READINGS IN AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

-The History you were never taught

INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

The readings before you have been produced by Jim Poulter over several years. During this time Jim has tutored U3A classes in Australian History and given innumerable talks to schools and community groups, in order that we might better share and take pride in our rich Australian Aboriginal history and heritage. Over the last few years Jim has also written a popular monthly column 'Birrarung Stories' for the Warrandyte Diary Community Newspaper.

A retired Social Worker, Jim's close knowledge of our rich Aboriginal history and heritage does not come from abstract academic study, it comes from lived experience.

Jim Poulter's family first settled on the Yarra Rive at Templestowe in 1840. Close relationships were established with the local Aboriginal community, and these have endured through the generations. Jim has therefore been privy to the oral history both of his own family and Aboriginal families. He has known and worked with many iconic Aboriginal Elders and tribal people who have trusted him with their knowledge. Many of his thirty books on our Australian Aboriginal history and heritage have been in collaboration with or the endorsement of Aboriginal Elders.

The nearly sixty articles in this course have been grouped within eight themes, in order to guide your learning about what has previously been a much neglected aspect of our Australian history.

To aid student reflection about the content and issues raised in each of eight themes, questions will be posed for consideration and as a stimulus for discussion with others.

THEME 1: FARMS WITHOUT FENCES

Over untold millennia, Aboriginal people developed knowledge systems that allowed them to live in sustainable harmony with the land. Despite being regarded by Europeans as *'simple, primitive, pagan and nomadic'* it was a society free of poverty, hunger, pestilence and war, with the highest common standard of living in the world.

This first collection of seven articles examines the nature of Aboriginal environmental management and how Aboriginal 'Permaculture Farming' was largely invisible to European eyes.

THEME ONE QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. In your lifetime, how far has the estimated time of Aboriginal occupation moved backward?
2. In view of the specialization of western science, is 'knowledge splitters' an accurate term?
3. Did early British artists paint what they saw, or was it an idealized image of England?
4. Can you identify any main roads in your area that must have been Songlines?
5. What evidence is recorded in your own municipality of prior Aboriginal occupation?

JUST HOW LONG HAVE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE BEEN HERE?

Before the 1940's it was thought that the arrival of Aboriginal people in Australia only dated back 2000 years. In 1940 this arrival date was dramatically extended when the Keilor skull was unearthed and dated at nearly 15,000 years. However the skull was in the upper sedimentary levels of the Maribyrnong River Gorge and by 1971, radiocarbon dating had pushed the date of the lower sedimentary layers back to 31,000 years.

In every decade since, the date of human occupation of Australia has inexorably marched backward as new scientific techniques have been developed. The problem though, is that scientists get attached to the theories and techniques of their own particular discipline. Certain ideas get entrenched with religious conviction in the scientific community and then in the general public.

For instance the technique of radiocarbon dating originally had a validity level of only 40,000 years, but with technological advancement is now 50.000 years. That is, the radiation decay in a C^{14} molecule is such that every 5,730 years its radioactivity decreases by half. Ultimately you get to a situation when a half of stuff all is still stuff all.

This means that the oldest artefact measured by radiocarbon dating always came out at 40,000 years, regardless of the fact that it might have been 80,000 years or even 180,000 years. So from this imprecise scientific method, a myth developed that Aboriginal people have been in Australia for 40,000 years. This is still the most quoted figure, even by Aboriginal people.

The point is, if you ask the question *'Well, if Aboriginal people arrived here 40,000 or even 50,000 years ago, how did they get here?'* The obvious answer is: *'They arrived by boat during an ice age when the sea levels were lower.'* Well, if that is right then the sea levels were right for migration into Australia around 70,000 years ago.

This is an interesting figure because about 75,000 years ago Mount Toba, a volcano in Sumatra erupted. It was a catastrophic event that almost wiped out life in the Northern Hemisphere. The toxic pollution would have been a great motivator to migrate southward into Australia which was not affected. However an arrival date in Australia of 70,000 to 75,000 years ago conflicts with the popular 'African Eve' theory.

Mitochondrial DNA (MtDNA) research, which traces ancestry through the female line, puts migration out of Africa at about 60,000 years ago. The big problem with such research is that every time a woman has no daughters, her genetic history disappears, because her sons cannot pass on her MtDNA. This means that the age of African Eve is constantly moving forward as female genetic history disappears. The same flaw also applies to male Y chromosome dating.

New research in fact now shows that there was indeed migration into Australia around 75,000 years ago. However there is also mounting evidence that Aboriginal people were already here. Another window for migration at the time of low sea levels occurred about 105,000 years ago, but various new techniques put the antiquity of Aboriginal occupation significantly longer than even this.

In 1985 Australian palaeontologist Gurdip Singh drilled a 72 metre core sample at Lake George in NSW and analysed the pollen and charcoal layers. He found that the charcoal deposits at a certain point became so regular, that it could only be explained by deliberate human activity. In other words it was due to Aboriginal firestick farming. \

Singh estimated this date as 120,000 years ago, and created a storm of controversy amongst conservatively minded academics. However his findings were replicated by core samples in North Queensland which pushed the date back to 140,000 years ago. Since then, thermoluminesce techniques have pushed the date of ochre paintings at Kakadu back to 150,000 years ago.

This is a really interesting coincidence of dates, because at this time there was a 20,000 year window of opportunity for migration into Australia, due to the lower sea levels of an ice age. So it now seems likely that Aboriginal people first migrated here at least 150,000 years ago.

As marsupial animals cannot communicate diseases to humans they found themselves in a disease free environment, and apart from the marsupial lion (the Dooligar), they had no predatory competitors. So within 10,000 years of arrival, Australia was fully colonised and Aboriginal people had begun systematically managing the environment by fire. However you will still see the culturally blind assumption in academic texts that Aboriginals were just using fire to hunt animals, rather than as a sophisticated tool of land management. Terra Nullius still insidiously influences our thinking.

If firestick farming was going on 140,000 years ago ***then it was underpinned by a systematic knowledge base.*** That knowledge base was of course the totem system, within which all knowledge was integrated to serve ecological purposes.

ALL ABORIGINAL KNOWLEDGE SERVED ECOLOGICAL PURPOSES

In Western society totemism is not well understood. It is seen to not conform to the canons of empirical science and so tends to be dismissed as just a set of superstitious beliefs held by 'primitive' people.

At its core however, Australian Aboriginal totems can be seen as symbols of ecological relationship. Whilst my knowledge of totems could easily be printed on the head of a pin, I have come to realise that the Aboriginal totem system was in fact the world's first computer system. Like all computers it is a binary matrix, and through this, all Aboriginal knowledge is related and integrated.

This can be noticed most clearly when looking at the 'Skin Totem' system, which determines social structure and family relationships. All tribes throughout Australia were first divided into two halves called Moieties. The two Moieties were then divided into four quarters called Skin Groups. Each of these four Skin Groups had a binary relationship with each of the other three. These pairings represented the father-child, mother-child, and husband-wife relationships, and were repeated over a three generation cycle.

This division into halves or moieties was fundamental to Aboriginal thought systems and was applied universally to both the living and non-living worlds. This is because everything with a form is seen to possess a life essence or spirit. This split into dualities or complementary opposites, for instance included day and night, thunder and lightning, wind and rain, and suchlike, so that the two moieties reflected and maintained the balance of nature.

This splitting of reality into complementary opposites is quite similar to the Taoist concepts of Yin and Yang, with which people are usually more familiar. In a quite fundamental way Yin and Yang are both totems, yet Taoism is regarded as a fully fledged religion. In Australia the totems most commonly representing these two halves of reality are Black Cockatoo and White Cockatoo. In some areas of southeast Australia, between roughly Melbourne and Sydney, these moiety division totems are Eagle and Crow.

Within this moiety system, everything is balanced between the two halves and every species is therefore protected. For instance brush-tailed possum, red kangaroo, frill-necked lizard and shark might belong to Black Cockatoo. This would be balanced by ring-tailed possum, grey kangaroo, stumpy-tailed lizard and barracuda belonging to White Cockatoo. This division included every single species, even insects.

Nobody was allowed to hunt or kill any animal in their own moiety, because they are your spirit cousins, so under this system, no species could ever be hunted to extinction. If a particular creature was endangered, it would be made a clan or tribe totem, so then nobody could hunt it.

Each individual totem had a matrix of connections both within and across the moiety divisions. A totem can therefore at the same time represent an animal, a person, a family, a clan, a constellation, a weather pattern, a reciprocal relationship, an abstract idea and, most importantly, an ecological relationship.

As well as knowledge being integrated through the totem system to ensure ecological balance, each totem could also have a more metaphoric meaning.\ For instance Eagle represents power, Crow means wisdom, Owl means death, Turtle means age, and Bees mean youth and so on. This means that a metaphoric subtext is often embedded in what might at first appear to be a simple story. For instance the story might be about an Eagle killing a Crow to take his tree. However the Crow then comes back to life so Eagle agrees to share the tree.

In a metaphoric sense, the story says that in the short term power can overcome wisdom, but wisdom can never truly die, so power and wisdom must balance each other. Power must be used with wisdom and with wisdom comes power. The story also conveys the message that as part of a greater ecology, human relationships also have to be in balance.

Totems therefore provide an integrating and synthesising system to all Aboriginal knowledge. This is starkly different to western thinking in particular. Western thinking is compartmentalised into separate sciences or study areas, such as astronomy, meteorology, biology, botany, ecology, psychology, art, history, religion, sociology and so forth.

This compartmentalisation of knowledge in western thinking tends to lead to decontextualisation. Aboriginal people therefore refer to Europeans as 'knowledge splitters' where specialist knowledge is in danger of becoming divorced from practical reality and even common sense.

The totem system therefore provides an ecological context to all knowledge, and Aboriginal people see themselves as 'knowledge bundlers' rather than 'knowledge splitters'.

This totem-based knowledge is however not static. The Dreaming is seen as a reservoir of all knowledge that has not yet been found, so this helped ensure that traditional Aboriginal society continued to adapt, with new knowledge constantly being incorporated into the totemic system. It continues to do so.

WHAT THE EARLY EXPLORERS SAW

Although all Australians now know that our continent was not Terra Nullius, we are still influenced by the assumptions embedded in our written history. Early explorers frequently marvelled at the ordered beauty of the landscape before them, but automatically assumed it was a pristine, natural environment. For instance way back in 1642 Abel Tasman described the vista of Tasmania's south coast near present day Hobart as:

'...pretty generally covered with trees standing so far apart that they allow a passage everywhere...unhindered by dense shrubbery or underwood.'

This spacing between trees and absence of undergrowth is not what we see today. When colonisation began, regular firing of the environment by Aboriginal people was prevented. Forest areas and dense undergrowth therefore inexorably grew back to provided fuel for our regular devastating bushfires. Abel Tasman's observations were later echoed by James Cook in April 1770 who noted:

'The woods are free from under wood of any kind and the trees are at such a distance from one another that the whole country ...might be cultivated without being obliged to cut down a single tree'.

When the First Fleet finally arrived in 1788, Captain Watkin Tench noted that:

'...the face of the country is such as to promote success whenever it shall be cultivated, the trees being at a considerable distance from each other and the intermediate space filled, not with underwood, but a thick rich grass growing in the utmost luxuriancy.'

Many other settlers and explorers similarly commented that: *'In parts it resembles the park of a county seat in England, the trees standing in picturesque groups to ornament the landscape'.*

When the colony in Tasmania was established in 1803, settlers moving into the hinterland often recounted how they emerged from forest areas into lightly treed pastures of great beauty. They gave these places names like 'Eden' 'Paradise' and 'Promised Land', presuming it was a pristine environment put there by God.

Similarly, when John Batman first arrived in Port Phillip in May 1835 he incredulously noted

'...as rich land as I ever saw with scarce a tree upon it, the grass above our ankles...Most of the high hills were covered with grass to the summit, and not a tree...The whole appeared like land laid out in farms for some hundred years back, and every tree transplanted. I was never so astonished in my life'

Notice how there is a pattern in the observations? Grassy hilltops, picturesque copses, and open sparsely treed areas? Because we have been so indoctrinated with the idea of Terra Nullius, these words usually go straight through to the keeper. However Aboriginal oral history can in fact often help provide a deeper understanding.

For instance the grassy hilltops were explained to me by the iconic Gunditjmara Elder Banjo Clarke some forty years ago. He said that these hilltops were in fact grass seed or grain farms. Banjo explained that clans routinely cleared the hilltops of trees then contour ploughed or ringed them with stone terraces. This meant that the rain did not readily run off, thereby helping the growth and continual self-sowing of grain grasses. Kangaroos and emus would not go up to the hilltops because there was no shade or protection there.

When ripe in summer, grain was harvested from the hilltop farms, threshed and stored in kangaroo skin bags for later use. These bags would often weigh as much as 50 kilograms. Explorers like Charles Sturt for instance found storage wells and hollow trees holding bags that totalled literally tons of seed. When the grain was later required, particularly at times of large inter-clan gatherings, the grain seeds were used to grind into flour and make damper.

The more thickly wooded areas, noted by Tasman, Cook, Batman and many others, varied in size. This might be from a hundred metres to a couple of kilometres in width, and these copses were always surrounded by a curtilage of open ground. As possums do not like crossing open ground, these separated copses were protected habitats that were in reality possum farms.

The more open areas where the trees were a regular twenty-five to fifty metres apart were in fact kangaroo and emu farms. The trees provided sufficient shelter for early morning and late afternoon grazing and also provided a strategic stalking distance for Aboriginal hunters. But there were more than just possum farms and kangaroo farms. Like on the hilltops, flatter areas would be cleared of all trees to form grain farms and myrnong farms. Grasses preferred by kangaroos would then be encouraged adjacent to the grain farms, so as to form grazing borders to the kangaroos.

Gullies and creek valleys were also subject to annual firing so as to promote the growth of myrnong, the native yam. Each spring these myrnong farms would be a blaze of yellow with the flowering of the yam daisy. Cultivation and harvesting techniques employed by the women ensured constant regeneration and proliferation of the yams in designated areas.

To ensure that creeks did not run dry during the summer, dams and chains of ponds would be created. When required, yabbies, fish and mussels would be carried in coolamons to stock the ponds. these protected breeding grounds then became a series of yabbie and mussel farms up the creek valley, and were often flanked by myrnong farms. In reality Australia was a series of 'farms without fences' and Aboriginal people 'permaculture farmers'.

A MANAGED ENVIRONMENT

I mentioned last month that Melbourne was planned on a north-south, east-west grid. This survey was completed by Robert Hoddle, who also did an early survey of the Templestowe-Warrandyte area in 1837. A full survey was then conducted by T. R. Nutt in 1839. It is most interesting to note his description of this area as: *'Grassy hills, thickly timbered stringy bark forests and gums'.* Nutt naturally assumed, as did the vast majority of settlers, that he was witnessing and describing a virgin landscape, but he was in fact describing a carefully managed environment.

About forty years ago a famous Aboriginal Elder, Banjo Clarke, explained to me how tribes traditionally removed all trees from the tops of hills, then terraced them with stone contours, so that the water did not readily run off. This promoted grain grasses to grow on the tops of the hills, which was then harvested for milling and making damper. The absence of shade trees meant that the kangaroos and emus did not go there to feed and the harvest from these hilltop grass farms was therefore protected. This was precisely what Nutt was describing by the two words *'grassy hills'.*

Elsewhere the boundaries of heavily wooded copses were maintained by removing bark from the trees on the perimeter and by regular burning off between copses. These heavily wooded areas were in reality possum farms. Possums were a very valuable source of both food and clothing, so their habitats were protected and nurtured. This is what Nutt was referring to by his phrase *'thickly timbered stringy bark forests'.*

Along the valley floors of the Yarra and its tributaries open areas were maintained by annual burning and clearing, so that there were only stately gum trees at regular twenty-five metre intervals. These areas were in reality kangaroo and emu farms. The trees not only provided shade for the animals, but also provided convenient cover when stalking game.

These open valley areas were also myrnong farms. Myrnong is a parsnip-like tuber that with the aid of annual burning-off grew in perfusion along every valley floor. So these kangaroo, emu and myrnong farms were what Nutt was describing with the two simple words: '*and gums'.*

Settlers were quite amazed at what they saw across Australia, often describing it as: *'Like an English gentleman's Estate'.* There was no wilderness and no undergrowth and the soil was so loose, even in the forests, that settlers complained their horses would sink in it up to their fetlocks.

Heaven forbid that I should quote such an inveterate liar as John Batman, but even he was occasionally moved to describe the truth of what he saw. For instance on 30th May 1835 Batman noted in his diary:

'Most of the high hills were covered with grass to the summit and not a tree, although the land was as good as land could be. The whole appeared like land laid out in farms for some hundred years back, and every tree transplanted. I was never so astonished in my whole life.'

See how the descriptions of Batman and Nutt tally so closely? One of the basic problems Australian historians have when they read such documents is that they can only read them with a European mindset. They are conditioned out of being able to see the reality of Aboriginal Australia embedded in the words.

Those settlers that saw the major weir walls and fish trap complexes along the rivers were similarly amazed at the engineering works, but unless they were strikingly obvious, a lot of Aboriginal fish and eel traps remained invisible to them. For instance, along the Warrandyte township waterfront, the early settlers noted the middens. These were piles of freshwater mussel shells and you can therefore be sure that the rapids areas were in fact freshwater mussel farms.

These mussels were a staple in the diet of local Aboriginal people and to make sure that they had plenty on hand when the river was in flood, the mussels were stored in 'refrigerators'. Before the floods were due, hundreds of mussels would be collected in kangaroo skin bags and taken up a nearby wet gully. A hole about a metre deep was then dug and the mussels lined up row upon row and buried. As soon as the damp dirt went on top, the mussels would go into suspended animation and stay fresh for up to two years.

Because we have been so conditioned to thinking of Aboriginal people in pejorative terms like simple, primitive, pagan, nomadic and stone-age, we have been blinded to their technological and land management achievements. The plain fact is that Aboriginal people farmed the environment, but in ways that were invisible to European eyes. In reality, Aboriginal Australians were not 'Hunter-Gatherers', they were 'Permaculture Farmers'.

SONGLINES ARE EVERYWHERE

When British settlement in Australia began in 1788 the colonists were essentially blind to Aboriginal technology. The manicured environment they saw had been carefully shaped by constant burning off and it looked for all the world like an English gentlman's estate. However it was nevertheless thought of as the 'natural' state of affairs. These misapprehensions permeate our history books and continue to influence our thinking right up to the present day. So in this sense we have been brought up to be virtually blind to many aspects of our Aboriginal heritage.

It is exactly the same situation with Aboriginal trade and travel routes, which are known as Songlines. The reason they are called Songlines is because the landmarks, ecological features and creation stories along each route were coded into a song. Aboriginal people had to learn hundreds of these songs that had verses patching into each other, thus enabling them to diverge at any given point onto a different trail and a different song.

These Songlines criss-crossed the whole of Australia with the important travel routes covering many hundreds of kilometres. These major Songlines were even coded celestially, so that the various landmarks were represented in the constellations. For instance once such celestially coded Songline goes from Alice Springs to Byron Bay.

Now just pause and think about this for a minute. Why would people from Alice Springs want to travel to Byron Bay and vice versa? The answer is both simple and stunning.

People from the central desert wanted to go to the far east coast to see the ocean and witness the local people working in cooperation with dolphins to catch fish. Every dolphin was known by name and responded to their name in working as a team to drive shoals of fish to the shore. Aboriginal peoplw would net the fish and then share the fish eveny with the dolphins. On the other side of the ledger people from the far east coast of Australia wanted to travel to the central desert to see the majestic Uluru for themselves.

When settlers first arrived in Melbourne in 1835 they simply got on their horses and in their carts and started spreading out into the hinterland. They of course followed the ridge lines, valley lines and easy contours that seemed to be remarkably free of trees and offered convenient travel routes. These Songlines then became established cart tracks and were progressively gravelled then bitumenised.

So whilst Melbourne itself was established on a surveyed one mile square grid of north-south and east-west roads, all the meandering roads out of Melbourne were originally Aboriginal Songlines. If you take an aerial view in your mind's eye, you can see all the main roads radiating out of Melbourne. Geelong Road, Ballarat Roadm Calder Highway, Sydney Road, Plenty Road, Heidelberg Road, Maroondah Highway, Dandenong Road and Nepean Highway. They were all originally Songlines, but are not recognised as such, and our kids at school are not taught this part of our heritage.

It is in fact quite easy to identify Songlines and being on the Yarra, Warrandyte has an abundance of them. You can for instance be certain that any shallow rapids area on the Yarra was the point at which a Songline crossed the river. The street where the Police Station is situated is one such place where the Songline taking you to Research crossed the river to follow the Research-Warrandyte Road. Barely a couple of hundred metres further up where the bridge stands, is where the Songline to Kangaroo Ground starts. Take a trip along the Kangaroo Ground road and see how it follows the ridge line and gives you 360 degree views. It is of course also a Songline.

Another good example is Tyndals Road. Take your kids along it and enjoy the paoramic vistas to the east and west. Tell them, 'Hey kids, this is an Aboriginal Songline, You know this because you can see for miles.' Originally the Tyndals Road Songline branched off from Doncaster Road to follow Old Warrandyte Road. It then went past the Donvale Christian College , followed the ridge line and dropped down into Pound Bend However it is now bisected by Warrandytre Road where a cutting has been put in.

Much of Warrandyte Road itself was also a Songline. The route followed the ridge line as it does today past Warrandyte High School, but the original Songline then followed Melbourne Hill Road. With a little bit of thought it is relatively easy to identify the original route of these Songlines by seeing where cuttings and diversions have been put in.

So if you have any information that could help to map these local Songlnes and restore knowledge of this part of our heritage, please let me know.

A RIVER RED GUM GUARDS YOUR JOURNEY

Aboriginal people believe that anything with a form or a shape has a spirit of its own. You only have to stand in front of the massive 500 year old River Red Gum at Heide Museum of Modern Art in Bulleen, to know this is true. It was obvious to the earliest settlers in this area from the 1840's that this was a special tree, not just because it was scarred by a canoe having been cut from it, but because local Aboriginal people also often used to congregate there.

The land on which the tree stands was eventually bought by artists John and Sunday Reed in 1934. They opened up their home to like-minded artists such as Sidney Nolan, Albert Tucker and Joy Hester, and this gave birth to the present day Museum of Modern Art 'Heide'. This stately tree stands in Heide's upper car park at 7 Templestowe Road in Bulleen.

Standing at the tree you can see that a couple of hundred years ago, a four metre length of bark was harvested to make a canoe. The precise year this was done can't be determined, the month certainly can. In the ninth lunar month, which occupies all of August, the sap starts to rise in trees. This means they give up their bark more easily, so August is the Aboriginal Bark Harvest Season. This also precedes the October rains and the annual flooding along the Yarra Valley, so this is when new canoes were needed.

Harvesting bark in August also gave the tree the greatest chance of survival, so it could begin healing before the heat of summer. These scars are almost always on the south-east side, which was also a deliberate strategy to ensure the tree's survival. Most of the heat of the day in summer is from the north and west, whilst the desiccating winds are from the south-west and north-west. It is after all just common decency to protect the spirit of the tree, especially when it has just given birth to the spirit of your canoe.

Since the Upper Yarra Dam was built in 1956, the Yarra rarely floods nowadays and Red River Gums suffer from not having their feet wet each spring, but this tree is in obvious good health and houses colonies of birds and bees. This is because the Gardeners at Heide regularly soak its root system and trim any dead wood.

The height of the scar on the south-east side is about four metres. The width of the original cut has been reduced by the bark slowly growing back over the scar. However about half-way up, you can see by the way the tree branches grow laterally, that its growth was interrupted. This was probably caused by a lightning strike about 200 years ago. When this happens, the sap instantly boils and the tree explodes as if hit by a bomb.

This is however no ordinary canoe tree. It is also a 'Songline Marker Tree'. In other words it is a silent sentinel that marks a traditional Aboriginal travel route. These routes are called 'Songlines' because just like the GPS in your car, Aboriginal people composed songs recounting the various natural and man-made landmarks, so they could find their way, even in unfamiliar territory. Just as when you travel overseas to another country you wouldn't think to go without your passport, neither would Aboriginal people, and the song was in fact your passport to safe travel.

The longest known Songline stretches 3,500 kilometres from Uluru to Byron Bay. It was also celestially coded into the constellation movements and would have taken over four months to complete one way. The reason why such trips would be made is simple. People from Byron Bay wanted to see the Sacred Rock and the people from Uluru wanted to see the sea.

Marker Trees come in four types Scarred, Ring, Arched or Spiral. Yingabeal is a good example of a Scarred Marker Tree. A Ring Marker Tree is where two branches are tied or spliced so they fuse and leave a hole like the eye of a needle. An Arched Marker Tree is where two saplings are fused to grow from two trunks into a single trunk. Such trees usually mark a birthing spot. A Spiral Marker Tree is a genetic freak where about one in every 20,000 trees grow with a spiral grain. These 'corkscrew trees' were only allowed to grow on Songlines, and because they were useless for timber, settlers rarely cut them down, so they can often still be seen along our highways.

The Heide River Gum is however no ordinary common-or-garden Scarred Marker Tree. It in fact marks the junction of Songlines going in five different directions. First leads west over the river ford near the Heidelberg Bridge, then splits off to Songlines along Greensborough Road, Bell Street and Heidelberg Road. Second leads south past Bolin-Bolin Billabong and on to meet the Doncaster Road-High Street Songline. Third heads south-east along Manningham Road to Shoppingtown were it joins the Doncaster Road-Mitcham Road Songline. Fourth heads east along the high floodline route of Templestowe Road. Fifth follows the meandering northeast course along the south side of the Yarra from Melbourne to Healesville.

In October 2013 a special ceremony was held at which Wurundjeri Elder Uncle Bill Nicholson named the tree 'Yingabeal'. The name is drawn from the Woiwurrung words 'Yinga' meaning sing and 'Beal' meaning River Red Gum. So together, it means the 'River Red Gum Songline Marker Tree' at Heide.

SIGNIFICANT SITES ON THE MIDDLE YARRA

In traditional tribal life in Australia, every tribe had a permanent water source as the centre of its tribal territory. Their very identity as a people was centred on the river system of their land. Manningham is therefore an extremely lucky municipality. The Yarra River forms our northern boundary and much of traditional tribal life was centred along and adjacent to the river.

In this article I therefore want to take readers on a tour of some of the significant sites in our municipality. And by significant I do not mean just the sites that have been archeologically identified and are therefore legally capital S 'Significant'. I mean the sites that were historically and functionally significant, but have usually not been formally identified.

The tour therefore starts at the junction of Koonung Creek and the Yarra, in the southwest corner of Manningham. This was a traditional gathering place, especially during eel harvest season from mid-February to mid-March each year.

This area at Bulleen is now occupied by picturesque football ovals. It actually doesn't look that much different now to what it did 200 years ago when the landscape was often described by settlers 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 at the Caltex Service Station on the corner of Bridge Street and Manningham Road, there is a 500 year 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 year 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 same time.

Following the Templestowe Road Songline to Finns Reserve, you can view a 200 metre 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, with only the one at Laughing Waters, near the end of Alexander Road in Warrandyte, having been formally identified.

Back at Finns Reserve, this is also where Ruffey Creek meets the Yarra. Further up the creek near Foote Street there was 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. The first settler in the Manningham area, Major Charles Newman, was also in the habit of shooting at Aboriginal 'trespassers' from the narrow windows of his hut at the Mullum-Mullum Creek junction.

Like Bolin-Bolin, Pound Bend 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 foot 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.

Near the Brushy Creek junction in Wonga Park was a Birthing Place. This was indicated by a Ring Marker Tree that has since fallen, so the exact site is not known, but it would have been on higher ground. Brushy Creek was in fact the birthplace of the most famous of Wurundjeri Elders, William Barak.