

134 Macquarie Street (GPO Box 618)
Hobart Tasmania 7001
Phone: 1300 850 332 (local call cost)
Email: enquiries@heritage.tas.gov.au
Web: www.heritage.tas.gov.au

Name: Big Penguin
Status: Provisionally Registered
Tier:

THR ID Number: 12074
Municipality: Central Coast Council
Boundary: Whole of Title

Location Addresses

Main RD, Penguin 7316 TAS

Title References

Property Id



Big Penguin
NRE Aug 2024



Big Penguin and Main Rd, Penguin
NRE 2024



Big Penguin
NRE Aug 2024



Big Penguin and adjacent plaque
NRE Aug 2024



Plaque adjacent to the Big Penguin
NRE Aug 2024



Big Penguin costumes
Penguin Heritage Trail



The Advocate 27 Oct 1975, p.1.
The Advocate

Statement of Significance: (non-statutory summary)

The Big Penguin demonstrates the development of tourism and roadside attractions in Tasmania during the late 20th century, and the characteristics of an outdoor cultural object or 'big thing'. As one of Tasmania's first 'big things' the Big Penguin is highly intact and retains its original form, materials and location. The Big Penguin is a unique example of a 'big thing', built by a community to commemorate the centenary of Penguin, named after an endemic species of the region. The Big Penguin has strong community value as a popular tourist attraction on the north-west coast of Tasmania, championed by the local community. The Big Penguin was constructed using improvised and creative techniques due to the need for completion of the figure in time for the centenary celebration. Goliath Cement, previously known as Tasmanian Cement, has a special association with the Big Penguin, providing the resources, staff and facilities to create it at short notice. For almost a century Goliath has produced cement products for housing, businesses and factories in Tasmania and wider Australia, and for major projects such as the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

Why is it significant?:

The Heritage Council may enter a place in the Heritage Register if it meets one or more of the following criteria from the Historic Cultural Heritage Act 1995:

a) The place is important to the course or pattern of Tasmania's history.

The Big Penguin demonstrates the development of tourism and roadside attractions in Tasmania during the late 20th century. More broadly it demonstrates the growth of the phenomenon of 'big things' as a tourist attraction and destination in Australian tourism.

b) The place possesses uncommon or rare aspects of Tasmania's history.

The Big Penguin is a unique example of a 'big thing', built by a community to commemorate the centenary of Penguin, named after an endemic species of the region.

c) The place has the potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of Tasmania's history.

No Data Recorded

d) The place is important in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a class of place in Tasmania's history.

The Big Penguin structure demonstrates the characteristics of an outdoor cultural object or 'big thing'. Big things represent flora or fauna, are larger than life size, are constructed from materials like fiberglass and steel, are associated with a tourist attraction and occupy a roadside location to entice tourists to visit the attraction. As one of Tasmania's first 'big things' the Big Penguin is highly intact and retains its original form, materials and location.

e) The place is important in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement.

The Big Penguin was constructed using improvised and creative techniques due to the need for completion of the figure in time for the centenary celebration.

f) The place has a strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social or spiritual reasons.

The Big Penguin has strong community value as a popular tourist attraction on the north-west coast of Tasmania. The Big Penguin is championed by the local community and is associated with local endemic species of wildlife. The Big Penguin has landmark status as one of Tasmania's most well-known 'big things'.

g) The place has a special association with the life or works of a person, or group of persons, of importance in Tasmania's history.

Goliath Cement, previously known as Tasmanian Cement, has a special association with the Big Penguin, providing the resources, staff and facilities to create it at short notice. The company also provided the resources and facilities for the construction of St John's Anglican Church, Railton (THR#12031). For almost a century Goliath has produced cement products for housing, businesses and factories in Tasmania and wider Australia, and for major projects such as the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

h) The place is important in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics.

No Data Recorded

Heritage approval is required for work that will result in changes to the nature or appearance of the fabric of a Heritage place, both internal and external.

Please refer to the Heritage Council's Works Guidelines (www.heritage.tas.gov.au) for information about the level of approval required and appropriate outcomes.

Heritage Advisors are also available to answer questions and provide guidance on enquiries@heritage.tas.gov.au or Tel 1300850332

This data sheet is intended to provide sufficient information and justification for listing the place on the Heritage Register. Under the legislation, only one of the criteria needs to be met. The data sheet is not intended to be a comprehensive inventory of the heritage values of the place, there may be other heritage values of interest to the Heritage Council not currently acknowledged.

Setting:

The Big Penguin is located in the town of Penguin, located on the north-west coast of Tasmania. The Big Penguin sits on the Penguin beach foreshore reserve, adjacent to the Penguin Memorial Library and Obelisks (THR#10933). The area is locally referred to as the village green and is used as a community space.

Description:

The Big Penguin sits on an area of pavers, extending from the public footpath on Main Road. The Big Penguin stands approximately three metres tall, 1.5 metres at the widest point, and 1.3 metres from tip of tail to point of beak. The Big Penguin weighs approximately 600 kilograms (Nickols 2013, p. 11). The structure is formed by a steel base plate, central steel rod and welded steel frames form the wings. The barrel form of the body was constructed from slats of hardboard tacked on, covered with wire netting and hessian, coated with plaster, then moulded cement. The beak is reinforced by a piece of timber. The majority of the Big Penguin is painted black and white, with pale orange beak and feet. The whole figure is coated in fibreglass and polyester resin. A plinth with an angled face with bronze plaque information panel sits adjacent to the Big Penguin.

A community library, in the form of a Tardis, sits within the registered area. The community library does not form part of this registration.

History:

Penguin is in the land of the North nation.

Penguin early history

The discovery of the Penguin Silver Mine (THR#10964) in 1861 prompted the development of the township of Penguin. Large numbers of men were employed on the works, either as miners, merchants, or labourers, and Penguin evolving into thriving township, with a rapidly increasing population. The Penguin Silver Mine was also instrumental in the development of the Penguin Port for the export of the minerals. Despite the initial optimism, the Mine was a failure. In the succeeding years, Penguin and the surrounding district remained mainly rural, devoted to farming, forestry and residential development along the coast (Simco 2005, p.269). The town was proclaimed on 25 October 1875.

According to local history, Penguin took its name from the Fairy Penguin, now known as Little Penguins, and was so named by Ronald C Gunn, a distinguished botanist of the era (Nickols 2013, p.17; Burns & Skemp). Little (Fairy) penguin rookeries are located along the north-west coast. There are three observation points, at Burnie, Penguin and Lilloo Beach.

The Big Penguin, a centenary celebration, 1975

According to local sources, grocer and member of the local Tourist Association, George Daniels, first conceived of the idea of creating a 'Big Penguin' on the foreshore. Supported by the Penguin Municipal Council, the plan was to have it in position by the centenary of the proclamation of the town in October 1975.

Engineering firm RM Foster prepared construction plans free of charge, drawn up by chief draftsman Carl Johnston. Mr Foster later stated, 'The penguin which has graced the foreshore at Penguin for many years, had its origin in an illustration by John Richards in the book titled "Australian Animals", by Jennifer Oswin.' Additional photographs of penguins were used to make the sculpture three dimensional, and the beak was slightly altered (Nickols 2013, p.5).

A Hobart company engaged to build the penguin pulled out at short notice. On 7 October 1975 the Council asked Goliath Cement's David Lawrie if they could build the penguin for the centenary celebrations. Goliath employee Mr Andrew Bennie was tasked with making the penguin, he recalled, 'It (the penguin) kept me busy for a week I was presented with the challenge on a Friday, made the plans over the weekend and finished it the following Friday.' (*The Advocate* 6 March 2002, p.15). Goliath Cement, previously The Tasmanian Cement Company, became one of the north-west coast's most successful industries, constructing buildings and infrastructure across Tasmania and the mainland, including the Sydney Harbour Bridge (Rimon, 2005, p.164).

The progress of the Big Penguin was recorded by David Lawrie, factory manager at Goliath Cement, and *Goliath News*. On Monday 13 October the frame was started with the co-operation of the carpenter and the fitting shop. On Tuesday the body frame was coated with plaster on bird wire to give it stability. The base was constructed of steel and a rod was secured to it and concealed in the head to be able to lift it with a crane. The next day the penguin was ready to have its head fitted and the concrete covering was completed. On Thursday the penguin was enclosed in a giant plastic bag and steam introduced to cure the concrete quickly as time was running short. The penguin was uncovered on Monday 20 October and prepared for the trip to Penguin. The rigger made up a frame and the penguin was suspended by the head bolt and the base packed to minimise movement. After checking with overhead bridge heights between Railton and Penguin the journey was started. The truck arrived in Penguin about 4pm and a crane lifted the penguin on to a prepared pad. The following day the top of the head was sealed to hide the lifting bolt and, Bill Licht, a local painter began work ready for the celebrations on Saturday 25 October, 1975. The penguin was later coated with fibreglass to give it more strength (*Goliath News* and David Lawrie's diary in Nickols 2013, pp.7-17).

The Big Penguin was unveiled by America's Qantas sales manager John Rowe, who lived in the town as a child, on 25 October 1975 (*The Advocate* 27 Oct 1975, p.1; Nickols 2013, pp.16-17). The Big Penguin was placed adjacent to the Main Road prior to the construction of the Bass Highway bypass. At that time traffic would have travelled between Ulverstone and Burnie along the old coast road, which included the main street of Penguin.

Community and penguins

Following the placement of the Big Penguin, parts of the community have embraced the theme and rolled out several penguin themed amenities and decorations, particularly along Main Road. In 1981 ten penguin-shaped bins funded by the Penguin Leo Club (the youth branch of the Lions Club) were placed on the streets of Penguin (*The Advocate* 11 December 1980, p.13). The 1981 penguin-shaped bins were replaced in the mid-1990s by a set created by north-west artist Jenny-Lee Hutton. This was funded by an Arts Tasmania Creative Communities Fund grant awarded to the council (*The Advocate* 22 Dec 1996, 11 June 1996 p.20). In 2024 the 1990s bins were upgraded to larger receptacles of the same design, following a waste management review by Central Coast Council (*The Advocate* 25 April 2024). Rows of penguin bollards sit adjacent to the Big Penguin and outside the Visitor Centre. Each year the Big Penguin is dressed in an array of handmade themed costumes by Penguin locals, including for Christmas, Easter, Anzac Day, Valentine's Day, NAIDOC week, and various community and fundraising events. Local resident Shirly Good was recognised for creating the big penguin costumes for the past 25 years (Fittock; Nickols 2013, pp.18-19).

These items do not form part of the registration but complement the Big Penguin.

Comparative Analysis

'Big Things'

The phenomenon of 'big things', sometimes termed 'shire promotional grotesques' (NSW based terminology) or 'supersized kitsch icons', swept across Australia in the late 20th century. 'Big things' in Australia are a loosely related set of large structures, built to promote a regional town/region, local produce, a local business or to mark a historic event or milestone. Some 'big things' are novelty sculptures, such as fruits and vegetables and native animals. Others are architecture. There are estimated to be hundreds of such objects around the country (figures vary) and can be found in each state and territory of Australia. Many of the big things began as tourist attractions along significant roads between destinations, encouraging people to visit smaller towns along the way to more established cities. Unfortunately, many 'big things' have fallen into disrepair. Community responses to 'big things' vary, some are embarrassed by them, whereas others hold a fondness for these regional 'landmarks' (*Blueprint for living*).

Stockwell asks

'...what do Big Things mean to us?'. He responds 'At one level, Big Things are just another form of commercial signage, attracting potential customers to road-side enterprises by having a bit of a joke in the great Australian larrikin tradition. But the passions that Big Things raise suggest that these roadside attractions have other dimensions – artistic, political and spiritual...In Australia, Big Things have always had a higher purpose. They celebrate notions of regional and national identity, often with an aesthetic sensibility. Big things are a way that local communities can claim significance. As regional economies struggle to survive, one strategy commonly pursued by the town elders is to build a Big Thing that not only attracts tourists but also becomes a focus for regional pride. Sometimes this mundane exercise produces something quite remarkable. The Big Penguin guarding the town of Penguin, the Big Pink Buffalo in Darwin and the Big Gumboot at Tully are all examples of local icons with surreal appeal. Mark Amdur's 1981 book *It Really Is a Big Country* describes these as 'Imaginarium' – familiar, safe everyday items adrift in the magic naturalism of the Australian landscape and mind.' (Stockwell 2004, pp.viii-xi).

Stockwell notes that Big Things 'celebrate the nation's tendency to the low art of a larrikinism and the associated sardonic, ironic and anti-establishment humour often expressed in public art or a prank...Big things are 'carnival', inverting social rules and promising some weird utopia.' (Stockwell 2004, pp.viii-xi).

An ABC discussion of 'Big Things' in 2015 reasserted that they are a reminder of the Australian larrikin spirit, they are 'Carnavalesque' and 'jokes on the landscape'. Despite their age, and sometimes dilapidated state, Big Things are an unexplainable phenomenon, with many people using them as an excuse for a road trip and others seeking to see how many they can tick off on their travels ('Everything you need to know about Australia's Big Thing – 'The Big Bogan'').

There are numerous websites dedicated to documenting and spruiking 'best of' list of Australia's most 'iconic' big things to see - the Big Penguin appears on each list. There are 12 known 'big' things in Tasmania, the majority located in regional areas of northern Tasmania,

- Big Spud (Kenny Kennebec), Sassafras

- Big Apple, Spreyton
- Big Rock Lobster, Stanley
- Big Coffee Pot, Deloraine
- Big Cherry, Latrobe (removed from location c.2021)
- Big Platypus, Latrobe
- Big Penguin, Penguin
- Big Tasmanian Devil, Trowunna Wildlife Park, Mole Creek
- Big Thumbs Up, Scottsdale
- Big Wickets, Westbury
- Big Slide Rule, University of Tasmania, Hobart
- Big Axe, Longley

There are no other big things on the Tasmanian Heritage Register in 2024.

The Big Pineapple was listed on the Queensland Heritage Register in March 2009 (QHR#602694).

References:

'Analysing the big banana and other 'big' things', *Blueprint for living*. Radio National ABC, 26 September 2015. Radio. <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/blueprintforliving/big-tourist-attractions/6777422> viewed 22 July 2024.

Burns, TE & JR Skemp, 'Ronald Campbell Gunn (1808-1881)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/gunn-ronald-campbell-2134> viewed 17 July 2024.

'Everything you need to know about Australia's Big Things – 'The Big Bogan'', <https://bigthingsofaustralia.com/the-big-bogan-of-nyngan/> viewed 17 July 2024.

Fittock, S 'The dresser behind the penguin: Shirley shares her 25-year adventure', *The Advocate* 12 July 2024 https://www.theadvocate.com.au/story/8691468/shirly-good-celebrates-25-years-of-dressing-penguins-big-penguin/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTAAR2_Njqd-qvEXR8WJ4GtMFQEHZtmyWniWkdJ-yNP_9yw-LEmDmrWtlBr6LQ_aem_CfxsQ_6FSHkK1yKdh--ULw viewed 17 July 2024.

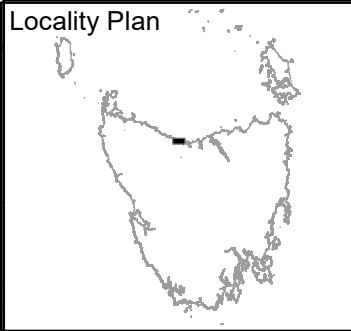
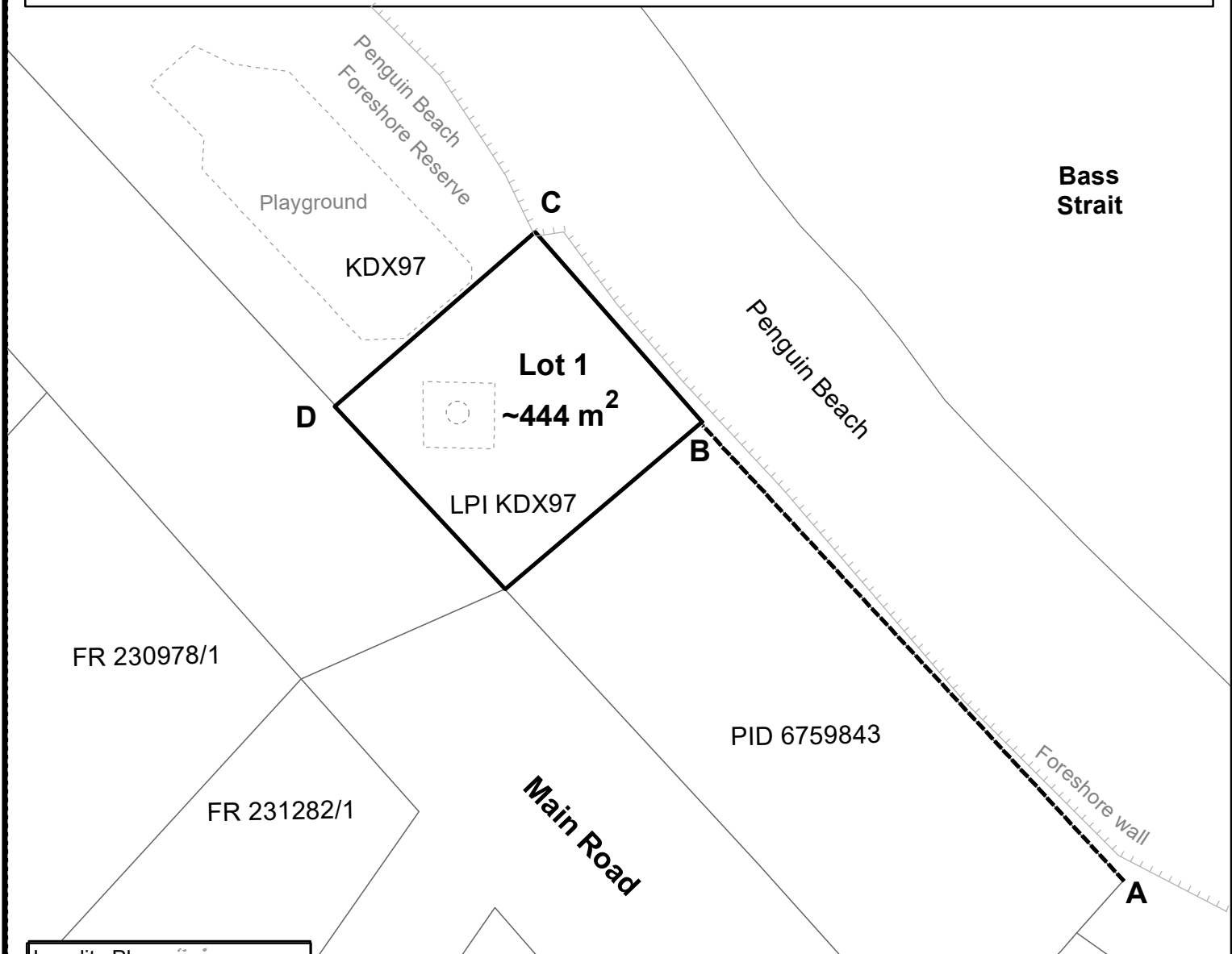
Rimon, W. 'Goliath Cement' in A Alexander (ed) (2005) *Companion to Tasmanian History*, University of Tasmania, Hobart. p.164.

Simco, H 'Penguin', in A Alexander (ed) (2005) *Companion to Tasmanian History*, University of Tasmania, Hobart. p.269.

Stockwell 'Big Things: Larrikinism, Low Art and The Land' in Clark, D 2004, *Big Things. Australia's amazing roadside attractions*, Penguin, Australia pp.viii-xi.

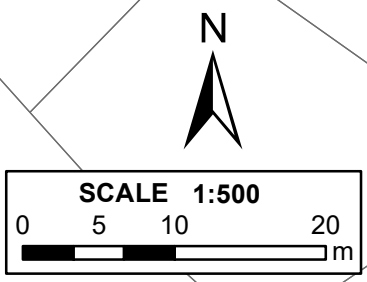
Note

1. For the purpose of s15(4)(b) of the Historic Cultural Heritage Act 1995, Lot 1 represents the registered boundary for 'Big Penguin', #12074 on the Tasmanian Heritage Register.
2. Lot 1 is the partial parcel of LPI KDX97 the boundary of which is marked by a heavy black line and described below.
3. All boundaries are parcel boundaries unless otherwise described, details of individual land parcel boundaries may be accessed through the Land Information System Tasmania (LIST).



Point & boundary description

- A. Eastern corner node of PID 6759843
- A-B. Eastern boundary of PID 6759843
- B. Northern corner node of PID 6759843
- B-C. Prolongation of A-B
- C-D. Straight line along southern face of playground fence
- C. Intersect of B-C & C-D
- D. Intersect of straight line and parcel boundary



TASMAB: ULVERSTONE - 4244 GRID: MGA94 / ZONE 55 DATUM: AHD CONTOUR INTERVAL: N/A

No.	PRODUCTION / AMENDMENT	AUTHORITY	REFERENCE	DRAWN	APPROVED	DATE
1	Production	THC	12074	AW	B.TOROSSI	10.12.24



Big Penguin
Main Road, Penguin

PREPARED BY
HERITAGE TASMANIA

CENTRAL PLAN REGISTER

p.p. Surveyor General:

Date Registered: 13.12.24

CPR
11547