

The Horse Trap Yards

Oil on Canvas

60 x 100 cm

2017

This is a painting of the Horse Trap Yards that were built over Warburton Spring, Oodnadatta Track. As the name implies, the yards were used to trap wild horses in the 1940's so they could be culled. The story goes that they were culled so feed for cattle could be maximised. Warburton Spring also happened to be a key field site for my PhD. The backstory of the site combined with my personal connection lead me to paint this picture. Below is a transcript from "*The Oodnadatta Track Heritage Survey 2001*", *Government of South Australia, Department for Environment and Heritage*.

Description:

The yards are situated on a low rise beside a mound spring. The main yard is an irregular oval in plan. Constructed of large diameter posts with a combination of timber rails and heavy gauge wires between the posts. Access to the yards was through a large gate located adjacent the spring on the western side, where horses were driven in between wing fences extending part-way around the spring. There is an exit chute on the south side, narrowing at its outer end to a small but heavily constructed gate opening sideways like a rodeo chute"

History:

The yards are known locally as the Murdering Yards, because they were built for a particularly brutal episode of feral horse culling about 1943. Beef prices rose during the Second World War, and pastoralists tried to increase stocking rates on the land during a drought. This land was part of Anna Creek at the time, and the Manager sought to reduce the number of brumbies competing for feed and water on the property by trapping them as they drank at Warburton Springs. The horses were killed by releasing them one by one after inflicting a fatal stab wound to the carotid artery in the neck. According to one version of the story this was to save the price of bullets; more likely it was to allow them to disperse before dying, saving the trouble of disposing of the carcasses.

Statement of Heritage Value:

The Horse Trap Yards are of heritage value because they demonstrate the dominance of the pastoral industry, and the threat that feral horses posed to the viability of that industry. The site is also of significance to local Aboriginal community because they acknowledge it as a place where Aboriginal stockmen were unwillingly involved in the destruction of brumbies for the pastoralists.

