

**OYB Ride:** 5/2/21

**ROUTE:** Anniversary/Outer Circle (Zoo)/Moonee Ponds Creek Paths to Docklands, ending at Southbank's Eel Trap Bridge.

## **INDIGENOUS COMMENTARY**

Riders are asked to acknowledge the Aboriginal land that we will be riding across and reflect on its historical and cultural significance to the Traditional Custodians, the Wurrundjeri and Yalukut Weelam clans of the Kulin alliance (nation).

The following commentary focuses on Royal Park and the Zoological Gardens, an area not covered in previous commentaries. For information about Birrarung (Yarra River) and the Docklands area please refer to previous rides:

- OYB RIDE: 28/2/20 (Yarra Trail to Abbotsford Convent)
- OYB RIDE: 26/6/20 (Rushall, Kensington, Docklands, Herring Island)

### ***Pre-European Settlement***

- The land now known as Royal Park has been occupied by ancestors of the Wurundjeri for many thousands of years. The Wurundjeri people take their name from the Woiwurrung language word 'wurun' meaning the Manna Gum (*Eucalyptus viminalis*) which is common along Birrarung (Yarra River), and 'djeri', the grub which is found in or near the tree. Wurundjeri are the 'Witchetty Grub People'.
- The Wurundjeri lived on the north side of the Birrarung and when riders cross to the south side of Birrarung they will be riding on the land of the Yalukut Weelam clans of the Kulin Alliance (Nation).
- The area of Royal Park was a significant Wurundjeri camping ground because of its elevation above the Birrarung wetlands. It provided spectacular views across their land upon which Melbourne has been built.
- The area was also an important ceremonial site and for welcoming visiting clans from across the Kulin alliance, many of which would be permitted to set up camps for the duration of their stay.

### ***Post-European Settlement***

- The early colonist William Westgarth recorded the presence of an Aboriginal camp in Royal Park in the early 1840s and often corroborees were observed to have taken place there.
- The area was held back from sale by Lieutenant-Governor Charles La Trobe when the rest of the Melbourne settlement was sold in a real estate frenzy in 1845. La Trobe wanted the park reserved for public recreation but it wasn't until 1876 that it was formally gazetted as such.
- Aboriginal groups continued to use the reserve in the 1850s as a camping ground but by the 1860's they were only allowed to enter the area to visit the Royal Park Mounted Police barracks and the residence of the Crown Lands Bailiff to receive survival rations.
- Instead of developing Royal Park for public recreation the Government continued to use it as cleared space for the various needs of the time. Over the years it has been a place for grazing,

experimental farming, a military base, a zoo, emergency housing and the site of sports complexes and hospitals.

- After the war, Camp Pell huts in Royal Park were used as emergency housing for thousands during Melbourne's homelessness crisis. Camp Pell, nicknamed 'Camp Hell', was essentially a shanty town for thousands of people with nowhere else to go; toilet and cooking facilities were shared, the Nissen huts overheated in the sun, there was a quagmire when it rained and diseases inevitably broke out. The media portrayed the camp as the worst slum in Melbourne, 'a place of filthy moral degeneracy, crime and disease'
- Political pressure forced the removal of the camp before the staging of the 1956 Olympics.

## **Melbourne Zoo**

- The Melbourne Zoo was founded by the Zoological Society of Victoria in October 1857 and today it is widely known as one of the oldest zoos in the world.
- What is not so well known is the reason that an English colony of little more than 20 years would be interested in establishing a zoo?
- The zoo was set up to acclimatise domestic animals after they had travelled from overseas, the settlers unfamiliar with catching and eating native animals sought to introduce a more familiar European food supply.
- Founding members of the Zoological Society were existing members of Melbourne's Acclimatisation Society. The principle of acclimatisation involved transporting fauna from other places in the world to see which animals could adapt and be integrated into a new environment.
- The Society's aim: "the introduction, acclimatisation and domestication of all innoxious animals, birds, fish, insects and vegetables" to alleviate the "savage silence of the Australian bush".
- Animals recorded as being imported for this scientific experiment included foxes, rabbits, alpaca, ostrich, deer, blackbirds, pheasants, quail, salmon, oysters, camels, goats and sheep. These animals were brought to the Zoo for a period to acclimatise before their introduction into the Australian environment.
- Originally the imported animals were housed in the botanic gardens and then they moved to the 'Richmond Paddocks' (opposite the gardens on the edge of the Yarra river). It was discovered these paddocks were too damp for the animals. As such the Royal Park site was provided by the City of Melbourne.
- The Zoological Society and the Acclimatisation Society were amalgamated in 1861 prior to the zoo being opened at its current Royal Park site as the Acclimatisation Society's Gardens.
- Many of the imported species did not establish in the Australian landscape. By the late 1860s the 'zoo' was in financial trouble and the public had lost interest.
- In 1870 Albert Le Souëf was appointed as the first residential manager of the Acclimatisation Society's Gardens. Changes in order to survive included building a collection of animals for the amusement and instruction of the people of the colony. To reflect this the name was later changed to the Zoological Gardens

- Albert Le Souëf was the son William Le Souëf, a former Protector of the Aborigines on the Goulburn and a long-serving member of the Aborigines Protection Board. Albert used his connections to establish a new 'popular' exhibit in 1888.
- An Aboriginal family of 20 people was put on display in Melbourne Zoo and advertised as "an exact representation of an Aboriginal people's encampment in the Bushland exhibit".

### **The impact on the Wurrundjeri of establishing Royal Park.**

1. The Wurrundjeri clan lost connection to a place of significant ancestral and ceremonial significance.
2. The Kulin alliance was disrupted, visiting clans could no longer visit the Wurrundjeri for ceremonies and for sharing plentiful seasonal food supply e.g. eel trapping. (Ending today's ride at Eel Trap Bridge is appropriate)
3. As the Acclimatisation Society's Gardens, the Melbourne zoo introduced feral animals which interfered with the natural habitat and food supply of the Wurrundjeri (the impact on Victoria's natural flora and fauna, and ironically settler farming, continues today).
4. The Zoological Gardens displaying of the Wurrundjeri as a live animal exhibit reflected the settlers belief that Aboriginal people were 'savages' of minimal intellectual capacity. It was consistent with the emerging support for Darwin's evolutionary theory of natural selection (1859). It conveniently provided the basis for the settlers declaration of 'terra nullius' and 'excused' the inhumane treatment of the people who were occupying the land they were seeking.

### **REFERENCES**

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