

Glenelg Shire – A Stone Upon A Stone



A fine example of dry stone wall construction, located in the Parishes of Condah & Dunmore, north-east of Heywood, Victoria.

The Greater South West of Victoria appears to be a rather unique region, as evidence suggests that over time, two distinct cultures were adapting to the challenge of this difficult landscape, by using similar materials to assist their survival.

The basalt lava flows that resulted from the eruption of Mt Eccles about 27,000 years ago, significantly altered the local landscape, and were a major factor in influencing both Koori and European use of dry stone constructions in the region.

The eruption led to the formation of Lake Condah, and over time, the increased abundance of flora and fauna gradually resulted in the Gunditjmara (the local Koori population) adopting a less nomadic lifestyle. Prior to European settlement this modified way of life led the Gunditjmara to make practical use of the local stone. They created fish traps and constructed low, circular dry stone walls. The latter formed the base for shelters that were re-built annually from branches, leaves and grass.

In the mid 1800s, early Anglo Saxon pastoralists acknowledged the rugged nature of the region by naming it the “Stones”, and also used the materials at hand to establish their presence. Early European settlers like the Henty family (1834), relied heavily on farming for survival, and as a result, used local stones for the construction of sheep washes, cattle yards, and more typically boundary and dividing walls.

One early settler, Mark Cross, was a labourer on a pastoral property in Ettrick owned by W.M. Learmonth. Cross had his own 90 acre allotment near Heywood, and by 1875, had built 30 chains of dry stone wall on it. He gained freehold ownership of this property in 1882. During the 1880s, he kept a diary which records his continued construction of dry stone walls to meet Lands Department requirements.

Excerpt from Mark Cross' Diary 1885 - 1889 Ettrick Homerton area southwest Victoria

January 28th 1886 "M.C. (Mark Cross) Alf and Walter working at the wall Put up a little over a chain Mr. Purcell came for the boring machine and took it away and good readiness (sic) to it I wish I'd never seen it, a fine day."

NB - A chain is equivalent to approximately 20 metres, which is a significant amount of dry stone walling to complete in one day.

Handwritten diary entry:
 28 THURSDAY 1886
 M.C. Alf + Walter working at the wall Put up a little over a chain Mr. Purcell came for the boring machine and took it away and good readiness (sic) to it I wish I'd never seen it, a fine day.



Dry stone walls have been used on this property north-east of Heywood, to construct Cattle-yards. Though no longer used, the current good condition of the yards is a testament to the skill of those who built them.



An excellent example of a dry stone wall used to fence separate paddocks for grazing cattle in the south-west of Victoria.



Dry stone walls are generally built using available materials. The terrain of this area - volcanic in origin - is clearly the source of stone for these walls, located in the south-west of Victoria.

- 1855 District of Portland created.
- 1863 Heywood proclaimed a Shire.
- Borough of Portland proclaimed.
- 1867 - 69 Lake Condah Aboriginal Mission established near Heywood, and dry stone walls built around it.
- 1885 The Lake Condah Mission property extended. A team of Aboriginal people from the Mission employed to build the long 'Serpentine Wall' across five selection allotments in the Parish of Condah.
- 1879 - 93 Condah Swamp drained.
- 1949 Township of Portland proclaimed and deep-sea port established.
- 1963 The Port of Portland officially opened after extensive development of the harbour.
- 1994 The Shire of Heywood and the City of Portland amalgamated with the Shire of Glenelg. Commissioners were appointed to establish the current Glenelg Shire Council.

Key structures in the area

In the Lake Condah area, the Koori population used dry stone techniques to construct fish traps and low foundation walls for semi-permanent shelters.

A local farming property in the Heywood district still has an excellent example of dry stone wall Cattle-yards, which originally had a holding capacity for about 100 head of cattle

In the Bessiebelle district, a fine example of a Wool Wash built using dry stone techniques still exists. The main wash is approximately 100 feet long.

'Blacks Wall' is an extensive dry stone wall on a local farming property in the Heywood district. Much of the wall is still in good condition, and extends for over 4 kilometres in a straight line. It has an average height of 1.5 metres, though it is considerably higher where it crosses deep gullies.

THE SHIRE OF GLENELG