

## Place No. 03 Balla Balla Landing (ruins)



View of the Balla Balla causeway, 2012

LOCATION	
Name of Place	<b>Balla Balla Landing (ruins)</b>
Location/Address	.
Street Number	
Street Name	Off North West Coastal Highway
Suburb/Town	North of Whim Creek
Other Locational descriptor (text)	mE 581598 mN 7713699 Longitude 117.7834 Latitude -20.6743

OWNERSHIP & LAND DESCRIPTION				
<i>Owner</i>	<i>Address</i>	<i>Phone/fax</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Item No.</i>
<i>Reserve No.</i>	<i>Lot/Location No.</i>	<i>Plan/Diagram</i>	<i>Vol/Folio</i>	<i>Item No.</i>
UCL				

LISTING & ASSESSMENT	
HCWA Reference Number	4551
State Register of Heritage Places(Y/N)	No
Classified by the National Trust (Y/N)	No
Register of the National Estate (Y/N)	No
Local Town Planning Scheme (Y/N)	Yes
<b>Management Category</b>	<b>C</b>

DESCRIPTION	
Construction Date (1)	Port established 1898
Site Type (Place Type)	Historic Site Other Structure
<b>Use(s) of Place</b>	
<i>Original</i>	TRANSPORT/COMMUNICATION: Rail: Other (Rail)

	Road: Other (Road) Water: Jetty Communications: Post or Telegraph Office RESIDENTIAL: Other COMMERCIAL: Hotel, Tavern or Inn
<i>Present</i>	VACANT/UNUSED: Vacant/Unused
<i>Other</i>	MONUMENT/CEMETERY: Graves
<b>Construction Materials:</b>	
<i>Other</i>	9. STONE 904 Local Stone
Condition	Boat ramp and causeway in use. Townsite an archaeological site.
Integrity (how much of the original fabric is intact?):	No visible remains of jetty; townsite comprises an archaeological surface scatter. Causeway intact. Degree of original fabric not determined.
<b>Physical Description</b>	
<p>The Balla Balla Landing consists of a landing (on the site of a jetty), a causeway and the remains of a townsite. The landing is situated on the Balla Balla River, a 30km long river which rises near Whim Creek and flows into the ocean near Depuch Island on the Pilbara coast. The landing is on the southern side of the river, 3 km from the river mouth. The landing is located on a coastal mud and sand plain and is connected by a 2 km long causeway of rubble construction, mounted with a dirt road replacing the earlier railway.</p> <p>The Balla Balla townsite is located on the low ridge immediately overlooking the coastal plain. The remains of the town are reduced to a surface deposit of artefacts and shell remains.</p> <p>A small gravesite is located at the townsite, with one marked grave.</p>	
<b>History</b>	
<p>The period from 1895-1900 saw great activity in the construction of northern ports. One such port created during this period was the port at Balla Balla.<sup>1</sup> The name Balla Balla was first recorded by surveyor John Forrest in 1878 and is an Aboriginal name, probably from 'Parla', the Kariyarra language word for mud.<sup>2</sup> The Balla Balla port was established as the port for the area and was gazetted as a townsite in 1898. A listing in the <i>West Australian</i> newspaper mentions work being undertaken at the Balla Balla jetty and approaches proposed for the tax year 1897-8.<sup>3</sup></p> <p>At its peak the port supported two hotels, a blacksmith, a police station, a horse track and a Post and Telegraph building. The port was used for the export of livestock and wool from surrounding stations and as the rail head and port for Whim Creek mines. A single track narrow gauge railway ran for 20 km from Whim Creek mines to the jetty at Balla Balla. In the early days sails were attached to the loaded rail wagons to aid the journey to the port. The jetty was used until the decline of the copper mine in the 1930s and was later destroyed by a cyclone in 1956.</p> <p>A small graveyard halfway across the causeway bears testament to the danger of shipping from the port. Five burials were victims of the <i>Crown of England</i> which sank March 22 1912. Another died on the schooner <i>Merlin</i>, and another drowned at the port.</p> <p>The site is described by the Protector of Aborigines as having a rations station.</p>	
<b>Archaeology</b>	
<p>There is considerable potential for archaeological remains to exist at Balla Balla landing, in addition to those described here. The site saw intensive use over a considerable period of time and it is likely that subsurface remains associated with the occupation and operations of the port and townsite exist within the area. These may include evidence of the buildings, railway and jetty which were once present at the site, as well as smaller artefacts related to the construction and use of the site. In addition, the port will reveal remains of shipping activities such as ballast mounds, possible</p>	

shipwrecks and abandoned craft, and boating infrastructure.

*Townsite:* the townsite is characterised by late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century historical materials, including glass bottles, matchboxes, clothing buckles, and metal cans. The main evidence for buildings is several metal clamps used to secure the footings; these suggest a metal clad building with floor area measuring 15 m by 20 m. A concentration of rubble on the northern side of the track suggests another building ruin.

*Aboriginal archaeology:* There are two Registered Aboriginal Sites in the immediate vicinity: DAA Site ID 940 'Balla Balla Causeway' and DAA site ID 7827 'Balla Pool Scatter'. There is a range of archaeological material at the townsite, including shells such as baler, oyster and anadara. The shell material forms a deposit and may result from natural as well as human processes. There are flaked stone artefacts of quartz and silcrete. Additionally, there is clearly historical flaking of olive bottle bases to form typical base flakes.

#### SIGNIFICANCE

##### Historic theme (s)

##### 2. TRANSPORT/COMMUNICATION

201 River and sea transport  
202 Rail and light rail transport  
210 Telecommunications

##### 3. OCCUPATIONS

303 Mining

##### 4. SOCIAL AND CIVIC ACTIVITIES

404 Community services and utilities

##### 6. PEOPLE

601 Aboriginal people

##### Statement of Significance:

The Balla Balla Landing site is strongly associated with the development of mining and farming in the region – it was used for the import and export of goods from the surrounding stations and the Whim Creek mine. It therefore played a significant role in the history of early development of the area. Although there are no standing building remains at the site, there is considerable research potential for archaeological (subsurface) remains associated with its historic past, as well as for maritime archaeological sites in the port.

#### ASSOCIATIONS

Other Associated Person(s)

Richard Apel Pty Ltd, previous owner (until 2004)

#### References

Cumming, D.A., Garratt, D. McCarthy, M. & Wolfe, A., *Port-Related Structures on the Coast of Western Australia*, Report – Department of Maritime Archaeology, Western Australian Maritime Museum, No. 98, 1995

MHI Review 2013

Assessment Undertaken, Place Record Form Created



**Sheep being loaded at Balla Balla jetty**  
(Courtesy Shire of Roebourne Local History Collection, 2005.126)



**Balla Balla Train pulling copper ore in sacks c1901-1910**  
(Courtesy Shire of Roebourne Local History Collection, 2005.122)

<sup>1</sup> Building a State, JSH Le Page, 1986 p 210

<sup>2</sup> Landgate, history of river names

<sup>3</sup> Estimated Expenditure, 1897-8, the West Australian newspaper, 17<sup>th</sup> November 1897 <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/3188117>