

Toombon Mine

1870 – 1940

The Toombon Mine was one of the largest mines in West Gippsland, and the largest producer of gold in the Donnelly's Creek/Aberfeldy area with a total of 50,844 oz of gold won from 61,888 tons. It was also the deepest Gippsland mine outside of Walhalla.

Miners first arrived in this area as early as 1864. Various reefs were worked throughout the next decade which brought a gold rush to the region. The Toombon Reef was first discovered by a man named Richard Fleming in 1870. In 1871, he dug a water race with his crew, in preparation for the battery, and in 1872 the mine was officially opened by the Aberfeldy Company. They installed a ten-head water powered battery at the mouth of the tunnel and the mine was worked intermittently until 1880 by approximately 20 miners. In 1880 the Toombon Gold Mining Company was formed. In the next year, the new main shaft was sunk and a variety of machinery was installed including a Langland's Cornish boiler, a 33hp steam engine, a double winding drum and pumping gear. In 1886 the battery was increased to a twenty-head battery which ran via a forty-foot water wheel which also had an auxiliary 35hp steam engine. The main shaft reached a depth of 607 feet and then a winze (minor connection between different levels in an underground mine) was sunk, chasing the reef which penetrated to a depth of over 1000 feet in total. In 1891, flooding destroyed parts of the mine and other buildings, with appeals and concerts held to raise funds for affected miners and their families. Work at the 1000-foot level was not considered to be profitable and the mine was officially closed in 1903. Investors from London attempted to revive the mine briefly in 1910 and in 1914 miners from Melbourne attempted to rework the mine by sinking a new shaft for a cost of £15,000. They reported that the old main shaft had collapsed for about 100 feet and was extensively flooded. They pegged out a new lease, though there are no records of their success.



Toombon mine, showing shaft, mine managers house and surrounding mine buildings, note large supply of firewood to fuel the boiler c. late 1800



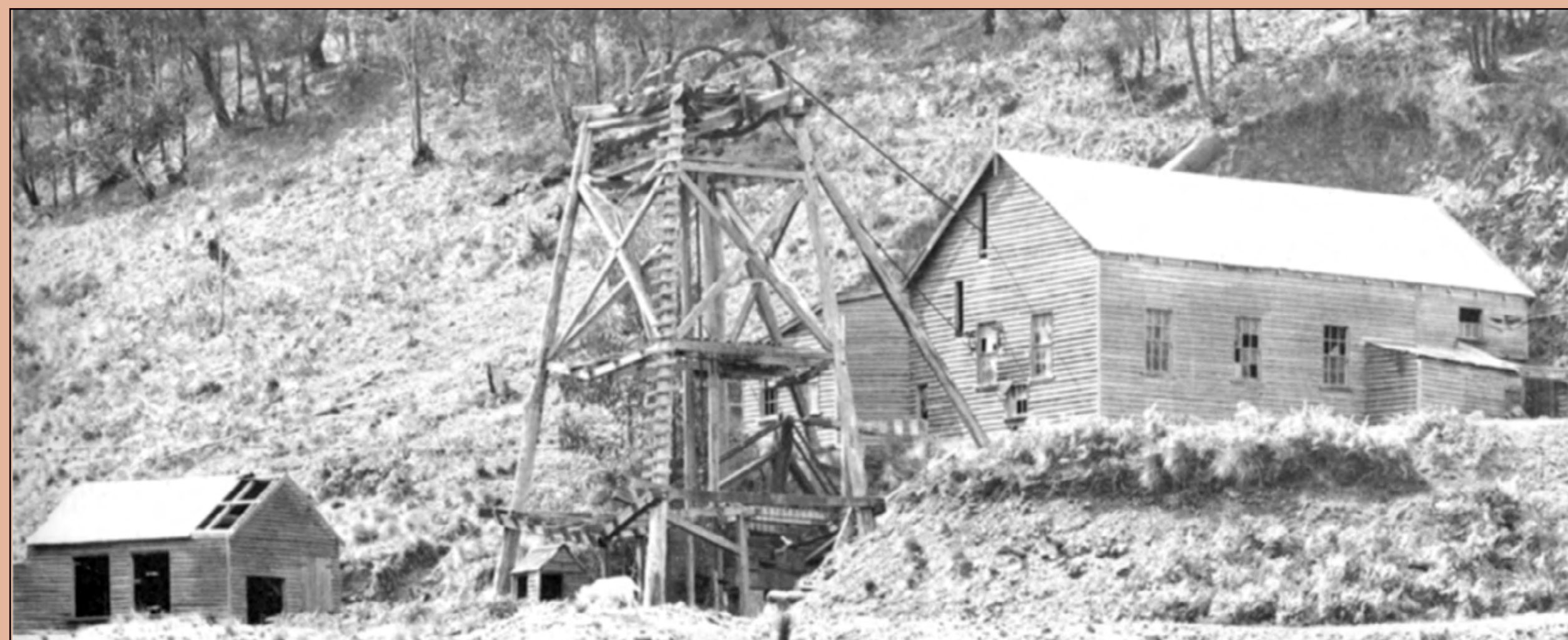
Toombon Mine Workers 1896



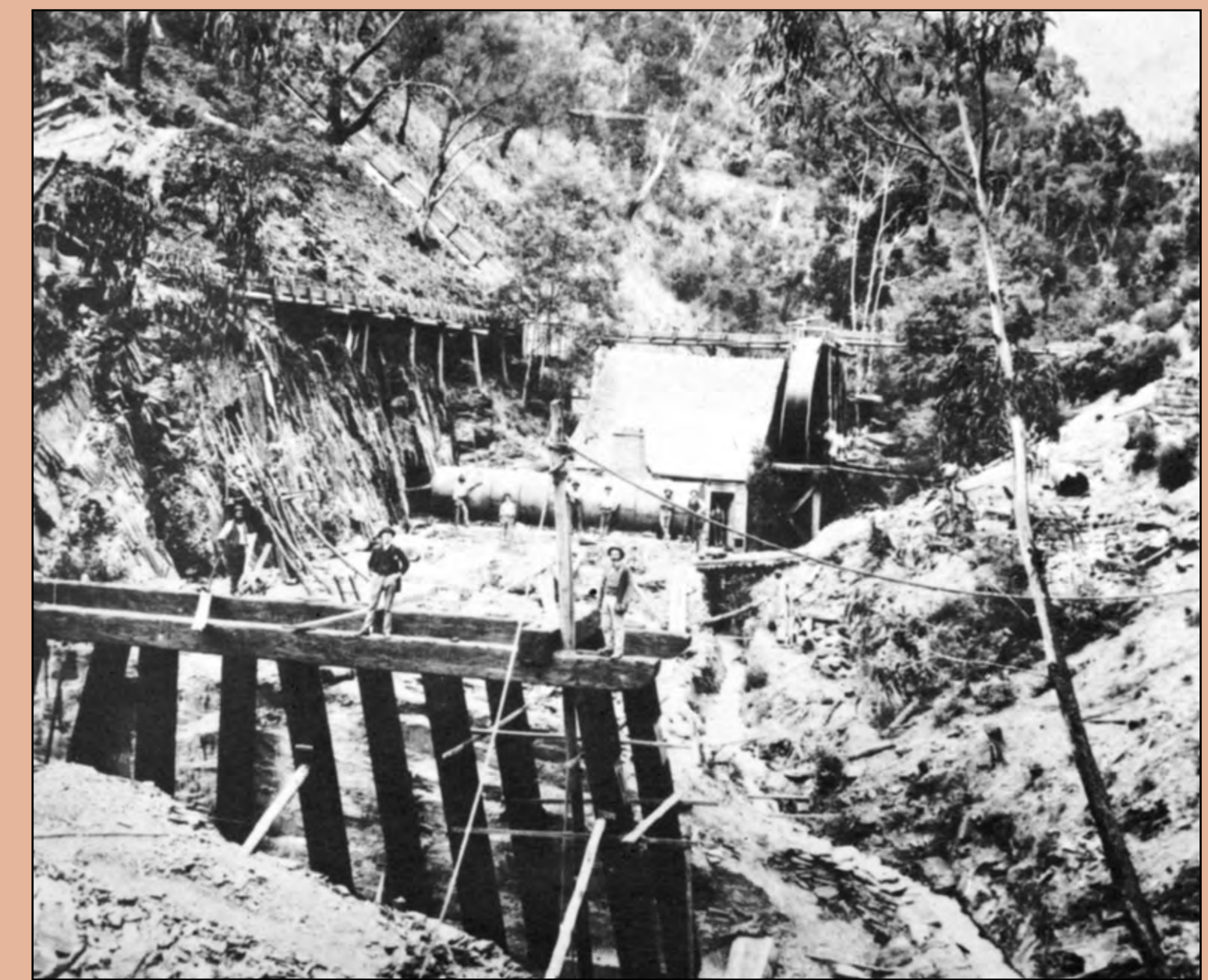
Enticed by the prospects of further riches in the depths of the mine that were uneconomical to retrieve in the 1800's, The Toombon Company was formed in 1934 and commenced work. The work was very costly and difficult and involved cleaning out the winzes, crosscuts and the main shaft. Extensive pumping out of excess water was required to reach the lower workings which had flooded past the No.6 Level, and progress was continually hampered by heavy rain. By February 1940 they had started to rework the mine from the 977 foot level. The stone was not deemed rich enough in the three winzes sunk from the NO. 10 Level and by March of that same year, the company had ceased work for a total cost of £30,000. Only the water tube boiler remained from this Company's efforts, and the disused mine was capped by the Mines Department with railway sleepers to deter any 'adventurers' into the mine.

In 1974, one such 'adventurer', 19 year old Grant Wilson, together with his friend Ken Hargrave (18 years old), ventured into the mine to search for gold. When they didn't return, Senior Sargent Tom Milne of the Erica Police Station was contacted. A local resident found them both down the Toombon Mine shaft after being lowered down by rope, Grant found deceased, and Ken found curled up in the foetal position expecting to die. The dead man was tied to a stretcher where he was hauled up the shaft, with his friend also winched out by rope and taken to hospital.

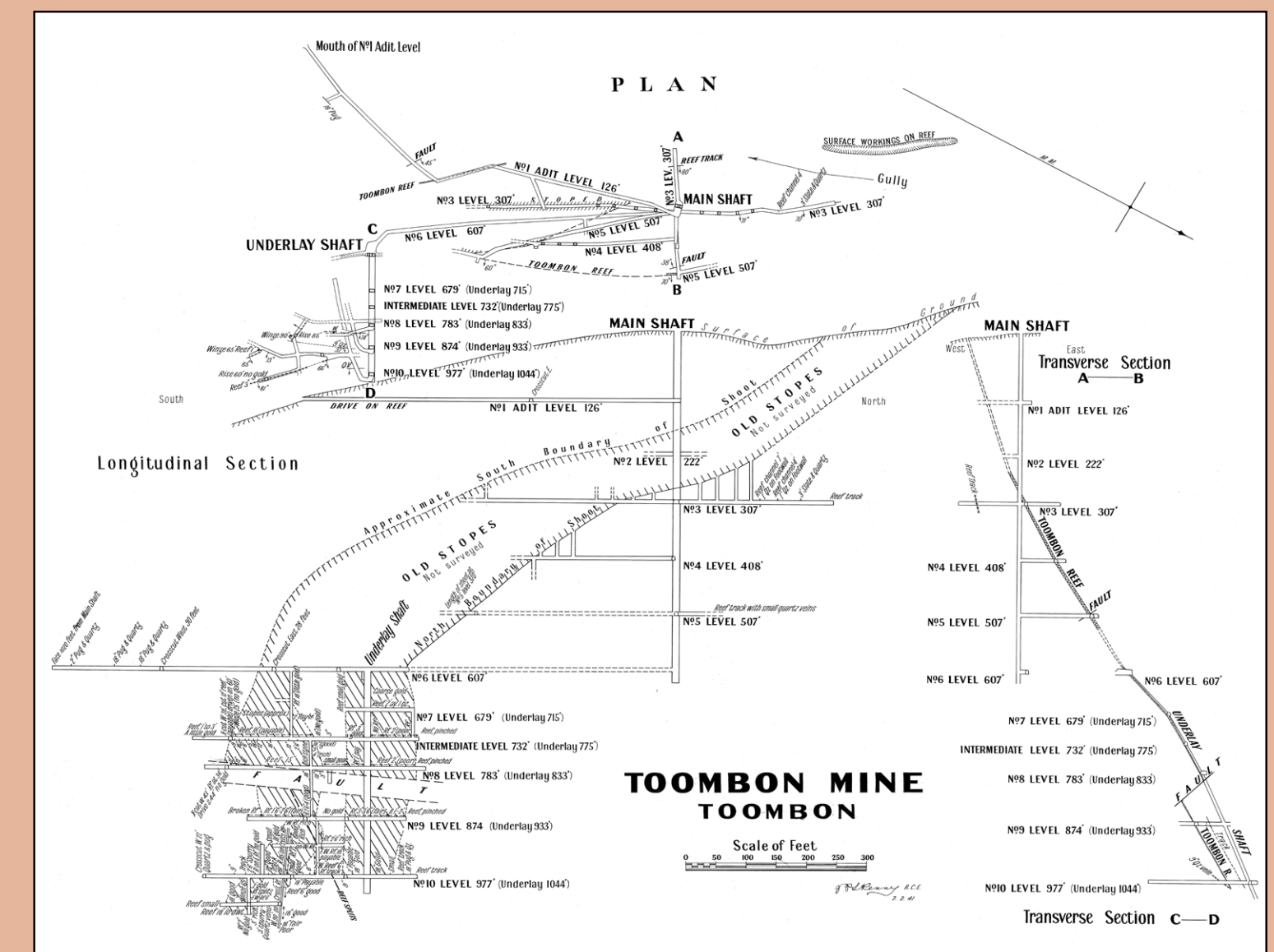
The success of the Toombon mine supported a town with various stores, 1 hotel, a butcher, a bakery, banks, a stable, school, rifle club, cemetery, confectionary shop, Wesleyan Church and Hall (with a piano) and a skating rink. Town musicians played and recited at regular concerts using the school building or one of the town's halls. In 1887, Henry Donaldson's store opened selling groceries, drapery, books, shoes, crockery, tin wax, ironmongery, tanks, doors and windows, bedsteads – all of the best quality. Henry Archie Donaldson, son of Henry Donaldson, died in World War 1, and is remembered on a cenotaph erected at the Aberfeldy Cemetery. Today the shaft has been secured by a heavy duty grate for safety not only to protect animals from falling in, but for the protection and safety of people and further so-called 'adventurers'.



The wooden poppet head standing above the main Toombon shaft. This was used to lift ore, rock, equipment and personnel from deep underground. The pulley wheels can be seen on top of the head frame with the cabling running into to the engine house to a ground mounted hoist motor.



Toombon Battery Site 1880



Transverse Plan of Mine workings

Source and Photos
 - Gold for the Taking, A Pictorial History of the Heyday of the Walhalla-Wood's Point Goldbelt:1860's-1960's published by Paoletti's Maps (Rudi Paoletti)
 - Mine Department of Victoria
 -Jeanette Paoletti
 - G. Code Local Historian
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