

Moonta Mines State Heritage Area

Moonta Mines was declared a State Heritage Area on 10 May 1984.

HISTORY

Copper was discovered at Moonta Mines in 1861, and the Moonta Mining Company commenced there the following year. The government town of Moonta was surveyed in 1863, but a large part of the workforce preferred to live on the company's lease, where they were close to work and were permitted access to the company's pumped mine water and firewood stacks. The community divided into two, with the business and professional community living in the surveyed town, while the miners and their families built an informally laid out township of small pug and shingle cottages around the mines, with their own chapels and other community infrastructure. They called this township Moonta Mines to distinguish it from the official town.

In the 1870s there were probably about 5,000 people living in the mine community, which straggled off to the north to join up with the villages of North Yelta around the separate Yelta mine, and Cross Roads where the Wallaroo and Kadina roads met. There was no piped water supply before the 1880s, and the Moonta Mines community suffered terribly from infectious disease in the early decades.

For much of the late 19th century, Moonta Mines was one of Australia's largest and most profitable mining operations. The company built its engine houses and treatment plants along the five lines of lode. The biggest ore deposit, Elders Lode, ran north-south through the middle of the Moonta Mines community, and this is where Hughes, Taylors, Stuckeys and Stirlings shafts and ore treatment area powered by Richmans engine house were all located.

The mines closed in 1923, and most of the mine plant was sold or broken up for scrap. Only the two largest stone engine houses remained. The community rapidly shrank in size, and most of the cottages were demolished or fell into ruin. The cementation works continued production until 1943, salvaging copper from the waste heaps and providing employment for a small workforce. What remains on the site today is a small representative sample of the large industrial complex which filled the landscape from 1862 until 1923, with industrial plant and habitation juxtaposed in a way that was characteristic of the 19th century mining industry.

(Extracted from the Yorke Peninsula Heritage Survey.)

FEATURES

The Moonta Mines state heritage area ranks as one of the state's most important collections of nineteenth century mining structures and relics. Unfortunately salvage operations removed or demolished most of the mining and residential structures after the mine's closure in 1923. Those relics that survive are therefore particularly important.

In its hey-day (1861-1900s), the Moonta Mines complex comprised a vast network of timber-lined mine shafts and drives, from which water and ore were extracted by steam-driven pumps and winches. The deepest shaft was deeper than Mount Lofty is tall. Impressive stone engine houses and chimneys were built to Cornish designs, and housed the large steam-powered beam engines. Elsewhere on the site were ore sorting and crushing plants and repair and manufacturing workshops which, at the time, were reputed to be the largest in the Southern Hemisphere. Other buildings housed the offices of the Mine Manager and the Captains. Many miners and their families lived in small stone cottages adjacent to the mines, and more substantial dwellings were built for the bosses. Other buildings, such as churches, halls and a school were built to satisfy the mining families' personal and community needs.

Only scant vestiges of the former mining complex now remain, and are important reminders of the once-thriving mining enterprise and settlement. The low topography of the precinct makes the above-ground relics easily visible – the tailings heaps, and the ruins of Hughes Pumphouse and Richmans Concentrating Plant dominate. A few miners' cottages, in varying degrees of maintenance, have survived, as has the former Moonta Mines Model School, the Methodist Church and the 1908 Railway Station. Bald Hill (outside the state heritage area and along the Moonta-Kadina road) offers a panoramic view of the area. There are also good vantage points from hills and tailings heaps within the mine area.



Through prolonged effort, the National Trust has preserved the area's most distinctive built heritage. Since the state heritage area was declared in 1984, there has been extensive development of walking and vehicle trails and interpretation facilities, including a tourist tramway through the cementation works. The former school and a miners' cottage with replanted garden have been developed as museums; the railway station has been restored; conservation work has been carried out on the Methodist Church and Richmans and Hughes engine houses; Hughes Shaft has been stabilised; and the ground level around the pumphouse has been lowered by removing the post-1923 tailings dump.

STATE HERITAGE PLACES

Six items within the Moonta Mines state heritage area are state heritage-listed places. These include:

- former Hughes pumphouse and chimney
- former Moonta railway station
- Moonta Mines Uniting Church, fence and Sunday School building
- Moonta Mines Model Sunday School site
- Miner's cottage and fence
- former Moonta Mines Model School.

VISITING

The Moonta Mines state heritage area showcases the history and remnant features of South Australia's largest copper mining enterprise, and of the associated settlement of Moonta Mines. It is one of Yorke Peninsula's major tourist attractions and offers a number of visitor experiences, managed largely by the Moonta Branch of the National Trust.

The Railway Station is now a Visitor Information Centre, and is an ideal 'gateway' to the state heritage area. The former Moonta Mines Model School is an acclaimed National Trust Museum, and a nearby cottage offers a glimpse into the lives of the early mining families. Visitors can opt for a guided tour of the Wheal Hughes Mine or hop aboard the tourist railway that links many of the old mining and processing sites.

This state heritage area can also be explored independently, following maps or a booklet available from the Information Centre. There are numerous interpretive panels at key sites, and the spectacular view from the lookout at Richman's Tailings Heap offers a panorama of the mine site. A drive around the Moonta Mines state heritage area is easily a whole-day activity.

Accommodation and dining options are not provided within the state heritage area, but are readily available in Moonta or other nearby towns.



Further Information

For further information please contact the State Heritage Unit

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