

MORDIALLOC-BEAUMARIS
CONSERVATION LEAGUE



COAST & CREEK

Mordialloc to Beaumaris
Walks and History



Port Phillip bay is one of Victoria's greatest assets, attracting millions of people to the coastline every year. The narrow foreshore around the bay has decreased in area since it was established in the 19th century but pressures on the foreshore and coastal vegetation are increasing as the population increases. The fourth edition of *Coast and Creek* has been prepared in the hope that people will become aware of the need to preserve the foreshore.

Mordialloc Beaumaris Conservation League proudly acknowledges the Bunurong people of the Kulin Nation as the traditional owners and custodians of this land and we pay our respect to their elders, past, present and emerging.

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Fourth edition of *Coast and Creek* compiled by Mordialloc Beaumaris Conservation League Inc, 2024.

Further information: www.mbcl.org.au

Fascinating natural habitat and wildlife survive along coast and creek between Mordialloc and Beaumaris. This booklet aims to guide to first steps on two different journeys of discovery.

One path tracks the narrow band of vegetation that clings to the dunes and clifftops of the foreshore and dips into the rock pools and shallows of the bay.

The other follows the flowing waters of Mordialloc Creek and connected wetlands that are alive with birdlife and aquatic species.

Along the way are glimpses of First Nation/ Bunurong history, finds of ancient fossils, key moments in modern Australian art and a picturesque harbour of hundreds of small boats bobbing at their moorings.

Mordialloc Beaumaris Conservation League campaigns for protection of fragile natural environment and monitors development in environmentally sensitive locations. Meetings are held monthly and new members are welcome.
www.mbcl.org.au



Foreshore favourites:
A Rainbow Lorikeet and Coastal Banksia



An Australian Reed Warbler, a bird often heard but rarely sighted at the edges of creeks and wetlands.

MORDIALLOC TO BEAUMARIS FORESHORE WALK

- 1** Begin at the pier, construction of which commenced in 1869. Site also of the Carnival which raised money to build the promenade and band stand. Mordialloc Sea Baths were demolished in the severe storm of 1934.
- 2** In the Peter Scullin Reserve there is memorial to the Bunurong tribe. This is also the site of the first white settler's farm and later the first Mordialloc football ground.
- 3** Walk along the promenade until Bay Street car park is reached. This was the traditional site for swimming race-horses from the Epsom training track. A bronze horse now marks this spot.
- 4** Proceed to the former Parkdale Lifesaving Club house, now a popular café. Enjoy a cup of coffee and watch out for blue wrens in the bushes.
- 5** Continue along the cliff top track or walk along the concrete path on the sand to the promenade at Parkdale Yacht club. Sustenance workers commenced construction of the sea wall and promenade during the depression years.
- 6** On the cliff top between Dixon Street and the Mentone Lifesaving Club is a significant area of foreshore – Red Bluff Heathland with a Trim Greenhood Orchid colony. The gravel track winds through 77 year-old tea-trees.
- 7** The Mentone Clay Cliffs consist of poorly consolidated yellow-brown clay Red Bluff sands. These sands were badly eroded and regraded by the Metropolitan Board of Works in 1972-73.
- 8** Cliffs and adjoining beaches were painted by Australian impressionists and, later, Clarice Beckett (1887-1935). Beckett painted from Beaumaris looking across to Mentone. She also painted bathing boxes and boatsheds later destroyed during the 1934 storm.
- 9** The prominent red sandstone cliffs at Beaumaris is the only Australian suburban site where fossils of terrestrial mammals occur with abundant marine invertebrates. The richest finds of fossil penguins in Australia were made here and important discoveries are still being made.
- 10** Continue along the track to Table Rock, an historic location for aborigines which once included middens and a fresh water well. Watching swans and pelicans with a cup of tea at Rickett's Point would be a pleasant end to the walk.



Mentone

Beaumaris

Parkdale

Mordialloc

8

7

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4

3

2

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Ricketts Point
Marine
Sanctuary





White Correa



Kneed
Wallaby-Grass



Drooping Sheoak



Phragmites



Yellow Star



Bower Spinach



Seaberry Saltbush

THE THIN GREEN LINE

Foreshore vegetation has always formed a fragile fringe along the bay. On one side are windy, salt-washed, sand dunes and cliffs and, inland, heathland that has now given way to suburbia. The Mordialloc Creek environs have also faced major urban and industrial pressures, yet indigenous habitat remains and is home to a wide variety of native wildlife. These survivors make a living connection with our pre-european landscape.

Four plant communities are found along Mordialloc Creek: Tall Marsh, Estuarine Scrub, Swamp Scrub and Brackish Wetland. The foreshore supports three: Coastal Headland Scrub, Coastal Dune Scrub and Sand Heathland.

A large photograph of a Coastal Banksia plant, showing a prominent, cylindrical, light-colored flower head (infructescence) and several dark green, lance-shaped leaves.

Coastal Banksia

THE FORESHORE AND DUNE SYSTEM

The Mordialloc foreshore is characterised by a range of landforms, varying from the historically significant Beaumaris cliffs and sea ledges with views across the bay to the wide, sandy, safe beach at Mordialloc. These features add variety to the coastline and are attractive to visitors.

While much of the original vegetation has been cleared from the foreshore this environment group has strongly supported the revegetation work being carried out by the local council. Significant indigenous vegetation can be observed while on the foreshore walk included.

Coastal sand dunes are formed when sand deposited

on the shore dries out and is blown to the back of the beach. Dune grasses help to hold the sand in position especially during severe storm surges. and so helps to prevent erosion of the foreshore.

The present day coastal dune system was formed during the last 6000 years. Between Mordialloc and Frankston a coastal barrier was formed behind which lay the fresh water Carrum Carrum Swamp.

In 1866, when Rawlinson first surveyed this area, water from these swamps ran either north into Mordialloc Creek or south into Kananook Creek.





Photo: Wayne Imlach

The cliff track starts at Mordialloc and runs through Parkdale, Mentone and Beaumaris. Intermittently this track passes through carparks, lifesaving clubs and yacht clubs.

The Australian Impressionists walked along this path. In 1887 renowned painter Tom Roberts wrote in his diary:

“We returned in the evening through groves of exquisite Ti trees.”

Mordialloc Beaumaris Conservation League supported the Around the Bay Bike and Walking Trail “edge of road curb” option. This led to the retention of many indigenous trees and understory plants on the cliff for protection from wind and storms.

ESTUARINE WATERWAYS

Carrum Carrum Swamp once extended from present-day Mordialloc to Frankston, approximately 44 square kilometres, fed by small creeks with headwaters in the Dandenong Valley. The resource-rich, freshwater wetland was isolated from seawater in the bay by a broad sand ridge and outflow from the swamp to the bay was confined to two outlets – Mordialloc Creek and Kananook Creek.

Draining of Carrum Carrum Swamp to allow for farming began in 1879. Subsequent housing development on flood-prone land led to Mordialloc Creek being considered primarily as a flood control medium. Industrialisation and urbanisation caused serious pollution problems in the creek and by 1975 Mordialloc Creek was considered to be one of the most polluted waterways draining into the bay.

An outcry from Bayside conservation groups led to the Dandenong Valley

Authority working to improve water quality. Melbourne Water has superseded the DVA in management of this waterway.

Wetlands offer new ways to treat urban run-off and associated pollutants. CSIRO scientists have found that aquatic plants offer a low cost alternative for removing excessive nutrients and heavy metals. Phragmites (reeds) in the creek help to stabilise banks and also remove nutrients from the water. The reed beds and sandbars provide safe habitat for water birds and other species. Conservation groups lobbied for the retention of a natural bush setting for the creek and environs. The Swamp paperbark groves opposite the Chute Street boat ramp have been preserved as a remnant of the original vegetation.



MORDIALLOC CREEK WALK AND SHARED BIKE TRACK

- 1 Mordialloc Pier is a haven for sightseers and fishers and enters the bay beside the mouth of Mordialloc Creek. Commence travelling towards Nepean Highway.
- 2 The creek has moorings for 700 boats. The island in the creek houses the Mordialloc Motor Yacht Squadron. The Bridge Hotel, which is on the opposite bank, commenced operating in 1873.
- 3 The old carnival site opposite the island is now called the Hazel Pierce Reserve in memory of the former Mordialloc councillor. Carnival events raised funds for the promenade and band rotunda built in 1925.
- 4 Pompeis Landing. Walk under the road bridge and emerge opposite the former Pompeis Boat Building Works. This family business built seaworthy wooden boats for more than a 100 years.
- 5 Continue under the railway line and follow the shared bicycle/ pedestrian track through the George Woods Reserve to the footbridge over the creek.
- 6 Continue along the south bank of the creek and note remnant Swamp-paper Bark trees and Phragmites reeds on both sides. Phragmites on the island in the creek provide a wonderful habitat for birds.
- 7 Walk past the Centre Swamp Drain pumping station to the Wells Road bridge. Note Brown's Reserve playing fields and Yammerbook saltwater wetland, created on a Melbourne Water flood retarding basin.
- 8 Cross Wells Road bridge and turn left to commence the return journey through stands of indigenous vegetation planted by Kingston council and Friends of Mordialloc Creek. Note abundant bird life in the trees and water.
- 9 Pass the Chute Street boat ramp and rejoin the shared bicycle/ pedestrian path at the footbridge. Alternatively, cross the bridge, turn right and continue past Mordialloc Secondary College, on land claimed 140 years ago by the district's first European settler, Alexander McDonald. Walk through Attenborough Park to the Nepean Highway and perhaps enjoy refreshments in Mordialloc.
- 10 Epsom Conservation Reserve. See page 12.

Mordialloc Pier

Mordialloc Creek

Nepean Highway

Attenborough Park

Footbridge

Boat ramp

Brown's Reserve

Wells Road

Boundary Road

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Yammerbook Nature Reserve

To Waterways >



EPSOM CONSERVATION RESERVE

99% of native grassland in Victoria has been destroyed by agricultural and urban development since the arrival of Europeans.

Epsom grassland survived from 1886 to 1988 locked away in the centre of a privately-owned horse racing and training track. When the property was sold, a campaign by MBCL and other local groups saved the grassland component and it is now surrounded by housing.

Epsom Conservation Reserve holds 3.6 hectares of rare, grassy, ephemeral dampland adjacent to a constructed wetland that filters stormwater and offers important refuge for flora and fauna.

The reserve holds Ecological Vegetation Classes of Plains Grassland, Plains Grassy Wetland, and Tall Marsh; and fauna of frogs, reptiles, terrestrial and water birds.



Early Nancy



Epsom Conservation Reserve.



Reconstructed wetland adjacent to Epsom Grassland.

YAMMERBOOK NATURE RESERVE

This land was once part of the Carrum Carrum Swamp behind coastal dunes, a large wetland and bush terrain between Mordialloc, Frankston and Dandenong; a unique ecosystem that flourished with a wide range of plants and wildlife. Small sections of original swamp remain at Edithvale and Seaford Wetlands but many plant and animal species are now extinct.

The coastal Bunurong people are the traditional custodians of the region between Werribee River and Wilsons Promontory. They lived off the land observing animal behaviour and plant growth to predict food supply. Today descendants of the Bunurong live in our community.

In the past the ecological importance of wetlands was poorly understood. In 1866 the Carrum Carrum Swamp was surveyed then gradually drained for agriculture and housing.

In 1987 Yammerbook Nature Reserve became a flood retarding basin under Dandenong Valley Authority, and then Melbourne Water.

During the 1990s soil was removed to raise the ground level for housing development, however excavations breached the saline water table creating a salty lake with barren banks.

In 2000 Mordialloc Beaumaris Conservation League and local residents initiated restoration of the site with later cooperation from Melbourne Water and City of Kingston. A Master Plan was developed to reinstate a wetland, bush habitat and recreational space. The reserve was officially opened to the public in September 2006 and is now an important link in the habitat corridor between Mordialloc Creek, Edithvale Wetlands and Patterson River.



ABORIGINAL OCCUPATION

The Bunurong people of the Kulin nation are the original holders of the resource-rich coastlands along the eastern part of Port Phillip bay, from present-day Werribee to Point Nepean, and further east to Wilsons Prom.

During the last great Ice Age, so much water was locked away, frozen at the poles, that sea levels dropped and the bay became a dry, grassy plain. Bunurong oral histories tell of the reflooding when seawater returned 6,000-10,000 years ago.

European settlers claimed Naam/Melbourne in 1835 and rapidly displaced the Indigenous population. In 1852 a reserve was established for Bunurong people along Mordialloc Creek and rations and blankets were distributed in what is now Attenborough Park, north of the Nepean Highway. Further demands by settlers, principally fishermen, led the government to revoke the reserve in 1862 and by the late 1860s most of

the local Bunurong had relocated to Coranderk, near Healsville.

Jimmy Dunbar, the last occupant of the reserve, died in 1877.

Today, signs of aboriginal occupation include hand-dug wells in the Beaumaris cliffs, kitchen middens on the shore and a canoe scar-tree beside the creek.

The name Mordialloc is derived from two Bunurong words, *Murdi* or *Moordi* meaning flat or lying flat, and *Yallock*, meaning creek or stream. Mordialloc likely refers to flat or swampy water.



BEAUMARIS CLIFFS AND REEF

These enigmatic red sandstone cliffs are important for their scenic impact and for scientific study of our ancient geology and ongoing fossil finds, some of which date back 5 to 6 million years

The adjacent reefs contain some of the nation's richest and most diverse assemblages of fossils of marine and terrestrial mega fauna, including sharks' teeth. Remnants of the oldest known Australian albatross have been found as well as a variety of sharks' teeth and bones of marsupials, seals and penguins.

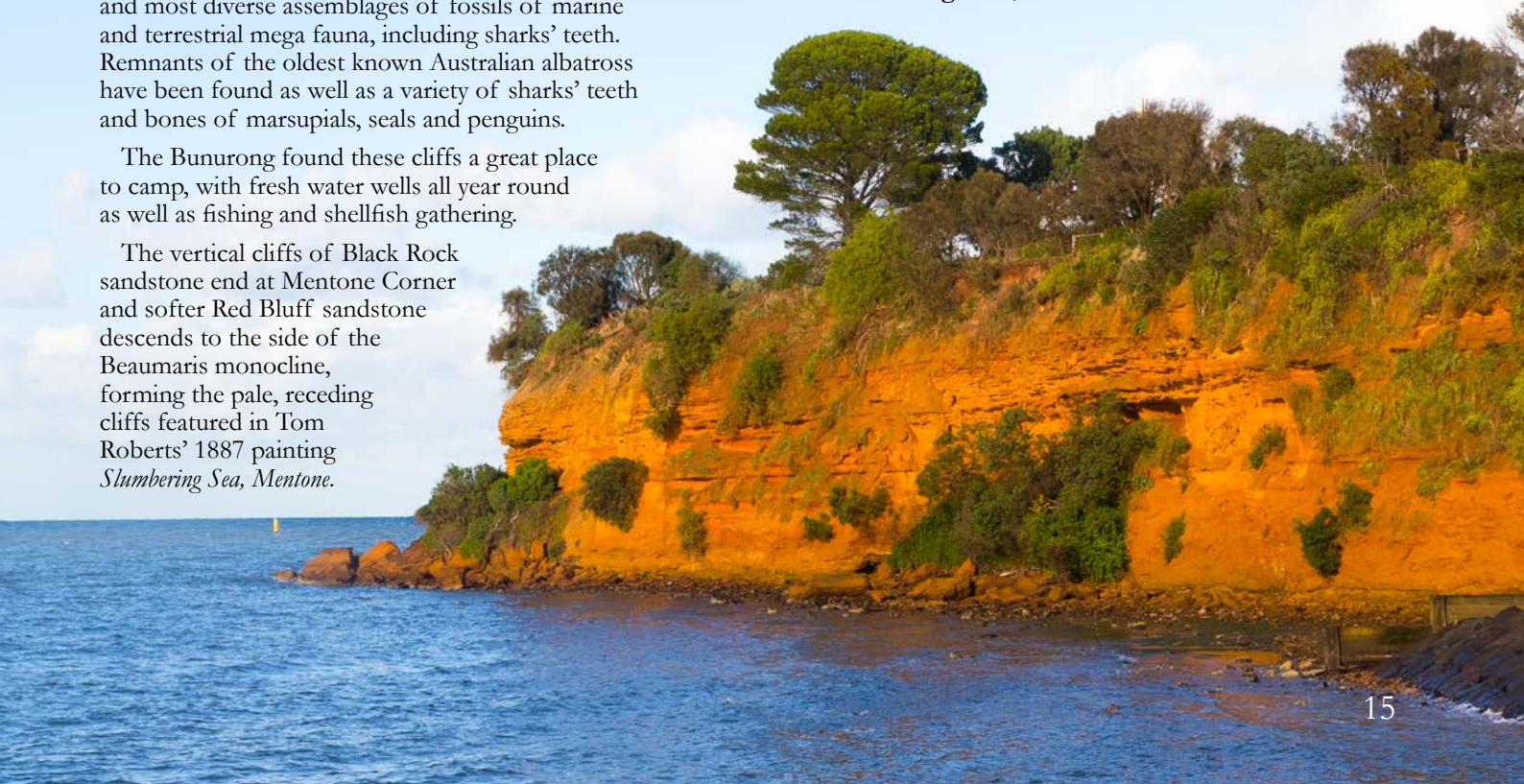
The Bunurong found these cliffs a great place to camp, with fresh water wells all year round as well as fishing and shellfish gathering.

The vertical cliffs of Black Rock sandstone end at Mentone Corner and softer Red Bluff sandstone descends to the side of the Beaumaris monocline, forming the pale, receding cliffs featured in Tom Roberts' 1887 painting *Slumbering Sea, Mentone*.

"Internationally, this site is recognised as a reference site for all other rock sequences of this age in Australia."

"This site has yielded one of the most diverse assembles of marine fossil mammals recorded in Australia"

Dr Erich Fitzgerald, Museum Victoria



ANCIENT TRACES

Fossils, pictured here, are each about 5.5 million years old and were gathered from the foreshore (without digging) at Beaumaris. They are destined for the collection of Museum Victoria. Significant finds new to science are emerging every few months at this heritage listed listed.



**Heart Urchin
(*Lovenia woodsii*).**



**Chambered Nautilus
(*Aturia coxi*).**



***Eucrassatella
eupontica*.**



**A rare
tooth of
a White-
pointer
Shark
(*Carcharodon
carcharius*).**



**The largest fossil tooth ever found in
Australia, from an ancient relative of
Sperm Whales (*Livyatan melvillei*).**



Specimens and photographs courtesy of Sandra and Murray Orr.



Tom Roberts' 1887 painting *Slumbering Sea, Mentone*. Clarice Beckett, *Beaumaris Seascape*, c. 1925.

DISTINCTIVE STYLES

The beauty of the bay has long inspired artists and made the Beaumaris-Mentone district a site of great cultural value. In the late 19th century, Heidelberg School painters Arthur Streeton, Tom Roberts, Charles Conder, Walter Withers, Frederick McCubbin and others moved out of their studios and worked in the open air to create a new, distinctly Australian, style. This celebration of colonial life, the bush and bright sunlight is sometimes called Australian Impressionism.

Slumbering Sea, Mentone (1887) by Roberts features the cliffs at

Mentone and is typical of the Heidelberg School.

Clarice Beckett, 1887-1935, lived in Beaumaris for most of her adult life, painting when time caring for her elderly parents permitted. Blending naturalism and abstraction, her subtle landscapes brought emotional and spiritual qualities to “everyday” views and were early examples of modernism in Australia. Beckett was not widely celebrated during her lifetime but is now considered to be one of Australia’s greatest painters.

The area continues to inspire new generations of artists.

ACTIVITIES

MORDIALLOC BEAUMARIS CONSERVATION LEAGUE

was formed in August 1969 and campaigns for protection of the local environment through actions to:

- Advocate for protection of the fragile foreshore reserve, native coastal vegetation and habitat.
- Ensure that foreshore amenities are designed and sited so as to preserve the harmony and natural aspects of the coastal environment.
- Encourage the restoration of wetlands to improve the quality of water entering the bay from Mordialloc Creek.



- Ensure that publicly owned land is not appropriated or exploited for the benefit of commercial interests.
- Oppose inappropriate development, such as high rise buildings on the foreshore and housing estates in flood prone areas.

The League actively seeks to influence decision making processes through participating in community consultation, preparing submissions, letter writing and networking with other organisations involved in revegetation programs along the creek and foreshore.

New members sympathetic to the League's objectives are welcome. Meetings are held on the first Wednesday of the month. Further information: www.mbcl.org.au





A shy Baillons Crake finds refuge in a thicket of phragmites.

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Superb Fairy Wrens are permanent residents on the foreshore



MORDIALLOC BEAUMARIS
CONSERVATION LEAGUE



Melbourne
Water

