

The Life of the Yarra Audio Tour: Punt Road Landing Transcript

Narration - Sarah: I'm standing on Punt Road Landing facing the water, with Punt Road crossing the river to my left. Take a look down stream; is it still and glassy? Or is the wind making it ripple and break against the banks? By this point, the Yarra has already travelled 230 km from its source high in the Yarra Ranges to the east. It now only has a dozen kilometres to go, flowing west, until it reaches Port Phillip. But it wasn't always called the Yarra river. As Arweet Carolyn Briggs of the Boon Wurrung language group describes, John Wedge, a British explorer and surveyor, mistook the the word 'Yarra'...

Arweet Carolyn Briggs: *You're thinking about the Yarra River. Yarra is when somebody at a certain point asked the people 'what is that?'. But where they were standing was the waterfall. The Yarra Yarra ... fall. That's where Wedge was standing. And then years later he had to retract that, but Yarra had become so embedded into the language of the early settlers. But it's Bir-arang or Birrung. Birrung was not only source food but a means of transport. It represented the life-blood of Kulin nation as it flows into our bay.*

Narration - Sarah: There are few of descriptions of what this area looked like before European settlements. Mark Schneider, Council's general gardener and habitat gardener describes what plants might have been here...

Mark Schneider: *The original plant communities, would have up the top some escarpment species, saltbush and grasses. In the Studley park area you had a lot of yellow gum, that's very tough and slow growing up the top. Come down a bit lower, the lower points, you would've had red gums, lots of them. with Yellow box and red box between these different terrain areas. There would have been the Tree violet, and the gold dust wallet, we use that a lot in plantings.*

Narration - Sarah: There's a lot of traffic on Punt Rd today, but in the middle of the 19th Century, Punt Road was a dirt road that ran through the first commercial vineyards in Victoria. This area was once the state's first wine region. Where Punt Road met the river, the only link to the northern bank was a small boat called a punt, which is how the road got its name. The punt service was eventually replaced by a footbridge, and that was replaced by the current Hoddle Bridge, which opened in 1938. As Melbourne grew, the vineyards were replaced with housing, and the area has become ever more urban. But nature hasn't disappeared. You just need to know where to look. Patrick from Do it on the Roof points out some indigenous species you might see along your way today.

Narration - Patrick: Some significant indigenous species that you might see in the Yarra area includes the *phragmites australis*, the common name is the common reed. It's a tall aquatic reed-like plant, you'll often see it in the water, or on the river banks. It has tall flowering stems that are up to 3 meters tall, the flowers are very distinctive, a dense fluffy, plume-like broom heads that are white and are held in November through to May. It's a very upright plant. It spreads vigorously. It's quite common in Melbourne around waterways or

lakes. It will take a bit of salinity, so that's why it's growing in the Yarra because of the brackish water systems. It's an important plant ecologically because it provides food and nesting habitat for waterbirds. Often swamp hens will create a sort of nesting platform amongst the reeds, provided by the phragmites. It's also used by Indigenous people as a food source, for spears, as a weaving material, and as a fire carrying torch.

Narration - Sarah: City of Stonnington have been working on the Yarra Biodiversity Project since 2010 to support and strengthen our natural ecosystems. You are standing in an area that was completed as Stage 1 of the project. In this area they've removed weeds, planted native species and improved the bike track.

Narration - Sarah: You'll notice that the river has a brown, muddy colour, a state that has caused it to sometimes be called 'the upside down river'. This colour is caused by development throughout the river's catchment, but it doesn't mean that the river is unclean. The colour comes from natural clay particles that are suspended in the water. The clay particles have found their way into the river from local soils which have been disturbed by development. In adding sediment-capturing plants and infrastructure to this section of the river, the Yarra Biodiversity Project is a positive step towards restoring the Yarra to be the clear river that it was 200 years ago.

Narration - Sarah: Using plants to capture sediments as we have just described, is just one of the many 'ecosystem services' nature provides. As well as creating beautiful spaces for us to relax in and enjoy, nature also provides us with fresh air, clean water, food and the list goes on. By restoring native ecosystems, we are putting nature to work. Ecosystem services are helping us to reverse the impacts humans have had on the river since European settlement.