

Our Stony Creek

For thousands of years the Stony Creek has made its serpentine journey from what is today St Albans, through Sunshine and Yarraville to its destination at Stony Creek Backwash by the Yarra River.

From ancient times the land has undergone many changes. As little as 10,000 years ago, ancestors of the Boonwurrung and Woiwurrung people could have walked across a land bridge from the Stony Creek area to Tasmania. Volcanic eruptions eventually transformed the landscape into a vast basalt plain stretching to the South Australian border.

The basalt plain ends at the mouth of Stony Creek, which earned its name from bluestone quarried along its banks.

Today, Stony Creek winds its way, partly underground and fed by stormwater systems, through parkland, industrial and urban estates and out to sea. It is this journey of change that inspires us to love our Stony Creek.



Industry

Around 1853, William Stone arrived from Portland, England, and built his home from stone quarried in his Hyde Street ‘backyard’. He was one of the first to supply basalt to ships as ballast.

By 1861, at least 20% of local male workers were quarrymen. In Cruikshank Park area alone there were eleven quarries. Bluestone from Stony Creek went as far as Paris and London, and supplied Melbourne’s earliest public buildings, such as Pentridge and St Paul’s cathedral.

When manufacturing arrived, the creek was viewed as a drain fit only for tipping and to carry away industry by-products from wool mills, meat preserving works, tanneries and glue factories.



By 1870, water supplies were so polluted that Footscray recorded one of the highest death rates from typhoid in Australia.

Yet, even into the 1950s, children swam in deserted quarry holes filled with rubbish, dead animals and hazardous chemicals like asbestos. Today, industry run-off continues to threaten the health of the creek. Offenders are subject to prosecution and penalty funds are channelled into community and restorative projects.



Aboriginal history

For thousands of years the creek was the estate of two Kulin clans, the Marin Bulluk of the Woiwurrung, inland from Yarraville, and the Yalukit Willam of the Boonwurrung along the coast. The traditional land of the Boonwurrung included Port Phillip Bay which was dry land prior to climate change and rapid sea level rises beginning around 10,000 years ago.

The creek served as a source of food and water, tools and reeds for basketmaking. Midden sites were recorded at the creek’s mouth, where clans feasted on shellfish. Evidence of activities in the area include stone tool sites, silcrete quarries, scar trees and burial places.

Derrimut and Ningerranarro (Benbow) were two heads of the Boonwurrung people at the time of settlement, as was Bungarin of the Marin Balluk clan. They provided leadership to their people, and interacted with early settlers such as John Pascoe Fawcner and John Batman.



Chief Derah Mat (Derrimut) of Port Phillip, 1836 by Benjamin Duterrau – State Library of NSW



Geelong 1854 by Eugene van Guerard – State Library of NSW

Their names appear on landmarks around Stony Creek, including Benbow Street in Spotswood and Derrimut Street in Footscray West. Bungarin’s name appears as one of the ‘chiefs’ on John Batman’s so-called deed of purchase.

Exploration and settlement

In the summer of 1802, the *Cumberland* sailed into Port Phillip Bay to seek a suitable site for a British colony. Botanist James Fleming walked upstream along Stony Creek, noting the waterside gave way to ‘a level plain to the mountains’ and observing stiff black earth bottoming on ‘white clay and many large stones.’

Thirty-three years later John Batman sailed up the Yarra River and landed at Stony Creek. He set out from there to find tribal ‘chiefs’ to negotiate the ‘sale’ of Melbourne.

Batman’s land grab sparked a stampede of settlers that quickly dispossessed the Boonwurrung and Woiwurrung of their lands and saw Melbourne become the headquarters of a vast sheep stocking program. The sheep had a devastating impact on the

murrnong or yam daisy, which had been a major food source cultivated by people for thousands of years.

Until the 1930’s, the Stony Creek area remained somewhat isolated. For many years the creek was known as ‘Murderer’s Creek’ after young Matthew Lucke’s body was found near the Backwash in 1848. In 1856, settlers by the creek were officially numbered at six.



Stony Creek at Hyde Street, Footscray, c.1970 Electricity sub-station, Yarraville – Footscray Historical Society



Native flora and fauna

Significant wildlife and vegetation can be found along the creek.

Native wildlife includes:

- Australian white ibis
- chestnut teal duck
- Pacific black duck
- white-faced heron
- superb fairy wren
- red wattlebird
- sulphur crested cockatoo
- rainbow lorikeet
- night heron
- black cormorant
- eastern froglet
- spotted marsh frog
- pobblebonk (Banjo) frog
- bluetongue lizard
- longneck turtle
- tiger snake
- short finned eel



Native plant species include:

- drooping she-oak
- black wattle
- silver wattle
- yam daisy
- kangaroo grass
- Kangaroo apple
- bullrush or cumbungi
- mangrove
- pigface or noon flower



photo John Chapman

Restoring the creek

Friends of Stony Creek officially formed in 1993 and have been working with Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria, Maribyrnong and Brimbank Councils to regenerate the creek.

Along with public parklands at Matthews Hill Reserve and Cruikshank Park, a path between Cala Street and Paramount Road, West Footscray has been transformed into a small urban bush habitat. A track winds through Hyde Street Reserve among native trees and grasses.

Melbourne Water is the caretaker of almost 9,000 kilometres of rivers and creeks across the metropolitan area and beyond.

Melbourne Water works with councils and community groups to improve waterways and smaller suburban creeks such as Stony Creek.

With the help of volunteers, Stony Creek can continue to grow into an environmental haven for wildlife and for future generations to enjoy.

For information, contact: Steve Wilson, President 9332 3889 stony_au@yahoo.com Melbourne Water 131 722 www.melbournewater.com.au



Follow the Stony Creek trail



Following the Stony Creek Trail, one can discover a surprising array of landscapes – wetlands, frog habitats, industrial estates and historic sites, native grasslands, city vistas, recreational parks, urban backyards and even a bush habitat!

As the waterway meanders out to sea beneath the soaring Westgate Bridge, each landscape tells a different story of life along the creek, and the many contradictions of our time.

Take a moment, or a few, and get to know the many faces of your creek.