacksons Creek about two kilometres upstream of the railway bridge on the Rupertswood property. It was used to provide access from the camp below to the plateau, from which the main mock battle could be observed easily and safely.

While the track is the only substantial relic or work which marks the place of the historic encampments in the landscape, pieces of ammunition have been found in the surrounding hills.

History:

Britain had a long tradition of volunteer militia, and in 1854, at the outbreak of the Crimean War, the Victorian Volunteer Corps Act was passed. The Melbourne Volunteer Rifle Regiment, the Victorian Volunteer Yeomanry Corps, and the Geelong Rifle Corps were the first raised. In 1859 many new rifle companies and naval volunteers were authorised - ten in the metropolitan area, three in Geelong and others in Portland, Port Fairy, and Warrnambool. The men were unpaid, supplied only with a uniform and a firearm, but also gained membership of a kind of club, and a 'sense of belonging'. General encampments were instituted, the first ones being held on the Chirnside's property at the Werribee River, and another near Geelong. These had devastated the countryside, and Thomas Chirnside offered the Government £2000 to hold future encampments elsewhere.

In 1864, in an uncharacteristic display of largesse, 'Big' Clarke offered the Victorian Volunteer Forces 'every facility' to hold their fourth annual encampment on the western section of his 'home park' (later to be called Rupertswood). Held over six days of the Easter period, this encampment, in the valley of Jacksons Creek about two kilometres upstream of the railway bridge, was a resounding success. Some 2,400 volunteers attended, with 10-12,000 spectators observing the spectacle of the mock battle held on the Monday. The next two Easter Volunteer Encampments were also held at Sunbury (in 1866, 1867), after which they were held at the You Yangs (1870), and Cheltenham - Hobson's Bay (1872, 1873), when imaginary invaders from Westernport, and a naval assault by the naval ships Cerberus and Nelson, were resisted. Several of these later encampments were washed out however. The Volunteer Encampment was back in Sunbury in 1874 and 1877.

Doubts about the efficiency of the Volunteers led to a Royal Commission in 1875 which noted inadequacies of training and other procedures, and recommended their disbandment and replacement by a militia force. Action was postponed until the Defence Reorganisation Scheme of 1883 did in fact institute a Militia to replace the Volunteer system. As part of this reorganisation, and the big Russian scare of 1885, wealthy citizens were also encouraged to form local militia forces, which resulted in the establishment of the Rupertswood Battery in 1884.

For the period of their existence, the Volunteer Encampments offered 'a glorious holiday with plenty of good fellowship, six-pence a day expenses, and a licensed canteen'. Two and a half thousand participants poured into Sunbury by train, with bands playing, and in high spirits. Four hundred tents were erected, in strict military regime, on the flat to the west of the

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2. The Argus, 24/3/64. Unless otherwise stated, the material for this section comes from copies of the Argus, Age, Australasian and Leader, 1864-1903, gathered by Jeff Cossum of the George Evans Museum.
4. The 1874 encampment is identified in J Waghorn's post office research, held in the George Evans Museum. Post offices, with special frank stamps, were established for the duration of the encampments.
5. ibid.
creek. There was considerable leisure time for the men to fish Clarke's precious blackfish, and go 'opposum' shooting at night. On the Saturday nights one or other corps provided a concert, usually in the form of songs, quartettes, glees and recitations. Impromptu concerts were had in tents, the men gathered around huge fires, and numerous corps bands could be heard playing merrily around the camp. At headquarters, the Governor, general, and officers also gathered around a massive fire, swapping stories of the Crimea and China wars, brushes with the Maoris, and overlanding feats. During the day lusty cheers accompanied the Governor's appearances around the camp, the corps were cheered and raised their caps high in the air as they marched past one another on their return to Sunbury station. Reporters constantly noted the 'fine military style' and 'manly bearing' of the Volunteers.

Reporters were also sure to note that the events were not a picnic, a sneer which became increasingly common over the years. The intent of the Encampments was to train the men in military disciplines and battle procedures. A 5:30 reveille aroused men to their military duties. On most days these consisted of marching to and fro, drills, and ceremonies such as mounted escorts and the Governor's reviews. There was much hoisting and saluting of Union Jacks, toasts and playing of anthems, polishing and preening of arms and uniforms, and general display of the 'pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war'. Easter Monday however was the day of the great mock battle.

This event was clearly one of the brilliant spectacles of the age, and its preparations and episodes were reported in minute detail in the daily newspapers. Trains left Spencer Street every half-hour for Sunbury, where the crowds were greeted by the stentorian lungs of cabbies spruiking for fares, exaggerating the distance to the camp. Along the route canvas booths offered refreshments. Young women were conspicuous in the crowd, in copious crinolines arrayed to impress. The throng wandered curious among the camp tents, absorbing the excitement and martial air. The volunteers were grooming horses, polishing sabres, and attending to their uniforms, ensuring they looked 'not only respectable, but dashing' on the big day ahead. The military uniforms were always sure to attract the attention of the ladies.

The holiday crowds of up to 15,000 were then treated to four hours of fireworks. Infantry were deployed and massed, and their firing, in files and volleys, was capped by the big field guns booming across Jackson's Creek from the heights around the valley. Suddenly, the cavalry emerged from the timber, squadron upon squadron with their gay accoutrements and sabres blazing, charging into the volleys. The corps had been divided into the attackers (enemy) and defenders, who were gradually forced back, but in an orderly military manner. One of the standard scenarios involved the retreating defenders blowing up one of the timber bridges (three, including a suspension bridge, were thrown up at each encampment), to impede the progress of the attackers. Despite the set-plan there was some room for initiative by commanders, and the men were provided with the opportunity to learn to be 'steady' in the face of the fire. For the crowd, the artillery (in 1864 five 40 pounder Armstrongs, numerous 12 and 6 pounders, and smaller calibre guns) firing over the battleground provided a highlight of the spectacle. They occupied positions on the high points to the east and south-west of the camp, which assumed names such as Chute's Bluff, Canterbury Spur, and Carey's Heights.

Crowd control was a problem, with onlookers mingling too liberally in the early events, sometimes in the way of the battle. In 1866 the military requested spectators to restrict themselves to the high bluff, or plateau, on the east side of the creek, which provided a perfect view of the amphitheatre. Flags guided the 'crush of visitors' to this location, which could accommodate 20,000 persons. The railways, which also assisted by building a platform nearer to the camp, helped by constructing 'a fine bridge across the creek, and cut a zig zag path up the ascent.' This path, situated in 'Cannon Gully,' is as prominent today as it would have been when the crowds used it to climb up the steep escarpment to the valley top.

These events attracted enormous interest and press coverage, and were also suitable matter for more serious representations, such as Nicholas Chevalier's 1864 oil painting. This painting had been entitled 'Militia Encampment on the Werribee', but it has recently been confirmed that its subject is one of the Sunbury Encampment at Jackson's Creek. Its focus is...

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6 The Argus, 29/3/1864
7 Jones, op cit.
8 Clarke, loc cit.
9 The Argus, 2/4/1866.
some pleasant picnic groups in the foreground of a wide and green landscape, with Mount Macedon in the distance. The orderly tents of the camp are presented as a feature of the landscape, and the military maneuvers are almost imperceptible.\textsuperscript{10}

The Sunbury camp was favoured for its considerable advantages, as a suitable setting for the military maneuvers, for its shelter to participants, and its unique viewing advantages for visitors. It is interesting also to note the journalists descriptions of the Sunbury setting. In 1864 the \textit{Argus} described it as 'a far prettier and more advantageous spot than the ground selected for any of the preceding annual encampments. It would be difficult indeed to find a district which conveys a more charming picture of the best portions of Victorian scenery.' In 1867 the \textit{Age} thought it 'a lovely spot, one of the most picturesque to be seen in Australia - well wooded, well watered, and with real green grass growing ... to refresh the eyes of city people.' The battle left its mark on the landscape however, wearing off the grass, and gunpowder threatening to 'destroy the sylvan beauty which now abounds.' In later years a journalist described the splendid work of the artillery, whose 'occupation of knocking large spots off the landscape was continued last Saturday with great success.'\textsuperscript{11}

In the early years of the new century Easter military maneuvers were again held at Sunbury, although this time they ranged more widely, and further to the north and east, which was still pastoral land in 1903. By this time, it was claimed, volunteering had long shed its image of a fashionable amusement. In the post Boer War era, there was none of the reckless bravery of past reviews, when men were trained to face annihilating fire without quivering a muscle. Instead of regimented formations, set plans and the spectacular display of battle, men were expected to take cover in the landscape, and to display 'individuality' where circumstance required.\textsuperscript{12} Such lessons would all too soon be put into practice by Australians.

Apart from the zig-zag track up Canon Gully, the landscape of the site remains much as it was represented in the 1860s, with native vegetation probably thinner, but apparently still present in the same parts of the valley and surrounds, undisturbed by any intensive subdivision. Without doubt it remains an exceptionally beautiful part of the landscape of the study area, indeed Victoria.

\textbf{Recommendations:}

It is recommended that Canon Gully be included in the Heritage Overlay of the Hume Planning Scheme.

\begin{enumerate}
\item The painting is reproduced in Jones, S, \textit{Early Painters of Australia}, (Bay Books, Sydney, 1988), p.138. The correct site of the painting was identified by Jeff Cossum, and confirmed by the State Library of Victoria which holds the work.
\item \textit{The Leader}, 18/4/1903.
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