

Controller's Notes – State Series 5 2016 – Sailors Falls

Hi everyone,

Welcome to Sailors Diggings, and State Series Event number 5 for 2016!

Several controlled burns through the area over recent years have kept the undergrowth down, and the forest is mostly very open and runnable out of the gullies, with occasional small areas of knee to waist high ferns. In the gullies, however, it's thicker and harder going. Recent winds and rains have resulted in a few fresh tree falls, and it may be slippery in parts, especially in the deeper erosion gullies.

This area is variously called Sailors Falls, Sailors Diggings or Sailors Creek, depending where you look. Sailors Falls are at the Southeast corner of this area, which our courses don't go to today, but the falls are readily accessible from the Daylesford – Ballan Road and have been a local tourist attraction since Daylesford was settled in the late 1840s. Sailors Creek, which flows northwards over the Falls, is the major watercourse that runs South to North along the East side of today's map. Sailor's Diggings relates to the gold rush days, and comprises the general area between Sailors Creek and Bells Reef Road (the gravel road that you drove in on), in which our event is running today.

This area was popular with prospectors back in the 1850's, and if you look around as you do your course, you'll see some good examples of earthworks left over from the mining days. The gold here was mostly fine alluvial gold trapped in dense clay, and to separate the gold from the clay the prospectors needed water, and plenty of it, preferably continuously flowing. The old ditches you'll find following the contours around the hills were the water supplies the miners built to divert water from the main creeks to sluice the clay dug out of their shallow shafts and the smaller creek banks. I suspect the amount of manual effort required to construct these ditches and keep them flowing and holding water was at least equal to the effort required to dig the gold-bearing clay out of the ground, to eke out a living. Mining in this fashion was therefore primarily a wintertime activity, and probably rather miserable given how cold it gets here, so spare a thought for the miners while they unwittingly constructed the excellent suite of features for our orienteering map today!



Those of you doing courses 2, 5 and 6 will visit Control 44, which on our clue sheets today is a “Mound, South Side”, but is also quite a fine example of a gold “puddler”. The miners would have brought barrow-loads of clay to this place, to be “puddled” in the circular trench to release the gold, probably for a fee. Some enterprising people realised there was more to the gold rush than just finding the gold!! It would have looked something like the adjacent sketch in its day, and also would have been a central hub of activity for the prospectors – this would have been a busy spot, and a social meeting place, in the late 1850s!

I also understand that the area of broken ground between Briggs Track and the Finish, which all the courses today will traverse, was quite a busy tent city when Sailors Diggings was being mined. There was probably quite a variety of shops, makeshift hotels, churches and chapels, police, blacksmith forges, “purveyors of quality mining supplies”, and probably even a field cemetery here.

Enjoy the history of this area, and enjoy your courses!

Best wishes, Ian Chennell (Event Controller)



Also, for those following our Juniors over in Europe, MFR's Aston Key ran a blistering European Youth Orienteering Champs Sprint race in Poland last week, winning M16 by 8 seconds over Frenchman Guilhem Elias. Being non-European, Aston wasn't eligible for an official placing or medal, but he's very clearly stamped Australia on the European stage in an exciting way, on the eve of JWOC this week in Switzerland. Live progress reports and results will be on the JWOC website at <http://www.jwoc2016.ch/>, with the Sprint Final race this evening (10 July).