



Camel Station Reconnaissance Report - 2019

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide a report on the reconnaissance visit of the Camel Station undertaken in March 2019.

It provides a summary of information collected to date, including a historical summary and sketches/photos, that is in a form to be passed to a future implementation team.

Overview

Camel Station is located in the Shire of Sandstone alongside the Vermin Proof Fence. It is a 2 acre homestead block that was subsequently included in the Narndee lease. The area is also known as the Dromedary Hills. It is located about 12 km east of the Paynes Find-Sandstone Rd, 3-4 km south-west of the Narndee Rd turn off.

GPS coordinates for Camel Station are (Lat/Long format):

Latitude: 29 degrees 02 minutes 31.64 seconds

Longitude: 118 degrees 26 minutes 53.74 seconds

(UTM format, Zone 50: 641011.3 Easting; 6786482.3 Northing)

Narndee and Boodanoo Station are run by Robert and Julie, Narndee Homestead (Ph: 9963 5414). Julie and Rob are keen to rebuild the homestead and fence off the 2 acre block, with possibility of annexing it from the Narndee lease again. They are developing Narndee as a station stay and caravan park.

Narndee and Boodanoo are in the Shire of Mount Magnet. The Shire has a model of Camel Station homestead.

Reconnaissance Trip Report

On Thursday 28 March 2019, Grant Van der Helder, Tim Mitchell, Merv & Elizabeth Bradshaw camped at Warriedar Station, as a stop-over en route to Camel Station. Friday morning Tim and Grant inspected the homestead and shearers quarters to assess repairs required when a work party attends later in the year.

Lunchtime saw us at Camel Station (also known as Camel Camp). The turn-off is 76 km along the Paynes Find-Sandstone Road followed by 12 km to the vermin proof fence. The first inspection and assessment of this Dromedary Hills Depot was made in November 2012 by Jeff & Lyn Hemsley, Merv & Liz Bradshaw and Dave Adams. Dave drew up a detailed reconstruction plan. Since then interested members have called in. A work party on the way to Lake Mason in May 2016 found the cottage to be in the same state of neglect without further obvious deterioration. However, there has now been some unfortunate vandalism. The end wall of the room which was added in 1927 has had the fireplace knocked out and stolen. This has caused that wall to sag and consequently to misplace an adjoining wall. The one room which was intact on previous inspections (perhaps because concrete mortar was used instead of white ant nest) will now need extensive reconstruction

along with the other two rooms.

A sketch summarising the layout of the Camel Station building and surrounding features, is shown in **Figure 1**. A selection of photos of Camel Station is included as **Appendix A**.

Tim, Grant and Merv drove along the vermin fence and inspected the original breakaway site from where the building blocks were cut. This is not available for us to use as it is believed that this has now been classified as an Indigenous sacred site. However, another larger breakaway was discovered and on inspection this site has been found to be suitable to access building blocks. An advantage of this new site is that it is on the cottage side of the fence eliminating the need for permits to travel to and from. Liz had remained at the cottage and found what is believed to be the original well to service the Depot before the tanks were installed.

In discussion with Rob (owner, Narndee Station), he is very supportive of repairing and preserving Camel Camp (or Camel Station). He has offered us a water supply nearby. He said he would like to fence the reserve to help protect it and suggested that it may be desirable to have the reserve re-claimed separate from the Station in case future Station owners may not be amenable to access by travellers. Since our motto is *Access for the Future*, we agree this would be desirable.

Mt Magnet Shire, which has a replica of the cottage at their museum, is very supportive, and has offered help in negotiations with the Heritage Council. This foam replica was used in the telemovie “Three Acts of Murder”. A brief outline of these murders and the history of the Depot will be appearing in a future newsletter. Rob also directed us to a lonely grave site, a former caretaker. Another modern grave site is on Dromedary Hills overlooking the cottage. The story is of Noel Froome, who arrived at the Depot as a 14 year old and worked there and on stations in the area and loved the bush so asked for his ashes to be returned there. His wife said he wasn’t going without her, so they are both there together. Liz has made contact with the family and they are thrilled to know we are interested in restoring the cottage.

Everyone agrees that this historic cottage is well worth preserving and we believe it can be done. It does however require focused effort from a future implementation team to make it happen.

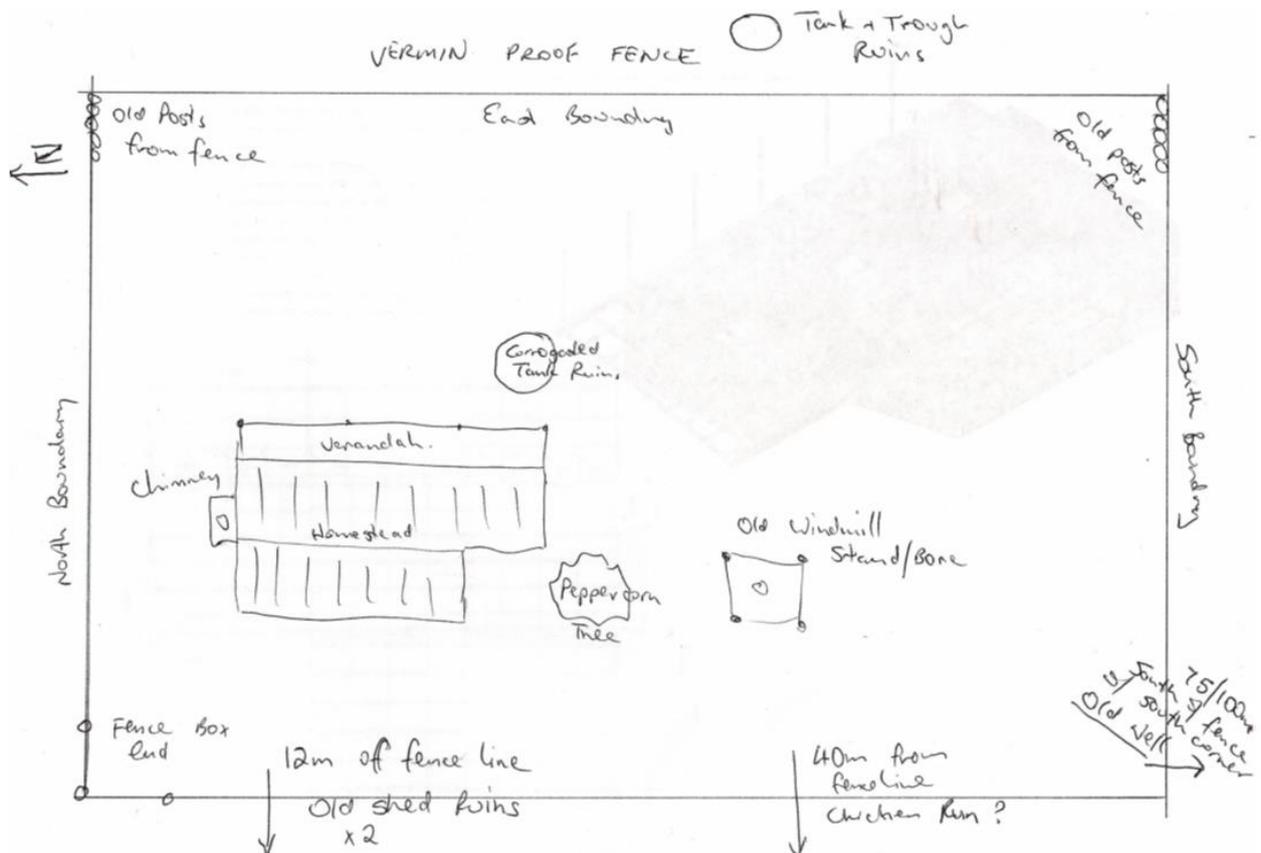


Figure 1 – Sketch of Camel Station Building and Surrounding Features

Engagement with Key Stakeholders

Narndee Station Owner

As summarised above in the reconnaissance report, the Station Owner is supportive of repairing and preserving Camel Station. His preference is to fence off the area and excise it from the station. This requires follow-up on the best / simplest way to do this through change in tenure.

Heritage Council

Camel Station has been added to the Heritage Council Registry – refer InHerit database listing here: <http://inherit.stateheritage.wa.gov.au/Public/Inventory/Details/139ad853-6172-4e05-9f5f-06c8fdafa53b>

Discussions have been held with Megan Ventris (Ph: 6552 4051), and Moss Wilson (Ph: 6552 4056) of the State Heritage Office (www.stateheritage.wa.gov.au).

The advice received from the State Heritage Office is that they need a proposal on works to be completed, which would be reviewed, and also local Shire approval would be needed.

Shire of Mount Magnet

Shire of Mt Magnet, Bill Atyeo (Building Inspector)

Bill is very keen for any rebuilding work to be done to invite tourists, and advised he would be happy to help with Heritage Council submission.

Email: shire@mtmagnet.wa.gov.au

Phone: 0409 981 144

Maureen Maurat – knows a lot about the history of the area, and has the model of Camel Station.

Historical TCWA information and sketches / plan

Jeff Hemsley has lots of information, photos and sketches/plan set for the roof timbers and frame. These sketches/plans are included as **Appendix B** for future reference.

History of Camel Station

In response to the very real threat of an invasion by hundreds of thousands of rabbits which were swarming west in the 1890s, ringbarking shrubs and saltbush as they came, the WA Government was galvanised into action following a Royal Commission in 1901. As a result of the Commission's findings it was decided to build a barrier fence from Starvation Boat Harbour on the south coast to a location near Cape Keraudren in the north, to protect the growing agricultural areas. When completed in 1907 the No 1 Rabbit Proof Fence was the longest unbroken line of fence in the world, stretching 1,139 miles (1,845 km). It was then maintained by 8 boundary riders who led a very lonely life for weeks at a time, repairing the fence where necessary. Their duties also included keeping the track on both sides of the fence clear of scrub re-growth and rake and burn leaves which may have constituted a fire hazard, emptying trap yards of rabbit carcasses, laying baits of strychnine where dingo tracks were found, and recording rainfall from gauges along the way. Depots were located at Burracoppin, Dromedary Hills (Camel Camp), and Jigalong for the purposes of administration, replenishment of supplies, and as a place where the patrolman could pick up stores, take time off, and spell his camels or horses.

By the year 1911 3,000 acres had been fenced at the Dromedary Hills depot. At some stage the shacks which did duty as staff quarters were replaced by a neat and respectable stone and anthill-mortar homestead. The stone, a white medium-soft rock, was quarried from a deposit no great distance from the Fence, the blocks being squared roughly by using a tomahawk. A separate kitchen and dining room of bush timber with thatched roof was built about 50 yards from the homestead. The homestead's iron roof now enabled catchment of rain water in a tank instead of the dubious supply from a well or occasional surface water. In 1927 an extra room was built onto the homestead.

The depot staff at this time consisted of a foreman and one offsider whose main job was to attend to the horse and camel breeding and to break in the young stock as they matured. However, both men were liable to be sent out to repair sections of the fence damaged by fire, flood or other untoward events, or the offsider might find himself transferred to the scrub cutting gang south of Burracoppin (163 miles/264 kms away) for a few weeks.

Life at the Camel Camp was not monotonous. There was always someone calling in from further up the fence, a squatter or prospector perhaps. There was a good track leading from Narndee Station homestead through to the fence at Dromedary Hills used by the owner of Narndee who called in on his way to Youanmi township. Sheepmen and the owner of Black Range Station near Sandstone to the east of the fence also visited.

MURDER MOST FOUL. In 1931 Camel Camp was catapulted into the national news by the murder of 3 itinerant bush workers. Arthur Upfield worked for the Rabbit Department and for a few weeks in mid 1929 he was stationed at Camel Camp. Upfield was the writer of several novels and the creator of Bony the part Aboriginal detective. During this time Upfield met a stockman named Snowy Rowles who was a stockman working for Narndee Station. Rowles occasionally passed through the Camp on his way to service outlying Narndee wells to the east of the Fence. Upfield wanted to formulate a plot for a novel with no corpse or identifiable part of a corpse. He discussed this with the men who were resting at the Camp at the time. Of course the murder could not actually be perfect because there had to be clues for Bony to discover. Upfield later wrote "Sands of Windee". The murder included strychnine sandwiches and burning of the body with kangaroo carcasses, sifting the ashes and dropping any residue down a mine shaft. Snowy Rowles later enacted this plot for real, strychnine being readily available as it was used for poisoning dingoes on pastoral leases as well as along the Fence. He used the strychnine to murder two men and then burned their bodies. He later said that they took too long to die so when he later murdered a third man he decided to shoot him before also burning his body. Unfortunately for Rowles, just as in Upfield's novel, he left clues for an astute policeman to find. He was hanged in 1932. It was said at the time that he was the first person in the state to be hanged on circumstantial evidence alone.

The programme of abandonment of the Rabbit Proof Fence began in 1948. By 1958 rabbit numbers had been kept in check by 1080 poison and Myxomatosis. In the early 1930's emus, forced to move by the near drought conditions to the station country, were prevented from devastating the properties on the west of the fence. Although the fence has been abandoned completely in some sections, in other areas steel posts have been used to replace wooden posts and the fence is fully maintained. The name has been changed to The Vermin Proof Fence and has had success in repelling emus and wild dogs. In the area which included Camel Camp the fence is fully maintained.

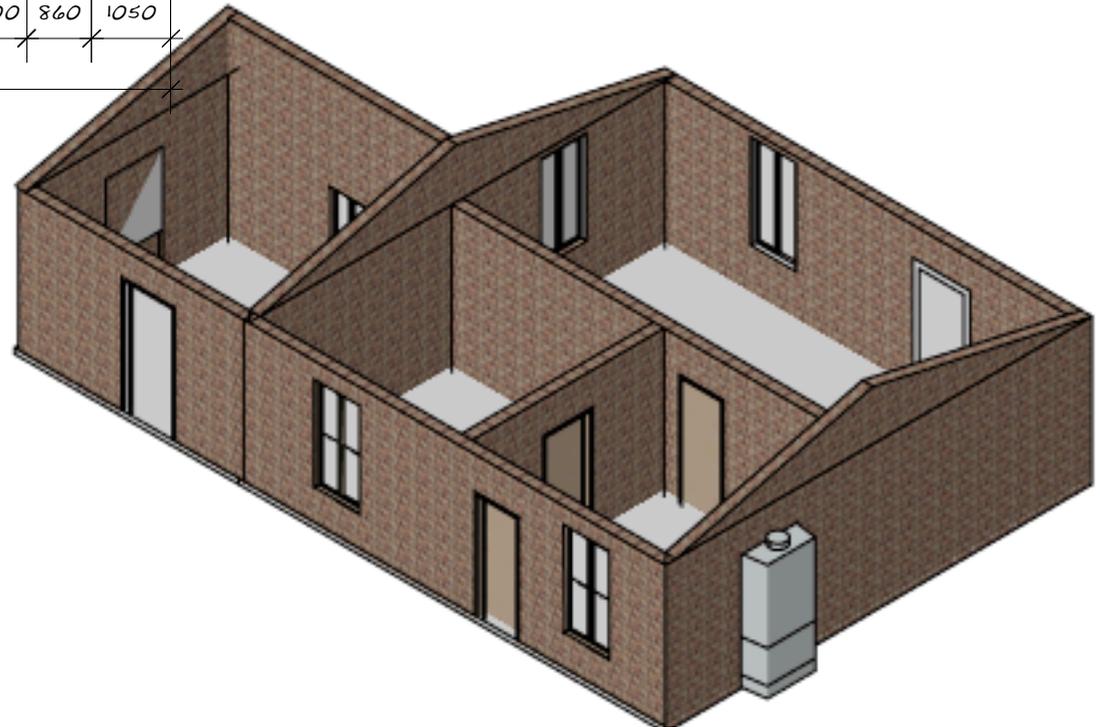
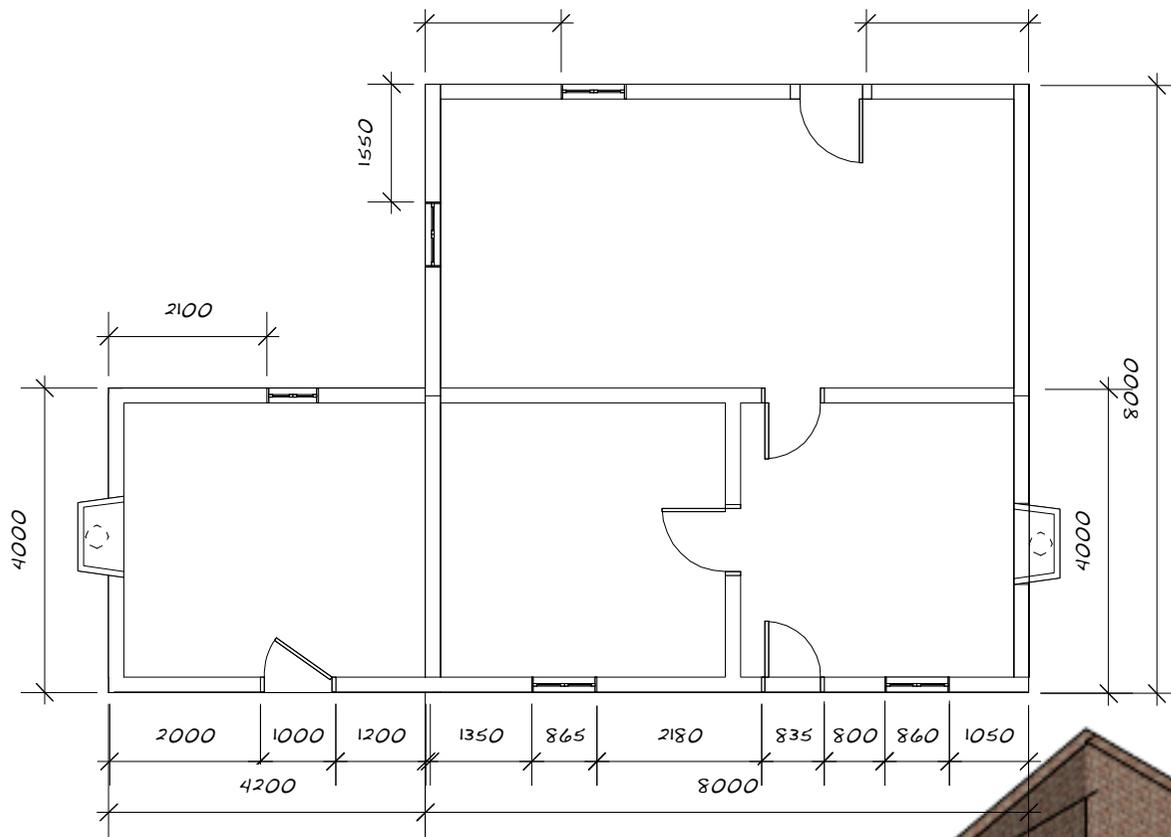
APPENDIX A – SELECTION OF PHOTOS OF CAMEL STATION



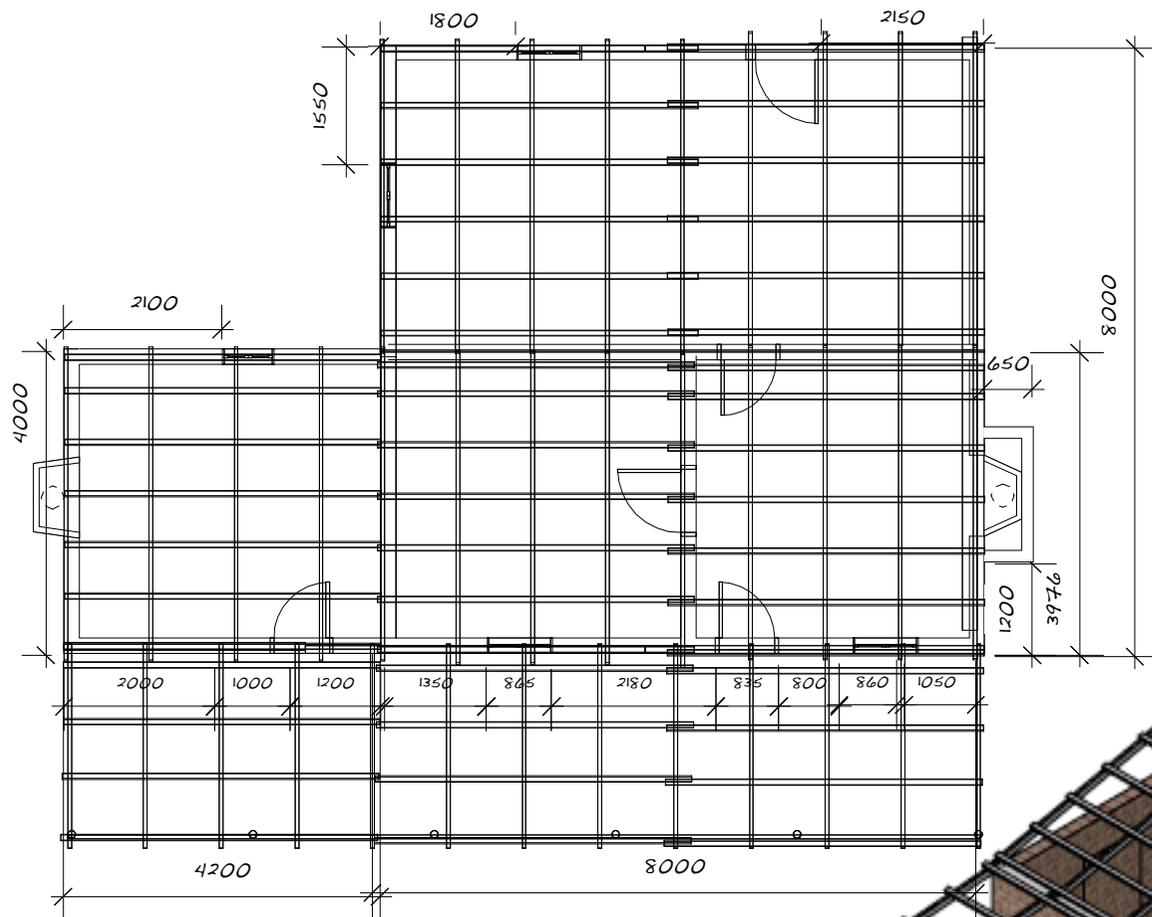




APPENDIX B – PLANS / SKETCHES FOR RECONSTRUCTION OF CAMEL STATION



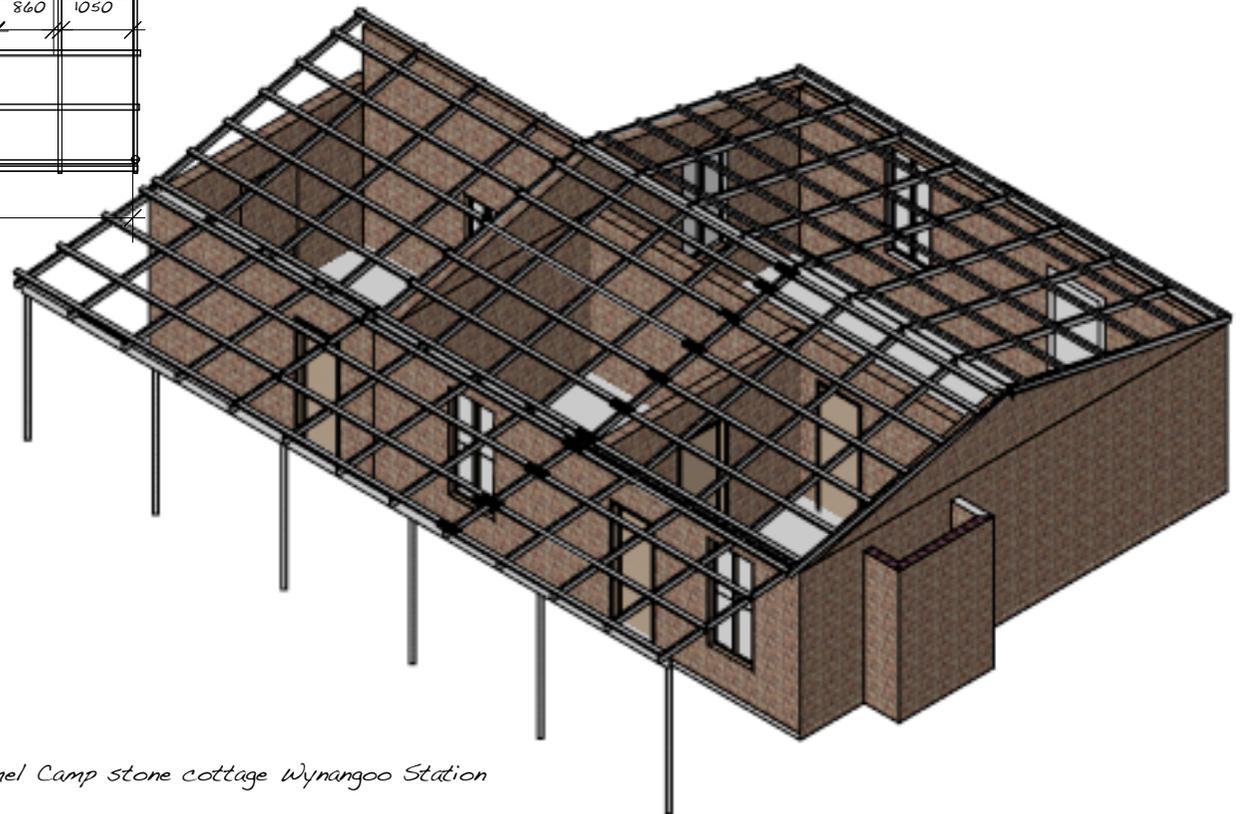
Camel Camp stone cottage Wynangoo Station



Timber Quantities for roof repair.

Suggested rough sawn jarrah

<i>Top Plate 100 x 50</i>	<i>8 x 4.200</i>
<i>Rafters 100 x 50</i>	<i>22 x 4.200</i>
<i>Ridge 175 x 25</i>	<i>3 x 4.500</i>
<i>Collar ties 100 x 50</i>	<i>10 x 4.200</i>
<i>Verandah rafters 100 x 50</i>	<i>13 x 2.700</i>
<i>Verandah beams 150 x 50</i>	<i>3 x 4.500</i>
<i>Verandah posts 100dia</i>	<i>6 x 3.000 (600</i>
<i>below)</i>	
<i>Roof battens 75 x 50</i>	<i>45 x 4.200</i>
<i>Barge capping 175 x 38</i>	<i>5 x 4.800</i>



Camel Camp stone cottage Wynangoo Station