

The Life of the Yarra Audio Tour: Williams Road Transcript

Narration - Sarah: Williams Road marks the boundary between South Yarra and Toorak. Toorak is a variation of an Indigenous word, Turruk. Turruk was an Indigenous campsite which covered much of the area that you are in now, including Como Park and Thomas Park. Take a look at the Indigenous marker here to find out more. Williams Road used to be linked to the northern side of the river by a boat service, known as the Burnley Ferry, which began operating in 1896. Particularly in its early years, the crossing could be dangerous; two lives were lost in the first ten years of the service. By 1944, local road and bridge improvements made the ferry service redundant.

Narration - Kim: A little upstream, between here and the Grange Road wetlands, there is a big, natural meander in the river. The river is wide and the Monash Freeway is almost out of sight. This is where the river takes a moment to stretch, before its run through inner Melbourne.

Narration - Sarah: Throughout this tour, we are never far away from Alexandra Avenue. This boulevard follows the meanders of the river. Today, the avenue runs all the way from Princes Bridge to MacRobertson Bridge at Grange Road, but this wasn't always so. Until the 1930s, the Avenue reached no further east than Chapel Street. Work began on its extension in the early 1930s. In the winter of 1931, at the height of the Great Depression, the State Government put 720 men to work on the project for one week to give unemployment relief. You can see where the rock has been cut away on the side of the road opposite the river. It was tough work, all done by hand. The following year, more funding for the roadwork and the creation of nearby Como Park, was provided by Philanthropist Sidney Myer, the founder of Myer department stores. The 5000 pounds he donated created 2 weeks of work for 120 men just before Christmas.

Narration - Sarah: It's evident here just how much people can change the landscape, but this doesn't mean that biodiversity is lost. All along this stretch of the river the riverbank is home to many types of plants and animals. Look out for willy wagtails here; these small black and white birds that are frequently seen darting in and out of the vegetation along this stretch of the river. These plucky little birds have adapted to an urban setting, and are not overly afraid of people or cars.

Narration - Patrick: One of the important things about planting a shrub layer like you'll see on the banks of the Yarra with the Yarra Biodiversity Project, particularly in urban areas is that wrens and small birds will often use shrubs like the *acacia paradoxa* also known as the hedge wattle, they'll use this shrub layer for nesting habitat because the spines on the *acacia paradoxa* provide protection against predators, things like cats and foxes that would love to get into a small bird's nest and eat it. The thicket that's provided by the shrub layer adds a level of protection. The seeds provided by the acacia are also a valuable food source for the birds. Planting a shrub layer of indigenous plants can also help protect populations of smaller birds, against invasive or bully, territorial birds like Indian or noisy minors, because

the density of the foliage, and the variation of foliage between ground level and tree layer, if there is a middle layer of indigenous shrubs, the thicket provides cover and hiding potential for these smaller birds to get away from not only predators and also bully birds like myna's or larger magpies.

