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# A History of the Toolong Diggings, Kosciuszko National Park

David Scott, December 2009

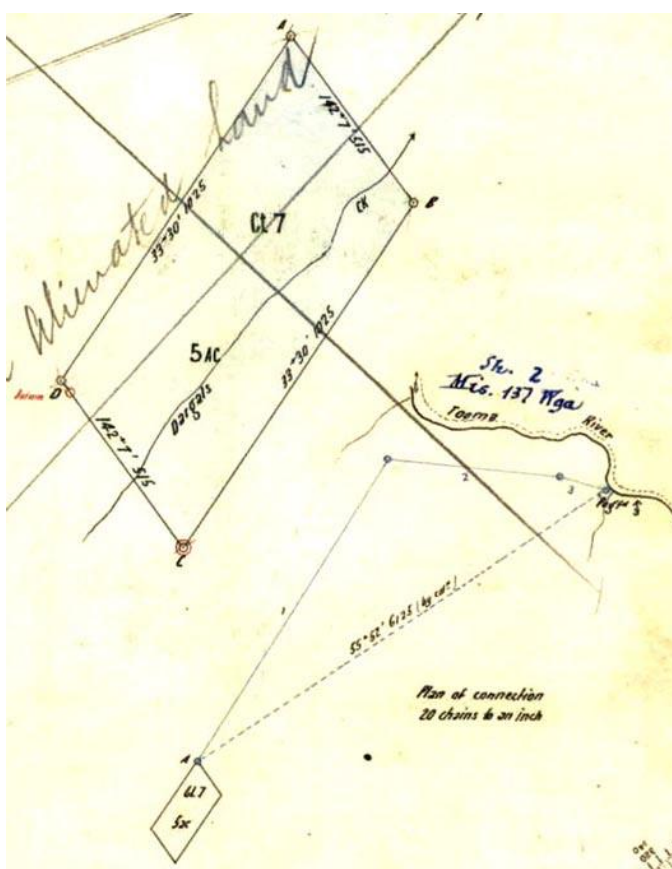


# Toolong Diggings

## Alluvial Mining Phase 1893 - 1899

In 1887 gold was discovered in the bed of the Tooma River at *Toolong* – a pastoral run extending from the current location of Tooma Dam to Pretty Plain – by J & D Caholan, and mined by them through the late 1880s and early 1890s.<sup>1</sup>

In 1893 the *Dargals Creek Lead* was discovered just below the current location of Wheeler’s Hut; a site that would become known as the *Toolong Diggings*. The Caholans claimed this discovery, but this was disputed by F Allen, who formed a syndicate and took up a 5 acre lease in the western branch of Dargals Creek about 1km above the Tooma River. The intent being to systemically ground sluice the creek, Allen’s party commenced work in cutting a tailrace through the granite bar at the creekmouth.<sup>2</sup>



1893 Portion Plan of GL7, Parish of Dargals © NSW Dept Mines

Before they could progress far, word of the find got out. In July 1893 John Robyns & Co took up 5 acres on the western branch of Dargals Creek (GL7)<sup>3</sup>. Lublin & party applied for a lease just below the junction of the creek branches, but this claim was disputed and ultimately refused as miners swarmed across the field pegging-out small claims over the entire creek bed and defeating Allen’s plans.<sup>4</sup>

“Mining began practically in December 1893, and was carried on until winter began to set in, when most of those engaged obtained exemption on account of the rigorous nature of the climate. A few claim-holders (about 30), however, erected winter quarters and made use of the snow-water [for ground sluicing of the claims]. Some portions of the lead are reported to have been covered 7 feet deep in snow.”<sup>5</sup>

Miners returned to the field the following summer from the Tooma side of the range, when “the snow on the ascent from ‘Possum Point had melted’”. By October 1894, 300 men were back on the Toolong Diggings, whilst others were working the Tooma River.<sup>6</sup>

In January 1895 there were 250 miners present when the Dept of Mines geologist JE Carne visited the diggings and reported:

“the Dargal’s Lead is very limited, not being more than about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile long by 1 chain wide [1.2km x 21m], it will be nearly if not quite worked out before the ensuing winter.

“The richest portion of the lead occurs about the middle point of its length, which is opposed to the general rule; usually the heaviest gold, especially when coarse, lies nearest the source at the head of the lead. The present exception may possibly be due to the torrent-like force of a stream, fed by melting snow . . .

<sup>1</sup> Dept Mines AR 1895, p129

<sup>2</sup> Dept Mines AR 1895, p129

<sup>3</sup> Portion Plan of GL7, Parish of Dargals

<sup>4</sup> Dept Mines AR 1895, p129

<sup>5</sup> Dept Mines AR 1895, p129

<sup>6</sup> Dept Mines AR 1895, p130

*“The stripping [of the overburden] varies from 3 to 7 feet, including 1 to 3 feet of surface peaty matter, which has to be cut with hay knives.*

*“The [gold-bearing gravel] wash is from 2 to 5 feet thick . . . a little gold occurs through the whole thickness, but generally only the bottom foot is worked.*

*“Box-head sluices are in universal use, the water supply being drawn from the creek itself.*

*“The gold is coarse; nuggets of 3, 5, 8 and 11 oz [up to 340g] have been found. In outward appearance the nuggets are solid and of good quality, but . . . nearly all coarse pieces have been found to contain drusy cavities filled with dross . . .*

*“The western branch of Dargal’s Creek contains little payable gold . . . close to the head of the main lead – or eastern branch – a thin leader has . . . been discovered in which gold is freely visible. . . . a small quantity taken from a shallow shaft yielded . . . 11oz 14dwt . . . of gold per ton. The thickness of the lead varies from a quarter to one inch.*

*“Close by, on the east of Dargal’s Creek, is another short creek and flat known as Broadway Flat . . . a few pot-holes have been put down at rare intervals . . . reported that nothing more than colour of gold can be obtained from it . . .”<sup>7</sup>*



*Toolong Station diggings from 1944 RAAF aerial photograph*

Small numbers of miners dispersed north-eastward into the adjoining catchments to try their luck: *“On the opposite side of the Tooma River a small lead near the Toolong Station Homestead is affording work for a few men”<sup>8</sup>*. This may be evident in ground disturbance on the east side of the river at 614630E 6008630N and/or a small opencut excavation just 70m southeast of the station at 615130E 6008075N<sup>9</sup>.

*“Still further north-easterly towards Round Mountain other parties are at work in small creeks near Ogilvie’s Creek. In all the drainage channels in this locality gold is obtained, and no doubt from time to time payable patches will be discovered. Close by the workings, the highest point still retains a small cap of basalt . . .”<sup>10</sup>*

There is no record of living conditions on the Toolong Diggings. Consistent with other mining sites of the times, miners were

probably accommodated in tents, sod-walled huts with canvas or bark roofs, or bark gunyahs, situated along the banks of the creek close to each of their mining claims. The presence of several hundred men on the field would have generated a commercial need for stores and grog shanties, but these were likely no more salubrious in their construction. The diggings appear to have been serviced from the town of Tooma via an access track running up Welumba Creek and past Toolong Station.

Carne’s prediction proved accurate as the alluvial gold was soon worked out. By November 1895, Robyns and Co had wound up operations and their lease was terminated.<sup>11</sup> Some returns were made in 1896; by 1897 it was reported that there was *“many miners not earning enough to pay for food”*; and by 1898 only 3 miners remained.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Dept Mines AR 1895, p130

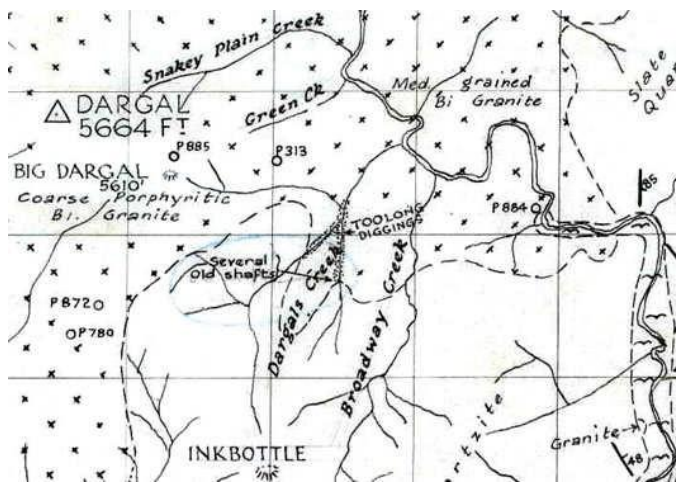
<sup>8</sup> Dept Mines AR 1895, p130

<sup>9</sup> RAAF aerial photography held by NLA

<sup>10</sup> Dept Mines AR 1895, p130

<sup>11</sup> Portion Plan of GL7, Parish of Dargals

<sup>12</sup> Dept Mines AR 1895, p130



From Toolong Geological Survey 1950 ©NSW Dept of Mines

### Reef Mining 1900-01

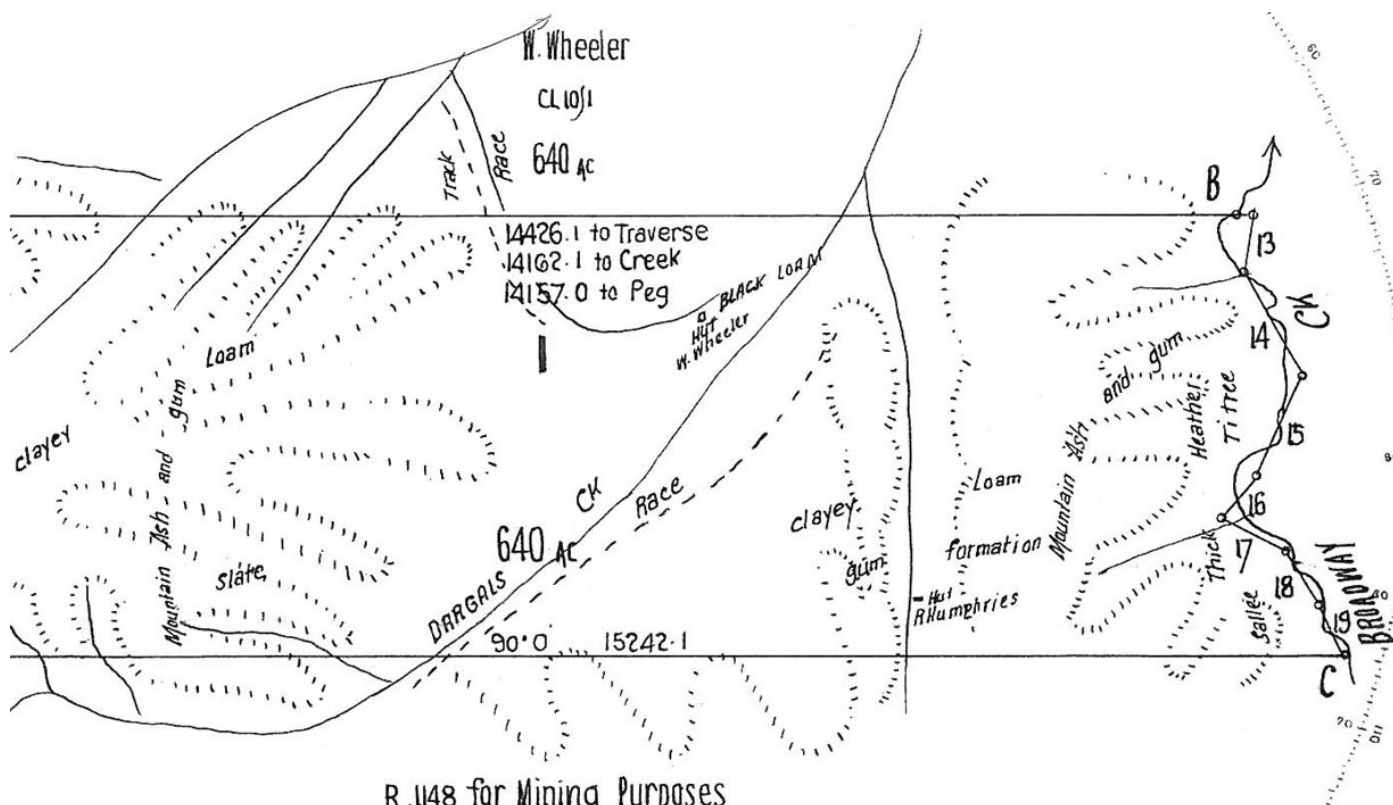
By 1900 the “men working in the Dargals Creek at Toolong are all making fair wages, some of the men averaging £2 10s per week.”<sup>13</sup> The miners had improved their methods, probably making better use of water in ground sluicing the old diggings.

1900 was also the turning point from alluvial to reef mining. The source of the river gold had been traced to a few quartz leaders 50-75mm wide upstream on the western branch of Dargals Creek. Three reef mining claims were taken up, with

shafts being sunk to a depth of 6m.<sup>14</sup> Charles Everard and Carlos Corino appear to have been one party so engaged, and Charles Taylor another, as both groups took up mining tenements (MT 1 & 3 and MT2) to provide a supply of water for washing up operations.<sup>15</sup>

In 1901, £2000 of gold was won from alluvial and reef mining combined,<sup>16</sup> one source suggesting this amounted to 17.7kg<sup>17</sup>.

A survey plan of around 1910 shows a hut (‘Humphries Hut’, possibly Humphries) in existence on the east bank of the eastern branch at about 613200E 6001830N.<sup>18</sup> Close by on the opposite bank are a number of shafts<sup>19</sup>, thus it appears likely that this was a miners hut associated with the latter period of reef mining but ‘Humphries’ may have been a later prospector who remained on the diggings for a decade



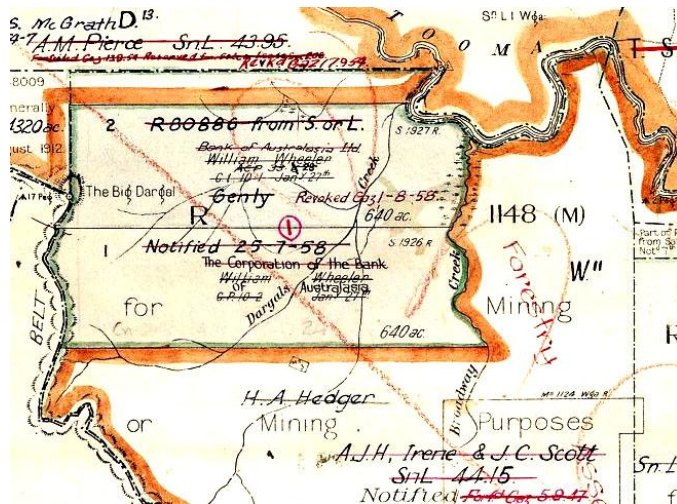
‘Humphries Hut’ on Portion Plan 1, Parish of Dargals ©NSW DLP

<sup>13</sup> Dept Mines AR 1895, p130  
<sup>14</sup> Dept Mines AR 1895, p130  
<sup>15</sup> Portion Plans for MT1, MT2 & MT3, Parish of Dargals  
<sup>16</sup> Dept Mines AR1901, p  
<sup>17</sup> Mine datasheet, Bega mapsheet 1971  
<sup>18</sup> Plan of portion 1, Parish of Dargals  
<sup>19</sup> Toolong Geological Survey Map 1950

after most activity had ceased.

The presence of further shafts or shallow pits along the western branch, a few hundred metres south of Wheeler's Hut is suggested in airphotos and anecdotal comments.<sup>20</sup>

The reefs were soon depleted and the diggings all but abandoned. Reports indicate fossickers at the Toolong continued to win "a few ounces" up to 1904,<sup>21</sup> whilst the mining tenement leases were only forfeited in 1910.<sup>22</sup>



From Parish of Dargals Ed 3 1915 ©NSW DLPI

## Beyond 1905

In 1910, William Wheeler – known as Bill or Wingy, because of a missing arm - acquired two blocks over most of the Dargals Creek catchment - freehold portion 1 of 640 acres and a leasehold block of a further 640 acres (CL10.1).<sup>23</sup>

On portion 1 Wheeler is reported to have built a hut on the west bank of (the western branch of) Dargals Creek at about 613125E 6002535N, approximately 400m southwest of the present hut. However this location, in a frost-prone area well down from the treeline and directly beside the Diggings, suggests it may have been built for mining prior to Wheeler taking up grazing in the area.

As the portion plan of 1910 shows the hut being that of "W Wheeler", we can be certain that Wheeler lived in the hut at this location prior to its dismantling and relocation to the present site of Wheeler's Hut by 1924.<sup>24</sup> The 1910 hut may or may not have been of the same size and layout as the current Wheeler's Hut. The relocation of the hut could have involved shifting the original structure intact without change, or it could have comprised a recycling of material into a completely different form.

The Wheeler family - William, AS & CF – retained a presence in the area until the 1960s, retaining the two blocks along with a series of snow leases to the west of the Dargals. The construction of Tooma Dam 1958-60 led to the freehold and leasehold block on Dargals Ck being surrendered in 1958, whilst the snow leases west of the Dargals were taken over by AJ Montague in 1961.

It is likely that the Toolong diggings were subject to intermittent fossicking by the Wheelers, the occasional single prospector, and even SMA workers, through to 1960 however there are no records of such activity.

## Present Remains at the Toolong Diggings

*The following is based on historical records and a walk across the middle of the diggings. Detailed site exploration and recording is required.*

Two distinct types of mine workings occur at the Toolong diggings:

<sup>20</sup> RAAF aerial photography 1944, Wheeler's Hut logbook

<sup>21</sup> Dept Mines AR1902, AR1903, AR1903

<sup>22</sup> Portion Plans for MT1, MT2 & MT3, Parish of Dargals

<sup>23</sup> Parish map Ed3 c1915, Parish of Dargals

<sup>24</sup> Plan of portion 1, Parish of Dargals

## **1. Ground sluicing.**

The most extensive evidence occurs immediately below the junction of the two branches of Dargals Creek, where the creek bed encompasses a 50m wide strip of heavily worked ground. Workings are visible for approx 500m upstream along both branches and 500m downstream.

A prominent raceline is visible extending up the western side of the east branch from the junction, and it is expected that a number of racelines are likely to occur upstream of the junction and possibly also in the lower reaches of Dargals Creek near the Tooma River (to service the Tooma River workings) . These could possibly link to the remains of small stone or timber header dams.

Records suggest a tailrace was cut through solid rock in the base of Dargals Creek near the Tooma River by Allen & party 1893 (estimated location 613700E 6003450N). This site was not inspected but if it exists, this would be a flat-bottomed excavation at least 2-3m wide and 12m long, possibly much larger. Timber boards or flat stones would be laid in the base to trap the gold particles as the excavated gravels were flushed through the tailrace.

Other alluvial workings occur on the Tooma River, at the crossing of the Dargals Fire Trail (614080E 6003690N), and near Tooma Dam (refer notes).

## **2. Reef Mining.**

Records suggest a number of shallow potholes were sunk across the diggings. These were not true shafts as they only extended down a couple of metres, however the remains may resemble caved in shafts.

The main recorded shafts are believed to occur around 613140E 6001830N. These have not been inspected or recorded. Anecdotal evidence and air photos suggest other shafts may occur along the western branch of Dargals Creek south of Wheeler's Hut (possibly at 612710E 6002510N).

## **BUILDINGS**

### **1. Wheeler' Hut (current)**

A horizontal slab hut located at 612770E 6002715N, associated with pastoral and fossicking activity after the main mining activity ceased in 1910.

### **2. Wheeler's Hut (original site)**

Likely to have been a bark or slab miner's `hut, located on the west bank of Dargals Creek at about 613125E 6002535N, in a location approximately 400m southwest of the present hut. Although the records claim that the current hut was originally at this site, we cannot be certain the structure was the same size or shape as the current hut – or even that the materials from this site were recycled to build the current hut.

### **3. Humprie's (Humphrey's) Hut site**

Likely to have been a single room bark or slab miner's hut, located on the east bank of the eastern branch of Dargals Creek at about 613200E 6001830N. Not inspected or recorded.

### **4. Miners' camp sites**

The diggings would have contained over 50 camp sites at its peak, mostly tents but possibly including sod or bark structures. It is possible that some evidence of the more substantial structures may remain, including flattened areas to accommodate a tent/structure, remains of stone or sod walls over which was erected a canvas roof, or minor features such as fireplaces or wells. No detailed survey or recording has yet been carried out.

# References & Key Source Documents

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## ***BIBLIOGRAPHY***

Hueneke, Klaus *Huts of the High Country*, ANU Press 1982

Dept of Mines (NSW) annual reports

Portion plans for gold leases & mining tenements, Parish of Dargals

Toolong Geological Survey Map 1950

Metallogenic Survey & Mine Datasheets Bega 1:250k sheet

held by NSW Dept of Primary Industry;

accessible through the DIGS online information database

<http://digsopen>

NSW Lands Dept Parish maps: *Parish of Dargals* Edition 3

held by NSW Dept of Land and Property Information;

accessible online through the Parish Map Preservation Project

*Snow Lease Lithograph 1* editions 1945, 1952

copies held by National Library of Australia

Pearson, Michael report *A Report on the Mining Remains in Northern Half of the Kosciusko National Park*, NPWS, 1979

## ***KNOWN MINING LEASES ON THE TOOLONG DIGGINGS***

Based on former Mines Dept records held within the NSW Dept of Primary Industries' DIGS online information database, as attached.

Most miners would have held alluvial claims, a lease type that is not recorded in DIGS.

<b><i>Lease</i></b>	<b><i>Lessee</i></b>	<b><i>Possession</i></b>	<b><i>Terminated</i></b>	<b><i>Area</i></b>	<b><i>Notes</i></b>
<b><i>Portion</i></b>					
<b>GL ?</b>	F Allen	1893	?	5 ac	
<b>GL7</b>	John Robyns & Co	Jul 1893	Nov 1895	5 ac	
<b><i>Mining Tenements</i></b>					
<b>MT 1</b>	Charles Everard & Carlos Corino	Jul 1900	Forf Jul 1910	1 ac	
<b>MT2</b>	Charles Taylor	Jul 1900	Forf Jul 1910	1/2 ac	
<b>MT3</b>	Carlos Corino	Oct 1900	Forf Jul 1910	2 ac	



PLAN OF PORTION GL 7

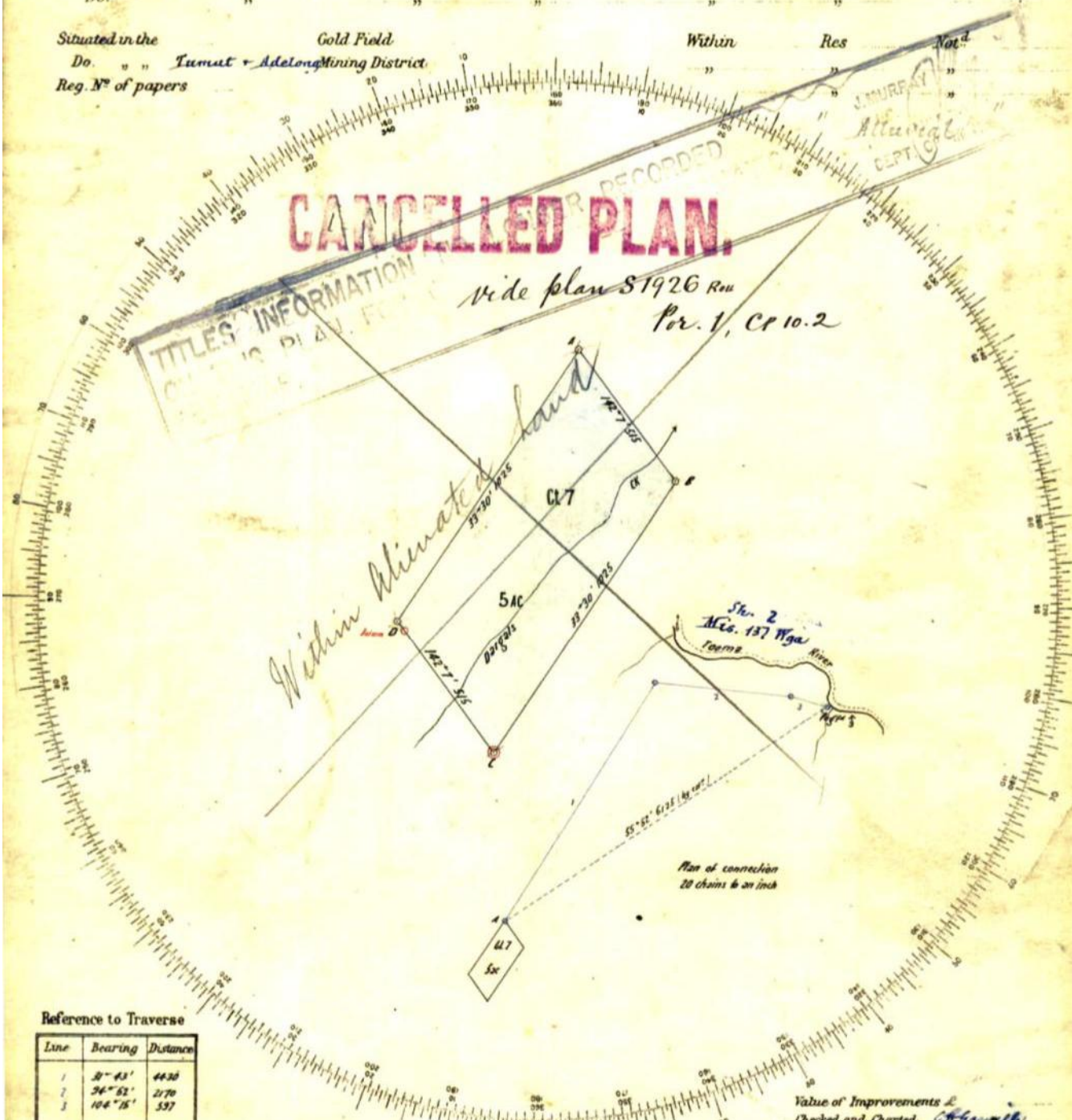
Authorised Plan Form.

County of Selwyn

Parish of Dargals  
Khanaban

GL Appn. N<sup>o</sup> 2 at Kiandra possn. G. S. 93 by John Robyns & Co Refused Lease N<sup>o</sup> 396 Tr A 22/1/95<sup>64</sup>  
Do. " " " " " " " " " "  
Do. " " " " " " " " " "

Situated in the Gold Field Within Res Not<sup>d</sup>  
Do. " " Tumat + Adelong Mining District " " " " " " " "  
Reg. N<sup>o</sup> of papers



**CANCELLED PLAN**

vide plan 81926 Rev  
Por. 1, Cr 10.2

TITLES INFORMATION  
CANCELS PLAN FORM

Reference to Traverse

Line	Bearing	Distance
1	81° 43'	44.30
2	34° 52'	21.70
3	104° 15'	5.97

Reference to Corners

Corner	Bearing	Prom	Links	N <sup>o</sup> on Tree
Numbered pegs at all corners				

Value of Improvements £  
Checked and Charted G. H. Lamb  
Calculation Book N<sup>o</sup> None  
Voucher N<sup>o</sup> 500 Passed 5<sup>th</sup> 3d Survey Fee £ 1 10  
per cent on £  
D<sup>r</sup> " " " " " " " "  
D<sup>r</sup> " " " " " " " "  
Survey Fee lodged by Applicant £ 1 10 0  
Examined 28<sup>th</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> 94 H.B.S.  
Plans approved.  
Chief Inspectors Mining, 7.3.94



Scale 4 Chains to an Inch.

Applicants' pegs shown thus in red.  
Azimuth taken from Needle.

2591

I hereby certify that I in person made, and on the 24<sup>th</sup> October 1893 completed, the survey represented on this plan, on which are written the bearings and lengths of the lines measured by me; and I declare that the survey has been conducted in accordance with the regulations published for the guidance of Licensed Surveyors, and the practice of the Surveyor General's Department

R. H. Lamb Mining Surveyor

Transmitted to the Chief Mining Surveyor with my letter of the 28<sup>th</sup> Oct<sup>r</sup> 93  
6612 111  
Letter N<sup>o</sup> 27



Regn. No. of Papers <sup>00/</sup>26340

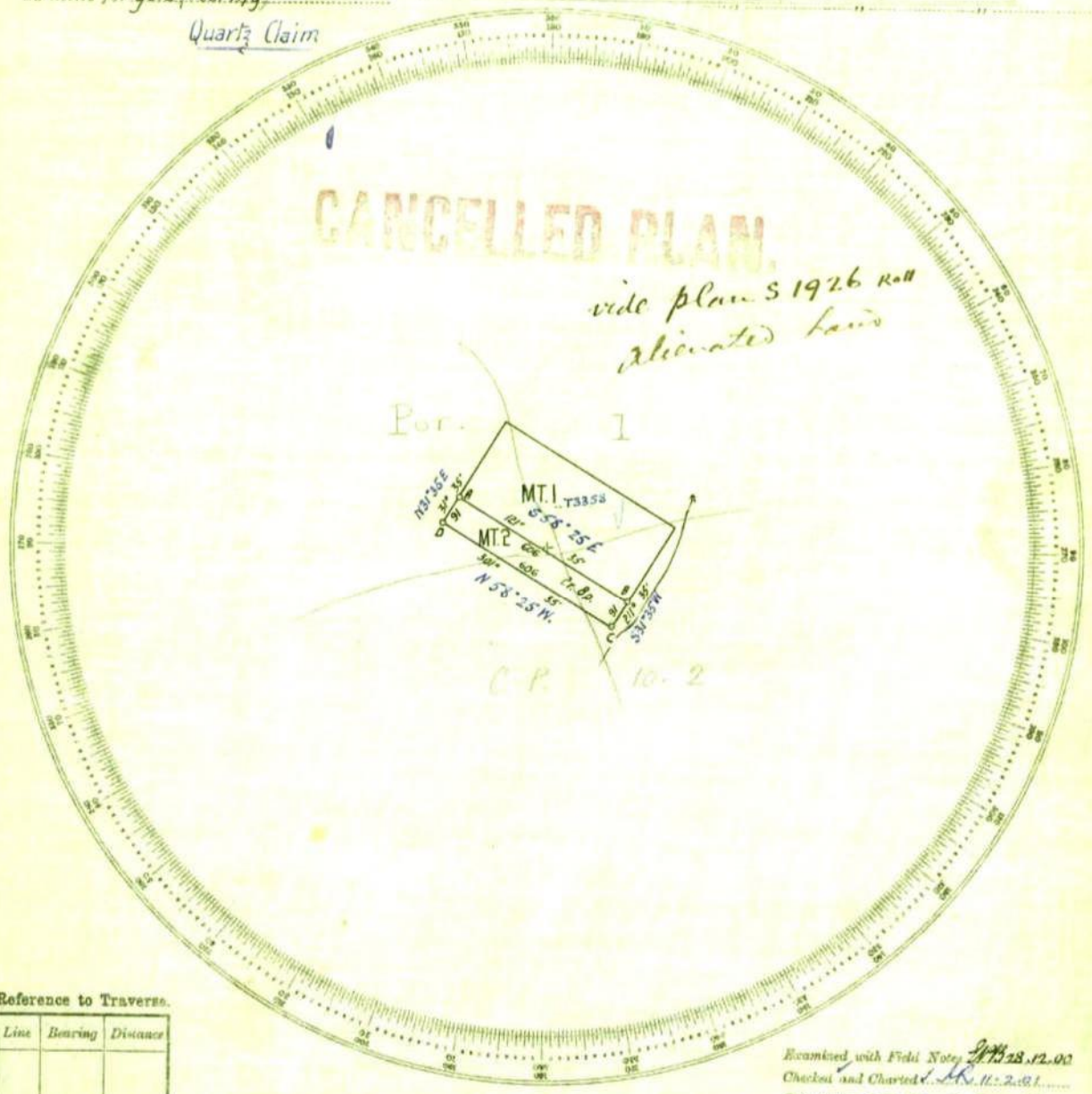
PLAN OF PORTION MT. 2

County of Selwyn Parish of Nargals

M.T. Appn. No. <sup>00/</sup>2 at Taama on ~~Assess~~ 25.7.00 by Charles Taylor Forfeited 27.7.10 Misc 10-6246

Do. Do. Do. Do. Situated within Gold Field Within Res. Notd. Do. Tumat Adlong Mining District To mine for gold (reefing)

Quartz Claim



Reference to Traverses.

Line	Bearing	Distance

Reference to Corners.

Corner	Bearing	From	Links	No. on Tree
A. B	Pegs numbd.			MT. 2
C. D	Do			MT. 2

Examined with Field Notes <sup>9/28</sup> 12.00  
 Checks and Charted <sup>11</sup> 2.01  
 Calculation Book No. <sup>1</sup> Folio <sup>1</sup>  
 Voucher passed Survey Fee £1.10.0  
 Do. do. per cent. on Fee £  
 Do. do.  
 Survey Fee lodged by Applicant £ 1.10.0  
 Examined by <sup>15/28</sup> 2.01  
 Plan approved <sup>15/28</sup> 2.01



Scale <sup>4</sup> Chains to an Inch  
 Applicants' pegs shown thus   
 Azimuth taken from G.L.T.

I hereby certify that I in person made, and on the 26<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1900 completed, the survey represented on this plan, in which are written the bearings and lengths of the lines measured by me; and I declare that the survey has been executed in accordance with the regulations published for the guidance of Licensed Surveyors, and the practice of the Department of Mines.  
 T. E. Hall Mining Surveyor.

Transmitted to the Chief Mining Surveyor with my letter of the 28<sup>th</sup> Decr. 1900  
 Letter No. 86

T 3359

Regn. No. of Papers

00/26341

PLAN OF PORTION MT. 3

County of Selwyn

Parish of Dargals

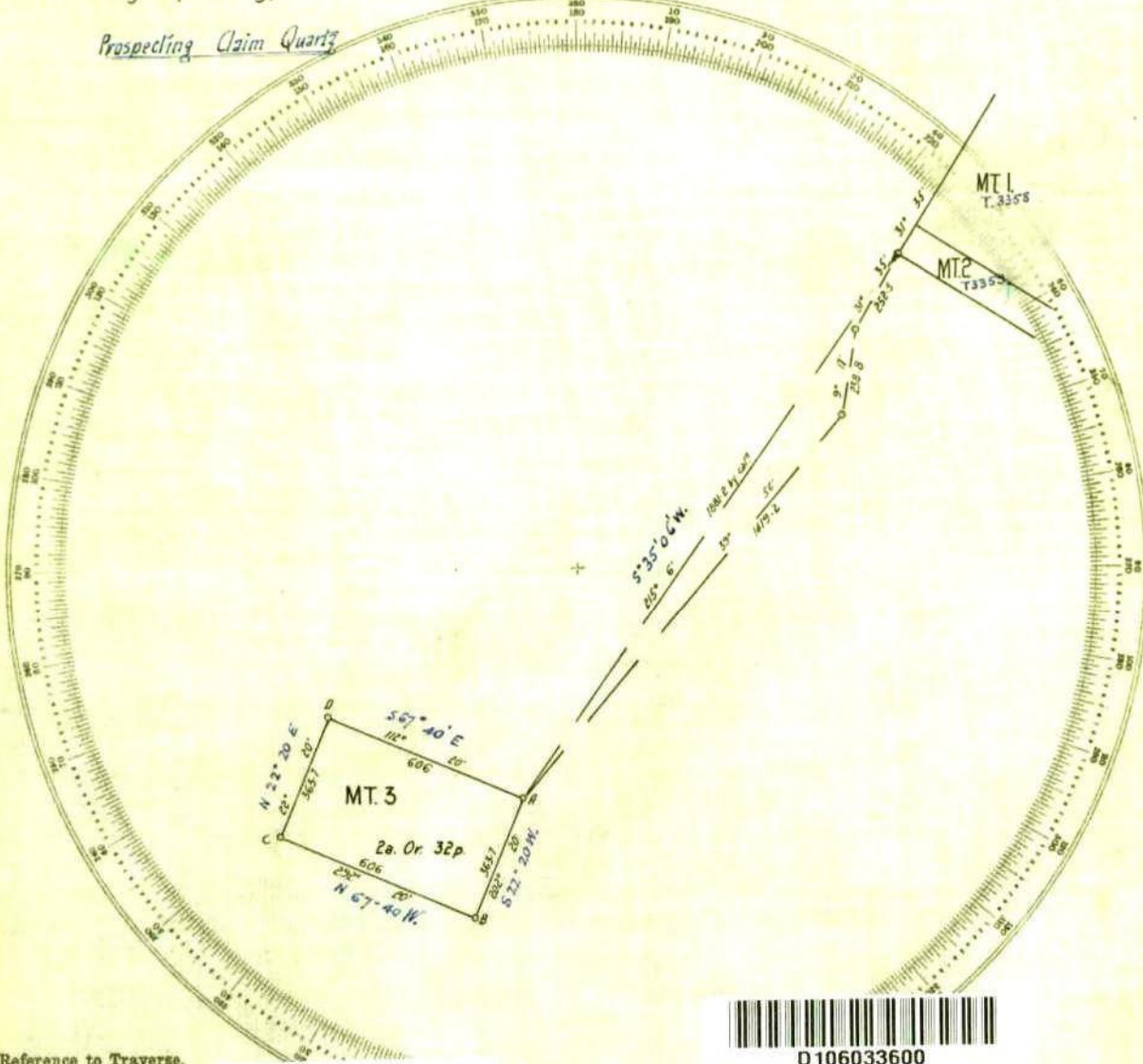
M. T. Appn. No. 00/3 at Taama on 26<sup>th</sup> Oct. 00 by Carlos Corino Forfeited 127.7.10 Misc W-6246

Do. Do. Do. Do. Do. Do. Do. Do. Do. Do.

Situated within Tumut's Adelong Gold Field Mining District Within Res. Nold.

To mine for gold (reefing)

Prospecting Claim Quartz



Reference to Traverse.

Line	Bearing	Distance



Reference to Corners.

Corner	Bearing	Prom	Links	No. on Tree
A	43° 59'	Gum	25.4	MT. 3
B	161 44	Do	29.7	Do
C	298 56	Do	29.3	Do.
D	180 30	Do	16.1	Do.

Examined with Field Notes 27<sup>th</sup> 28. 12. 00  
 Checked and Charted 1<sup>st</sup> Dec. 11. 2. 01  
 Calculation Book No. 4 Folio 16  
 Voucher passed ..... Survey Fee £ 1. 15. 0  
 Do. do ..... per cent. on Fee £  
 Do. do. Amt. 13. 0. 01  
 Survey Fee lodged by Applicant £ 1. 15. 0. 0  
 Examined *(Signature)* 14. 2. 01

Plan approved ..... Chief Mining Surveyor.

I hereby certify that I in person made, and on the 27<sup>th</sup> Mar. 1900 completed, the survey represented on this plan, on which are written the bearings and lengths of the lines measured by me; and I declare that the survey has been executed in accordance with the regulations published for the guidance of Licensed Surveyors, and the practice of the Department of Mines.

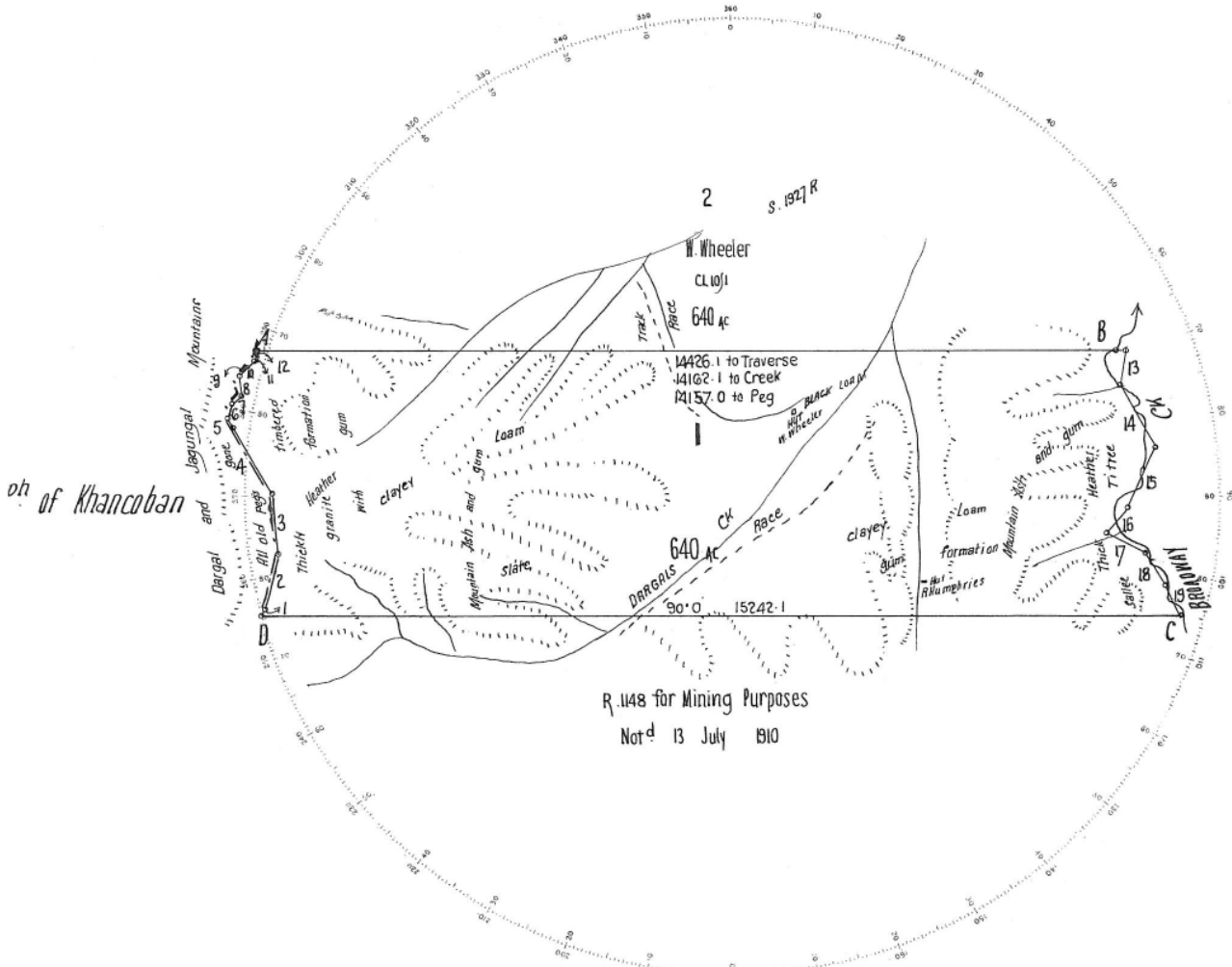
Transmitted to the Chief Mining Surveyor with my letter of the 20<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1900  
 Letter No. 87



**PLAN OF PORTION I**  
*County of Selwyn Parish of Dargals*  
 LAND DISTRICT OF TUMBARUMBA LAND BOARD DISTRICT OF WAGGA-WAGGA  
 Resumed Area No. Pastoral Holding, Eastern Division.

Applied for under the 26<sup>th</sup> Section of the Crown Lands Act of 1884 by William Wheeler

Por. No. O.C.P. No. 10/2 dated January 27<sup>th</sup>  
 Por. No. C.L. No.



Azimuth taken from Sbdy Por 2  
 Field Book Vol. 824 Folios 41 + 47

Reference to Corners				
Corner	Bearing	From	Links	No. on Tree
A		Post	1	2
B		Post	1	2
C		Post	1	
D		Post	1	

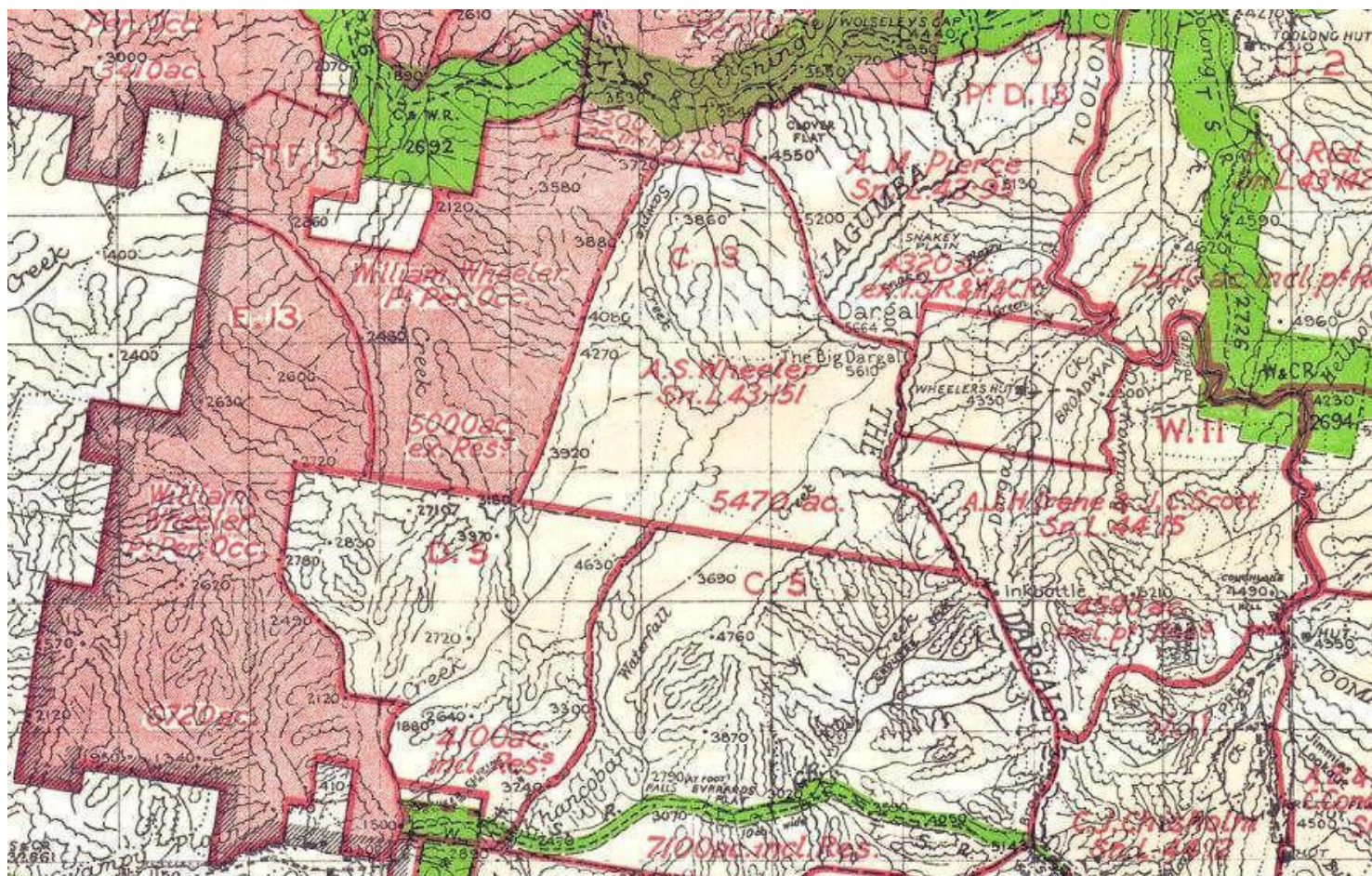
Reference to Traverse		
Line	Bearing	Distance
1	22° 10'	93.2
2	14° 10'	1000.0
3	352° 50'	1000.0
4	332° 21'	1270.0
5	317° 37'	162.0
6	17° 21'	228.0
7	48° 18'	227.0
8	2° 50'	295.0
9	31° 32'	135.0
10	37° 07'	154.0
11	21° 58'	175.0
12	335° 37'	41.3
13	189° 44'	544.0
14	152° 12'	1176.2
15	202° 34' 45"	1063.0
16	218° 20' 30"	552.7
17	118° 14'	706.5
18	150° 06'	604.0
19	154° 21'	546.0

I hereby certify that I in person made and on the 25 Feb'y 1911 completed the survey represented on this plan on which are written the bearings and lengths of the lines measured by me and I declare that the survey has been executed in accordance with the regulations published for the guidance of Licensed Surveyors and the practice of the Department of Lands.

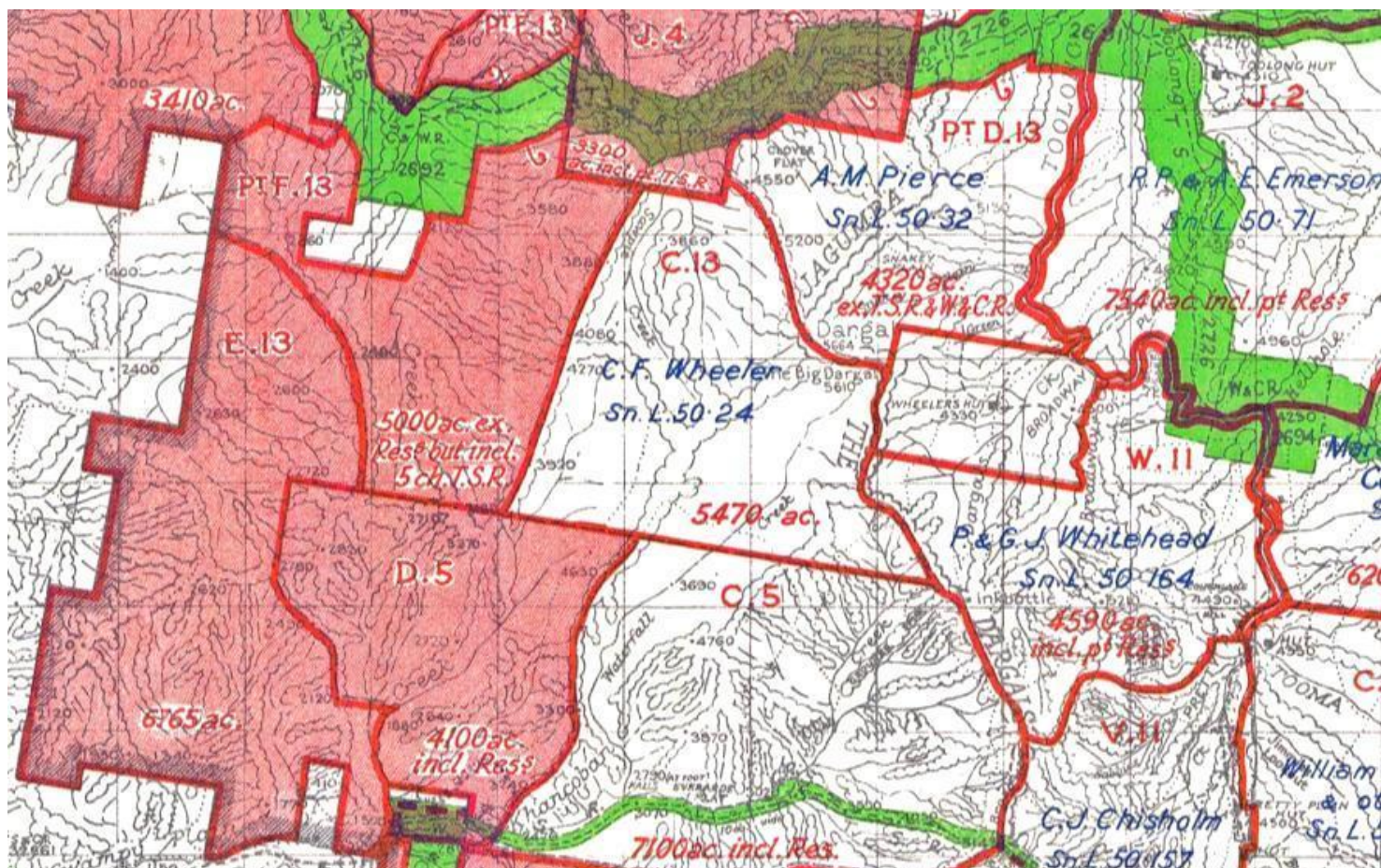
Temp'y Staff  
H. Godfrey  
 Licensed Surveyor  
 Transmitted to the District Surveyor with my letter of 14 April 10 No. 11  
 Voucher No. Passed Staff  
 Calculation Book No. 1010 Checked with planimeter  
 Checked and Charted S. Frarger 9 Aug<sup>r</sup> 11  
 Examined and 11th August 11  
 Plan approved H. Fynmore 19  
 Acting Draftsman in charge

S. 1926 1522  
 Scale 20 Chains to an Inch.

1940s-50s Snow Lease Maps – Dargals Area



From Snow Lease Lithograph #2 1943 ©NSW DLPI (copy courtesy National Library of Australia)



From Snow Lease Lithograph #2 1952 ©NSW DLPI (copy courtesy National Library of Australia)

1944 RAAF Aerial photograph of Toolong Diggings



(copy courtesy National Library of Australia)