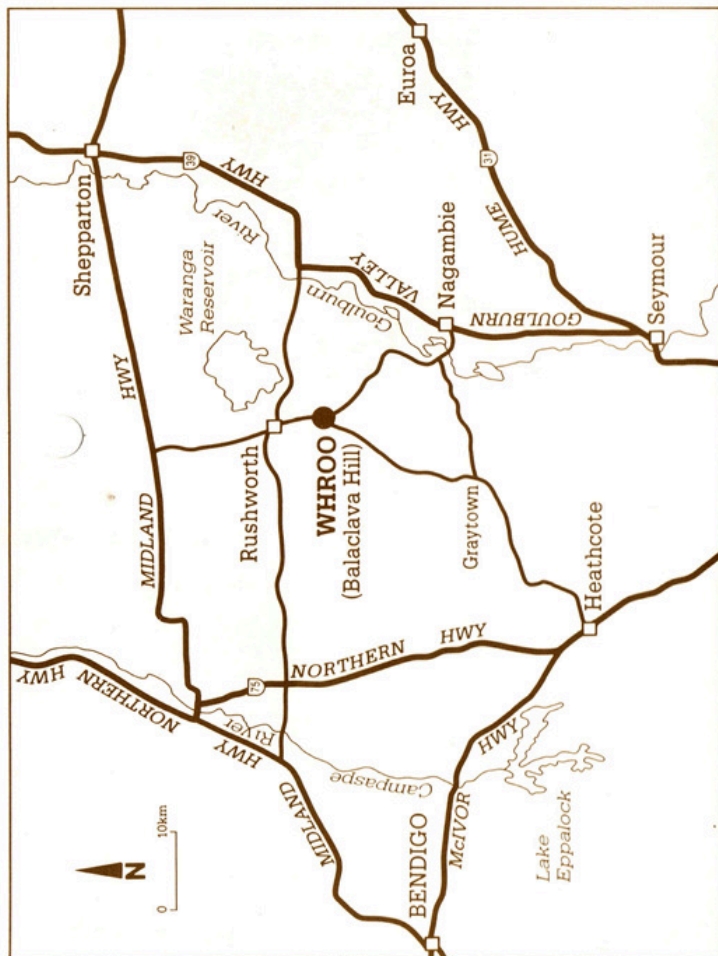


The Aboriginal name for the waterhole, **Wooroo**, meaning "mouth", is the origin of the name Whroo. This waterhole is now the only visible evidence of a history of occupation of the area between Lake Cooper and Reedy Lake that dates back many thousands of years before Whroo was a flourishing gold-rush town.

Further Reading

- Hammond, J. G. **The Golden Years of Rushworth and Whroo.** Hammond, Rushworth, 1978.
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- Massola, A. **The Native Water Well at Whroo.** Goulburn Valley. **Victorian Naturalist** Volume 74, 1957, pp. 41-44.
- Forster, H. W. **The Central Gold Fields.** Cypress Books, Surrey Hills, 1959.
- Forster, H. W. **Waranga 1865-1965: a Shire History.** F.W. Cheshire, Melbourne, 1965.



Whroo Historic Area

FORESTS COMMISSION VICTORIA



Whroo Historic Area

Whroo Historic Area consists of 490 hectares of forested land around the site of the Whroo township. It was set aside in November 1982 to:

- protect relics and sites of historical significance;
- provide opportunities for people to enjoy the area and view its many features;
- assist people to gain an understanding of the area and its interesting history.

The Visitor Centre, built in 1983 by the Shire of Waranga in conjunction with the Forests Commission and the Department of Minerals and Energy, contains a display of historical maps and photographs.

The construction of the Visitor Centre and other improvements in the area were funded under the Government's Employment Initiatives Program.

History and Features of the Area

Alluvial gold was found at the present sites of Rushworth and Whroo in August 1853, and the resulting gold-rush brought thousands of hopeful diggers into the area almost overnight.

What eventually set Whroo apart from the many other goldfields of the district was the discovery, over a year later, of the Balaclava Reef.

Balaclava Mine

The Balaclava Mine was first developed using shafts to follow rich veins in the gold-bearing quartz. Just north of the open cut, deep fissures (called "stopes") slant down into the rock where miners removed whole veins of quartz and left the mountain propped apart with timber.

Later, an enormous charge of explosive was used in an attempt to shatter the hill and enable open cut mining. This was not entirely successful, and unfortunately made further shaft mining unsafe. However, a convenient opening was made in the side of the hill, and material from the open cut was conveyed by tramline to steam-driven stampers.

The spectacular open cut, some 25 metres deep, remains today, as does the horizontal tunnel through 100 metres of solid rock where the tramway once passed.

Puddling Machine and Cyanide Vats

At first, gold was obtained from the surface deposits of gravel and silt found in shallow gullies around Whroo, by washing it in a portable tub and cradle equipment. Later, puddling became the main method of working the alluvial fields. The restored puddling machine which was originally powered by horses, is one of many which operated in the area last century.

Cyaniding, a more efficient chemical means of extracting gold, was introduced to the alluvial fields late last century, and was often used to win more gold from the tailings previously treated by the comparatively rough physical methods.

As the more easily won surface gold petered out, and the reef mining activity intensified, the Whroo area began to assume the character it maintained for many years. Tents were replaced by huts of logs, slab, dry clay bricks and stone. Stores and hotels appeared, along with butcher shops, dairies and a bakery.

Lewis and Nickinson's crushing battery in about 1859. A hand Berdan machine is visible near the centre of the picture. From Don Jon of Balaclava - Miles Lewis





Site of Lewis Homestead

John Thomas Lewis, one of the original working partners and, according to one account, the man who discovered the Balaclava Reef, built a house here in 1877. It is described in **Don John of Balaclava** as "a weatherboard bungalow imported from the United States, with French windows, a verandah around three sides, and with additions built on in more primitive local construction". Several pine trees from the original garden still survive, although evidence of the house itself has all but disappeared.

Whroo Cemetery

Wives accompanied many men to the diggings, despite the harsh life. For most there was no alternative. Children were born and raised on the goldfields too and, with medical assistance often unavailable and hygiene, food storage and water supply only of the most primitive kinds, it is perhaps not surprising that there was an appallingly high mortality rate among infants.

Balaclava Hill from the north in about 1894, with Baud's Balaclava Inn and stables in the foreground.
From Don Jon of Balaclava - Miles Lewis

The lonely hillside cemetery contains 340 graves, most of which date back to last century. Some graves are unmarked mounds, but most have either metal or wooden markers, or headstones.

The cemetery has a National Trust Classification, because of its significance as a relic of early settlement.

Aboriginal Waterhole

On the south-eastern slope of Spring Hill, not far from the cemetery, an outcrop of sandstone bears a small rock well, sunk to a depth of about one metre. The waterhole is apparently fed by an underground spring as well as surface run-off, and is thought to have been originally a slit which was enlarged by gold miners so that they could immerse billies.

It is thought the Aborigines protected the waterhole with a rock to prevent pollution by animals and debris, and to reduce evaporation. Sadly, the water is now undrinkable.

