

The Water-Channel and it's 100 year History

This Interpretation Board was created by the Friends of Kurth Kiln to commemorate the people who built this Water Channel some 100 years ago, and to explore the varied uses it served over time. We gratefully acknowledge funding for the project from Cardinia Shire under the Cardinia Heritage Grant Program 2010-2011.



Kurth and his Kiln

Much of the historic information here is based on Daniel Catrice's Kurth Kiln Conservation Plan of July 1996, and Gary Vines' Kurth Kiln Action Plan of 2002.

In the early year of WWII the Forests Commission of Victoria became involved in the production of charcoal as a viable fuel alternative for the transport industry. Having secured the drawings for a revolutionary new kiln design from Dr Ernest Edgar Kurth, it turned its attention to the selection of a site. It had to have three essentials: water for cooling, plenty of timber and sloping land to build a ramp for top loading. The kiln needed 9,100 litres of water every day for cooling down the charcoal to allow continuous extraction. The site on Tomahawk Creek, near Gembrook, satisfied all three requirements.



ABOVE In some places the old channel is still one metre deep



ABOVE An example of the flora in the area, a Banksia spinulosa

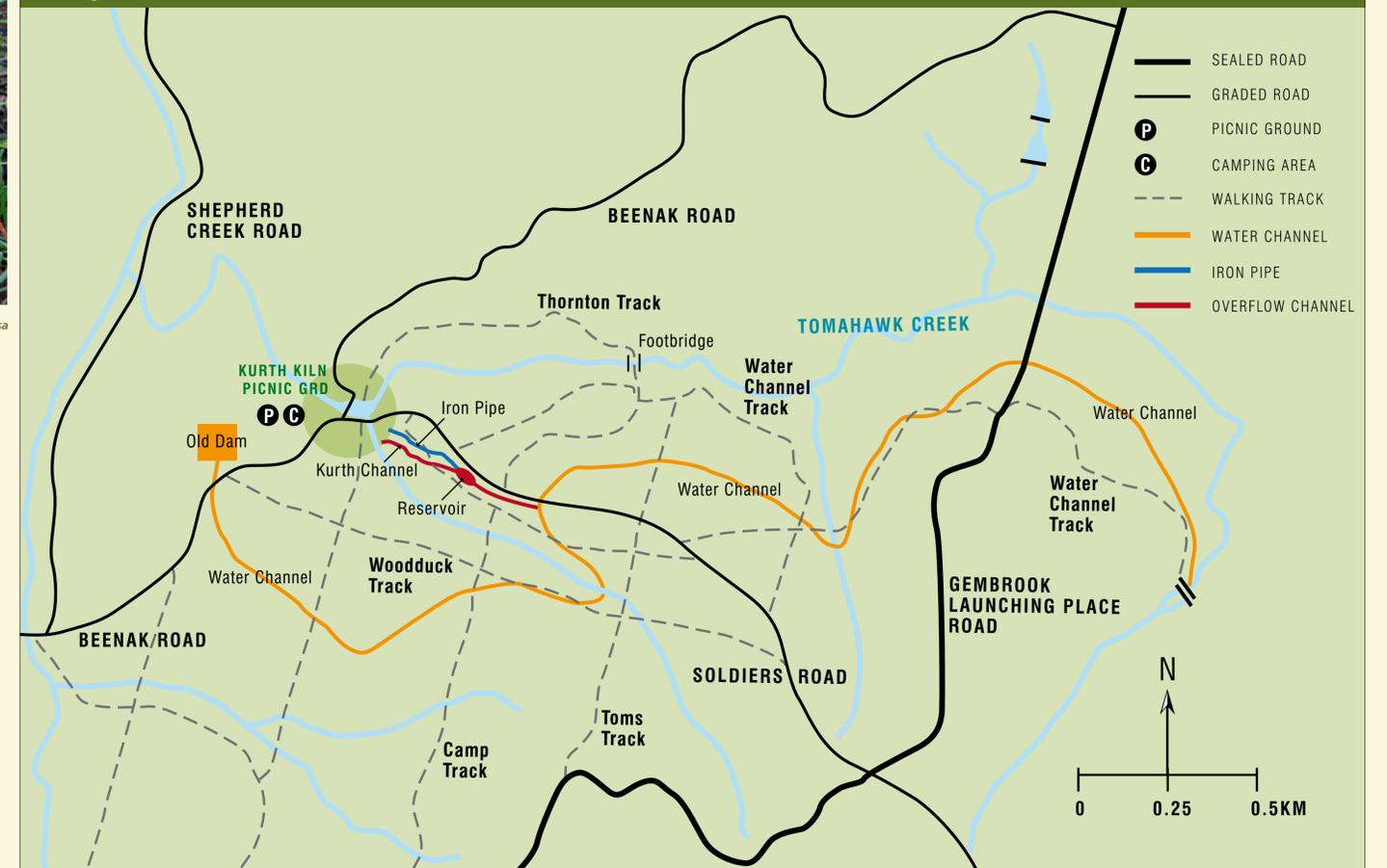
According to a preliminary report by District Forester, W. Griggs, '...the possibilities of an existing old water race, which could be used as a means of water supply by gravitation... This race was in good order, needing only repairs in one or two places, pipes or fluming to cross one narrow creek and cleaning out'¹.

Left over from old mining operations around the turn of the century it was capable of supplying all the water needed for the kiln.

The race follows a course commencing on a branch of Tomahawk Creek upstream of the Gembrook-Launching Place Road. It runs along the 230m contour line, crossing two small creeks and passes Kurth Kiln on its way to an old mining dam site west of Beenak Road. Very little is known of the original project for which the channel and the big dam were created, or what the water was used for. Where the channel crosses Soldiers Road Kurth had the water diverted into a retarding basin and used an iron pipe for the last 300m down to the kiln. 'A charcoal grader was installed and operated most satisfactorily with power supplied from a large waterwheel'².

The map shows the approximate route of the historic water-channel (orange), the diversion by Kurth into a reservoir (red) and the feed down to the kiln in a 300m iron pipe (blue) to build up pressure.

Map of the area



Conservation

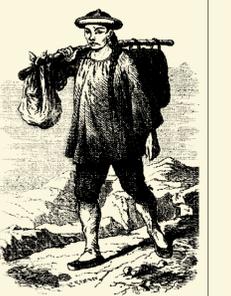
From: *A Monument to Ingenuity in The Age of 1988* comes; ... 'A unique water-cooling system, fed by a five kilometre aqueduct from the nearby Tomahawk Creek, cooled the charcoal, which was then raked out at the bottom. Seven tonnes of wood produced one ton of charcoal... Machinery at the kiln, including a vibrating sieve to grade the charcoal, was powered by a waterwheel fed from the aqueduct'³.



ABOVE In other places only the lush ferns tell where the channel was

Contributing to our Heritage

Late 1800 and early 1900 records show many Chinese people in the Upper Yarra region making a living from fossicking for alluvial Gold and Tin. They were hard-working and industrious and well versed in diverting water over long distances. Their legacy is part of our cultural heritage.



NOTES
 1 W. Griggs, District Forester, Preliminary Plan 1942-43
 2 Daniel Catrice, Kurth Kiln Conservation Plan, 1996, Forests Commission of Victoria
 3 John Schauble, The Age 7/1/1988

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