

Wurundjeri Stories at Pound Bend

Visitors Information Guide



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Wurundjeri Stories is an interpretive signage trail at Pound Bend Reserve, Warrandyte State Park that comprises a series of six signs following the bush path upstream. Each sign shares topics that relate to the Wurundjeri history, culture, traditional life and people associated with this sacred site. There is also an interpretive sign at Wittons Reserve, Wonga Park, which is sacred Wurundjeri Women's Country.

'Wurundjeri Stories' involved Wurundjeri people leading the research and development of the content of each sign along the trail. The project offers a fascinating exploration for park visitors and a framework for schools to deliver indigenous based excursions to the site.

The project is funded through a grant from the Australian Government's Department of the Environment and Manningham City Council, who managed the project.

For more information about Wurundjeri Stories, public program opportunities, school excursions and educational resources, please visit www.manningham.vic.gov.au

Wurundjeri Stories funding and project partners:



Womin-jeka Wurundjeri Biik

Welcome to Wurundjeri Country

Womin-jeka (Welcome) to Pound Bend, a central living and gathering place for the *Wurundjeri* people from time immemorial. The *Wurundjeri* people welcome you to this sacred site and in turn ask that you respect and care for this country.

'*Wurundjeri Stories*' is a *yerrin barring* (bush path) comprising six interpretive signs located along the river path, moving upstream. This trail has been developed in partnership with *Wurundjeri* Elders to reflect their history, culture and traditional life at Pound Bend. Each sign includes a section entitled 'Bunjil's Challenge' offering activities for children.

The language of the *Wurundjeri* is *Woi wurrung* and they believe that ancestral spirits created the world during the Dreamtime. *Bunjil* the Eagle created *Wurundjeri* people, the animals, the land and the waterways.

Wurundjeri people have a rich culture, with a strong connection to the land and spirit world. There are many traditional *Wurundjeri* ceremonies and practices that celebrate this rich culture, many of which still occur today. One of the most important is the *Tanderrum*, or Welcome to Country ceremony.

Tanderrum Welcome to Country Ceremony

In traditional life, visiting clans would be formally welcomed by the *Wurundjeri* Elders with a *Tanderrum* ceremony. Decorated possum skin cloaks would be worn during the ceremony.

The *Ngurungaeta* (Headman) would offer the visitors gifts to symbolise that they were free to access the local resources, and reed spears were snapped to assure their safety. Visitors would also bring gifts for their hosts.

All visitors passed through the smoke of a fire smothered in young Manna Gum leaves, which represented cleansing and respect for *Wurundjeri* people.

The *Tanderrum* still forms an integral part of being a *Wurundjeri* person today.



Figures in Possum Skin Cloaks by William Barak, 1898 Courtesy of the National Gallery of Victoria

Birrarung

River of Mists

Wurundjeri people call the Yarra River '*Birrarung*', meaning river of mists, and it marks the centre of Wurundjeri Country.

Unlike today, where the river marks a township boundary, Wurundjeri people saw it as the centrepiece, accessing both sides of the river, often felling a large gum tree to act as a bridge across the water.

The bark of large gum trees were cut from the trunk and shaped into canoes such that they could fish, hunt and travel along the river with ease.



Aboriginal Men in Canoe by Fred Kruger, 1883. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Victoria.



A Place of Plenty

The Birrarung at Pound Bend offered an abundance of *duat* (fish), *iuk* (eel) and *duyang* (yabbies). Woven eel traps were set at river confluences, deep river estuaries were excavated for breeding fish, and rapids were extended to increase fresh water mussel yields. Evidence of these ancient fishing techniques can still be found along the Birrarung today.

With the abundance of natural resources provided by the Birrarung and surrounding wetlands, it took only two hours of work a day to feed a family. The remainder of the day was spent on cultural, spiritual, educational and recreational pursuits.

River of Change

Since European arrival the Birrarung landscape has changed dramatically, primarily due to increased population, farming and gold mining. These changes had a profound impact on the Wurundjeri people and their ability to live a traditional land based lifestyle. By 1870 when the Pound Bend tunnel was excavated at the site, traditional Wurundjeri life along the Birrarung had been entirely lost.

Wurundjeri History at Pound Bend

A Place of Life, Hope and Loss

Pound Bend was a popular Wurundjeri site for conducting ceremony, trading, fishing and hunting, and is positioned between the thriving eel estuaries of *Bolin Bolin Billabong* and a sacred Women's site in Wonga Park. The site falls along the Yarra Valley 'Songline' route which is a series of marker trees (bound or scarred) that acted as signposts for travellers. Song lyrics were created to assist in recalling landmarks between the marker trees, a practice known as 'Singing Country'. There are a number of significant marker trees throughout the Warrandyte Gorge region.

Aboriginal Reserve at Pound Bend

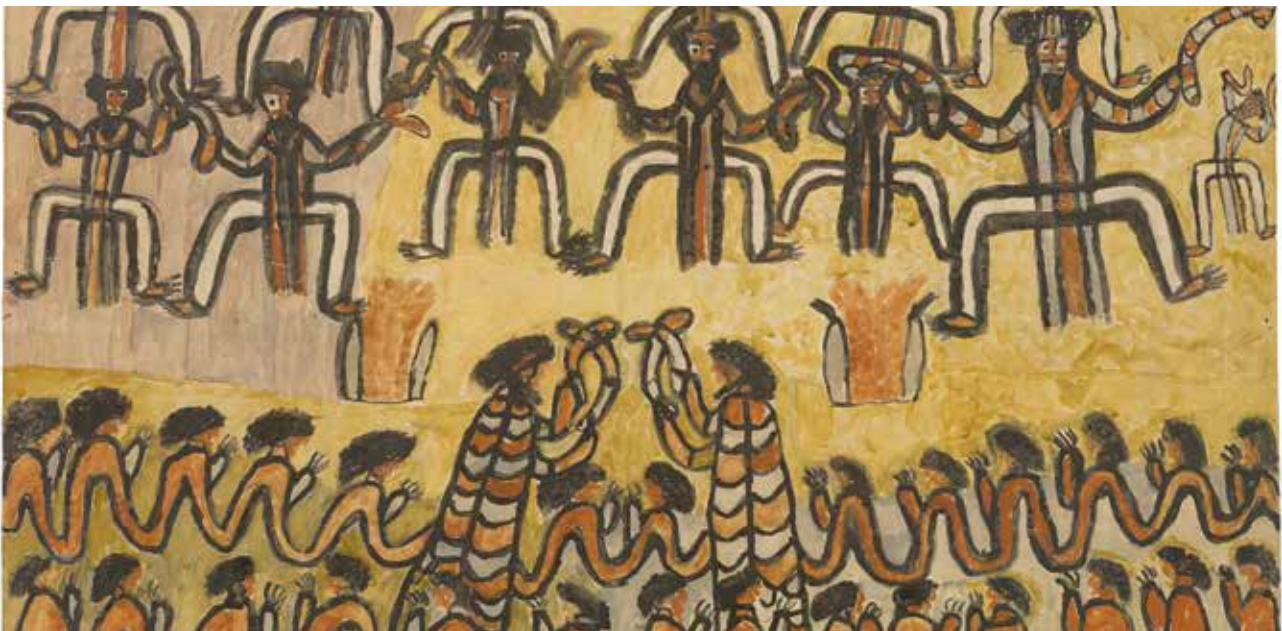
European arrival represented a period of mass genocide, new diseases and loss of land for the Wurundjeri people, and by 1828, only 10 per cent of their population remained. In 1841, Wurundjeri *Ngurungaeta* (Headman) Billibilleri welcomed Aboriginal Protector William Thomas onto Wurundjeri Country, where he negotiated that a section of land be set aside for his people. In 1850, Pound Bend Aboriginal Reserve was created which provided some hope for the survival of the Wurundjeri people and their traditional way of life.

Gold Rush Takes Over

In 1851, gold was discovered in Warrandyte, causing an influx of miners and new settlers. Within one year of the Aboriginal Reserve being created, traditional life had become impossible at Pound Bend. The new *Ngurungaeta*, Simon Wonga, realised that in order for his people to survive he would need to learn more about 'white man's way' and secure employment for his people on local farms.

The Last Gayip (Corroboree)

In 1852, the Wurundjeri people were formally removed from their traditional land at Pound Bend. Simon Wonga organised the last great inter-clan *Gayip* (special gathering) with neighboring clans of the Kulin Nation, where they conducted ceremony and played games. This event marked the end of traditional Wurundjeri life however, it did not mark the end of the Wurundjeri people.



Wurundjeri Ceremony by William Barak, circa 1898. Courtesy of the National Gallery of Victoria

Wurundjeri Bush Tucker, Medicine and Tools

The Wurundjeri people lived entirely from resources derived from the land, including their food, shelter, clothes, tools and medicines. It must have taken some careful research to determine which plants were useful and which were dangerous.



Wurun Manna Gum

The name Wurundjeri is derived from the traditional words *Wurun*, the Manna Gum and *Djeri*, the grub that crawls under its *wilam* (bark).

The Wurun leaves are used in the traditional Wurundjeri smoking ceremony, where visitors are cleansed as they walk through the smoke created by placing young wurun leaves on the embers of a *wiinj* (fire). The *wilam* is perfect for creating a strong *gayaam* (shield) or canoe, and the *duanu* (sap) was a source of sweet bush tucker.



Muyang, Muyan and Garrong The Wattle

Wattles were a versatile resource, the branches and roots used to create a strong *wangim* (boomerang), and the *duanu* (sap) with the *birrip* (sinew) from a *marram* (kangaroo) tail was used to fasten *moojerr* (stone) to the end of a *warra-warra* (spear), *marrivan* (spear thrower) and *garrginj* (axe). The bark of the wattle is used to tan *walert* (possum) skins to create a *walert-walert* (possum skin cloaks). The sap of the wattle can also be soaked in *baanj* (water) to make a sweet drink or chewed as a sweet treat.



Coranderrk and Kalertiwan Pomaderris and Mint Bush

The *Kalertiwan* (Pomaderris) and the *Coranderrk* (Victorian Christmas Mint Bush) branches are used as fire drills. By rolling the hard straight branches between your *marnang* (hands) into the soft flower stem of the *bagap* (grass tree), the friction causes heat. By placing stringy bark fibres over this friction point and blowing onto it, *wiinj* (fire) is made.



Traditional Life at Pound Bend

Wurundjeri Country is largely that of the *Birrarung* (Yarra) catchment including the tributaries that shed water into the Birrarung.

The Warrandyte Gorge area provided a diverse and rich source of food and resources for the Wurundjeri people. Plentiful resources, combined with clever land management and hunting techniques ensured that a clan of several hundred could live sustainably. Wurundjeri families camped at Pound Bend for many months at a time, building mud and bark shelters which kept them warm even throughout colder climates.

Caring for Country

The Wurundjeri people used firestick farming techniques, creating a patchwork of burnt land that enabled edible plants to flourish and prompted new grass to attract grazing kangaroos for hunting.

Wurundjeri women worked these burnt patches with their *wulunj* (digging sticks), looking for edible *barrm* (yam daisy) and collecting berries and tubers in their *bilang bilang* (woven bag).

Wurundjeri men fished on the river, harvesting traps and hunting in the nearby grass and bushlands. They moved hunting grounds regularly allowing areas to naturally replenish.

Healthy Living

Fish and game were cooked in oven pits that were dug into rock or ground. The clay lined pits were packed with hot coals, heated rocks, wet leaves and herbs before being covered with soil. An oven pit, *kup murrie* (banquet) took half the day to cook, leaving time for playing traditional games such as *marngrook* (football), *wit wit* (hammer throw) or *bidi* (kick ball). Other daily activities included arts, music, dance, storytelling, tool making, weaving and ceremonial activities.

Educating Children

Time was devoted daily to educating the young, and if a *bubup* (child/baby) showed an interest in a particular topic, this was nurtured as their special skill. Knowledge was shared orally, often using song and dance as a means to communicate meaning and memorise information.



An encampment of Aboriginal Australians on the Banks of the Yarra by John Cotton, circa 1845. Courtesy of the State Library of Victoria

Wurundjeri Spirituality

The Dreamtime Beginning of Time

The Wurundjeri people believe that ancestral spirits created the world at the beginning of time during a period called The Dreamtime. Dreamtime Stories have been passed through generations of Aboriginal people, and tell of the creation of country and the shaping of moral, cultural and spiritual law.

The two Dreamtime spiritual leaders of the Wurundjeri people are:



Bunjil the Eagle (or Eaglehawk) is the Wurundjeri people's Creator Spirit who created the land, the waterways and the people. Bunjil travelled across a formless land marking sacred sites and defining cultural and spiritual law.



Waa (Waang) the Raven/Crow is the protector of the Wurundjeri people and through trickery brought fire to Bunjil, who shared it with the people.

Murrup Biik Spirit Country

Wurundjeri people have a deep spiritual connection to the land and believe that anything with a defined shape has its own spirit, known as *Murrup Biik* (Spirit Country). A tree or rock has its own spirit, and features along the river, a forest or grass clearing has its own *Tikilara* (spirit of place).

As Wurundjeri people travelled by foot from site to site 'singing country' following the marker tree routes, their cheerful voices informed the *Tikilara* spirits of their peaceful and respectful arrival at a place.

Wurundjeri people believe that it is a human responsibility to Care for Country and respect its *Tikilara*.

Personal Totems Spiritual Protectors

Each Wurundjeri child was given a personal Spiritual Protector Totem at birth, which was usually a local native animal. If a child was given a *wimbirr* (wallaby) for example, they were thought to be related to the ancestral spirit of the wimbirr, and cultural law meant that child would always protect, and never hunt or eat that animal. This created a link between spiritual beliefs and one's responsibility to the land. Totems also helped identify one's family lineage, moiety and clan, as did the markings on one's possum skin cloak, an item every Wurundjeri child received at birth.

Wurundjeri Past and Present

Traditional Wurundjeri clans operated under the leadership of an elected headman, or *Ngurungaeta*, who was supported by nominated community leaders known as 'Elders'.

The role of Elder still exists in Wurundjeri culture today, reserved for those Wurundjeri family members who demonstrate community leadership.



Simon Wonga, Chief of the Yarra Yarra (Wurundjeri) Tribe, age 37. Photograph by Carl Walter, 1866. Courtesy of the State Library of Victoria

Simon Wonga (1824 - 1874)

A Visionary Leader

The suburb of Wonga Park is named after Simon Wonga, who was nominated as *Ngurungaeta* (headman) at age 22 and was well known by settlers as a gifted cattle musterer. Wonga recognised that European settlement was threatening the existence of his people, so he developed a survival plan that involved learning white man's way. Wonga negotiated land for his people at Pound Bend in 1850 and arranged work for his men on local farms.

Wonga organised the last *Gayip* (inter-clan gathering) at Pound Bend in 1852, and assisted the safe relocation of his people to Coranderrk Aboriginal Station in 1863, establishing the station as a viable farming enterprise.



William Barak of the Yarra Yarra (Wurundjeri) Tribe, age 33. Photograph by Carl Walter, 1866. Courtesy of the State Library of Victoria.

William Barak (1824 - 1903)

Beloved Leader

William Barak was born near Brushy Creek and is son of Bebejin, the *Ngurungaeta* who negotiated the Batman Treaty in 1835; the only documented time when Europeans consulted Aboriginal people about land ownership.

Barak lived a traditional life until his clan's relocation to Coranderrk in 1863. In 1875, William Barak was appointed *Ngurungaeta*, after the passing of his cousin, Simon Wonga. He became known as a charismatic leader, talented artist, and vigorous campaigner for Aboriginal rights. Barak is considered to be the last of the traditional Wurundjeri *Ngurungaeta*.

Wurundjeri Today

Present day Wurundjeri people are descendants of William Barak through his sister Annie Boorat and her son Robert Wandoon. Many Wurundjeri Elders work within the Wurundjeri Tribe Land and Compensation Cultural Heritage Council Inc, focusing upon caring for Country and preserving and sharing their cultural heritage. Many Wurundjeri Elders contributed to the Wurundjeri Stories Project at Pound Bend.

Women's Country at Wonga Park

The area of Wittons Reserve at the confluence of Birrarung (Yarra River) and Brushy Creek is sacred to Wurundjeri women, who are part of the Woi wurrung language group. Women gathered at this place for ceremony since time immemorial, where the ritual of 'Welcome Baby to Country' was performed as newborns were daubed with ochre and passed through fire smoke to connect them to their Country. Children were awarded their personal 'Spirit Protector Totem' at this place, and the ritual of Murrum Turukuruk (Coming of Age Ceremony) was celebrated at this sacred place.

Wurundjeri people read this country using a series of bound or scarred marker trees, which acted as sign posts along trail routes. On Women's Country, a manna gum tree was bound to create a notable loop in the trunk or branches, alerting travellers of their approach to Women's Country, where they must observe cultural protocol. An impressive bound marker tree once stood near this site on the banks of Brushy Creek.

In 2014 Wurundjeri Women performed a rare public re-enactment of a traditional Women's Ceremony at this site. They also planted a commemorative garden representing the river and to mark this site as Traditional Women's Country. Wittons Reserve will continue to play an important role in Wurundjeri women's reconnection with their cultural heritage.



Annie Boorat

Traditional Wurundjeri Woman

Born in 1836, Annie Boorat was the daughter of Wurundjeri-balluk *Ngurungaeta* (headman) Bebejan and his wife Tooterie, and sister of William Barak. In 1863, Annie and her family were forced to relocate to Coranderrk Aboriginal Station in Healesville. Wurundjeri people today are all direct descendants of Annie, through her son Robert Wandoon, who was raised at Coranderrk.

Annie Boorat of the Yarra Yarra (Wurundjeri) Tribe. Photograph by Carl Walter, 1866. Courtesy of the State Library of Victoria

Wurundjeri Today

Present day Wurundjeri people are all descended from William Barak through his sister Annie Boorat (Borate) and her son Robert Wandoon.

Many Wurundjeri leaders, known as Elders, operate through the Wurundjeri Tribe Land and Compensation Cultural Heritage Council Inc, where their focus is to continue to care for Country and preserve and share their cultural heritage.

The Wurundjeri Stories Interpretive Trail at Pound Bend has been created in partnership with current day Wurundjeri Elders.



Barak by Mandy Nicholson, 2006

Other 'Wurundjeri Stories' Resources:

- A **student project workbook** providing a series of interactive project questions for students relating to the Wurundjeri Stories at Pound Bend trail, is available at www.manningham.vic.gov.au
- For information about the **environment, gold and Wurundjeri history at Pound Bend** and Warrandyte State Park, please visit www.parks.vic.gov.au
- To learn more about the role and resources of the **Wurundjeri Tribe** Land and Compensation Cultural Heritage Council Inc, please phone 9416 2905.
- For more information on **local Wurundjeri history and other Aboriginal Sites of significance in Manningham**, please visit www.reconciliation-manningham.org.au
- For information about the **protection of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Sites** governed by the Office of Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, please visit www.dpc.vic.gov.au