

Lower Selwyn Huts Statement of Significance - Review

Review of S. Irvine and K. Webb 2024: 'The Lower Selwyn Huts – A Statement of Significance', unpublished report for the Lower Selwyn huts Association

Statutory provisions

The Lower Selwyn Huts are not included in the recently updated Selwyn District Plan schedule of Heritage Buildings, Structures and Items, or the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga New Zealand Heritage List/Rārangi Kōrero. The Lower Selwyn Huts are also not entered on ArchSite, the New Zealand Archaeological Association's site recording scheme. Also, the huts themselves are not managed by or in the care of the Department of Conservation.

As such, currently the huts are not recognised heritage under relevant statutes. This makes much of section 2 'Statutory Provisions' irrelevant.

Methodology

I agree with the methodology employed and criteria used to determine heritage significance.

History

It is suggested or asserted some of the historic events described in section 4 relate to the Lower Selwyn Huts. Specifically, that Lord Onslow, Governor of New Zealand, and the Duke of York, later King George VI, fished at this location. However, the source material shows that Lord Onslow fished at the Upper Selwyn, and that the Duke of York fished at the Selwyn, without specifying this further. This has implications on the assessment of heritage significance (see below).

Heritage significance

Archaeological values

The archaeological values of the Lower Selwyn Huts area are considered to be high, as it is considered to be an archaeological site as defined in the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014. However, the history indicates limited occupation prior to 1900, likely leaving very few, if any, physical remains from that era. To date no evidence has been presented that confirms archaeological remains that have the potential to provide significant information on the history of New Zealand have been preserved. Therefore, until proven otherwise, I consider the archaeological values to be **low**.

Furthermore, it should be noted that none of the extant huts have been proven to have been constructed prior to 1900, and their presence (or absence) has therefore no influence on the archaeological values of the area. In other words, those values would not be diminished if the huts were removed.

Rarity

The report ascribes **high** rarity value to the Lower Selwyn Huts. However, without a comprehensive comparative study and analysis it is not possible to make this assertion.

Representativeness

Likewise, the report ascribes **high** value in this category. However, without a comparative study and analysis it is not possible to make this assertion

Vulnerability

Only one factor is listed under 'vulnerability', which is considered to be **high**. No other factors, e.g. environmental, are identified or described.

Statutory recognition

This is considered to be of **moderate** value. Here it is noted the Lower Selwyn Huts are 'managed by the Department of Conservation under the Conservation Act 1987'. However, the huts themselves are not, the land they are located on is PCL, classified as Stewardship Land, but the huts are owned and managed by the lessees. Consequently, the huts are also not subject to the Policy for Government Management of Cultural Heritage Place, as that only applies to places managed and cared for by the Department. It is also noted the Lower Selwyn Huts are an archaeological site protected by the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014. However, as it has not been shown that any of the huts were constructed prior to 1900 this is not correct. The underlying land may be, but that Furthermore, as discussed previously, they are not scheduled in the Selwyn District Council district plan or listed by Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga. I therefore consider the statutory recognition value to be **low**.

People

The report considered that the Lower Selwyn Huts has **moderate** heritage values through the association with visits by Lord Onslow, Governor of New Zealand, and the Duke of York, later King George VI. However, as noted above, it has not been shown these actually took place at the Lower Selwyn Huts. Furthermore, even if that was the case, in my opinion a single visit does not create an association that would elevate the place's heritage values to moderate. The only relevant and enduring association is with the Canterbury Acclimatisation Society and its founder and president, W. Spackman. Therefore, I consider this value to be **low**.

Technological value

This is considered to be **low**, but again, the lack of a comparative analysis makes it difficult to understand why this is the case.

Summary and conclusion

In my opinion the heritage values of the huts are inflated, and in some instances unsubstantiated.

In the summary statement of significance, the Lower Selwyn Huts are assessed to have significance for their archaeological, architectural, cultural, historical and technological values. However, as discussed above, the archaeological values are limited to the land, the architectural values are insufficiently justified as a result of a lack of comparative analysis, the cultural and historical values are moderate at best, and the technological values are low.

Following on from above, the conclusion that 'the Lower Selwyn Huts ... contain significant heritage values' is not supported by the evidence presented in the report.

Key considerations:

- The huts are not scheduled in the District Plan.
- The huts are not listed on the New Zealand Heritage List.
- The information in the report does not support the conclusion the huts are an archaeological site.
- The information in the report does not support the conclusion the place contains significant heritage values.
- The area may have archaeological values, as some of it was occupied prior to 1900, but removal of the huts would not affect those remains and associated values. This assumes minimal earthworks are required to remove the buildings and structures, and any earthworks are limited to areas already disturbed in the past.

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