

# VICTORIA'S HERITAGE

## MOUNT FRANKLIN, HEPBURN REGIONAL PARK

by Daniel Catrice, circa 1995.

*Mount Franklin is an extinct volcano, which rises 648 metres above sea level and lies about 10 kilometres north-east of the town of Daylesford. Part of the Hepburn Regional Park since 1977, Mount Franklin is a fine example of a breached scoria cone. The breach through which the road now enters the crater is thought to have been caused by a flow of lava breaking through the crater rim.*



Franklinford Cemetery, Photograph by Rod Beveridge, courtesy of Australian Cemeteries Victoria.

About 400 eruption points have been recorded on Victoria's south-western plains, with the highest concentration clustered in the Daylesford-Smeaton-Creswick region. A few of these volcanic hills were still active within the last 10,000 years. These eruptions would have been witnessed by the *Djadja wurrung* people who called this country the 'smoking grounds'.

Mount Franklin and the surrounding area appears to have been a place of considerable religious significance to Aboriginal people. Both ethnographical and archaeological evidence indicates that frequent large ceremonial gatherings took place in the area. The basalt ridge connecting Mount Franklin and the Larnabarrammul Swamp to the north-west was once a resource rich wetland before European contact and may have been a route of movement between different camp sites. The Larnabarrammul Swamp also appears to have been an important camp site, with various archaeological sites, including scar trees and rock arrangements, indicating a regular pattern of use and occupation.

The clan that occupied the country around Mount Franklin were the Gunangara balug. They knew Mount Franklin as 'Lalgambook'. The first European settlers called it Jim Crow Hill, but later re-named it after Sir John Franklin, lieutenant-governor of Tasmania

between 1837 and 1843. Franklin climbed the mount in 1843.

The district's first European settler, Captain John Hepburn had also used Mount Franklin as a vantage point. In 1838 he brought his family and flocks through the Gunangara balug's traditional land, settling at Smeaton Hill to the west.

Reports of fertile land waiting to be claimed prompted a minor rush by squatters. The country around Mount Franklin was described in 1855 as 'thickly timbered with box and stringbark. The crater comprised '50 acres of good land, park-like and nearly flat, being timbered with large white gum and other trees'.

European settlement had a devastating effect on Aboriginal clans. Squatters took up large tracts of land, depriving clans of the natural products of their country and excluding them from their native soil. George Augustus Robinson, Chief Protector of Aborigines, noted in 1846 that the clan, although once numerous, had been reduced to just three individuals. The clan suffered greatly in a massacre at McNeill's station on Bet Bet Creek, west of Maryborough. By 1863, only one of the original clan group had survived.

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In 1840, in response to concerns about the decimation of Aboriginal clans, the government resumed Mount Franklin and the surrounding area for the Loddon Aboriginal Protectorate Station. Edward Stone Parker, who was appointed Protector of Aborigines for the Loddon district, resided at Franklinford, about three kilometres west of the mount. The original station consisted of 41,073 acres of land, and was intended for Aboriginal people displaced by expanding settlement. Parker attracted nearly 130 'Jaara' people (presumably a variant of *Djadja*) who were urged to take up residence and learn farming. The station flourished until 1843, after which the government failed to provide adequate funds.

Gold was discovered in the area in the 1850s, placing additional pressures on the protectorate station. When the alluvial gold was worked out, miners turned their attention to the gold-bearing leads deep beneath the earth's surface. These buried rivers of gold, created by lava flows during the Newer Volcanic period, were mined intensively during the nineteenth century. One such company operated a mining lease at the eastern foot of Mount Franklin.

With the discovery of gold the protectorate station was relocated to a 640 acre reserve several kilometres west of Mount Franklin. Little by little, parts of the station were settled by whites, and by 1858 only 113 acres remained. By this time the station was no longer viable, and in 1864 it closed and the remaining Aboriginal people were removed to Coranderrk Station at Healesville.

Today all that survives of the Loddon Protectorate Station is the cemetery at Franklinford where Edward Parker, his relatives and the Aboriginal people who lived at the station are buried. There is a cairn and plaque, with several markers showing the location of the homestead and school. The crater of Mount Franklin was temporarily set aside as a recreation reserve (in 1866), and the remainder reserved as State forest.

Owing to the high demand for land in the district, two areas of the reserve were excised and sold for agricultural settlement. This galvanised popular support for the permanent reservation of Mount Franklin.



Franklinford Cemetery, Photograph by Rod Beveridge, courtesy of Australian Cemeteries Victoria.

Growing public appreciation of nature and 'wilderness' lent greater urgency to the campaign for protection. Whereas outdoor recreation in the 1850s and 1860s was often contained within highly designed and exotic landscapes such as botanic gardens and public parks, the scenic qualities of natural bushland were more and more popular with the pleasure-seekers of the 1870s and 80s. Sites that provided an elevated view of the surrounding countryside also fitted in with the nineteenth-century taste for the picturesque.

A meeting held in 1875 resolved to memorialise the government to reserve all the land at Mount Franklin for public purposes. The permanent reservation of 157 acres was gazetted the following year. Regulations were also gazetted and a committee of management comprising representatives from each of the municipalities from the surrounding district. In 1891 the Shire of Mount Franklin was given sole control of the reserve.

From the 1880s parts of the reserve were being leased for grazing, providing much-needed revenue for the committee of management. By the 1920s rabbit infestation was a major problem. Nevertheless, during this period the crater was still a popular destination for picnickers and pleasure-seekers. Mount Franklin was promoted as a local beauty spot within easy reach of

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Daylesford and Hepburn Springs. A shelter shed and rainwater tank were erected, and in 1955 plans were prepared for the erection of a look-out tower.

Mount Franklin benefited from the promotion of the Daylesford-Hepburn Springs area as a mineral springs resort. The Railways Department, which were responsible for tourist promotion until well into the twentieth century, were keen to increase the opportunities for rail travel to the country and seaside. The extension of the railway network at the same time greatly increased mobility, making destinations like Mount Franklin a comfortable day-trip from Melbourne.

In 1944 a devastating wildfire destroyed most of the native vegetation on the mount. As a result, the inner and outer slopes of the crater were planted with exotic species, mainly conifers, to prevent erosion and to provide revenue through commercial harvesting. The Forests Commission of Victoria, who advised on the planting scheme, suggested that the crater should be planted with ornamentals such as silver birch and white poplar, oaks, planes and sycamores. Rhododendrons, spirea and berberis were also recommended for planting.

Not everyone approved of the scheme. As Edgar Morrison observed of Mount Franklin's 'pine-clad heights': *One feels that when the Forest Commission, a generation ago, draped this foreign garb around its shoulders, the old mount .... resented the indignity. Age old gum trees once adorned the volcanic perimeter which almost embraces the huge crater within encircling arms.* Nevertheless, each year thousands of visitors came to Mount Franklin, to picnic in the crater and to enjoy the panoramic views from the summit. Even critics like Morrison had to concede that once the pines and poplars had grown to maturity, the effect was 'truly remarkable'.

The reservation of 145 acres for public recreation was revoked in 1955 and re-reserved as permanent forest. Within the

reserve, an area of eight acres was set aside for recreation, specifically for an entrance gate and road which was placed under the control of the Shire of Daylesford and Glenlyon. The new road made the mount more accessible. The dramatic increase in car ownership in the 1950s, and the lifting of war-time petrol rationing, meant that individual forms of holidaying, such as car-touring and caravanning, became hugely popular. In turn, this initiated greater need for motoring amenities such as improved roads and roadside stops, scenic look-outs, drive-in picnic facilities with fireplaces and picnic shelters, and outdoor furniture and toilets. Many of the 'improvements' carried out by the Mount Franklin committee of management date from this time, when the mount was a just a short drive from Daylesford or Castlemaine.

In 1972 the Shire of Daylesford and Glenlyon was replaced as committee of management by the then Department of Crown Lands and Survey. As a result of Land Conservation Council recommendations in 1977 Mount Franklin was included in the new Hepburn Regional Park and managed by the Forest Commission of Victoria. It is now managed by Parks Victoria. There are panoramic views from the summit and a scenic walk along the rim of the crater. And just as it has been for well over a century, the crater is an ideal spot for a picnic.

## SOURCE

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