

Item name: Wangat Village1**Location:**

Dungog

Address:**Planning:** Hunter & Central Coast**Suburb/nearest town:** Chichester 2420**Local govt area:** Dungog**Parish:****State:** NSW**County:****Other/former names:****Area/group/complex:****Group ID:****Aboriginal area:****Curtilage/boundary:****Item type:** Archaeological-Terrestrial**Group:****Category:****Owner:** State Government**Admin codes:****Code 2:****Code 3:****Current use:** Part of Barrington Tops National Park**Former uses:** Late 19th century village and gold mining town**Assessed significance:****Endorsed significance:** Local

Statement of significance: The establishment and presence of Wangat village during the second half of the 19th century can be considered to be of potential local archaeological significance. Its purpose built nature, having been established to primarily house mining workers and their families, demonstrates the importance and wider success of the gold and quartz mining industry in and around the Wangat Valley during this period.

The archaeological evidence of the site, known to exist to some extent, holds the potential to provide a snapshot into a mining village which was in existence for a continual period of approximately 30 years. Its significance as a settlement purely served the needs of the mining community and their families, which may present information of a different variety to more permanent settlements. The mining industry was one of the main profitable economic industries to the greater area of Dungog during the 19th century. While the area was proposed and anticipated to be a permanent settlement, the unexpected demise of the gold mining industry in the greater Wangat area led to its abandonment and closure by the start of the 20th century.

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Historical notes of provenance: The establishment of a village within Wangat Valley, believed to have been occupied by the late 1870s, was created in direct association with the gold mining boom experienced in the dense valley areas north of Dungog and the Chichester regions. Initially housing workers of surrounding gold mines in the Wangat Valley, Whispering Gully and Chichester River valleys, the village quickly progressed into a formal small town settlement, facilitating resources for most of the gold mining areas in the valley.

Wangat village is located approximately two kilometres east of the current Wangat (or Little) River line, in an area originally known as the Wangat Valley. It is within the Wabbarenta Range and forms a small part of the Barrington Tops National Park (NSW Land and Property Information, Six Viewer, accessed 20th March 2013). Wangat was initially formed from the need for workers to live close to the gold mining area, which is part of a wider gold area known as the Gloucester gold fields and believed to have been established by 1879. As it was becoming increasingly apparent that a large number of workers and their families were relocating to this small village area, a formal survey of the town was completed by the early 1880s with the intentions of establishing a proper planned settlement (The Sydney Morning Herald, 24th December 1880: 7). The plan was created as it was believed that the gold mining in this area would continue and the town would thus continuously increase in population. Included in the plan (IMAGE D001.1.jpg) was the provision for a church, cemetery grounds of various denominations, water reserves, residential allotments, public allotments and a public school. The plan also marks the assumed location of mine shafts, which appear for the most part to be situated within laneways dividing residential allotments and public land. It is possible that the mine shaft locations could have been designed around the plan of the town, however it is also probable that the town was designed around pre-existing shafts, as the town plan was created in around the early 1880s and it is known that mining already existed in the area by this time.

The facilities and living conditions at Wangat would have been simple and basic during the first few years of settlement, the majority of resources and living supplies having to be brought through the valley from other surrounding settlements such as Chichester, Dusodie and Bandon Grove which were likely the closest in position. Descriptions of the site from individuals who travelled to visit the goldmines in 1880 note the lack of facilities at the site:

"The little township, Wangat, is about 19 miles from Dungog, and to reach it you cross the Williams River once, the Chichester twice and the Little River 13 times. Some of the crossings to the Little River are in very dangerous and bad condition" Wangat is situated on a very good site: and when it is a little more cleared, and the miners get their gardens into order, it will present a very pretty view on arriving out of the bush. There are about 30 buildings, some of which seem to be very homely and comfortable with their embryo gardens, and are kept clean and tidy. For the present there is no accommodation for travellers and very little feed for horses; but Mr A. Kenny has built a six-roomed house, and intends applying for a licence next month, when it is to be hoped this want will be supplied" Mr Fisher has started a butchery in the township (no baker yet)" At present there are about 100 persons on the Little River diggings" (Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser, 4th September 1880: 7).

The site had a registered polling place in 1880 and it was noted that "Post offices will be established on the first proximal at the following places, viz: Wangat, near Bandon Grove"(Australian Town and Country Journal, 4th September 1880: 1). The post office was known to have been operating out of the hotel that was opened by Mr. A. Kenny, which also offered a small amount of accommodation for travellers at the end of 1880 (Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser, 25th November 1880: 8). Although the town had been surveyed and formally planned out by the government, all of the facilities, such as the opening of the public school and the construction of permanent access roadways do not appear to have eventuated for some time or at all. The presence of a high density population in the area was directly dependent on the success of the mining industry, which had also started to mine quartz in the surrounding areas.

Concerning mining interests, the general area of Wangat Valley was divided into Upper Wangat and Lower Wangat. It appears that the planned Wangat township was in closer vicinity to Lower Wangat than Upper Wangat, based on the number of river crossings over the Wangat (or Little) River described in accounts of travelling to the town: An 1880 account noted that it took 13 crossings of the river to arrive at the village town,

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while an article dated to 1912 notes that there "is no fewer than 12 crossings between Bandon Grove and Lower Wangat and about 17 between Lower and Upper Wangat" (The Sydney Morning Herald, 18th September 1912: 11).

The access rights of companies or entities working in gold mines and quartz seams on the land were primarily based around claims. Claims could be obtained by individuals who have located gold or a valuable mineral in a new area and possess it as their own, or one could purchase a claim which was for sale by other prospectors. In 1882, the main companies involved in mining in the Lower Wangat area included Messrs. Wade, Walker and Co and The New Years Gift Co (Australian Town and Country Journal, 30th December 1882: 22). Companies holding claims in Upper Wangat included Messrs. Towns and Co., Messrs. Stephenson and Co. (also known as Vanderkolk, Towers and Co.) and Messrs. Connolly and party (Australian Town and Country Journal, 30th December 1882: 22). Large battery machines, used for crushing the larger amounts of extracted rock to obtain the desired mineral inside were also established in the Wangat Valley. One battery, known as the 'Surprise Battery', was operating 1880 near Wangat for some of the gold mine fields along the river (Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser, 4th September 1880: 7). This allowed miners to extract and process the gold and quartz finds at a much closer location to the mining seams and shafts, rather than having to transport the mass amount of rock to another location.

The development and population growth of Wangat Village ran in direct correlation with the number of mining claims present in the Wangat valley area. A newspaper article dated to 1887 notes the start of the decline of gold mining in the area and a slow demise for the Wangat township, which was never a large bustling town in the first place: "in that year (being 1882), Wangat was a flourishing mining township with a population of about 60 men. Now there are three, and the large hotel, stores, mill and Surprise Battery are gone" (Maitland Mercury and Hunter River General Advertiser, 25th October 1887). This dramatic decline in population numbers may have been emphasized to some extent, as companies were still mining around Wangat and would have needed appropriate accommodation. Mining appears to have shifted predominantly to the Whispering Gully area by the early 1890s (Department of Environment and Climate Change NSW (September 2010), p. 33). A small revival occurred to the gold mining industry in 1894, to which a newspaper article noted that:

"At Lower Wangat, about 17 miles north of Dungog, in the valley of the Little River, a party of working miners own the Wonga Wonga mine, and though they are working at a considerable disadvantage for want of capital, yet they seem to be doing fairly well and the stone they are breaking out now shows gold freely" (The Sydney Morning Herald, 8th August 1894: 9).

At this point in time, a number of people must have been still living at Dungog, as an advertisement mentions the application for a general cemetery in 1894 as a separate area to specific denominations (The Sydney Morning Herald, 19th October 1894: 2). The Wonga Wonga mine is known to have been worked up until approximately 1904, whereby it was one of the last mine's to shut down in around Wangat Village (Department of Environment and Climate Change NSW (September 2010), p. 33).

The first village of Wangat was practically abandoned by the start of the 20th century, as the majority of mines having been shut done or abandoned by 1907-1908. Having been a considerable distance away from other townships would have hindered population numbers as employment opportunities would have dwindled and needed to be sought elsewhere. The whole greater Wangat Valley area was resumed by Hunter Water in relation to the construction of the Chichester Dam in the 1920s and as a result made the town inaccessible to the general public. Barrington Tops National Park was established in 1969.

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Themes: National theme

3. Economy

3. Economy

3. Economy

4. Settlement

3. Economy

3. Economy

4. Settlement

8. Culture

8. Culture

State theme

Agriculture

Industry

Commerce

Accommodation

Communication

Mining

Towns, suburbs and villages

Religion

Domestic life

Local theme**Designer:****Builder:****Year started:** 1878**Year completed:****Circa:** Yes

Physical description: Site inspection was not completed for this study site area as per Council instructions. Personal communication with rangers from Barrington Tops National Parks infer that there are numerous ruins present a short time ago, from both the village site and surrounding gold mining areas. A conservation management plan completed in 2010 for sites located within Barrington Tops National Parks noted that; "The planning area contains the physical remnants of this mining activity, with the Wangat village a significant historic site. The other remains of mining activity, such as diggings, are mainly contained within the wilderness section of the planning area and are infrequently visited"(Department of Environment and Climate Change NSW (September 2010), p. 33).

Physical condition level:

Physical condition: Based on the position of the study site within the Barrington Tops National Park, it can be noted that the site and greater surrounding areas have remained unoccupied, vacant and inaccessible by the public largely due to the construction of the Chichester Dam since the early 20th century. Archaeological ruins are visible and present at the site, although their integrity and extent remain unknown. The fact that the site has remained in an area which has not been accessible to the public for a period of 100 years or more leaves the suggestion that there is a moderate to high potential for archaeological relics of an intact nature and of high integrity. Archaeological evidence pertaining to both a late 19th century village and the gold mining industry will be present at the wide scale site. The natural environment and vegetation growth would have largely hindered the quality of archaeological remains; however a site inspection would be required in order to assess the extent of disturbance.

Archaeological potential level:**Archaeological potential Detail:**

Modification dates: Original survey for planned town dates to c1881, however documentary evidence indicates that a small scale village existed as early as 1878.

Recommended management: A site inspection is highly recommended in order to determine the extent of archaeological ruins present on the site and the condition of the built environment.

The study site remains within Barrington Tops National Parks land which is protected and covered under conditions made by the NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change which do not allow development to this area. However should the study site area ever fall under the pretence of development, prior to the approval of any development of the study location an archaeological assessment and, if appropriate, relevant endorsements from the Heritage Branch should be sought where archaeological remains may be affected. Assessment of the site should be made prior to impact or disturbance being made to the current ground level surface.

Management: Management category**Management name**

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Further comments:

Criteria a): The late 19th century Wangat village can be considered to be of local historical significance to the original Wangat community and surrounding areas including the Chichester Dam area and Dusodie. The study site settlement demonstrates what can be considered a typical small scale mining village, whereby its success and stability is entirely dependent on the mining industry. The fast population growth of the village alongside the slow development of resources and town facilities of which included a post office, school, church, cemetery and hotel, is reflective of the needs of the community during the late 19th century.

Criteria b):
[Historical association significance]

Criteria c):
[Aesthetic/ Technical significance]

Criteria d): The site may hold some element of local significance to some of the descendents of family members who once lived in Wangat village.
[Social/Cultural significance]

Criteria e):
[Research significance]

Criteria f): The study site is not considered significant according to this criterion. Although if substantial and intact archaeological remains from several parts of Wangat village are found, the study site settlement may be considered to be of local significance. This premise would be based on the vast extent and size of the archaeological remains and the ability to largely reconstruct a late 19th century mining village.
[Rarity]

Criteria g): Wangat village can be considered to be of local significance according to this criterion. The settlement demonstrates the effort of local residents in the planning and establishing of a new township and village to meet the needs of the immediate mining community. In this way, Wangat village is representative of the climax of the gold and quartz mining industry in Wangat Valley during the second half of the 19th century. The demise and closure of the village by the turn of the 20th century runs in direct correlation with the demise of the mining industry itself.
[Representative]

Intactness/Integrity: Archaeological: The study site contains archaeological ruins. The extent and integrity of those remains is unknown.

References:	Author	Title	Year
	Carste Studio Pty Ltd: Williams, Mich	"A History of Three Rivers. Dungog Shire Heritage Study-	1912
	National Parks and Wildlife, Departme	"Barrington Tops National Park, Mount Royal National Park ar	2010
	Maitland Mercury and Hunter River G	4th September 1880, 25th November 1880, 25th October 1887	
	The Sydney Morning Herald	24th December 1880, 8th August 1894, 19th October 1894, 18t	1880
	Australian Town and Country Journal	4th September 1880, 30th December 1882	
	NSW Land and Property Information	"Six Viewer", Last update 2013	

Studies:	Author	Title	Number	Year
	Carste Studio	Dungog Heritage Study Review		2013

Parcels:	Parcel code	Lot number	Section number	Plan code	Plan number
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