

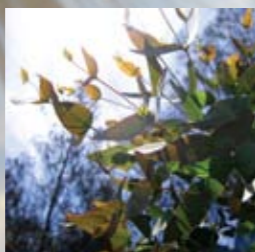
## Our Stony Creek

For thousands of years the Stony Creek has made its serpentine journey from what is today St Albans, through Sunshine and Yarraville to its destination at Stony Creek Backwash by the Yarra River.

From ancient times the land has undergone many changes. As little as 10,000 years ago, ancestors of the Boonwurrung and Woiwurrung people could have walked across a land bridge from the Stony Creek area to Tasmania. Volcanic eruptions eventually transformed the landscape into a vast basalt plain stretching to the South Australian border.

The basalt plain ends at the mouth of Stony Creek, which earned its name from bluestone quarried along its banks.

Today, Stony Creek winds its way, partly underground and fed by stormwater systems, through parkland, industrial and urban estates and out to sea. It is this journey of change that inspires us to love our Stony Creek.

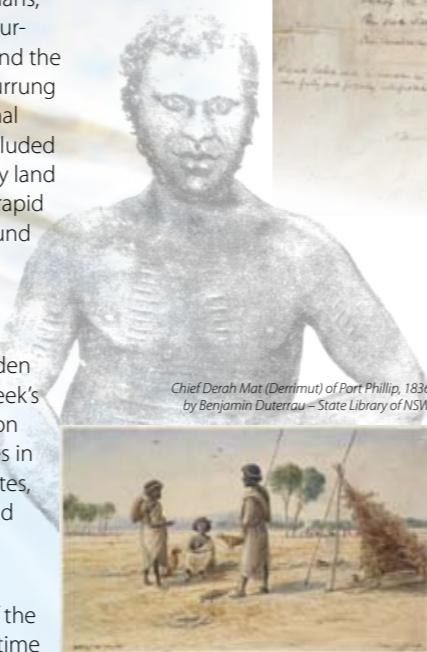


## Aboriginal history

For thousands of years the creek was the estate of two Kulin clans, the Marin Bulluk of the Woiwurrung, inland from Yarraville, and the Yalukit Willam of the Boonwurrung along the coast. The traditional land of the Boonwurrung included Port Phillip Bay which was dry land prior to climate change and rapid sea level rises beginning around 10,000 years ago.

The creek served as a source of food and water, tools and reeds for basketmaking. Midden sites were recorded at the creek's mouth, where clans feasted on shellfish. Evidence of activities in the area include stone tool sites, silcrete quarries, scar trees and burial places.

Derrimut and Ningerranarro (Benbow) were two heads of the Boonwurrung people at the time of settlement, as was Bungarin of the Marin Balluk clan. They provided leadership to their people, and interacted with early settlers such as John Pascoe Fawcner and John Batman.



Chief Derah Mat (Derrimut) of Port Phillip, 1836 by Benjamin Duterrau – State Library of NSW



Geelong 1854 by Eugene von Guérard – State Library of NSW

Their names appear on landmarks around Stony Creek, including Benbow Street in Spotswood and Derrimut Street in Footscray West. Bungarin's name appears as one of the 'chiefs' on John Batman's so-called deed of purchase.

## Exploration and settlement

In the summer of 1802, the *Cumberland* sailed into Port Phillip Bay to seek a suitable site for a British colony. Botanist James Fleming walked upstream along Stony Creek, noting the waterside gully to 'a level plain to the mountains' and observing stiff black earth bottoming on 'white clay and many large stones'.

Thirty-three years later John Batman sailed up the Yarra River and landed at Stony Creek. He set out from there to find tribal 'chiefs' to negotiate the 'sale' of Melbourne.

Batman's land grab sparked a stampede of settlers that quickly dispossessed the Boonwurrung and Woiwurrung of their lands and saw Melbourne become the headquarters of a vast sheep stocking program. The sheep had a devastating impact on the

murrnong or yam daisy, which had been a major food source cultivated by people for thousands of years.

Until the 1930's, the Stony Creek area remained somewhat isolated. For many years the creek was known as 'Murderer's Creek' after young Matthew Lucke's body was found near the Backwash in 1848. In 1856, settlers by the creek were officially numbered at six.



Stony Creek at Hyde Street, Footscray, c.1970 Electricity sub-station, Yarraville – Footscray Historical Society



## Industry

Around 1853, William Stone arrived from Portland, England, and built his home from stone quarried in his Hyde Street 'backyard'. He was one of the first to supply basalt to ships as ballast.

By 1861, at least 20% of local male workers were quarrymen. In Cruikshank Park area alone there were eleven quarries. Bluestone from Stony Creek went as far as Paris and London, and supplied Melbourne's earliest public buildings, such as Pentridge and St Paul's cathedral.

When manufacturing arrived, the creek was viewed as a drain fit only for tipping and to carry away industry by-products from wool mills, meat preserving works, tanneries and glue factories.



By 1870, water supplies were so polluted that Footscray recorded one of the highest death rates from typhoid in Australia.

Yet, even into the 1950s, children swam in deserted quarry holes filled with rubbish, dead animals and hazardous chemicals like asbestos. Today, industry run-off continues to threaten the health of the creek. Offenders are subject to prosecution and penalty funds are channelled into community and restorative projects.



## Community

Many long term residents of the Stony Creek area are dedicated to restoration of the creek. They recall changes and memories of a different way of life.

The late Jack Noye remembers the wildlife. 'Stony Creek was the 'country' – a treeless, urban wilderness'. In spring it bloomed with yellow buttercups and daisies, and swamps flourished with reeds, watercress and other marsh plants. There were hawks, skylarks, cockatoos, grey cranes, white egrets, gold finches, wagtails and crows, and many frogs, yabbies and fish.

Val Noye remembers Jack's mother, Beryl (or Ma), the first unofficial 'Friend of Stony Creek' who was often seen at the site now called Cruikshank Park, hoeing thistles and moving rocks to make a playground for the children.



Ethel Waters remembers that from Bishop Street one could see all the way to Spotswood. Between Somerville Road and Footscray Cemetery were the Angliss paddocks, across which neighbours would walk on Sunday mornings to exchange news.

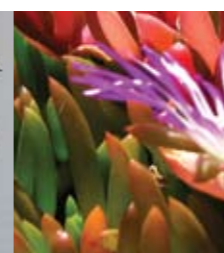
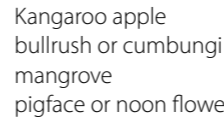
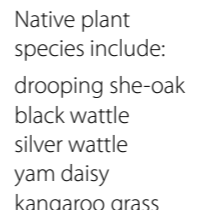
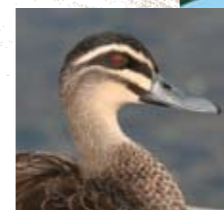
Walter Erm remembers the floods. In heavy rain, Somerville Road and Francis Street would become impassable. As a young boy, he found the bodies of Alfred Luizzi, a milkman, and his horse, who drowned in the floods of 1919.

## Native flora and fauna

Significant wildlife and vegetation can be found along the creek.

Native wildlife includes:

- Australian white ibis
- chestnut teal duck
- Pacific black duck
- white-faced heron
- superb fairy wren
- red wattlebird
- sulphur crested cockatoo
- rainbow lorikeet
- night heron
- black cormorant
- eastern froglet
- spotted marsh frog
- pobblebonk (Banjo) frog
- bluetongue lizard
- longneck turtle
- tiger snake
- short finned eel



Native plant species include:

- drooping she-oak
- black wattle
- silver wattle
- yam daisy
- kangaroo grass
- Kangaroo apple
- bullrush or cumbungi
- mangrove
- pigface or noon flower

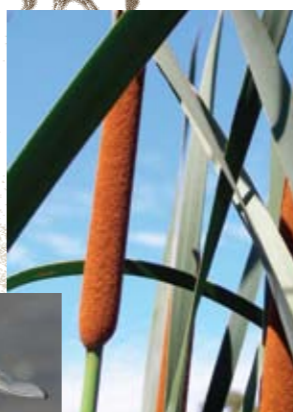


photo John Chapman

## Restoring the creek

Friends of Stony Creek officially formed in 1993 and have been working with Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria, Maribyrnong and Brimbank Councils to regenerate the creek.

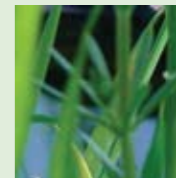
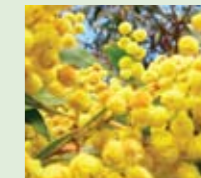
Along with public parklands at Matthews Hill Reserve and Cruikshank Park, a path between Cala Street and Paramount Road, West Footscray has been transformed into a small urban bush habitat. A track winds through Hyde Street Reserve among native trees and grasses.

Melbourne Water is the caretaker of almost 9,000 kilometres of rivers and creeks across the metropolitan area and beyond.

Melbourne Water works with councils and community groups to improve waterways and smaller suburban creeks such as Stony Creek.

With the help of volunteers, Stony Creek can continue to grow into an environmental haven for wildlife and for future generations to enjoy.

For information, contact: Steve Wilson, President 9332 3889 stony\_au@yahoo.com Melbourne Water 131 722 www.melbournewater.com.au

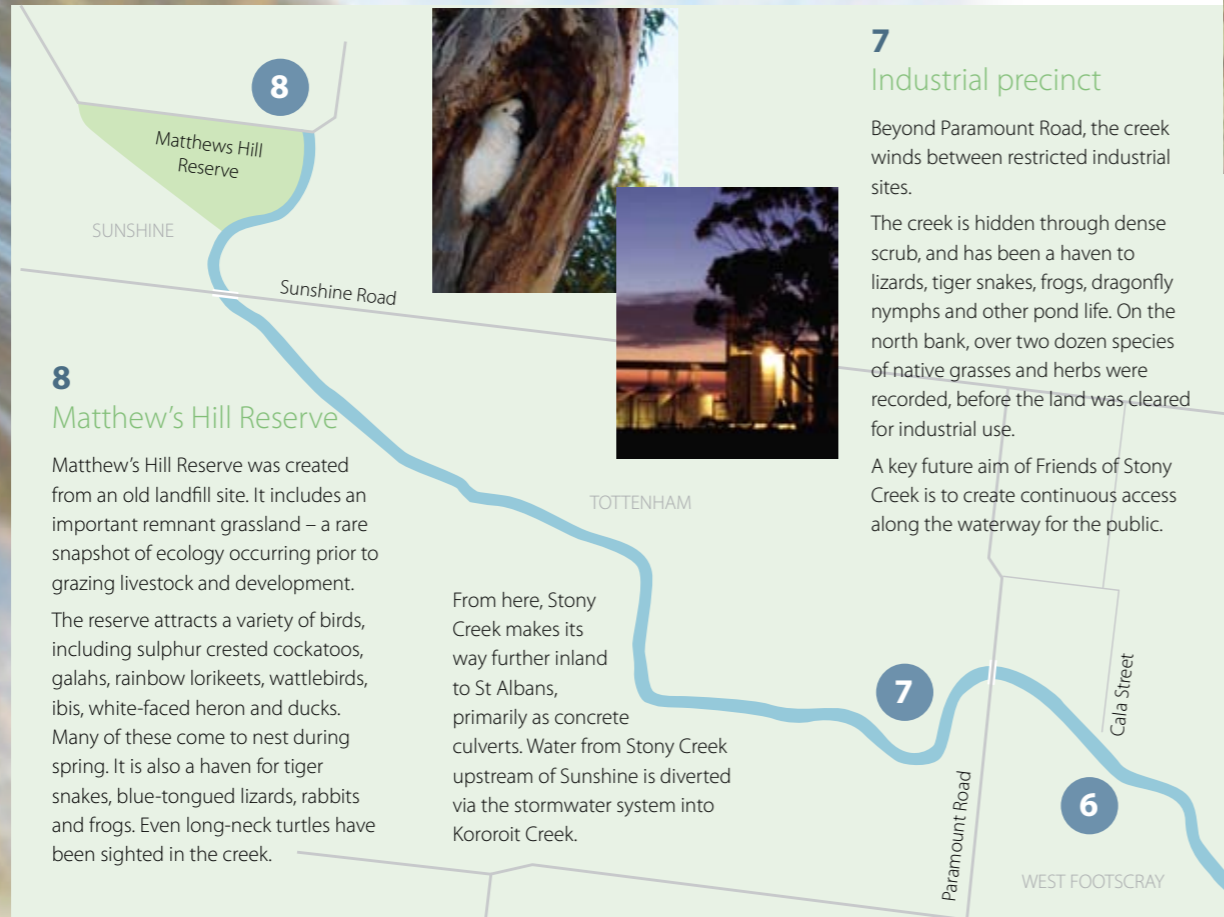


# Stony Creek trail guide



Ballasting, c.1870 – Footscray Historical Society

# Follow the Stony Creek trail



## 8 Matthews Hill Reserve

Matthew's Hill Reserve was created from an old landfill site. It includes an important remnant grassland – a rare snapshot of ecology occurring prior to grazing livestock and development. The reserve attracts a variety of birds, including sulphur crested cockatoos, galahs, rainbow lorikeets, wattlebirds, ibis, white-faced heron and ducks. Many of these come to nest during spring. It is also a haven for tiger snakes, blue-tongued lizards, rabbits and frogs. Even long-neck turtles have been sighted in the creek.

From here, Stony Creek makes its way further inland to St Albans, primarily as concrete culverts. Water from Stony Creek upstream of Sunshine is diverted via the stormwater system into Kororoit Creek.



## 7 Industrial precinct

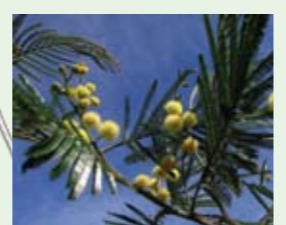
Beyond Paramount Road, the creek winds between restricted industrial sites. The creek is hidden through dense scrub, and has been a haven to lizards, tiger snakes, frogs, dragonfly nymphs and other pond life. On the north bank, over two dozen species of native grasses and herbs were recorded, before the land was cleared for industrial use. A key future aim of Friends of Stony Creek is to create continuous access along the waterway for the public.

## 6 Cala Street bush habitat

The creek winds pleasantly through the backyards of a residential area, where the pobblebonk, eastern froglet and spotted marsh frog can be heard. Between Cala Street and Paramount Road, planting of native trees, particularly silver wattle, kangaroo apple and eucalypt, have transformed the creek into an inner urban bush habitat and a haven for ducks and wattlebirds.



photo John Chapman



## 5 Cruikshank Park

Cruikshank Park was transformed from a moonscape of quarries and tips to a tree-lined haven for walkers, joggers, children and dogs. There is a BMX track, public tennis court and playground. It is also a habitat for birds such as honey eaters and herons, and frogs like the pobblebonk. Here, a number of stormwater drains carry rainwater and run-off into the creek. The health of the region's rivers and creeks has improved significantly in recent years. Wildlife relies on healthy rivers, creeks and wetlands for survival. Everyone can help improve local rivers and creeks by reducing stormwater pollution – simple things like placing your rubbish securely in bins and always picking up after your dog.



## 2 Hyde Street Reserve

Hyde Street Reserve was created from landfill in the 1990s. A walking track winds through growing stands of native trees, and regenerating grasslands, leading to a spectacular view of the backwash and city beyond the Westgate Bridge. A tidal area of mangrove and saltmarsh, where fresh water meets salt, provides important habitat for birds, fish and other smaller creatures. Legend says the ghost of young Matthew Lucke, whose throat was cut here in 1848, still wanders.



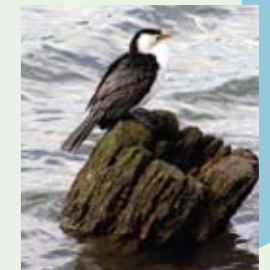
## 3 Westgate Golf Links

Westgate is one of Melbourne's most unusual golf courses. Two of the fairways are connected to the course by a narrow passageway under the Westgate Bridge. Much golfer time is spent fishing balls out of the creek. Some golfers even play in gumboots! Rivers and creeks are the backdrop to many recreational activities and are an important feature of Melbourne's liveability.



## 1 Stony Creek Backwash Park

Stony Creek Backwash is a site of industrial change along the creek. Below the Westgate Bridge is a memorial to workers who died in the 1970 bridge collapse. From earlier times, the remains of a historic barge can be seen, used to carry shellgrit to nearby bottle works. Similar vessels also carried bluestone to ships anchored in the bay. The Backwash is an important site for a variety of waterbirds, and has a rare stand of mangroves and saltmarsh plants.



Following the Stony Creek Trail, one can discover a surprising array of landscapes – wetlands, frog habitats, industrial estates and historic sites, native grasslands, city vistas, recreational parks, urban backyards and even a bush habitat! As the waterway meanders out to sea beneath the soaring Westgate Bridge, each landscape tells a different story of life along the creek, and the many contradictions of our time. Take a moment, or a few, and get to know the many faces of your creek.