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Name: Penguin Silver Mine
Status: Permanently Registered
Tier: State

THR ID Number: 10964
Municipality: Central Coast Council
Date Listed: 11/07/2007

Location Addresses

MAIN RD, PENGUIN 7316 TAS

Title References

Property Id
2080307



Untitled

Untitled

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Setting: The site of the Penguin Silver Mine is located on a small point at the eastern end of Watcombe Beach, Penguin, off Main Road and the adjacent railway line. Buildings and machinery associated with the mine are no longer extant and the shaft has been flooded and filled. The site is a known tourist attraction and has sweeping views back to Penguin and out to Bass Strait.

Description: The site of the Penguin Silver Mine is a grassy point of land projecting into Bass Strait. There is some evidence of domestic rubbish on the site. Evidence of the mine shaft still exists. An illustrated interpretation panel now marks the area as a historical industrial landmark. There is no visual demonstrable evidence of the mine apart from ground level remains.

History: The Penguin Silver Mine was discovered by James "Philosopher" Smith in 1861. Smith was born in 1827. As a young man, he prospected in the Victorian goldfields before settling in 1853 on the Forth River, where he made his living partly as a prospector. In 1860 Smith focused on the north-west hinterland. In the following two years he found minerals in the Dial Range area, including copper and silver on the beach near Penguin Creek and galena further east, convincing the government geologist Charles Gould of the rich potential of Tasmania's north-west (Haygarth: AMHF). Smith's discovery prompted legislative change, since at the time there was no legislation allowing mining leases on the sea shore or for metals/minerals/elements other than gold or coal. Smith had to wait for passage of The Waste Lands Act 1867 before he could take out a lease (Haygarth, pers. com., Feb. 2007). The Penguin Silver Mine, which resulted, was preceded in the Australian colonies only by the Glen Osmond silver mine in South Australia. It was also the first Tasmanian mine to attract significant mainland investment, and provided the impetus for the mining boom that followed in the west and north-west of Tasmania (Blainey, 1963:105). The Penguin Silver Mine prompted the development of Penguin. Large numbers of men were employed on the works, either as miners, merchants, or labourers, and Penguin evolving into thriving township, with a rapidly increasing population. The Penguin Silver Mine was also instrumental in the development of the Penguin Port for the export of the minerals. Despite the initial optimism, the Penguin Silver Mine was a failure. This was due in part to very lax mine management. The shaft drilled by the Cornish mine manager, Stevens, missed the main lode - a very expensive mistake, given the hardness of the rock). His employment of 10-year-old children to select ore for assaying at the "pickey table", an age-old tradition in Cornwall, also alarmed shareholders. (Pryor, 1962: 35). Stephens was sacked, but even though Andrew English - his replacement, recruited by the Penguin Company in Victoria - fired "a lot of useless over-paid [local] men" in favour of Victorian labour, the Examiner still found the mine characterised by "farcical waste" (Examiner, 30 Sept. 1880). Contributing shareholders refused to "stump up" for new machinery and many shareholders forfeited, Smith relinquishing 800 of his own shares. English recommended spending a further £2,000 to sink an 90m shaft led the directors to suspend operations and discharge all hands, including English. An unsuccessful attempt was made to sell the mine in England, and the company limped on for another four years. An attempt to resurrect the mine

was made by a Melbourne Company in 1898 (Examiner 13 Sept. 1898). The Government Geologist reported that "numerous smooth heads had been developed but without a regular lode" (Report on the Penguin and Dial Range Mineral Fields 1898). The mine failed again. The machinery and mining equipment was removed by 1908, and all but a mullock tip and the mine shaft remained (Ex 9 Dec 1908).

**Statement of
Significance:**
(non-statutory
summary)

No Statement is provided for places listed prior to 2007

Significance:

The Heritage Council may enter a place in the Heritage Register if it meets one or more of the following criteria from the Historic Cultural Heritage Act 1995:

a) The place is important to the course or pattern of Tasmania's history.

The Penguin Silver Mine is an integral part of the story of Penguin contributing to its initial development from a site of timber splitting to an established settlement with a port that later developed into a popular beach resort and municipality. The establishment of the mine served as an impetus to the development of the Mt Bischoff Tin Mine at Waratah and the subsequent mining boom on Tasmania's west and north-west coasts.

b) The place possesses uncommon or rare aspects of Tasmania's history.

The Penguin Silver Mine has historic cultural heritage value because of its rarity. It is the only silver mine in Tasmania and possibly also Australia to have been sited on a beach.

c) The place has the potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Tasmania's history.

The site of the Penguin Silver Mine is of historic cultural heritage significance as a potential archaeological site. It is likely that evidence remains of the former mine in surface and subsurface remains. These possibly include remains of building footings, artefacts and material from the use of the site as a mine. The key importance of the remains lies in their ability to contribute to an understanding of late 19th early 20th century mining practices.

d) The place is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of place in Tasmania's history.

e) The place is important in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement.

f) The place has a strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social or spiritual reasons.

g) The place has a special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Tasmania's history.

The Penguin Silver Mine is of historic cultural heritage significance because of its associations James "Philosopher Smith", Tasmania's most eminent mining pioneer and the discoverer of tin at Mt Bischoff. This discovery led to a mining boom on the north-west and west coast, which rejuvenated the flagging Tasmanian economy during the 1880s. Smith's achievements are credited with leading to the shift of Tasmania's economic base from agriculture to mining.

h) The place is important in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.

PLEASE NOTE This data sheet is intended to provide sufficient information and justification for listing the place on the Heritage Register. Under the legislation, only one of the criteria needs to be met. The data sheet is not intended to be a comprehensive inventory of the heritage values of the place, there may be other heritage values of interest to the Heritage Council not currently acknowledged.