

Fairfield Heritage Walk

(See the Alphington and Fairfield Heritage Walk for information about the residential development of Fairfield.)

In 1837 Colonial Government surveyor Robert Hoddle divided the lands surrounding Melbourne into Parishes such as Keelbundoora, to the east of the Darebin Creek, and Jika Jika, to the west. Within these Parishes, Hoddle laid out Crown Sections and Allotments for future sale. Land sales were held in the Jika Jika parish during the Melbourne land boom of the 1840s yielding the site of future Fairfield.

In 1848 the Yarra Bend Lunatic Asylum opened beside the Yarra River at a site selected by Hoddle in today's Fairfield. The name Fairfield had apparently been in use for the area since the 1860s but was mainstream by the 1880s when James & Dobson created their Fairfield Park estates: the locality is commonly thought to have been named after Fairfield in Derbyshire, England. As well as the Asylum, Yarra Bend was the site of a number of the City's institutions including the Merri Creek school (a mission for aboriginal children established in 1848), and the Queen's Memorial Infectious Diseases Hospital.

Accessed by the Johnson Street cable tram, Yarra Bend was also a popular 19th century recreational facility. The area accommodated a number of boat houses and the Deep Rock Swimming Basin, and the associated Deep Rock Swimming Club, which remained a popular spot for competition and recreational swimming well into the 20th century.

After the Asylum was decommissioned in 1925, its landscaped grounds joined Studley Park to become the Yarra Bend National Park in 1926. The park's head gardener was Hugh Linaker, previously the gardener for the Asylum. Improvements were carried out in the 1930s catering for games and picnics, including the Kane suspension bridge (1934) and the Yarra Bend National Park Golf Club House, designed in 1934, by Percy Everett, the Chief Architect of the Public Works Department. The park was bisected by the Eastern Freeway in the 1972.

This walk explores the land at Yarra Bend in Fairfield which has been traditionally reserved and used for public purposes. Explore the sites of:

- the former Yarra Bend Lunatic Asylum;
- the former Fairfield Infectious Disease Hospital;
- the former Fairlea Women's Prison;
- the former Bluestone Quarry;
- the former Aboriginal Protectorate; and
- the Yarra Bend Golf Club.

This walk is approximately 6.5 kilometres in length, and will take approximately two hours to complete.

Start at the intersection of Fairfield Park Drive and Heidelberg Road.

Former Yarra Bend Asylum

The land stretching from Heidelberg Road down to Kane's Bridge was once occupied by the Yarra Bend Lunatic Asylum (the Asylum). The Asylum was opened on 5 July 1848 but the major development of the site occurred in the 1860s after Chief Architect, William Wardell, had supervised plans in 1859-60 of the Asylum infirmary, surrounding ha-ha security wall, entrance gates and gate lodge.

The Yarra River and Merri Creek almost surrounded the site, providing excellent security. The Asylum could accommodate up to 1100 patients and was one of the largest institutions of its kind in the world at that time.

The Asylum was largely self-sufficient, the patients and staff growing most of their own food and making their own clothing and boots. The complex also contained carpentry and blacksmith facilities and it had its own cemetery close to the Yarra River.

With the development of the Kew Lunatic Asylum across the river, admission to the Yarra Bend Asylum declined and the complex was eventually closed in 1925. Most of its patients were moved to a newer facility, Mont Park in Bundoora (since closed). In 1926 many of the buildings were demolished by Whelan the Wrecker, leaving the ha-ha wall, gateway and infirmary which stood until the 1980s. The closure of the Asylum saw some of the land released for a variety of other public uses while the main Asylum buildings became the Venereal Diseases Clinic and later Fairlea Women's Prison.

Follow Fairfield Park Drive towards the Yarra River to the Boat House

Fairfield Boat House



John L St Clair, a Fitzroy piano tuner, approached the Victorian government in 1908 to allow him to start a refreshment room and boat shed- the permission of the superintendent at the nearby Yarra Bend Lunatic Asylum informed the Department of Crown Lands that the barren area of ground was no use to his patients who used the area for recreation. A landing stage, detached kiosk and boat house followed near the water line. This is thought to have been built without permission between 1909 and 1912. The Fairfield boat house is now more symbolic of a romantic river side Edwardian-era life style than actually representative of it. Much of what is seen today was created from second hand materials, in 1984-5, arranged about a basic Edwardian-era building form rebuilt and repositioned after the devastation of the 1934 floods. This includes extensive landscape work, bluestone pitcher steps, walls, added timber pavilions, fences, sheds and boat landings. The Edwardian-era can be seen in the simple gabled roof of the northern section of the building.

When you visit you may wish to hire a boat and paddle along the Yarra, admire the gardens, or have something to eat at the tearooms

It is recommended that you compare this boathouse with the Studley Park Boathouse which is across the Yarra River, it can be accessed from Kane's Bridge later in this walk.

Turn right and follow the Yarra River past the pipe bridge then turn right and walk to Yarra Bend Road where you will turn right

Fairfield Park



Excised from the Yarra Bend Lunatic Asylum reserve, Fairfield Park was landscaped after fencing in 1912. The present ornamental garden was planted next to the Heidelberg Road and the terraced rockeries established on the river embankment. Mr Brown of the Heidelberg Shire Parks and Gardens Committee laid out the paths and planting and a gardener was employed to realise the plan in detail. Many trees were brought in from the government nursery at Mount Macedon.

Chief Engineer of the Public Works Department and renowned landscape designer, Carlo Catani designed the rockeries on the hillside facing the river which were complete by 1914: Catani also prepared a landscape plan for the inner Melbourne Yarra banks, including the Alexandra Avenue gardens, as well designing the renowned Catani Gardens, St Kilda.

Fairfield Park was and is a well used park, and was home of the Fairfield Park Swimming Club which started in 1908. The Fairfield Swimming and Lifesaving Clubhouse was constructed in 1932. The bluestone terrace beside the river bank was used as a grandstand for swimming carnivals including Australian championships and once extended as far as the present amphitheatre. The amphitheatre itself was designed by Edmond & Corrigan Pty. Ltd. in the 1980s: the firm has won numerous Awards (three State Medals) and four National Architectural Design Awards.

Further south, the pipe bridge was built across the Yarra River in 1878 to carry water from the Yan Yean Reservoir to Kew but was rebuilt in 1937 after damage by the 1934 floods.

Walk to the information board located on the right hand side of the road, located opposite the NMIT site

Yarra Bend Park



Yarra Bend was first reserved for recreation in 1877, and after the Asylum closed in 1925, joined with Studley Park Kew to become the Yarra Bend National Park in 1929. In the 1930s the picnic and sporting grounds, toilet facilities and the Yarra Bend Public Golf Course were constructed.

Yarra Bend remains as the largest area of native bushland left in inner Melbourne, although much of it is regenerated. Scattered through the Park are a variety of mature European trees, such as Moreton Bay figs, which were associated with the former Asylum use. The former Asylum carriage drive can be followed, from Heidelberg Road along an avenue of cottonwoods to the former infirmary site (later Fairlea Women's prison)

Yarra Bend Park is significant as a cultural landscape, featuring a combination of rare fauna species, geological sites, natural vegetation and a variety of significant cultural elements. The Park clearly demonstrates the relationship between the natural environment of the area and the sequential history of its use for a wide range of activities and purposes since the 1840s...

Many notable artists who were drawn to the scenic qualities of Yarra Bend in the nineteenth century, including Eugene von Guerard, S T Gill, Nicholas Chevalier, Tom Roberts and Frederick McCubbin, who depicted the Yarra River and environs in the vicinity of Yarra Bend and Studley Park (National Estate Register 1996).

Former Fairfield Infectious Diseases Hospital



Queen's Memorial Infectious Diseases Hospital was officially opened in 1904 (after completion of the wards unfurnished in 1901) as the first and only purpose-designed and built infectious diseases hospital in Australia, funded by money raised to commemorate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee of 1897. The hospital had 22 acres of grounds, and wards for scarlet fever and diphtheria. It was a 'locked' hospital and had two separate entrances, for infectious and non-infectious traffic. The

committee of management was made up of representatives of adjoining municipalities such as Melbourne, Fitzroy, Richmond and St Kilda.

Key buildings within the complex from its various development stages include the two 1901 ward blocks with their picturesque roof turrets (Clegg Kell & Miller) and narrow plan forms to maximise cross-ventilation, the multi-level nurses homes overlooking the Yarra on the east side (A&K Henderson 1917, 1924, 1932), the administration block (A&K Henderson, 1917) and the circular plan of the ambulance garage 1940 and the zig-zag form of the FG Scholes block of 1947, both designed under Percy Everett, Chief Architect of the Public Works Department. Some of the ornamental planting developed under Guilfoyle and Linacre includes fine mature specimens of *Cedrus deodara*, *Eucalyptus cladocalyx* and rare trees such as *Ficus palmata*. More typical planting included cypress hedges and palms.

In the 1930s, at its peak, the hospital had 720 beds, spread across 56 wards. By the early 1990s the number of beds had dropped to 100. In 1948 the name of the hospital was changed to Fairfield Hospital.

Heritage Victoria has identified the site as being '*historically and socially significant as an institution responsive to the needs of patients during epidemics of infectious diseases for almost 100 years as it developed from isolation hospital to internationally recognised research and treatment centre. Its innovative responses to the challenge of caring for HIV/AIDS patients and their families from 1983 to 1996 included the establishment of the AIDS garden in 1988*'.

The hospital was closed in 1996, and the northern section of the site is now occupied by NMIT (Northern Melbourne Institute of Technology), and the southern section is occupied by the Victorian Institute of Forensic Psychiatry (Thomas Embling Hospital).

To the east of Thomas Embling Hospital is a Public Park and Memorial Garden which contains the AIDS Garden.

This site is registered on the Victorian Heritage Register.

Continue along Yarra Bend Road. Stop at the Eastern Freeway cutting. The former Fairlea Women's Prison was located to your left, and a bluestone pillar is located to your right

Former Fairlea Women's Prison

The site of the former Fairlea Women's Prison, was formerly occupied by the Yarra Bend Lunatic Asylum. In 1927 the site was occupied by a Venereal Disease Clinic named Fairhaven. The clinic was closed in 1951.

In 1956 the Fairlea Women's Prison was opened as the first women's prison in Victoria. The women were housed in the former Fairhaven buildings (most of which dated back to the former Asylum use) until 1982. These buildings include the Infirmary, the gateway pillars and entry gates (one relocated) and the ha-ha wall (a sunken perimeter fence). These structures were designed by F. Kawerau under the supervision of the Public Works Department Inspector General, William Wardell.

In 1982, as a result of a disastrous fire, the prison was reconstructed to house 106 women, as an increase on the previous 35-60. The new complex was opened in 1986 to the design of Borland & Brown. The old Asylum structures were demolished and the 1860 gate pillar relocated to a site opposite the

original entry to Fairlea. However, some of the bluestone and brick foundation walls of the 1860 Asylum still exist below ground level.

In August 1996 the prison was closed, and the inmates were transferred to a new facility constructed in Deer Park. In its 40 years of operation Fairlea had been the home to approximately 18,000 women.

The basketball courts, Park Office, and the adjacent building are all that remain visible of the former prison site. The mature cottonwood is the only landscape remnant from the Asylum period.

This site is registered on the Victorian Heritage Register.

Former Yarra Bend Asylum Gate Pillar



Apart from the mature trees scattered through the park, this is one of the few tangible reminders of the former use of this area as an Asylum. A square bluestone block structure from 1860, it is approximately five metres high with a tapered plinth. It has a capital over rectangular corbels and a string course to all four faces. A plaque fixed to the column gives a very brief summary of the history of Fairlea.

This pillar once flanked the main gate to the Asylum opposite.

Eastern Freeway

First Recommended by the Metropolitan Transportation Committee's 1969 report, construction of the cutting associated with the Eastern Freeway (route F19) through Yarra Bend began in 1972, after much controversy, with the last section built in 1997 to Springvale Road. The median strip between Hoddle St and Bulleen Road was reserved for a railway to link the Epping Hurstbridge line with Doncaster East. It was one of the State's widest freeways (10 lanes) and as such has been the most significant impact of urbanisation upon the park, covering among other places the Yarra Aboriginal Village Mission, cemetery and school site.

Cross over the Eastern Freeway and continue to the Golf Course clubhouse. You may wish to visit the Victorian Indigenous Nurseries Co-operative which is located to your right, which propagates plants which are indigenous to the local area.

Yarra Bend Public Golf Course and Clubhouse



In 1932 the first nine holes of the Yarra Bend Public Golf Course were laid out on the former Lunatic Asylum grounds, the following nine were opened in 1934. Designed by Percy Everett, Public Works Department Chief Architect, the clubhouse was opened in May 1936, as an excellent example of the Bungalow style in the American country club manner. Notable elements include the rubble stone piers and chimney, the name of the building comprising raised metal lettering, and the tiled roof. Clipped hedging was a feature of the garden.

Continue along Yarra Bend Road and stop at Kane's Bridge.

Kane's Bridge



In 1928 a bridge was constructed in this location to link Kew with the Yarra Bend Public Golf Course. This bridge was named Kane's Bridge after a councillor in Collingwood. The bridge was washed away in the disastrous floods in 1934.

Whole trees were used from the area to build the bridge. It was reconstructed in 1935 by Unemployed Relief Scheme Workers.

You may wish to cross the Yarra River at this point and visit the Studley Park Boathouse.

Returning to the Clubhouse, you may wish to walk along Yarra Bend Road, or take a scenic walk along the walking track along the Yarra River.

North of the clubhouse is a walking track which takes you to the former Aboriginal protectorate site, and the former Deep Rock Swimming Basin, turn left at this track.

Former Yarra River Protectorate Station and Yarra Aboriginal Village Mission Site



The junction of the Merri Creek and the Yarra River and its environs was an important meeting place and living site for Aboriginal people in the Port Phillip and Western Port districts. Important ceremonies and large gatherings were held to settle disputes and allow for social and ceremonial interaction. The locality was frequented by the Wurundjeri-willam, part of the Wurundjeri balug but people came from a wide range of Victorian communities to visit the site. The site was also the focus of Colonial government and church policies adopted at the time toward Aboriginal people. The historical landscape marks one of the most significant post-contact Aboriginal places in the Melbourne metropolitan area.

In recognition of the importance of the place, William Thomas, the Assistant Protector responsible for the Western Port or Melbourne District of the Port Phillip Aboriginal Protectorate, began to visit the junction of Merri Creek and the Yarra River in 1841. In 1842, Thomas built a hut that was to become known as the 'Assistant Protector's Quarters' or 'Merri Creek Protectorate Station' after his Narre Warren encampment was closed in 1843. A Thomas sketch from 1847 shows his quarters on a bluff overlooking and north of the Yarra River, east of the Merri Creek junction (approximately where the cricket oval near Deep Rock Picnic Area is today). From 1842 to 1843 it was also the temporary headquarters of the Native Police Corps, under the command of Captain H. E. P. Dana.

From July 1842 until February 1843, the Western Port Protectorate schoolmaster, Noble Keenan (and later Thomas), conducted school classes from the site, to children of the families who camped there. From 1846 Peter McArthur's hut near the site was used as Yarra Aboriginal Village Mission and school house for religious instruction, the *Port Phillip Gazette* described ... *'The situation of the school is one of the most beautiful about the town ...has the Yarra in front where it curves and winds most beautifully, and the Merri Creek at the back'*.

The Thomas map shows the 'Mission' sited to the north and east of the Merri Creek and Yarra River junction. A schoolroom, dormitory and part of a stable was added to McArthur's hut and, after 1848, the stable was completed, stock sheds built and a bridge built over the Merri Creek (later known as 'Black Boys Bridge'). Just below the school, on a small promontory formed by the junction of the Yarra River and the Merri Creek was an Aboriginal cemetery. Lucy Edgar who helped run the school in the late 1840s wrote:

'Just below our house and the small promontory of land formed by the junction of the Yarra and Merri Creek, were a few mounds, the graves of Aborigines... Only one as enclosed; it was said to be a chief's and had a plain wooden fence around it'

The Protectorate and mission school were closed in 1851. The mission site has since been covered by the Eastern Freeway but the Koori Gardens have been established near that cemetery site at the relocated river junction.

Former Deep Rock Swimming Club



As part of this development of recreation areas close to Melbourne, the Deep Rock Swimming & Lifesaving Club was established in 1906, at the Deep Rock Swimming Basin on the Yarra River. This, like the other swimming places along the river at Fairfield and Alphington Parks, was a popular spot for competitions and recreational swimming in the years up to World War Two. The cliffs opposite Deep Rock were the site of a world record 62.7 metre high dive by the South Sea Islander Alec Wickham in 1918, which was sponsored by the notorious John Wren.

The local press reported Wickham's dive as carried out in front of nearly 50,000 people as part of the Deep Rock club's aquatic carnival: proceeds were to aid the Soldiers Amelioration Fund. Wickham jumped from a high platform built on the west side of the river (cliffs) - the height was described as between 100 and 150 feet. Wren gave him £100 for the feat as a Victorian record. The final of the Canoe Singles Championship of Victoria was held there in 1921.

Foremost among the swimmers of the day was Miss Lilly Beaurepaire, a famous swimming name of later years. Images from the 1920s show extensive landscaping at the site, with a retaining wall around the swimming basin, earth terraces and a pavilion.

The cliffs also served for machine gun target practice during World War Two army exercise. The Deep Rock Swimming Club disbanded in 1957 but worse was to come.

'The construction of the Eastern Freeway in 1972 altered the course of the Yarra River, destroying the Deep Rock Basin. By far the most significant impact of urbanisation on the park, the Freeway's construction had a profound and irreversibly destructive effect on the natural areas of the park, in addition to significantly reducing the size of the park.' (Parks Victoria)

The eroded stone memorial overlooks the grassy Yarra River flood plain of Deep Rock to the west, as accessible via Deep Rock Road, off Yarra Bend Road. The rocky escarpment on the other side of the river is made of uplifted Silurian mudstone/sandstone sediments. This contrasts with the more recent and exposed basalt flows visible in the former City of Melbourne quarry across the Merri Creek.

Follow the trail under the Eastern Freeway to Westfield Reserve.

Former Fitzroy City Council Bluestone Quarry and Westfield Reserve



This bluestone quarry site is now part of the Yarra Bend Park but was still the Fitzroy City Council Quarry early last century. The Merri Creek banks at Clifton Hill served for both stone extraction and the deposit of night soil during the 19th century. Homes of quarrymen still survive in Clifton Avenue, Clifton Hill.

From the 1850s Melbourne City Council operated a basalt quarry on the Corporation Quarry Reserve in Clifton Hill, between Yambula Street and the Merri Creek, for about hundred years. Even by the 1930s Melbourne and Collingwood City Councils had stone quarries and plants at the east end of Ramsden Street (now Quarries Park reserve). In 1946 the Corporation Quarry Reserve was taken over by Collingwood Council, as the surrounding former La Trobe Ward and Smith wards of Melbourne had been in 1857 to East Collingwood (now Clifton Hill).

But in the early 20th century one reclaimed quarry next to the Heidelberg Road became a reserve named after Cr T H Westfield JP who was elected to the Heidelberg Council in 1931 and became its President 1954-5. The landscaping was complete by 1937 with traces seen today in the form of stonework. A remnant quarry face can still be seen along the Merri Creek.

End of walk. To return to the start turn left into Yarra Bend Road and then right into Heidelberg Road.

The information from this walk was sourced from:

- ["City of Northcote Urban Conservation Study"](#), Graeme Butler Architect, 1982
- ["City of Yarra Heritage Review"](#), Allom Lovell and Associates, 1998
- ["City of Yarra Review of Heritage Overlay Areas 2007"](#), Graeme Butler and Associates, 2007
- ["Darebin Historical Encyclopaedia"](#) www.darebinlibraries.vic.gov.au
- [Parks Victoria](#) website
- [Heritage Victoria](#) website

