



MINERAL RESOURCES TASMANIA

**Archaeological Survey Report  
1999/05**

**An archaeological inspection  
of the historic alluvial workings  
at Middleton Creek**

*By Parry Kostoglou*





ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY REPORT 1999/05

# An archaeological inspection of the historic alluvial workings at Middleton Creek

*by Parry Kostoglou*

---

## CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	2
Job brief .....	2
Methodology .....	2
Location of survey area .....	2
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE .....	2
RECOMMENDATIONS .....	2
Further work .....	2
HISTORICAL OVERVIEW .....	4
SITE REPORTS .....	6
Alluvial workings .....	6
Mill site .....	6
Tramway .....	6
Water race .....	6
REFERENCES .....	6
APPENDIX: Contemporary site photographs historic maps and plans .....	7

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The consultant wishes to gratefully acknowledge the assistance provided by Mr Robyn (Shorty) Halfacre of Mineral Resources Tasmania. In addition to his profound knowledge of west coast mining sites, Shorty proved a great companion in the field. Thanks are also extended to local dignitaries Messrs Russell Holland and Hugh Nolan for their attendance and good council.

## **Introduction**

### ***Job brief***

This archaeological inspection of the historic alluvial mine workings at Middleton Creek was commissioned by Mineral Resources Tasmania in response to a proposed tourism venture seeking to use the site as a gold panning venue. The verbal brief for this assignment called for a visit to the site in order to ascertain its historic extent and vulnerability to the proposed development. A brief inventory of the site's archaeological features was also requested.

### ***Methodology***

Field work was undertaken over a half day period on 24 May 1999. The alluvial workings within the resident creek banks were examined up to 200 metres distance from the Corinna Road and all resident archaeological features were photographed and inventoried. Half a day was also spent at the MRT library and map rooms in order to compile information on the history of this mine site.

### ***Location of survey area***

The alluvial workings at Middleton Creek described in this report occur one kilometre due north of the proclaimed township of Corinna. This settlement is in turn situated 1.5 km northwest of the confluence of the Pieman and Whyte rivers in the west coast region of Tasmania.

## **Statement of significance**

The alluvial goldfield at Middleton Creek is the second oldest minescape of this type in the region, being pre-dated only by the workings at nearby Browns Plains. These discoveries were also amongst the earliest mineral finds of any consequence throughout the entire west coast area. In addition to its age, the association between the Middleton Creek mining site and several prominent Tasmanian personages such as James Crotty, Cornelius Henry Curtain and T. B. Moore further adds to its historical significance.

## **Recommendations**

As a result of this inspection, it is recommended that the proposed tourist visitation and gold panning activities should not be carried out at the historic Middleton Creek workings. The anticipated damage from the creation of access tracks and the stockpiling of alluvial gravel would impact heavily on the resident landscape, and its resident archaeology. It is therefore proposed that another venue with no archaeological significance be found for this activity.

### ***Further work***

In researching material for this report, it is evident that a number of other alluvial mining sites in addition to Middleton Creek comprise the Pieman/Corinna gold field. Such workings include Sailor Creek/Brown Plains, Donaldsons Hill, Sunday Creek, Long Plains and Specimen Reef. In the event of future developments in this area, these sites could be archaeologically quantified collectively, thus making any significance assessment and future management activities all the more authoritative.

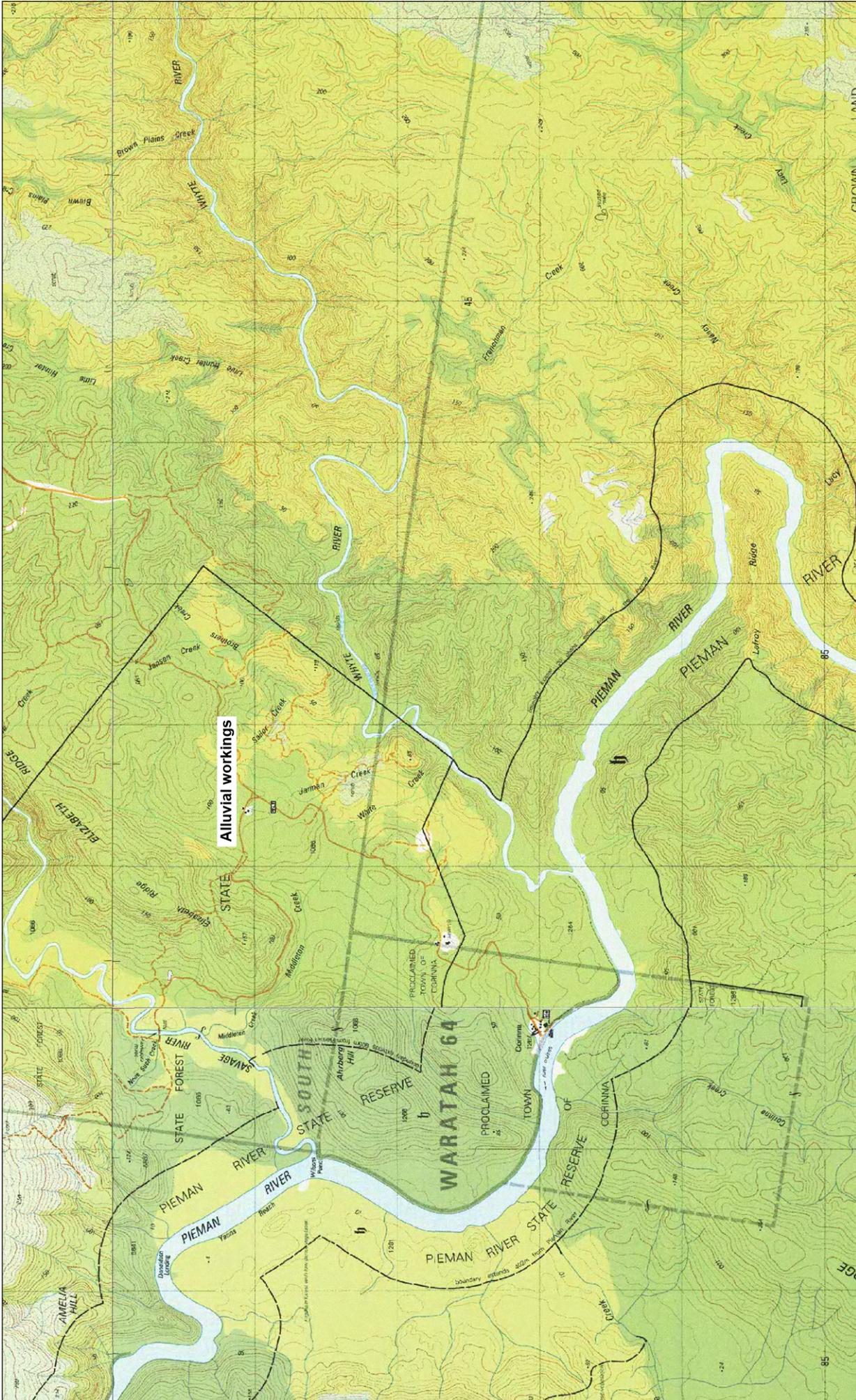


Plate I

Current 1:25 000 scale mapping showing location/extent of survey area

## Historical overview

The Pieman River catchment had lured large numbers of prospectors in search of mineral wealth by the time Charles Sprent made the first geologically based report on this area in 1878. He noted that ruby tin and gold had already been found to be widely distributed, although no payable deposits had yet been found (Sprent, 1878, pp. 4–6). In January 1879, Mr Jack Brown and party made the first gold strike in the Pieman/Corinna field and a small rush ensued to what was now known as Brown Plains. One of many prospectors drawn by news of Brown's discovery was a local man named Harry Middleton, who had worked in the Corinna area for some time. Among other enterprises Middleton evidently built but then grew weary of running was Sutton's Hotel at Pieman Heads. When news of Brown's good fortune became public knowledge, Middleton built a small boat and collected a party of four other prospectors to search for gold along the Whyte River. Having visited and failed to stake a claim at Brown Plains, the party examined tributaries along the Whyte, Pieman and Savage rivers. In one small waterway falling towards the Savage River, the party found a substantial amount of gold and immediately pegged their claim. Middleton hastily proceeded overland to Launceston and registered a Reward claim, but news of the find became public property soon enough and a gold rush for 'Middleton's' creek soon commenced (Binks, 1988, pp. 28–29).

By April 1879, up to 500 prospectors were crowded along the creek while a lucky few proceeded to win payable quantities of gold using rudimentary panning and cradling equipment. With the entire creek pegged by miners a short time later, many parties consolidated their workings and constructed more ambitious dams and water races in order to work more disparate patches of ground. The discovery of gold at nearby Sunday Creek by the redoubtable T.B. Moore in late June of that year was the first of several other mini rushes in the Corinna area (Binks, 1988, p. 29). However, it was the discovery of gold at Long Plains in December 1879 which proved the largest and most long-lived of the gold finds in this region. Most of the claimants at Middleton Creek were lured away by these and other discoveries over the next few years, although several parties stayed behind and made the best of their existing claims.

In June 1881, Department of Mines geologist G. Thureau made an inspection of the various workings comprising the Pieman/Corinna gold field. At Middleton Creek he reported that "*It appears that several gullies have produced good heavy gold in patches... In one of the gullies there a shaft had been sunk 60 feet deep*". Of present activities, Thureau briefly noted that "*At the head of Middleton's Creek the Messrs. Crotty and Co. are at present prospecting a 'make of stone' which they term an east and west lode*". (Thureau, 1881, pp. 3–5).

No direct reference to Middleton Creek appears in Department of Mines records until 1890, when in his biannual report to Parliament, the Secretary for Mines observed that "*A discovery which bids fair to be of some importance has lately been made at Middleton's Creek, on the Pieman River, West Coast*". (Secretary for Mines Report, 1890, p. 4). Unfortunately we are given no further inkling as to the extent of this new discovery, and no further news of activities at Middleton Creek was published until March 1894 when geologist Thureau's successor, A. Montgomery, made his first visit to what was now known as the Corinna Goldfield. His report noted that:

"The only party working in Middleton's Creek at the time of my visit was that of Fitzpatrick and partner, who have a claim in the main creek...Want of water—the season having been very dry—was preventing them from doing much sluicing, and the ground was getting very deep. The claim is a good one, however, and should give good returns to the owners when they have more water. The black false bottom is here soft, and contains a lot of gold, giving payable returns. The gold is flattened and water worn, but fairly heavy. This claim is at the foot of a face worked some time ago by M'Lean and party by hydraulicking, and though they were unable to get down to the good ground that Fitzpatrick is now working they are said to have had payable returns".

"Lower down the creek are several other old workings—Crotty's and Strong's, Middleton's, Conroy's and others. Middleton's old face is on the western side of the creek; the wash is seen to be 14 or 15 feet deep, but is clayey, and gives poor prospects. It is said however, to have yielded a good deal of heavy gold when worked on a large scale. Somewhat similar wash, but more cemented by oxide of iron, is seen at Fogerty's workings, in a small creek on the west slope of the valley. These are said to have yielded payable returns of coarse heavy gold, but rarely show gold in dish prospects".

Montgomery then proceeded to strongly advocate the establishment of large scale hydraulic sluicing, noting that:

"Up the various branches of Middleton's Creek large quantities of gravel are seen, and gold is nearly always obtainable in the dish when washing is resorted to. The creeks have given a living to men working with cradles and long toms in wet weather, and therefore there is a strong presumption that hydraulic sluicing of the terraces themselves will be payable...With a constant and copious supply of high pressure water I have little doubt that the whole of the old workings at Middletons Creek and its branches could be profitably re sluiced...".

In his summary, Montgomery then proceeded to divulge that a company had already proceeded to acquire mineral and water rights to Middleton Creek for this very purpose.

“The Corinna Hydraulic Sluicing Company, No Liability, has been formed to acquire land in the neighbourhood of Jansen’s and Middleton’s old workings, on the 1000 acres now withheld from leasing, and to bring in a water supply...”.

After briefly describing their proposed water race network from nearby Hunters Creek, Montgomery ended his summation with a personal plea to the company, begging that:

“the sale of of water to outside owners would be a constant source of revenue, and in the interests of the district it is hoped that the company will set aside a liberal proportion of the supply to be sold to applicants for it”. (Montgomery, 1894. pp. xxix–xxxvii)

A year later in mid 1895, the Secretary of Mines report to Parliament made passing reference to these new hydraulic sluicing activities at Middleton Creek and other venues comprising the Corinna field. Unfortunately the results appeared somewhat desultory.

“At Corinna and its neighbourhood, very extensive preparations have been made during the year, and are still in progress to bring in water and work the alluvial drifts for gold by means of hydraulic sluicing. The results so far have not been up to expectation, but a fair trial has hardly yet been made. This branch of the industry is new to this country. Great difficulties have to be overcome, but if only a few of the ventures now in progress turn out well, large numbers of men will be employed, and a great impetus will be given to this important auriferous district”. (Secretary for Mines Report, 1894–95, p. 8).

A year later, it was briefly reported that developments had not yet resulted in success. In a report for 1897, Montgomery reported that:

“All the hydraulic sluicing companies formed to work the extensive deposits of auriferous gravel in the neighbourhood of Corinna have ceased sluicing operations”. (Montgomery, 1897, p. xliii)

Further visits to the area in 1900 also found all these concessions dormant or abandoned. Intermittent prospecting at Middleton Creek occurred prior to the 1930s, including a six month lease of 320 acres between Middleton and Sailor creeks held by a Mr Robert Krebs in 1922. One final attempt to systematically mine this locale was begun on 14 September 1934, when Mr Charles Thomas Crabtree of Launceston took out two narrow but adjoining 40 acre leases. Limited sluicing and milling activities appear to have been undertaken by this gentleman over a four year period until the final cancellation of both leases on 17 May 1938 (Mineral Lease No. 11336M & 11337M). Various local prospectors have casually panned and sluiced the resident creek gravels since that time, although none appear to have sought a lease.

## **Site reports**

In addition to the earthworks relating to alluvial mining activities, a number of structural features were noted in the vicinity which appear to relate to an ore milling site and adjacent timber tramway. All of these are summarised below.

### ***Alluvial workings***

A section of alluvial workings, measuring approximately 150 x 30 m in extent, was examined alongside the western bank of Middleton Creek on the north side of the Corinna Road. These shallow (class 4) workings reach a maximum depth of two metres, which would have been sufficient to reach the dark coloured gold bearing layer referred to in historic reports (which is still evident today). Piles of stone waste workings lie alongside all of these shallow trenches and cuttings alongside the river bank.

### ***Mill site***

The remains of a battery milling site occur over a 30 x 40 m area on the western extremity of these workings. The central feature here is a 20 x 15 m wide surface scatter of ferrous remains formerly comprising part of a semi portable steam engine plant, which would have been used to drive the mill equipment. These artefacts include a pulley wheel, chimney pipe and several broken boiler staves. At least three lengths of rivetted metal pipe, used for conveying race water around the workings, lie amongst these items. A 4 x 3 m building foundation lies substantially concealed by leaf litter at the southern end of this scatter. A sheet of corrugated iron also lies partially buried and twisted around the base of a myrtle tree at this site.

### ***Tramway***

The presence of a set of four foot gauge tram bogie wheels adjacent to the building remains implies that this facility was connected by rail to Corinna or other nearby workings/infrastructure.

### ***Water race***

A 0.3 m deep earthen water race is evident at two locations in the vicinity of these remains. It is assumed that the race formed part of a much larger network ultimately laid out by the Corinna Hydraulic Sluicing Company and its successors between the 1890s and the 1930s.

## **References**

- BINKS, C. J. 1988. *Pioneers of Tasmania's West Coast*. Blubber Head Press : Hobart.
- MONTGOMERY, A. 1894. Report on the Corinna Goldfield. *Report Secretary for Mines Tasmania* 1893-94:xxix-xxxix.
- MONTGOMERY, A. 1897. Report on the mineral district between Corinna and Waratah. *Report Secretary for Mines Tasmania* 1896-97:xliii-liv.
- SPRENT, C. P. 1878. West Coast. Mr Sprent's report on its mineral resources. *House of Assembly Paper Tasmania* 1878:51.
- THUREAU, G. 1884. Mount Cleveland and Corinna gold fields. *Parliamentary Paper Tasmania* 1884:104.
- Gold fields of the colony. Report of the Commissioner of Mines. *House of Assembly Paper Tasmania* 1881:79.
- Reports of the Secretary for Mines between 1881 and 1932.

## **APPENDIX**

### **Contemporary site photographs and historic maps**



**Plate 2**

*Contemporary photograph showing discarded pulley wheel.*



**Plate 3**

*Contemporary photograph showing semi portable steam engine chimney pipe.*



**Plate 4**

*Contemporary photograph showing section of rivetted water pipe.*



**Plate 5**

*Contemporary photograph showing 4 foot gauge tramway wheels.*



**Plate 6**

Contemporary photograph showing remains of stone building foundation at mill site.



**Plate 7**

Contemporary photograph showing section of corrugated iron sheet at mill building precinct.



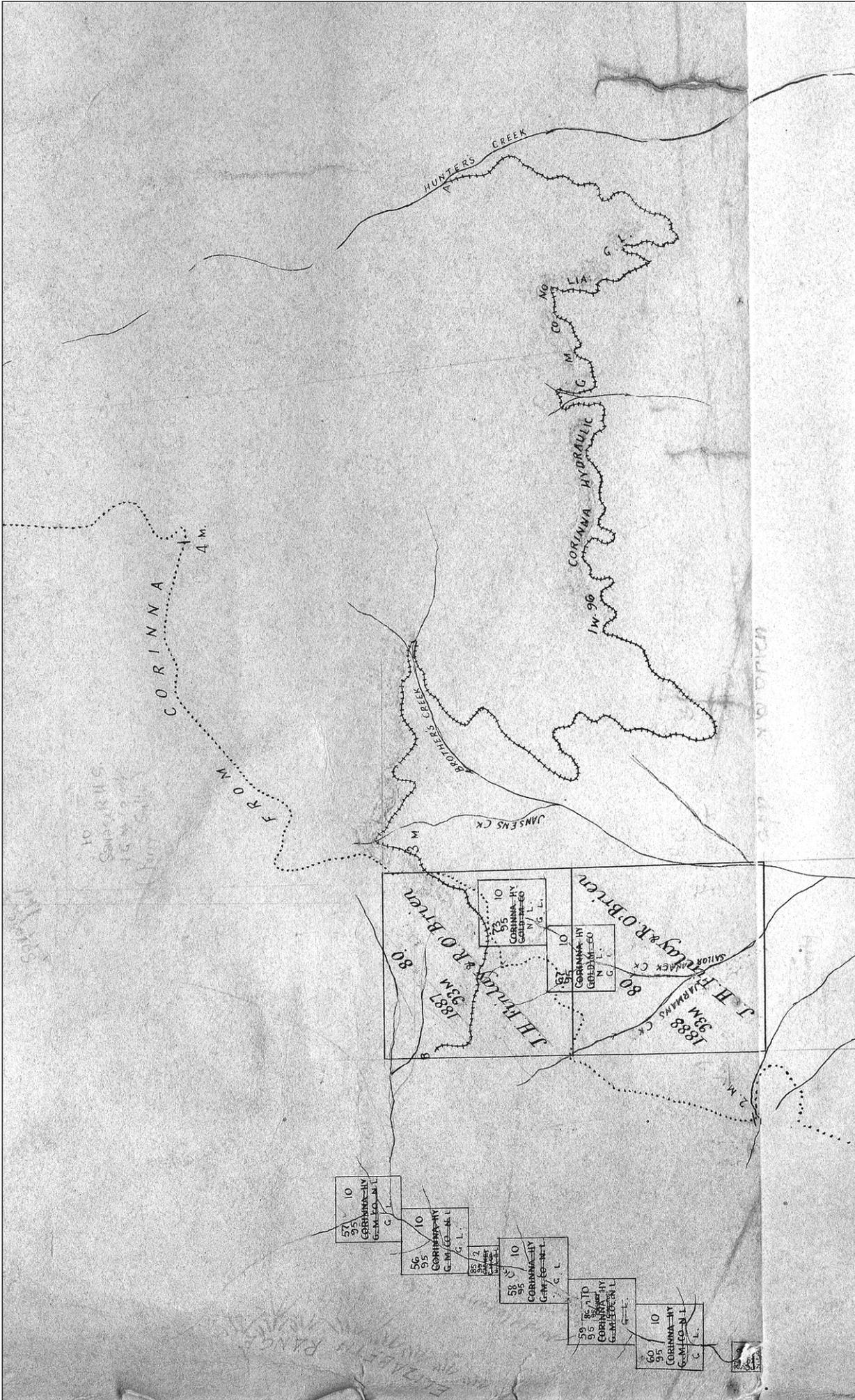


Plate 9

1891-1898 survey chart showing Corinna Gold Mining Company's cancelled leases. [MRT map 186c].



Plate 10

1898-1925 survey chart showing prospect lease held by Robert Krebs. [MRT map 186d].

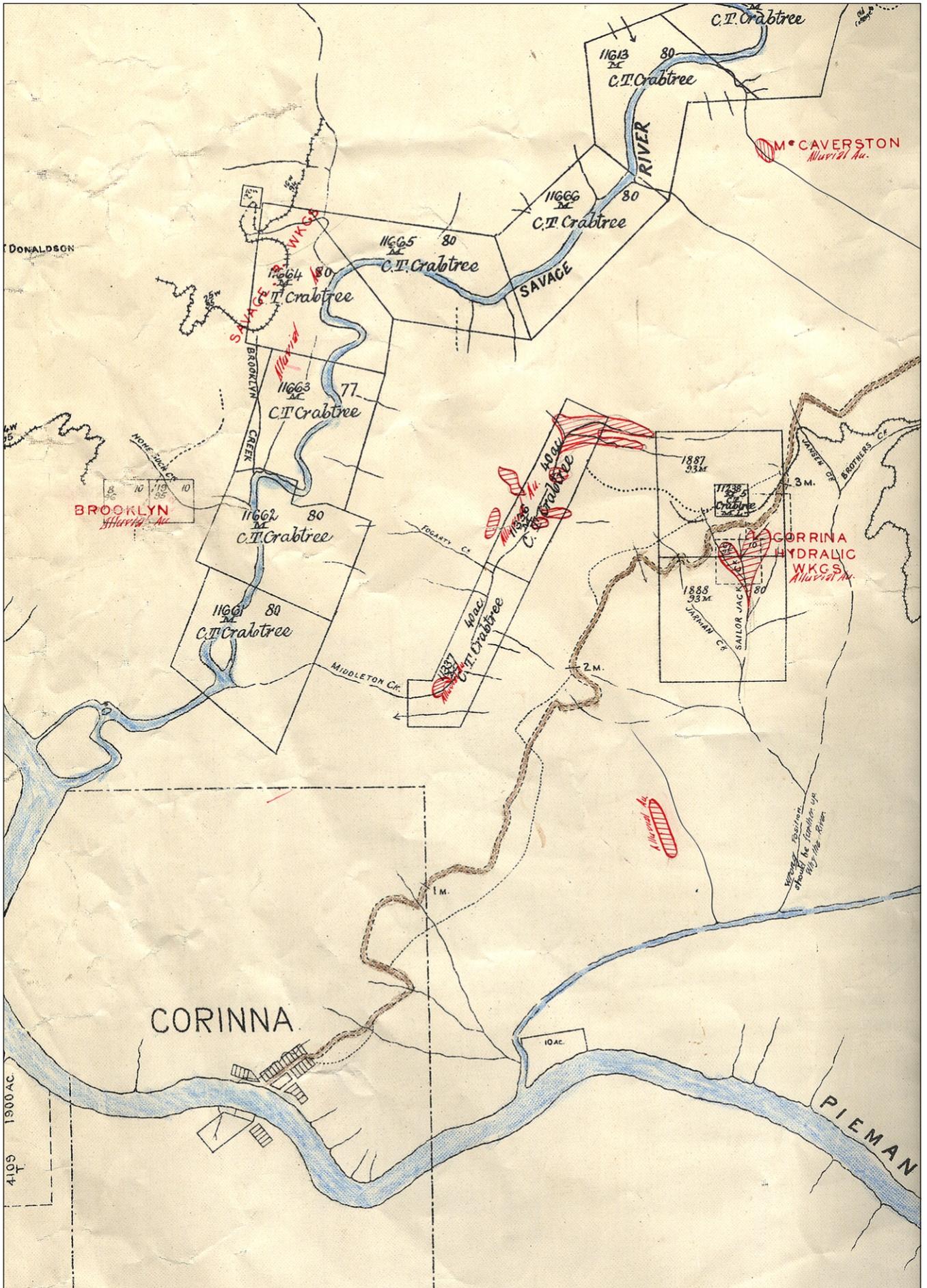


Plate II

1925–1945 survey chart showing leases held by C. T. Crabtree. [MRT map 186].