

The Life of the Yarra Audio Tour: Boathouse Transcript

Narration – Paul: As you're standing on the decking in front of the rowing sheds, can you see the river gum Mark Tanner describes to us?

Mark Tanner: "Down on the Island, on the other side of the island, there's the most beautiful river gum, pink in colour. People will come to the riverbank in front of the boatsheds in the early morning just to look at the tree, and it's stunning in the early morning sun."

Narration - Paul: When I stand here on the deck and look at Herring Island, I think it shows how great the threat of flooding once was, that they needed to go to the extreme of cutting a new channel in the river. That must have been no easy task. And it shows what a powerful influence this river has always been on its surrounds.

Narration - Sarah: As Paul from Do it on the Roof just alluded to, a completely new river channel was cut in the late 1920s to significantly change the flow around a big meander in the river, and reduce the impacts of flooding. It was cut through the volcanic rock on the northern side of the Yarra, and it allowed the river to take a short cut. The river was allowed to flow through both the old and new channels, so that the river split in two before reuniting. The new channel is the one you can see on the right as you look downriver. This created the only significant island in the river - originally called Como Island, but now known as Herring Island. This flood prevention work was immediately put to the test in 1934, when the last great flood hit Melbourne and swept away much of the newly-planted vegetation on the island. The island is currently managed by Parks Victoria and it is accessible only by boat.

Narration - Sarah: The cutting of the channel demonstrates how people can manipulate the physical environment. Another example of how we can change our environment is right here on this side of the river. A long copper-coloured wall stretches just beneath the rise in the riverbank. This is called a bio-retention pond. You may know this type of system better as a raingarden. Rain gardens like this have become a common sight around Melbourne, as a way of protecting our rivers and creeks from the harmful effects of urban stormwater. They contain special soils and plants that filter stormwater. Rain gardens come in many different shapes and sizes. This is a large one, designed to capture stormwater immediately before it reaches the river. Here's Sarah Buckley, Council's Senior Sustainable Environment Officer to explain...

Sarah Buckley: *Runoff is diverted through the raingarden and it takes out sediment, heavy metals and nitrogen, prior to the water heading into the river, cleaner than it was before.*

Narration - Pip: One community that benefits from improved water quality are the macroinvertebrates. Commonly called 'water bugs', macroinvertebrates are animals with no back bone that can be seen with the naked eye. They thrive in rivers and river banks. Macroinvertebrates are highly diverse, including worms, snails, spiders, mites, crustaceans and insects, and they are very important for two main reasons. Firstly, macroinvertebrates

are a vital part of the aquatic food chain and are the primary food source for many fish. Secondly, these 'water bugs' are actually one of the best ways we can measure and assess the health of our river system. Because macroinvertebrates are what we call a 'bio-indicator', meaning their presence or absence in the river indicates how healthy it is. At the moment the number of macroinvertebrates in the lower Yarra is considered low. This is where initiatives like the Yarra Biodiversity Project come in. By revegetating the Yarra and taking action to reduce stormwater runoff, this project is helping to reverse water pollution. With these efforts we hope to see a greater variety and number of macroinvertebrates return to the Yarra.

Narration - Sarah: You too could have a raingarden at your place. As well as attracting native animals and insects, your garden could help filter water before it makes its way to the river. To see how to do this head to City of Stonnington's website and look up Raingardens. You could also help lessen your car's impact on our waterways by getting your car serviced regularly and ensuring it isn't leaking oil.