

Baw Baw Shire Council – A Stone Upon A Stone



Walhalla Township. Photograph – Courtesy Walhalla Historical Society



Dry stone terracing remaining on Walhalla hillsides. Photography – Raelene Marshall



Dry stone chimney. Photography – Raelene Marshall



Tramway dry stone walling, westside. Photography – Raelene Marshall

Located within the Baw Baw Shire in west Gippsland, Walhalla is noted as one of Victoria's richest Gold Mining towns which in its hey day had a population of almost 3500 people. Initially known as 'Stringers Creek' the area developed with the discovery of gold in 1862 by Edward Stringer, William McGregor and William Griffiths. Soon afterwards the area was settled by Italian woodcutters, Irish Cornish, Chinese and European migrants.

Walhalla is situated in a steep sided, heavily timbered valley at the foot of the Baw Baw Ranges. Geologically the main strata rocks of the Walhalla

area are of the Silurian-Lower Devonian period. In Upper Devonian times intrusions occurred in this strata giving rise to quartz reefs including the famous Cohen's Reef.

As mines were established on Cohen's Reef, the population of Walhalla grew and people moved out and established homes further up the sides of the valley. Forced by circumstance and isolation to use what was at hand, they built dry stone retaining walls to create flat terraces on which to build and also constructed dry stone chimneys and house walls. To retract the stone they blasted the hillsides with gelignite. As many migrants came from similar terrains where the craft had already developed, they were simply reverting to an already familiar and practical skill.

The Walhalla area is noted for its variety of European style stone walls, which were built by the early settlers to support the roads and waterways. Of significance are lengths of the Tramline on the west side of the valley, and retaining walls along Stringers Creek. Remnants of terracing and chimneys still exist on the surrounding hillsides.

Initially Walhalla country was a tribal area of the Braiakalung clan, part of the Kurnai group. In 1862 Gold was discovered and by 1863 the town known as 'Stringers Creek' had arisen.

Italian woodcutters, Irish Cornish miners, Chinese who became food producers in the area, and a small group of European migrants predominantly settled the area. Most were employed by quartz crushing mines such as the Walhalla, Long Tunnel and Long Tunnel Extended Mines.

The extremely challenging terrain necessitated its early immigrants to utilise their stone working skills to create terraces, chimneys and house walls. Land became obtainable through a miners right that entitled them to settle on Crown Land without purchase.

The closure of the major mines in the area from 1912 onwards saw the rapid decline of the town, and by 1915 local businesses were selling out. Today Walhalla has a population of 24. A four star hotel has been built and the town now caters for the tourist market, and local historians protect the dry stonewalls and heritage of the area.

"Bottle collectors are destroying the walls now, knocking out stones to search for glass and bottles."

John Aldersea, Local historian 2000.

1862 Dec –	Gold was discovered and the town became known as 'Stringers Creek'.
1863 Jan	
1864	First road into area 'Campbell's Track' linked town to Sale.
1864	Walhalla Gold Mining Company formed.
1866	'Stringers Creek' becomes informally known as 'Walhalla'.
1867, Jan	First official survey of town is conducted.
1869, May	Officially named 'Walhalla' in the Government Gazette.
1872, Nov	Walhalla declared a Borough.
1878	Narracan created a Shire.
1881	Warragul created a Shire.
1885, Mar	Shire of Walhalla proclaimed.
1888, Nov	Fire destroys much of Walhalla.
1891	Flood disaster again destroys a large part of the town.
1910, May	Walhalla's 'Red Letter Day' – First train arrives from Moe.
1912, Jul	Long Tunnel Extended Mine closes and is auctioned.
1915, Jun	'Chronicle' newspaper closes with the announcement that Walhalla will have it's Court of Law system revoked
1915, Apr	Town businesses began to sell out.
1951, Dec	Star Hotel, Oddfellows Hall and Shire Hall burn down.
1994	Baw Baw proclaimed a Shire.
2002	Walhalla now has population of 24, and caters for the tourist market. The train line is currently being rebuilt.

"Up and down the hillside cottages are perched in nooks and corners", like swallows nests on the face of a rock." Julian Thomas 1886

