

## **SIGNIFICANT ABORIGINAL SITES IN MANNINGHAM**

In traditional Aboriginal Australia, the territory of every tribe was centred on a permanent water source, usually a major river catchment. The Birrarung, which is the correct name of the Yarra, was therefore the traditional land of the people who now refer to themselves as Wurrundjeri.

The Yarra River forms the northern boundary of the present-day Manningham municipality, so a great deal of traditional tribal life occurred along and adjacent to the river.

There are some sites in Manningham where artefacts have been found, so have therefore been identified as 'archeologically significant', but there are many more sites known through local oral history.

Starting at the junction of Koonung Creek and the Yarra in Bulleen, this was a traditional gathering place, especially during eel harvest season from mid-February to mid-March each year. This area is now occupied by picturesque football ovals and actually doesn't look that much different now to what it did 200 years ago. Many early settlers and explorers described the landscape as being 'Like an English Gentleman's Estate'.

The present day pristine mowed vista that you see is therefore very similar to the original scene. Annual targeted burning of these valley floor areas produced designed habitat areas for animals and plants. These habitat areas were in reality kangaroo, emu, possum, grass seed and myrnong farms, but were best described as 'Farms without Fences'. There was no such thing as undergrowth or understory in any of these areas and in the broader area kangaroo farms, solitary trees stood every 25 to 50 metres.

Just north of this area near the present-day Veneto Club was the Bolin-Bolin Billabong, a traditional site for duck hunting. There is a circuit around it that has some interpretive signs and is well worth taking the stroll.

Further north again where the Caltex Service Station used to be on the corner of Bridge Street and Manningham Road, there is a 500 years old Red River Gum. You will see some large holes higher on the tree trunk. These were originally outgrowths called 'borls' and each is harvested to make a large wooden bowl called a 'Tarnuk'.

In the Heide Museum of Modern Art car park is another 500 years old River Gum from which a canoe was cut. This tree is now named 'Yingabeal' in recognition of the fact that it is a Songline Marker Tree. Both this and the tree at the Caltex Station appear to have been struck by lightning a couple of hundred years ago, probably at the very same time.

Following the Templestowe Road Songline to Finns Reserve, you can view a 200 metres long rapids area that was in reality a series of fish, eel, yabbie, and freshwater mussel farms. I estimate there are about twenty similar sites along Manningham's stretch of the Yarra. However, only one of these, at Laughing Waters near the end of Alexander Road in Warrandyte, has been formally identified. But none have interpretive signage.

A couple of hundred metres from Finns Reserve near Foote Street, was the location of an Aboriginal camp. Middens were observed along this stretch, and an oven pit was carved into the mudstone. However, when Foote Street was put through over the creek in 1963, the oven was buried.

Where Williamsons Road crosses Ruffey Creek was a burial ground, which was disturbed when the road was constructed in the 1880's. The camp site at Foote Street was abandoned in 1848 because a local settler, John Hughes, was in the habit of taking pot shots at them from the window of his hut up the hill.

This was also the habit of the first settler in the Manningham area, Major Charles Newman, who fired from the narrow windows of his turf-block hut at the junction of Mullum-Mullum Creek and the Yarra. This area at present day Tikalara Park would also benefit from some interpretive signage.

Like Bolin-Bolin, Pound Bend in Warrandyte was also an important gathering place and there are now interpretive signs there so you can take a very rewarding self-guided walk. This is the site where Simon Wonga organised the last great Kulin Nation corroboree in March 1852, which was also the first Warrandyte Festival.

Along the riverfront at Warrandyte Township there was an extensive aquaculture area. Four feet high weir walls were built on the rapids area with sluice gates and races, and the middens observed along the banks were testament to the freshwater mussel and yabby farms there.

It is known that a Birthing Place was somewhere near the Brushy Creek junction in Wonga Park, and this was indicated by a Ring Marker Tree that stood some 400 metres away. The Marker Tree has since fallen and is on private land, so cannot be seen by the public.

While the exact site of the Birthing Place is not known, it would not have been at the flood-prone river junction. It would have instead been on higher ground, a couple of hundred metres from the Yarra. William Barak, the most famous Woiwurrung Elder clearly identified Brushy Creek as his birthplace, so it's a pity we can't identify the exact spot and provide some interpretive signage.