

Interpretive Signage

**RUFFEY
LAKE
PARK**

MANNINGHAM
manningham.vic.gov.au
Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country

Connect with country, experience nature and historical sites on the Ruffey Lake Park Heritage Trail

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First Nations

1

Bridge, Turtle, Lake

Take a deep breath. As you look over this section of the long, winding Ruffey Lake, can you feel the freshwater on the breeze?

Can you spot any turtles gliding at the top of the water, or birds perched in the surrounding trees?

Water is a precious life source for people, plants and animals alike. Before colonisation, Wurundjeri people collected river reeds from lakes and waterbodies just like this one to weave essential items, like baskets and dilly bags. Other plants that grew near the water were used for food and medicine. These practices continue today in and around many waterways across Australia.

Waterways were a crucial means of travel for Wurundjeri people, who moved across the water on canoes. Some canoes were crafted from the bark of river red gum trees. In this artwork, the circles within the path represent the waterways of Ruffey Lake Park, signifying the sacredness of water – to all creatures.



Artwork by Simone Thomson, proud Woi-wurrung Wurundjeri and Yorta-Yorta woman.

4

Gathering Place

This area is a special gathering place, where children, families and communities come to eat, rest, play and share stories. This echoes traditional kinship structures within Aboriginal communities, with gathering and storytelling at the heart of many Aboriginal cultures.

In this artwork, you can see a coolamon – a multipurpose dish that is carefully moulded and curved from tree bark. They were, and still are, used for carrying young babies and gathering food. Assorted fruits and other bushfoods fill the coolamon, inviting you to eat and rest in the shelter of this gathering place.

The 'U' shape depicts a person sitting on the ground with their knees crossed, from a bird's eye view. Here, they represent families and communities on their journey tracks, coming to this gathering place to eat and rest. The various animal tracks represent the diverse peoples and personalities who enjoy Ruffey Lake Park.



Artwork by Simone Thomson, proud Woi-wurrung Wurundjeri and Yorta-Yorta woman.

2

Healing Space

Follow the path to the shelter, where you can look over the vast parkland. Ruffey Lake Park is home to a mix of native and introduced plant species. How many different types of trees can you see from up here?

During a Wurundjeri smoking ceremony, a small fire is made out of gum leaves and native foliage to create a stream of thick, fragrant smoke. The smoke is brushed over the visitors coming onto Country, to cleanse them of any negative energy and spirits. Traditionally, this ensured bad luck did not affect the food or water sources found on Country.

In many Aboriginal art practices, a person is represented by a 'U' symbol. From a bird's-eye view, this is the shape a person makes while sitting on the ground with their knees crossed. In this artwork, the 'U' shapes lining the waterways represent the people and communities who use the park as a place of reflection.



Artwork by Simone Thomson, proud Woi-wurrung Wurundjeri and Yorta-Yorta woman.

5

Kookaburra

Country is what connects people, plants and animals. The plants and birds in this artwork symbolise connection to Country, and our collective responsibility to care for Country and its creatures. If you spot a friendly kookaburra, say hello!

Banksias are now very rare in Manningham, but once flourished on the river flats. While you won't see any remnant banksias in Ruffey Lake Park, they serve as a sign of respect in this artwork to the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waterways of the park – the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people of the Kulin Nation.

Woi-wurrung is the traditional language of the Wurundjeri people. In Woi-wurrung language, the word Wurundjeri is made up of two parts. 'Wurun', meaning manna gum tree, and 'djeri', the white grub that lives beneath the bark of the tree – the witchetty grub. The witchetty grub was an important source of food for Wurundjeri people, and continues to be a life source for birds and other creatures today.



Artwork by Simone Thomson, proud Woi-wurrung Wurundjeri and Yorta-Yorta woman.

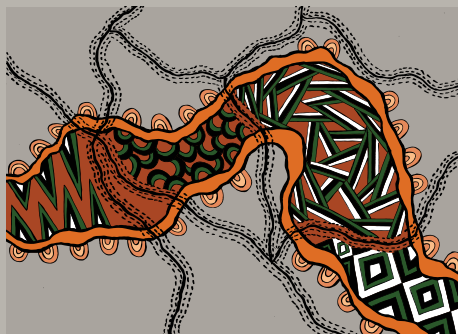
3

Trade Routes

Take in the view of magical Mount Macedon. Among the rolling Macedon Ranges is Wil-im-ee Mooring, also known as Mount William Quarry. Wil-im-ee Mooring is a sacred gathering place, where First Nations people would travel from along the east coast – from New South Wales, South Australia and even the Northern Territory.

Clans would trade highly treasured items, like possum skin cloaks, for one small green stone. Access to this prized green stone was rare, often being only one per clan. The stone would be used to make an axe head. In Woi-wurrung language, Wil-im-ee means 'home of many axes'.

This trading system was also important for building social bonds between clans. First Nations people from all over the country formed strong kinship links, despite how far apart they usually lived. In this artwork, journey tracks and trade routes are depicted across the park map.



Artwork by Simone Thomson, proud Woi-wurrung Wurundjeri and Yorta-Yorta woman.

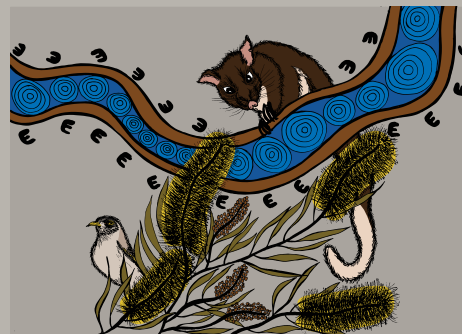
6

Possum

Ruffey Lake Park is home to lots of cheeky possums. Can you see any possums now, scurrying in the treetops? The 'E' shapes in this artwork represent possum tracks. Possum tracks line the waterways, symbolising the journey tracks of the diverse peoples and communities who use the park and lake.

Parklands and waterways have always been used as places of reflection and connection. The spiralling waterways in the artwork symbolise physical health and wellbeing. Wurundjeri people recognise the healing qualities of being present in nature and the restorative power of connecting to Country. How does being on Country feel for you?

Everyone can benefit from the restorative powers of Country, if we care for Country in return. This means caring for the lands, waterways and creatures all around us. When we care for Country, Country cares for us, offering a thriving and abundant landscape of natural resources. What can you do to care for Country today?



Artwork by Simone Thomson, proud Woi-wurrung Wurundjeri and Yorta-Yorta woman.

Waterbirds

Ruffey Lake Park contains some of the most significant waterbodies in Manningham for wetland birds. There are more than 30 species recorded here. All these birds make use of the different aquatic habitats within the park; the wetlands, creeks and Ruffey Lake itself. There are a variety of ducks and grebes, cormorants, herons, moorhens and coots that can be seen in the open water as you look across the lake.

Other birds are more elusive and live in vegetation beside the water, such as rails, reed warblers, little grassbirds and crakes. Many of these birds are not regularly seen. This is due to their secretive nature or feeding time – such as the Nankeen Night Heron that feed between dusk and dawn.

Some of the wetland birds recorded within the park are state and nationally threatened species. These include the Freckled and Blue-billed Ducks and Latham's Snipe.



Australasian Darter



Little Pied Cormorant



Eurasian Coot



Blue-billed Duck



White-faced Heron

Trees

The indigenous, native and exotic trees that form the landscape of Ruffey Lake Park play a crucial role in the local environment. They provide food, such as nectar and seeds, for a variety of animals, including possums, honeyeaters and parrots. They also provide habitat for larger animals, such as birds and mammals. A variety of invertebrates, including spiders and insects, also live under the bark, in cracks or on the leaves. These animals in turn provide food for animals, such as birds, microbats, lizards and possums.

Older trees also provide important homes for native wildlife in the form of hollows. Parrots, cockatoos, kookaburras and possums are all known to breed in hollows. Without them, they would have fewer places to breed in the local area.



Superb Fairywren - male



Galah in nesting hollow

Bonview Wetlands

You're now looking over the Bonview wetlands, which receive their water from the highly urbanised areas of Doncaster. This water contains numerous pollutants such as; litter, silt, runoff from roads and fertilisers from our gardens.

The wetlands help to filter this water. The plants within the wetlands take out the nutrients, while also trapping larger litter such as plastic bottles. The wetland also enables the sediments within the water to settle out before flowing into Ruffey Lake. It then makes its way to the Yarra River via Ruffey Creek.

Without these wetlands, and other similar ones in the Yarra Catchment, the water quality of Melbourne's iconic Yarra River would be lower. It would be more polluted with chemicals, litter and other undesirable objects.

These wetlands also provide habitat for a range of native animals including mammals, reptiles, frogs, local and migratory birds. This includes the Latham's Snipe (a migratory bird from Japan).



Australasian Grebe - with chicks



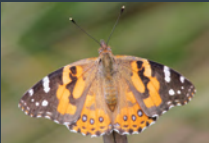
Latham's Snipe

Rewilding Ruffey

Prior to being cleared for orchards, this area was forested. Remnant vegetation can still be seen in the park. Over the years, Manningham Council has made a concerted effort to re-create some of the habitats and vegetation that would have been found here prior to European settlement. This has resulted in large numbers of native plants, indigenous to the local area, being planted across the park.

Much of the grassed areas in the park also contain native grasses and herbs. By altering the mowing regimes, these native plants have a chance to grow, seed and spread. This attracts beneficial native insects such as butterflies, native bees, hoverflies, ladybirds and many more.

Native grasses also don't grow as dense or long as introduced grasses. They remain greener as the soil dries out, which helps reduce fire hazard.



Australian Painted Lady



Common Brush-tailed Possum

Looking back in time

As you look at the trees in this location, you are looking back in time. The vegetation in this area is what remains of the forests and native vegetation that once occurred. This was before the land was cleared for orchards, and more recently, housing. The large Yellow Box Eucalyptus melliodora trees can reach a height of 20 to 30 metres tall when mature. These large trees provide a variety of habitats and resources for native wildlife. Can you see any hollows, nests or flowers in these trees?

There has also been supplementary plantings of shrubs and ground cover plants in this area. This has helped enhance the existing remnant vegetation, providing additional habitat for wildlife.

Patches of remnant vegetation like this along Ruffey Creek are important in the landscape. They provide 'stepping stones' and habitat corridors for wildlife to move through the urban environment.



Remnant vegetation



Long-billed Corellas in nesting hollow

Fauna in the park

Larger bird species are the most frequently seen fauna at Ruffey Lake Park. This includes the native Australian Magpie, Noisy Miner, parrots and cockatoos. However, there are many more native wildlife to keep your eyes and ears open for. The park has a range of small bush birds, such as fantails, fairywrens and scrubwrens, as well as two species of possums. There are also reptiles, including snakes, lizards, turtles, frogs and a vast array of invertebrates.

Meanwhile, revelling in the quiet and solitude of night are the nocturnal animals. Rarely seen in the light of day, some spend their days camouflaged on branches, such as the Tawny Frogmouth. Others are tucked up in hollows and cracks in the trees, such as the Common Brush-tailed Possum and Eastern Ring-tailed Possum and the various species of microbats. The microbats play a particularly important role in the local environment. They consume up to half their body weight in mosquitoes, moths and other flying insects each night.



Noisy Miner



Eastern Long-necked Turtle



Eastern Ring-tailed Possum



Tawny Frogmouth



Southern Brown Tree Frog



White-striped Freetail Bat

13

Logs and fallen timber

You may see areas around Ruffey Lake Park where large branches or trees have fallen, or even smaller branches and twigs on the ground. While these areas may at times appear untidy, logs, branches, twigs and leaf litter are important components of the Ruffey Lake Park environment. The logs become habitat for ground dwelling wildlife. This includes lizards, snakes and frogs, along with a large variety of beetles and other insects. Ants and other insects use the habitat provided by leaf litter, while foraging birds and echidnas feed on these invertebrates.

Invertebrates, along with the help of fungi, slowly break down the logs, branches and leaf litter returning the nutrients back to the soil. This enables other plants to utilise these nutrients for their own growth. This is referred to as nutrient recycling.



Spotted Flower Chafer

16

Thiele Orchard and Friedensruh

Johann Gottlieb Thiele and his wife Phillipine arrived in Victoria from Germany in 1849. Working first as a tailor in Melbourne, Gottlieb moved to the Doncaster district for the fresher air. In 1853, he purchased 20 acres of land along Ruffey Creek. He took up market gardening, growing wheat and vegetables. He then grew berries, grape vines and cherries, before planting fruit trees, which were better suited to the soil. The Thieles became successful orchardists. They were skilled at improving production and incorporated constructed dams, steam pumps and windmills.

The Thieles were the first German Lutherans to settle in Doncaster. Other families soon followed and also took up orcharding, calling their new settlement Waldau, a German word meaning 'a clearing in the forest'. The community grew and thrived for more than 100 years. The Thiele family house, Friedensruh, meaning 'peace and rest' in German, still stands in Waldau Court. The original cottage was built in 1853 by Gottlieb's brother, Gottfried, and extended over the years. Friedensruh is the oldest surviving home in Doncaster and listed on the Victorian Heritage Register.



Friedensruh, c1910

Thiele fruit pickers

Friedensruh, c1960s. The Thiele family orchard at Doncaster, with the homestead, outbuildings, orchard, and a large dam in the foreground.

Outside Friedensruh barn

Post Contact

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Orchards in the area

Aged over 150 years-old, this Black Achan Pear tree still bears fruit. The tree was planted in the 1860s by Johann Gottlieb Thiele. He was an immigrant from Germany, who established one of the first orchards in Doncaster. Black Achan Pears were one of 119 varieties of fruit trees that his descendants grew.

The mid-nineteenth century saw the expansion of orchards in the area. In 1855, Thomas Tully from Northern Ireland bought 20 acres of land. He planted pear, apple and peach trees. Henry William Crouch also became a successful orchardist, purchasing his first lots of land in 1862.

Over the years, these family-owned and worked orchards grew in size and prosperity. By the 1880s Doncaster was an established orcharding district and was at the centre of Victoria's fruit growing industry. When the orchards sold, from 1960 to 1970, the land was used for housing and parkland.



View to the north-east over John Finger's orchard, c1900

Johann Gottlieb Thiele's Black Achan Pear tree with Friedensruh in the background, 1973



17

Old Bullock Track Ford

Gold was discovered at Andersons Creek, later called Warrandyte, as early as 1851. Bullock wagons transported people and goods between Melbourne and the goldfields. This section of Ruffey Creek and its tributary was once the site of a natural ford, where the bullock track crossed the creek. It continued west up to Williamsons Road, then joining Doncaster Road, before continuing onto the Yarra Bridge in Hawthorn.

The rocks that formed the creek ford have washed away over time. However, if you look directly ahead, up the slope towards the Church Road car park, you can see a depression in the land. This was formed by the constant movement of wagon wheels and the hooves of bullocks and horses over the well-worn track.



15

Crouch Orchard

Henry William Crouch and his wife Sarah settled in Doncaster in 1862. They purchased 30 acres of land and planted their first fruit trees in the area that is between Williamsons Road and Church Road. The orchard prospered, and by 1882 their land had expanded to 103 acres.

Settling a family while orcharding was hard work. Henry had to build his family home at night, by the light of a candle held by his young son, because he had no time during the day.

Generations of the Crouch family lived and worked on the land for over 120 years. The Crouch's land was acquired to form Ruffey Lake Park and for housing development, however the family's legacy can be seen in the local street names – Henry Street, Stanley Drive and Crouch Court.



Crouch Orchard in 1972 looking east from this point



Harry Crouch picking Red Delicious apples on the orchard in 1972



Stanley Crouch on his horse-drawn Petty Plough on the 'Dingley Dell' orchard, 1942. Designed locally by Frank and Herbert Petty using the T-Model Ford car chassis, it was made by Daniel Harvey Foundry in Box Hill

18

Woodcutters and Coke Burners

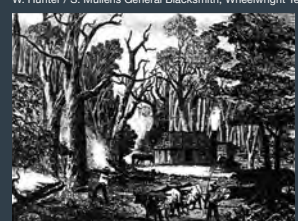
As Melbourne's settler population grew, so too did the need for firewood for cooking and timber for construction. Charcoal, the residue of burnt timber, was also an important product. Charcoal was the only available fuel hot enough to forge iron. Therefore it was invaluable to blacksmiths for making horseshoes. It also had a variety of household uses, from preserving food to maintaining the health of chickens.

In the 1840s and 1850s, travelling woodcutters and charcoal burners camped beside Ruffey Creek. This was to be close to a steady supply of fresh water and fuel timber. They felled trees along the banks and dug charcoal burning pits between Ruffey Creek and Church Street. Large quantities of firewood and timber were transported to Kew, Melbourne and to the firewood market in Fitzroy on drays drawn by horses and bullocks. The cleared land was then used for farming.

Charcoal burning continued until the 1880s when coke became available from gas works.



W. Hunter / S. Mullens General Blacksmith, Wheelwright Templestowe



Ruffey Creek Woodcutters

19

Williamson's Dairy Farm

At a time when orchards were flourishing across the landscape, Robert Williamson started a dairy farm. Robert arrived in Victoria from Scotland in 1854 with his wife Elizabeth. In 1858, when the land was subdivided, Robert purchased 250 acres and named the property 'Springfield'.

The Williamson's farm supplied milk to dairies in Doncaster, Box Hill, Mitcham and East Kew. He also supplied cream to butter factories in East Melbourne and Fitzroy. The cows were hand milked until 1939, when a milking machine was introduced.

The Williamsons also grew crops, such as oats, field peas, millet, maize and hay, which were all used as fodder for the dairy cows and horses. Robert and Elizabeth raised 12 children and the family continued dairying operations until 1969.



Carting hay at Springfield Farm in the 1920s



22

Story of Ruffey Lake Park

Ruffey Lake Park takes its name from Arthur Wiggett Ruffey, who came from Tasmania. He had a sheep run in Bulleen from 1837 to 1839. Ruffey gave his name to the creek which formed the eastern boundary of his sheep run. When the land was surveyed, there was a misspelling of Ruffey, with an 'e' added.

Ruffey Creek was vital to the early settlers, providing fresh water for drinking, washing, bathing and irrigating crops.

Several families occupied the land that today forms Ruffey Lake Park – the Thieles, Williamsons, Crouchs and Fingers. Gottlieb Thiele and Henry William Crouch established orchards, while Robert Williamson ran a dairy farm. For over a century, descendants of these families lived and worked on their land.

The 1950s and 1960s saw a rapid rise in population, with many young families settling in the area. The designated agricultural land was then changed to be zoned residential. With the growth of housing developments, came the need for more green open space. Between 1966 and 1974, the former City of Doncaster and Templestowe Council acquired the land once used for orchards and farming and converted it to parkland.



Ruffey Lake before conversion c1950s



Ruffey Lake Park in 2019



Ruffey Lake Park Masterplan 1993

Today, Ruffey Lake Park comprises 66 hectares containing waterways, wetlands, bushland and open spaces, as well as playgrounds, walking tracks and picnic areas.

20

Old Cart Track

This old cart track between two rows of Monterey Pines dates back to the 1850s. The Thiele family used the track to haul loads of stone from the western quarry to build their house, Friedensruh. They also used the track to cart timber, fruit and vegetables.

Monterey Pines were planted as windbreaks to protect the fruit trees. When the trees got much older they proved to be a problem. Their roots encroached into the orchards, taking water and nutrients from nearby fruit trees. Orchardists removed them and used the timber for fruit boxes, planting pine seedlings in their place.

In 1890, John Finger, a member of the German community of orchardists and one of the district's most successful lemon growers, purchased a right of way over the Thiele's track. This allowed him to transport the fertile soil from the alluvial flats beside Ruffey Creek to his orchard. His house, 'Heimat', still stands in Rieschlecks Reserve, across the road.



Cart track in Ruffey Lake Park



Dray used for carting stone

23

Fingers Bunya Pines

The two trees seen directly ahead are Bunya Pines, *Araucaria bidwillii*. They were planted in 1900 by early German settler, John Finger, on each side of the gate connecting his orchard to the cart track on which are you standing. The tree on the left is shorter due to fire damage.

The Bunya Pine is endemic mainly to south-east Queensland. It grows to 43 metres and can live for 600 years. Known to have existed from 200 million years ago, it was once food for dinosaurs.

Aboriginal People of Queensland valued the tree, calling it Bon-yi Bon-yi.

Every third year, Bunya Pines have a bumper seed crop. First Nations people would travel long distances to gather for seed feasts.

The large, sweet and nutritious seeds from the cones were considered a delicacy. The cones are very large (20 to 35cm in diameter) and weigh up to 10 kilograms. The seeds were eaten raw when young and fresh, or roasted in ashes or hot coals when ripe.



Bunya Pines located in centre of photo



Bunya Pine cone

21

Old Mudstone Quarries

Ruffey Lake Park sits on a bedrock composed of mudstone, siltstones and sandstones from the Silurian Age, some 440 to 420 million years ago. Over time, this bedrock buckled and fractured to form the rolling landscape that you see today. This is known as the Nillumbik Terrain.

Quarries were dug to extract the stone for building purposes. There are two former quarries in Ruffey Lake Park. Mudstone from this quarry was used to build several local houses during the 1850s. This included the foundations of Gottlieb and Phillipine Thiele's home. In the 1860s and 1870s, there were attempts to use the rock for road making, however it proved too soft and the quarry was abandoned.

The quarry in the eastern section of the park was re-opened in 1930 to provide stone for rebuilding the chancel of the Holy Trinity Church of England, on the corner of Doncaster and Church Roads.



Thiele family and friends at the quarry between Church Road and Victoria Street, Doncaster, adjacent to Ruffey Creek.

Further information

Manningham

<https://www.manningham.vic.gov.au/parks/ruffey-lake-park>

Doncaster Templestowe Historical Society

<https://dt-hs.blogspot.com/p/about-us.html>

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