

# Melbourne's Hidden History Ride

**B**efore European settlement in 1835, up to 15,000 Kooris inhabited the land which today is the state of Victoria. In inner Melbourne, the local people were from the Woiwurrung and Boonwurrung language groups of the Kulin nation. From the 1830s, Kooris began to be displaced from their lands and faced massive changes in their way of life. The encroachment onto Koori land by pastoralists resulted in a reduction of food resources and the introduction of new diseases. There are also many recorded massacres of Aboriginal men, women and children. By 1850 the Koori population had dropped to 3,000; the 1911 census recorded only 611 Kooris living in Victoria. On today's ride we unearth Melbourne's hidden history, and reflect upon the legacy and impact of 167 years of European settlement.

## 1 Old Melbourne Gaol

**Where:** Russell St, between LaTrobe St & Victoria St

**Look for:** The old bluestone gaol, now a tourist attraction

The site of Victoria's first execution on 20 January 1842. The first prisoners executed by public hanging were two Tasmanian Aborigines named Maulboyhenner (Jack) and Devay (Robert), charged with the murder of two whalers in Western Port. Several thousand Melburnians flocked to witness the spectacle of the execution.



## 2 Old Melbourne Cemetery (Queen Victoria Market)

**Where:** Cnr Franklin St & Queen St

**Look for:** The Koori section of the cemetery was beneath the eastern end of Sheds F-J; Monument to John Batman, Queen St south of Shed M

Few visitors to the Queen Vic Market are aware that it is built on the site of the Old Melbourne Cemetery. The cemetery opened in 1837 in place of Burial Hill (see #3 below), and was divided into sections for different religions with an area also set aside for Koori burials. In 1924, pressure from market stallholders led to the cemetery land being taken back by the State Government. When the market was extended, only 914 bodies from the 10,000 graves were exhumed and moved for re-burial – the rest still lie beneath the pavement.

## 3 Flagstaff Gardens

**Where:** William St, between Dudley St & LaTrobe St

**Look for:** Flagstaff Hill and the Pioneer Monument

The Hill was a high point from which the early colonists could spy the arrival of a ship in the bay; it was also the site of the city's first burial ground, known as Burial Hill. The first people buried in the new settlement were a squatter named Charles Frank and his shepherd, who were axed to death by local Kooris. A posse of colonists in pursuit of the "savages" responsible found a group of Kooris in possession of some of Frank's property. The

posse shot dead ten of the Kooris on the spot. Police Magistrate William Lonsdale investigated the murders, but no charges were laid due to a lack of evidence.

## 4 Supreme Court

**Where:** Cnr William St & Lonsdale St

**Look for:** Statue of "Justice", William St

In 1995, a footpath mosaic designed to be installed beneath the statue of "Justice" in front of the law courts building in William Street was vetoed by the Chief Justice. It depicted a Koori's head impaled on the sword of justice – reference to the practice of Western District pioneers of putting Kooris' heads on stakes on their properties to warn off "intruders".

## 5 Collins St Gaol

**Where:** Collins St, between King St & Spencer St

In late 1840, 400 Kooris from different clans gathered in Melbourne for ceremonial purposes and to settle disputes. At dawn on 11 October, a detachment of over 50 soldiers and police rode into the camp, looking for some Kooris who had committed crimes in the Goulburn River area. In the ensuing panic, two Kooris were shot dead and the remainder forced into custody at musket-point. Historians believe that they were imprisoned in the former Collins St Gaol, located just west of King St.

## 6 Bunjil sculpture

**Where:** Ride over Collins St Bridge, then loop back and ride east along Flinders St

**Look for:** Sculpture of "Eagle", Wurundjeri Way

To the Kulin people, Bunjil the Wedge-Tailed Eagle is the creation spirit. He is both the great creator and ngurungaeta (headman) of the Kulin, and is frequently referred to as Mami-ngata ("Our Father"). The imposing sculpture "Eagle" is by artist Bruce Armstrong.



## 7 "Scar, A Stolen Vision"

**Where:** Flinders St, in Enterprize Park near the Aquarium

**Look for:** Sculpture poles planted into the ground on the other side of the railway viaduct

This sculpture installation uses the idea of "scar trees" associated with traditional Aboriginal community life. Aboriginal people made scars in living gum trees for the purposes of cutting shields and canoes. Such scars are poignant reminders of the thousands of years that this land was occupied by Indigenous people. The thirty poles represent the Victorian landscape. The installation is intended as a symbolic representation of the scars of all Indigenous people and the ongoing process of healing.

## 8 Old Customs House

(Immigration Museum)

**Where:** Cnr Flinders St & William St

**Look for:** The plaque in the footpath which marks the place of John Batman's arrival

In 1835, John Batman and his party of entrepreneurs and investors sailed from Tasmania to the mainland and explored around Port Phillip Bay. They landed at this spot, at what was once a small waterfall in the Yarra River, and Batman famously wrote in his journal that "this will be the place for a village". Batman drew up

a "treaty" later ruled to be invalid (see picture below) with the local Wurundjeri elders, which involved an annual tribute of axes, shirts, flour and other items in exchange for the use of land around Port Phillip Bay. In 1838 construction commenced on the Old Customs House, which is now the Immigration Museum.



## 9 Birrarung Waterfalls & Meeting Place

**Where:** Ride over Queens Bridge

When Europeans first settled on the banks of the Birrarung (Yarra River), there was a small waterfall across the river. It was located just downstream of present-day Queens Bridge. Kooris used the falls as a natural crossing place for the Birrarung, and on the south bank (where Crown Obsceno is now) Koori clans gathered at least twice a year to settle grievances. The falls were also an important geological feature for both Kooris and early settlers because they formed a barrier to tidal water, which meant that the water upstream of the falls was suitable for drinking. The falls were removed in the 1880s because they were a barrier to shipping and contributed to flooding.

## 10 Kings Domain Resting Place

**Where:** Linlithgow Ave, between St Kilda Rd & Alexandra Ave

**Look for:** Five marker poles on top of the small hill on the right



In 1985, skeletal remains of 38 Kooris were reinterred in Kings Domain. The remains had previously been in the possession of the Museum of Victoria for many years. The reburial was commemorated by a procession of 200 Koori people who carried the remains from the Museum to their final resting place, on top of a grassy hill offering views back to Melbourne and the Yarra River.

## 11 Government House Meeting Place

**Where:** Alexandra Ave, 200m past the Swan St Bridge

**Look for:** Government House & the "Temple of the Winds" on top of the hill on the right

Koori law set out ways in which serious breaches of tribal customs could be settled. An accused person could be subjected to group punishment such as spear-throwing, or in some cases one-on-one combat might be used. Following these punishments, a corroboree was often held to restore harmony. The hill where Government House now stands was a meeting place for these rituals at the time of European settlement.

## 12 Koori Mission (Botanic Gardens)

**Where:** Alexandra Ave, right hand side of the road

In 1837, a mission was established to "civilise the blacks". The land set aside for the mission was 900 acres on the south side of the Yarra River, in a swampy area around a billabong which was a traditional meeting place. The mission attempted to encourage Kooris to permanently settle there by providing a school for their children and land for them to cultivate. However this failed largely due to a lack of understanding of the Kooris' nomadic way of life. Pressure to release more land for the growing township meant that after only three years the mission was closed.

## 13 Scarred Trees & Native Police Corps Barracks (Yarra Park)

**Where:** Enter Yarra Park from Punt Rd at the first gate past the Punt Rd Oval. Ride up the main path

**Look for:** A large tree stump surrounded by a fence is near the crest of the hill – ride around it on the grass to get the best view of the "scar". Two other scarred tree stumps (also surrounded by fences) are visible nearby. The Police Barracks were in Webb Lane near the corner of Punt Rd & Wellington Pde.

Yarra Park was a favourite camping area for Kooris at the time of European settlement. Signs of this habitation are visible through three "scarred trees" which still remain. The Kulin people cut slabs of bark for many purposes – such as to make canoes, shelter, shields and water-carriers. Kulin men used a stone axe to cut a shape in the bark, and with the aid of levers the bark could then be eased off in one piece. The Native Police were quartered in the Mounted Police barracks in Webb Lane. They drilled on horseback in Yarra Park, which was then known as the Police Paddocks. The Native Police were fairly successful for a time, but many in the Corps resented that they were being used to capture and kill their fellows. As a result, many officers deserted and in 1852 the Corps was disbanded.



## 14 Scarred Tree & Captain Cook's Cottage (Fitzroy Gardens)

**Where:** Fitzroy Gardens (Note: Cycling is prohibited in the Gardens – BICYCLES EXCEPTED!)

**Look for:** Scarred tree stump is 200m NW from the park entrance opposite the Hilton. Cook's Cottage is 100m further west.

Another of Melbourne's 300 recorded scarred trees is located in the Fitzroy Gardens. The large scar on this tree was probably made by removing bark for shelter. Nearby stands Captain Cook's Cottage, the relocated Yorkshire home of the man credited with "discovering" Australia (he was only about 39,800 years too late!). Cook's Cottage attracts thousands of visitors each year, but few venture a little further to see the scarred tree, evidence of a very different type of dwelling and culture.

## 15 Parliament House

**Where:** Cnr Spring St & Bourke St

The natural environment for this site was an underground spring, hence the name Spring Street. This was the site where the Wurundjeri people performed "ngargee" (corroboree) for the first time to Europeans. On 21 August 1836, the dance took place as part of the birthday celebrations for King William IV. The "ngargee" was used to tell traditional stories; the menfolk painted their bodies and performed the dancing, while the women provided the musical accompaniment on possum-skin drums, by hitting sticks together or by clapping.

## 16 Ride to the finish at the State Library

### Sources & Further Information:

#### The Melbourne Dreaming:

**A Guide to the Aboriginal Places of Melbourne** by Meyer Eidelson, Aboriginal Studies Press, 1997

#### Kooriweb

[www.kooriweb.org](http://www.kooriweb.org)

#### Koorie Heritage Trust

[home.vicnet.net.au/~korieht](http://home.vicnet.net.au/~korieht)

#### Yarra Healing

[www.yarrahealing.melb.catholic.edu.au](http://www.yarrahealing.melb.catholic.edu.au)

#### Meet the Eastern Kulin

[www.arts.monash.edu.au/cais/ekulin/homepage/fr\\_home.htm](http://www.arts.monash.edu.au/cais/ekulin/homepage/fr_home.htm)

#### Aboriginal Affairs Victoria

[www.nre.vic.gov.au/avv](http://www.nre.vic.gov.au/avv)



# critical MASS

5:30pm Last Friday Every Month  
State Library, Swanston Walk

## Safety tips & info

### Stick together for safety and fun

If you are at the front of the ride, don't go through red lights. Do continue if the lights change mid-mass. The front should wait at green lights for the back to MASS UP. Please don't speed ahead, it stretches the ride out and makes life harder for corks, other riders and the police.

### Give way to Trams & Pedestrians

Please let pedestrians walk through the Mass and give way to trams, they are in the business of green transport choices that are good for a healthy city.

### Corking

Protects the Mass from cars. Corking is stopping at the sides of the mass at intersections, side streets & driveways. Please don't cork cars that could proceed safely. It is not the cops' job to make the Mass safe, YOU are the friendly face of Critical Mass. To learn how, find someone corking & ask. If a motorist gets aggressive, don't take the bait.

### Critical Mass on your Internet

Join the low volume **News** e-mail list for a roundup of city bicycling news. Or join the party on the busier **Discussion** list. Send a blank email to:

#### News List

[cm-news-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:cm-news-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)

#### Discussion List

[cm-melb-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:cm-melb-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)

#### Website

[www.criticalmass.org.au](http://www.criticalmass.org.au) (Australian site)  
[www.critical-mass.org](http://www.critical-mass.org) (Worldwide site)

### Disorganizational Mass meetings

Meet other Critical Massers in a casual, non-formal environment. Second Saturday Every Month, 1pm, Cafe Sahara (upstairs at 303 Swanston Walk).

### St Kilda Critical Mass

Meet Luna Park, 5.30pm, 2nd Friday of every month.

**"We don't block traffic...  
We ARE Traffic!"**

**Bikes are Fun!**