

The Life of the Yarra Audio Tour: Introduction Track Transcript

Narration - Pip: I'm sitting in the patchy shadow of the river gum behind me, staring at the river below as it curls its way slowly east and out of sight. The sound of the traffic on the bridge to my right is quiet here, buffered by the trees. Beneath my feet the dirt is a strange texture, both soft and gritty, an odd mixture of sand and clay. It gives a little as I dig my heels down. A small chunk of rock is poking out and I pick it up. I wonder what else I would find if I dug down a little further. I can imagine the bones of some old fish or crustacean hiding, just out of sight.

I value having this space to come to, where I can tune out the city for a while and feel connected to the landscape around me. Places like these remind me that nature and ecology can still thrive in the city, that you don't need to drive for hours to go and find them. I like to imagine what it might have looked like here before the city was built. A lot has changed, but the trees might still be the same. They say that river gums can live for over 600 years, longer than the city has been here.

Narration - Shelley: The Yarra River has changed a lot over the past 200 years. So have the ways people have seen and interacted with it. The Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri people used the river to travel up and downstream in canoes. For the new settlers, the river was an obstacle to be crossed, a source of drinking water in the new town further west, and it was a liability: prone to terrible floods in South Melbourne. Later, wealthy settlers built estates such as Como House on the hill tops above the river, where the air was considered healthier than down below.

Only in the twentieth century did the people of Melbourne notice the river's beauty. In the Great Depression of the 1930s, the State Government started the Yarra Boulevard on the northern banks and Alexander Avenue on the southern side. This scheme was about creating jobs, but it was also about draining the marshes and opening up the river banks so that people could enjoy the beauty of the Yarra.

By the end of the twentieth century, Alexander Avenue was a busy road. Local people used the river banks to travel between places. The landscape had been neglected. Weeds had invaded. So, around the start of the twenty first century, people started to ask, "Can't we manage this land better?"

Narration - Carol: Even though the south bank of the Yarra between Grange Road and Punt Road is close to the city, you can listen to frogs and tune out from the city...well, you can still hear the freeway, but every time I have come here, when I pause and focus on listening, I hear frogs and birds. I notice different birds and noises and events at different times of day. The tide changes. The birds go a bit crazy at sunset.

Narration - Sarah: A lot has changed on the banks of the Yarra over the last 15 years. People don't take the Yarra for granted any more. All along the Yarra River individuals,

community groups, Local Councils, Schools and Government Agencies are pitching in to restore the Yarra and its banks.

Narration - Carol: I am going to take a look at one of these projects in particular, the Yarra Biodiversity Project. I find this project interesting because it has succeeded in bringing back native wildlife into the inner city. It has succeeded in creating places where I stop rushing from one place to another and notice something that amazes me about the world.

Narration - Sarah: Thanks for joining us for The Life of the Yarra audio tour. My name is Sarah, and you've been listening to my colleagues Pip, Shelley and Carol from Do it on the Roof. I'm going to explore the Yarra's winding course, delve into the past, and discover some small local wonders of the natural world. The route we will be travelling runs across the traditional land of the Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri people. We have great respect for their knowledge of this land. The way in which we see the banks of the river today reflects our understanding of how to live well with this land. There is still a lot for us to learn about the land in this country and we hope we can learn from the Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri people.

While you're listening to the tour, remember to watch out for cyclists and be careful when crossing roads. Choose the audio track closest to you, as shown on City of Stonnington's website as you go along, and look out for the animal tracks that will lead to the next listening station.