

MMHN Opportunity 2

Northbank Waterways Maritime Trail from ‘*Birrarung Marr to the Blue Lake*’

Many cities around the world celebrate waterfront promenades or trails as public infrastructure assets, attractive to both locals and tourists, but Melbourne has yet to do so. Public access to the waterways of Melbourne remains interrupted, patchy, scruffy, sometimes prohibited. These vital assets are not being optimised by state or local government. The bureaucratic tangle governing so much of Melbourne's maritime heritage, waterways policy and planning has thus far actually impeded the proper showcasing and further development of this valuable infrastructure.

With the co-operation of the multiple responsible authorities and multiple stakeholders, including government and industry, coupled with creative and sensitive design, the Waterways/Maritime Trail has the capacity to fulfil many complementary aspirations of diverse stakeholders and provide, in a practical form, essential ‘connectivity’ between elements of the maritime heritage we share.

The MMHN Northbank Trail

The MMHN ‘*Birrarung Marr to Blue Lake*’ walk encompasses Northbank from Birrarung Marr to Victoria Harbour Esplanade and New Quay Promenade, through to Waterfront City, the District, the Central City Studios, Melbourne Star Observation wheel and Icehouse ice sports and entertainment centre and beyond to the Bolte Bridge area.

In August 2021 MMHN commissioned an historically accurate, engaging and accessible narrative of the trail accessible via a digital App to inform and encourage different perspective on the maritime heritage of this key waterfront region. This is an extraordinary waterways/maritime trail encompassing much of Melbourne that is poorly understood and undiscovered by locals and tourists alike and builds on the key maritime heritage and tourism value of this precinct. The MMHN *Birrarung Marr to Blue Lake* trail extends the trail encompassing Victoria Harbour Esplanade and New Quay Promenade, through to Waterfront City, the District, the Central City Studios, Melbourne Star Observation wheel and Icehouse ice sports and entertainment centre through Ron Barassi Snr Oval. And the Bolte Bridge.

This narrative will enable broader community awareness of Melbourne’s rich maritime heritage located along a well-used, but little understood, riverside pedestrian trail which threads its way from Birrarung Marr, past the former Falls and Turning Circle, through Docklands, to the site of the now lost ‘Blue Lake’. Professional historical expertise will ensure that the narrative will be accurate and will include images and oral histories related to sites and artefacts visible from the trail and also refer to those which have long gone. MMHN is determined that the end product will be historically accurate, entertaining and capable of engaging the wider community – and in particular, the young.

The Northbank narrative will make reference to sites and historical data on Indigenous presence, the weir, the fords, colonial contact, growth of maritime trade and commerce, the vessel *Polly Woodside*, heritage listed dry docks, cranes, good sheds and warehouses, and more recently, the history of our

Merchant Navy, seafarers and Antarctic expeditions, continuing through to encompassing the exciting history of the Coode Canal and Victoria Harbour, and the little-known story of the ‘Blue Lake’ (known in colonial times as ‘Batman’s Swamp’). MMHN will work with the City of Melbourne Aboriginal Melbourne Branch to ensure both the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and the Bunurong people are consulted in the creation of the ‘Birraring to Blue Lake’ maritime walk and that there is appropriate recognition of their long history.

City of Melbourne (CoM) ‘Greenline’

2020 MMHN is delighted to find that the City of Melbourne has planned a multi-million-dollar capital works program along the north bank of the Yarra, which, to an extent, aligns with the MMHN Northbank Trail Proposal. Significantly, the City of Melbourne Annual Plan Initiatives 2019-2020 proactively set about effectively enabling a ‘joined-up’ Melbourne Waterways-Maritime Trail. The City of Melbourne Annual Plan 2019-2020 indicates a shift in this thinking and now proposes a *Greenline/Blueline* trail along the North Bank of the Yarra River

However, in the June 2019 Draft City of Melbourne River Strategy there was scant reference to, or recognition of, Melbourne’s river-based trade heritage and its irrefutable contribution to the social, economic and cultural evolution of the city. After MMHN’s Submission alerted the CoM to this, the final CoM River Strategy rectified, to an extent, the initial omission and included recognition of maritime heritage along the river. The struggle to gain rightful acknowledgement of Melbourne’s rich maritime heritage continues.

The proposed City of Melbourne *Greenline* trail runs from Birrarung Marr along Northbank through the CBD to Collins Wharf connecting ‘*green public spaces*’ many of which exist already or are planned along the waterways e.g. Domain Gardens, Birrarung Marr, Federation Square, Enterprize Park, Seafarers Park, pocket park at the end of North Wharf at No.5 Goods Shed, pocket park at the tip of Collins Wharf, Buluk Park, various pocket-parks in Docklands

The City of Melbourne Master Plan indicates that there has already been significant investment in a pedestrian access along the north bank of the Yarra River in a series of wharf walkways, paved pathways and gardens. Regrettably the trail is severed at several points by major roadways. There appears to be no plan to actually implement the ‘connectivity’ often cited as an outcome of *Greenline*. Collaboration with State authorities is required to at least plan for major road overpasses. It is significant to note that two international maritime museums (London and New York) refer to accesses to Docklands areas and waterways trails, as ‘attractions’

MMHN argues that *Greenline* should proactively reflect Melbourne’s rich maritime heritage. It should serve to ‘connect’ the ‘dispersed’ maritime heritage assets in and infrastructure in Melbourne, including: Aboriginal sites along the Yarra, the Vaults, all the bridges, the Turning Basin and Customs House (Immigration Museum), the vessel *Polly Woodside* (Discovery Centre), Duke & Orr’s Dry Dock and adjacent Wet Dock, the Merchant Navy Memorial on Southbank, Mission to Seafarers (heritage room), Seafarers Rest Park (artefacts), several heritage wharves (e.g. Australian, Collins, Central), extant heritage crane, port tower, the Heritage Fleet along North Wharf and Victoria Harbour – a world renowned heritage construction.

Note: See link to MMHN Submission to the CoM Draft Greenline Strategy Plan. MMHN argues that the route must extend beyond North Wharf. At present *Greenline* does not encompass Victoria Harbour or even New Quay and the premises of the City of Melbourne Waterways Branch. The Waterways Branch supports the MMHN view.

Indigenous Presence

Birrarung Council – the ‘voice of the Yarra’

The Birrarung Council was appointed by the government in August 2018 as prescribed by the *Yarra River Protection (Wilip-gin Birrarung murron) Act 2017* (the Act) to be the independent voice of the Yarra River as a living entity and to provide independent advice to the government on the implementation of the Act. They have produced a Yarra River Action Plan and a 50-year Vision. See: <https://www.water.vic.gov.au/waterways-and-catchments/protecting-the-yarra/action-plan>.

On 1 July 2021, registered boundaries of existing registered Aboriginal parties (RAPs) were endorsed by the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council. The traditional countries of the Bunurong and Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Peoples were defined by natural and environmental features, and most significantly by water. The direction of water flow provides a clear indication of the shape of Country and reflects the cultural understanding of the Bunurong as ‘salt-water People’ and the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People as the ‘people of the Birrarung’ (Yarra River). (<https://www.aboriginalheritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/boundary-variations-consideration-june-2021>):

- the Birrarung and the waters flowing into it as the traditional Country of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People. On this basis the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People are recognised as the Traditional Owners of the area that is now the Melbourne CBD.
- The traditional Country of the Bunurong People is defined by the waters that flow directly into Port Philip Bay. This country extends up from the existing BLCAC RAP registration area (including Fisherman’s Bend) west to the Werribee River.

Aboriginal Branch, City of Melbourne

MMHN in order to ensure that indigenous maritime heritage is properly incorporated into the ‘Birrarung Marr to Blue Lake’ maritime narrative APP, MMHN has developed a collaborative relationship with this branch which has offered on-going research support.

Koori Heritage Trust

The KHT based at Federation Square promotes Indigenous guides offering waterways walks from the former Customs House on Flinders Street opposite Enterprize Park to small groups heading upstream to Federation Square.

Existing Waterways Trails

Fragmented parts of several river and waterways trails exist in Melbourne, but they are little known, under-valued and under-developed. Furthermore, Melbourne’s major public waterways assets, its river, harbour and waters-edge facilities, lack connectivity. Examples of walks are the

- ***Port of Melbourne Heritage Trail - map*** – publication ceased in 2010.
- ***The City of Melbourne*** has a series of disconnected and unsigned pathways along the Yarra River, which are a consequence of an absence of any master plan for Melbourne’s urban waterways. There is minimal evidence of collaboration amongst the plethora of responsible authorities and no indication that any of them consciously support heritage values, or economic development in the urban reaches of the river.
- **Development Victoria Art Trail**

A welcome initiative despite minimal maritime reference is divided into three sections of around 2.5 kilometres and takes approximately one hour.

- **Port Heritage Trail**

The State Library Victoria has a map of the Port Heritage Trail Linking Melbourne's maritime heritage assets produced by the Port of Melbourne 2000-2010. It includes notable maritime port features to the West, the south as well as the north bank and the CBD. It may no longer be print.

- **Other trails**

Several commercial companies have recognised the attraction of Melbourne's waterways walks, including the 'Docklands Family Walk' and 'Yarra River Promenade' by Walking Maps. Similarly, walks around Docklands have been offered during Open Melbourne Weekend and Melbourne Design Week in 2020 and 2021.

- **Shrine of Remembrance**

In 2018 the Victorian government granted \$13 million to establish a *Shrine to Sea* Trail, linking the Shrine with Station Pier in recognition of those departing for overseas service. In essence, it will create a boulevard connecting Domain Gardens to Port Phillip Bay along Albert and Kerferd roads. The project will enhance the existing greenery and open spaces, improve the safety and experience for people walking and bike riding through this part of Melbourne and help bring the local history, stories and culture to life for residents and visitors. To what extent maritime heritage factors will be woven into these 'narratives' or how this relates to other trails is unknown. A Community Panel was due to commence in March 2021.

See <https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/shrine-to-sea>

Key Precincts along Northbank Trail

Victoria Harbour

Victoria Harbour is an integral part of Melbourne's maritime history, but it was hidden from sight for decades. The site of modern-day Victoria Harbour was originally swamp land that by the 1860s was home to the West Melbourne gasworks, railway industry, an explosives magazine, pottery works, abattoirs and tanneries.

Designed by British civil engineer John Coode, a major engineering project began in the 1880s to reroute the course of the Yarra River, which resulted in the widening of the river for shipping and the creation of a new Victoria Dock (the name was previously used by one at Queens Bridge as early as the 1850s). By 1908, Victoria Harbour received around 90 per cent of Melbourne's imports. It was lined with wharves and light industry grew around the nearby rail yards of Spencer Street railway station (now Southern Cross railway station), which were used for freighting the goods inland.

During the wars, Victoria Dock was used as the main port for naval vessels and most of the Victorian troops returned from both wars to these docks. By the 1920s, with shipping moved from the Yarra turning basin at Queensbridge, Victoria Dock and surrounding port had become Melbourne's busiest. With the introduction of containerisation of Victoria's shipping industry in the 1950s and 1960s, the docks along the Yarra River, east of the modern Bolte Bridge, and within Victoria Harbour, became inadequate for the new container ships.

The Blue Lake area

The wetlands to the north of the Yarra River once consisted of a large salt-water lake and a giant swamp at the mouth of the Moonee Ponds Creek, known as 'Batman Swamp', 'West Melbourne Swamp' and the 'Blue Lake'. It was an important meeting place for the traditional owners, the Woiwurrung people who would come together in large gatherings for trade, celebrations, and other social activities. The wetlands teemed with animals and plants which were important food sources for the Indigenous people who hunted, fished and collected plants and birds here. They used bark for canoes

for transport and fishing on the sea, rivers and the wetlands. The Woi-Wurrung people created middens around the edges of the lake and hunted on the nearby dry lands.

At Melbourne's foundation, John Batman set up his home on Batman's Hill, where Southern Cross Station is now, marking the westernmost point of the settlement. However, the rest of the area remained largely unused for decades. The advent of rail infrastructure in the late 1860s saw the city's industry gradually expand into the area.

The creation of Appleton Dock and Swanson Dock in an area west of the Moonee Ponds Creek, now known as West Melbourne, closer to the mouth of the Yarra, became the focus of container shipping, effectively rendering redundant for industrial use a vast amount of vacant inner-city land to the immediate west of Melbourne's CBD. Between the docks and the CBD, the Docklands Precinct was created.

The Riparian Zone

The value in re-instatement and protection of the riparian zone in urban waterways is irrefutable. The Yarra Planning Scheme – Significant Landscape Overlay Yarra (*Birrarung*) River Corridor Environs Zone states: *The Yarra River has metropolitan significance as an environmental, aesthetic, cultural, recreation and tourism asset. The river corridor links parklands and reserves into a near-continuous vegetated landscape experience that provides a highly valued, secluded natural environment, enjoyed by local and metropolitan communities. It refers to the Yarra River as: a corridor where the river, its topography, adjacent public open space and a continuous corridor of vegetation and canopy trees are the dominant features.*

Work yet to be done

Critical Signage

Informational and directional signage along the existing Northbank trail needs total refurbishment. Much of the signage is broken, defaced or absent altogether (e.g. there is currently no signage on Webb Bridge to explain its design to resemble an eel trap). Re-branding of the entire Northbank trail including consistent signage (both way-finding and informational) will ensure that the trail works effectively. Once the MMHN Northbank Trail is completed, MMHN hopes for collaboration from the CoM to install QR codes on informational signage installed.

Bridges

Heritage bridges are defaced and ignored by responsible authorities who fail to acknowledge that Melbourne's bridges are significant heritage infrastructure assets. Thus far, there is no consistency at all in the treatment of signage.

Rowing Clubs

Melbourne's rowing clubs commenced with a plethora of oarsmen offering transport in the early days of settlement. Many professional oarsmen and boatmen operated ferries and punts which were a necessary means of crossing the river as distinct from travelling along it. Ferries to Williamstown and to South Yarra were important, but ran into difficulty in competing with land transport. Rowing as a recreational pastime on the river commenced near Federation Square and later moved to the opposite side of the river, on the south bank.

Princes Walk Vaults

Constructed for the Melbourne City Council in 1890, their design attributed to A.W. McKenzie, the 19 vaults were part of works undertaken on the south side of Yarra Bank Road, which was realigned following completion of the new Princes Bridge in 1888. The vaults were used for various purposes. In 2006, Federation Wharf redeveloped the vaults under Princes Walk. The riverfront areas extend

south to an elevated pedestrian promenade which was once part of Batman Avenue. More recently, the vaults adjacent to the Princes Bridge have been converted into Federation Wharf.

Artefacts

Several maritime artefacts and several mismatched information signs are already installed along the Northbank and need to be replaced to form a cohesive integrated waterways/maritime trail. Since its establishment in 2018 OSSA has attracted much enthusiastic and generous stakeholder engagement by acting as a focal point for the donation of large maritime artefacts. Their aspiration in amassing these and rare items is that these items may be installed with informational signage and installed along the waterways/maritime trail at appropriate places. OSSA has strong international links with all major shipping organisations and is known for its interest in acquiring maritime artefacts.

Turning Basin

Several years ago the City of Melbourne dredged the riverbed to widen and re-construct the historic 'Turning Basin' shaping this area of the north bank of the Yarra at what is now called the Enterprize Park area. The naturally occurring rocky weir or barrier enabled pedestrian crossing at this point and it marked the demarcation between tidal in-flow and flow downstream of fresh water. This point was actually the first 'turning basin' for vessels in the Yarra and of course, so important to maritime trade on this river. Large hewn bluestone blocks form some of the riverbank at this point. Sadly, these have been dislodged and appear to be sliding into the river. Three large floating beacons or buoys are anchored at the edge of this new 'basin' - without informational signage and panels providing the history of the turning basin are tired and faded. However, the existing pathway along the basin edge is in good condition and forms a significant element of the Northbank walk.

Enterprize Park

In 2020 City of Melbourne reported on a planned landscape up-grade at Enterprize Park to *expand the lawn, enhance views to the river, improve accessibility, strengthen connectivity through the park and reinstate indigenous vegetation*. The first stage of works to demolish the concrete plinths at the base of the railway viaduct was completed in 2020. The plinths blocked views between the park and river and were not required structurally. Their removal has made way for an additional 1000 square meters of green space. The second stage involving the landscaping works commenced in January 2021 and will be completed by July 2021. Landscaping works will include an expanded lawn area, new seating along the river's edge, accessible pathways and wider stairways, an improved meeting place for Aboriginal cultural tours and the reinstatement of indigenous vegetation.

Lendlease Developers

Lendlease will shape the development of Collins Wharf. So far, they have demonstrated a positive approach to maritime heritage. For example, commitment to retain the redundant metal dock rails extending along Collins Wharf embedded within a new public walkway along the wharf. This Collins Wharf pedestrian walkway may be understood as potentially a 'spur' branching off the proposed maritime trail, along Collins Wharf to the proposed park at the tip of the wharf. Lendlease restored the adjacent Australian Wharf and has installed informational signage about the heritage significance of the north bank wharf. Lendlease has plans to restore the heritage Harbour Port Control Tower on Collins Wharf and is committed to retaining vestiges of Docklands maritime heritage e.g. rail tracks.

Riverlee Developers

Riverlee is retaining the extensive wharf public thoroughfare between the heritage Good Shed 5 and the river. This path links with the Jim Stynes Bridge (pedestrian/cycle), which in turn links to the west side of Yarra North Bank to the restored Australia Wharf and will eventually lead to the spur trail along to the tip of Collins Wharf as well as also head northwards to link with Harbour Esplanade. Riverlee is also supporting the re-design and construction of Seafarers Rest Park, which is between

the Goods Shed wharf trail and other pedestrian precincts along the north bank of the Yarra River. In April 2019 Riverlee prepared a draft proposal for an innovative concept plan aiming to *Connect Mission to Seafarers, Seafarers Rest, Seafarers Bridge and Seafarers Wharf to form a cohesive precinct ... Re-connecting the city and its people to the river, building on the rich history to create a new future ... Reactivate this forgotten piece of Melbourne's waterfront.*

MAB Corporation

MAB has development rights along New Quay. Although there are some areas still to be developed, access to the end of New Quay is open to pedestrians. The Northbank waterways trail terminates at the corner of New Quay Promenade and Wattle Road. Access to Ron Barassi Snr Park is via Docklands Drive, but access to the river from the south side of the park is currently prevented by cyclone fencing. Under the current arrangement with Development Victoria, MAB is responsible for the re-instatement and remediation of the Victoria Harbour wharves as far as Bolte Bridge. The cost of these works is estimated to be \$70-\$80 million. The economics of all such development has been adversely impacted in the short to medium term.

Seafarers Rest Park

MMHN has successfully advocated that the City of Melbourne incorporate genuine reference to seafarers in this major new CBD Park, which is scheduled for completion in 2023. It is particularly pleasing to note that ANARE has been able to secure the installation of a plaque in the Seafarers Rest Park to commemorate the five famous DAN Antarctic vessels, which were for decades associated with this stretch of North wharf.

Development Victoria

Development Victoria has designed and installed an Art Trail in Docklands featuring 26 works. While DV acknowledges the *unique feel and character of the precinct* and has placed *the sculptures, artwork incorporated into building architecture and facades and pieces integrated into the public realm and landscape of Docklands*, it is surprising that so few of the chosen works relate to the water, let alone maritime industry or trade. The DV walking trail has been divided into three sections of around 2.5 kilometres and takes approximately one hour. An APP and Harbourside Art Trail brochure is available. As for genuinely reflecting the unique maritime potential of Docklands, DV continues to miss the point. There have been very many plans and DV revises these often. One recent plan involved a pedestrian walkway on the water across Victoria Harbour from the Collins Wharf to the north side of Victoria Harbour near Ron Barassi Senior Park. The planning for this walk failed to take into account the adverse impact this would have on boating and other shipping. DV remains mired in controversy and legal proceedings in relation to Central Pier, which has implications for the design of any maritime trail.