

Interpretation Notes Wilsons Promontory

Gippsland (between Melbourne and Fish Creek)

- **Aboriginal people** have lived in the region of Gippsland for tens of thousands of years. The path which is now the Princes Highway formed the backbone of the network of trails and trading routes that spanned the region. Wilsons Promontory is a site of major spiritual significance to Victorian Koorie communities today.
- Both **Angus McMillan & Pawel Edmond Strzelecki** are credited with the early exploration of the area. **Strzelecki named Gippsland after the NSW Governor George Gipps.** In **1841** NSW governor employed Angus McMillan to find a route from the Monaro Plains (near Canberra) over the mountains to Omeo and down to Port Albert.
- **Port Albert** became essential to the growth of Gippsland. When gold was discovered in Walhalla and Omeo in the 1860's, Port Albert became the busiest port in Victoria.
- Movement between the settlement at Port Phillip (Melbourne) and Gippsland was mainly by sea due to the difficulty in traversing the swamps and rivers of Gippsland.
- Eventually roads were built hugging the higher ground above the **KooWeeRup swamp**. **The coming of the railway in 1879** finally gave the people of Gippsland an easy and quick way to send fresh produce to Melbourne.
- **KooWeeRup** comes from the local Bunurong Aboriginal language meaning 'plenty of black fish' or 'black fish swimming'. The swamp was drained over a number of years and was used for growing potatoes and other crops. KooWeeRup is the largest asparagus growing district in Australia.

European History (between Fish Creek and the Prom)

- **George Bass and Matthew Flinders were probably the first Europeans to see the Prom**, on their 1798 voyage from Sydney, and Bass is thought to have named it after a London friend of Flinders, Thomas Wilson. They recognised its commercial value of seals, whales and timber, as well as cattle grazing, which went on for nearly a hundred years.
- The Prom's position means it is important for navigation in the turbulent waters of Bass Strait, and a **lighthouse was built on South East Point in 1859.**
- Following campaigns by the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria, and lobbying by the Royal Society of Victoria, the **Victorian government temporarily reserved most of the Promontory as a national park in 1898. Permanent reservation followed in 1908**, although the Yanakie area north of the Darby River was not added until the 1960s. **Wilsons Promontory is Victoria's oldest national park.**
- A chalet for visitors was built at Darby River, but for many years a trip to the Prom was quite an adventure, involving a boat trip across Corner Inlet and a horse ride, or a car drive along the beach, with the risk of being swamped by waves. **The main entrance road was not completed until the 1930s and was sealed in 1970-71** with visitor numbers increasing steadily

- During World War II the Prom was used for commando training and was closed to the public. Army buildings at Tidal River formed the nucleus of a post-war holiday village that gradually developed as more people came to the Prom.

Natural History (at Pillar Point)

- **380 million years ago** -the solid granite base of Wilsons Promontory was formed.
- **120,000 years ago** the sea level was 6m higher than at present. Prom was a series of islands.
- **Between 120,000 and 100,000 BP** the sea level dropped and the Yanakie Isthmus formed.
- **18,000 BP** sea levels dropped to 130m below the current level creating a land bridge to Tasmania.
- **6000 BP** sea level rose to the present level.

Aboriginal History

- Wilsons Promontory National Park has an early history of Aboriginal occupation with archaeological records dating back **at least 6500 years**.
- The Prom was part of the tribal lands of the **Brataualung**. The coast provided a rich harvest of fish and shellfish while the forest provided timber and bark for shelter, tools, weapons and canoes.
- Aboriginal people **knew the area as Yiruk or Wamoon**.
- Aboriginal people **may have used the Prom, which was then part of a 'land bridge', to reach Tasmania during past Ice Ages**.

Day 4 - Little Oberon Bay walk (8.2km, 3hrs)

Starting at the Terrace toilet block, the track veers left at the junction and climbs over Tea Tree shrouded sand dunes to the southern end of Norman Beach (1.5 km) then winds across Norman Point to Little Oberon Bay.

- The walk provides fantastic views across Wilsons Promontory Marine National Park to the Anser and Glennie Island groups. Norman Point is 300 metres from the main track. Beware of unprotected cliffs

Day 5 - Squeaky Beach and Kilcunda (10km, 3 hrs)

- **Leonard Point** between **Picnic Bay and Squeaky Beach**.
- **Leonard Bay** is opposite **Squeaky Beach**.
- **Squeaky Beach sand** is almost pure quartz in the form of rounded grains causing the squeaking sound when you walk on it.
- **The difference between the sand at Squeaky Beach and Norman Beach**. Norman Beach is made up of sand rich in calcium formed from the break-down of seashells. Squeaky Beach consists of white silica-based particles.
- **Xenoliths** or 'plum puddings' are found in coarse granite on the west coast around Squeaky Beach.
- Finer grained granites or microgranites are more common to the east of the Prom. This was used to build the lighthouse.

- **Tors** (large square blocks of granite) formed at fault lines can be seen along the Waterloo Bay track.
- **Pillar Point** is an outcrop of granite boulders. It provides breathtaking views of both Norman Bay and Leonard Bay. Norman Island is in Leonard Bay and **'The Glennies' are SW of Norman Bay.**

Kilcunda was a railway station on the [Wonthaggi line along the Bass Coast in Victoria, Australia](#). It was an electric staff station from its opening until December 1916. The original station site, on a stretch of level track backing on to the ocean, was abandoned in 1925 due to coastal erosion, although a goods siding remained there until 1954. The station was moved to the former Picnic Platform, about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile (1.2 km) to the west and closer to the town, but on a 1 in 60 grade. The station operated at that site until the line's closure in 1978. There is almost no trace left of the station and the site is now part of the [Bass Coast Rail Trail](#).

George Bass Coastal Walk

The popular George Bass Coastal Walk is a cliff top walk that stretches from the outskirts of San Remo at Punchbowl Road, to the Bass Highway (just opposite the hall at Peppermint Road) in Kilcunda.

The walk is approximately seven kilometres long and takes an average of 2 hours to walk one way. The walk offers spectacular views of the coastline and follows the route of the explorer George Bass' epic voyage of discovery along the southern edge of the Anderson Peninsula, over 200 years ago.

Rail Trail Walk Foster

Lowry's Road - Foster 7.5km, 3-4 hours walk return

Part of this trail is moderately steep. At the road bridge (0.5km) the trail takes a sharp bend to the north and descends to Foster along the steep eastern side of the Hoddle Range via a series of cuttings and embankments. There is a lot of dense forest along the side of the trail composed of a great variety of plants including tree ferns and orchids, with plenty of resident bird and animal life. A kilometre or so past the bridge the trail is more open and there are spectacular views of Wilsons Promontory and Corner Inlet. Much of the descent is along the plane of a large fault - the rocks in the hills on the left are about 400 million years old whereas those to the right underneath the coastal plain are only about 100 million years. Visit the Museum in Foster to learn more about the local history of Corner Inlet and the gold rushes.

Great Southern Railway

South Gippsland, Victoria, Australia

The Great Southern Railway was financed by government in response to pressure by the settlers in South Gippsland. Early settlement was extremely difficult: the area was very isolated and difficult to move around in due to the wet climate and the steep rugged hills covered in dense forest and scrub. The railway helped make settlement succeed in South Gippsland - for example it reduced the time taken to reach Melbourne overland from weeks to merely six hours.

The railway took five years to build and opened in 1892; it initially joined Dandenong to Port Albert and was later extended to Yarram and Woodside; there were also branch-lines to Outtrim and

Wonthaggi. The railway ensured dairying would be the main industry of South Gippsland. It hastened the building of towns, roads and mines and reduced the social isolation of the settlers. Indirectly, it ensured the destruction of the great forests of Gippsland would be complete.

The government rail department designed the railway and a number of private contractors built in. Andrew O'Keefe built the section from Korumburra to Toora using 2000 men, 200 horses and 700 oxen at a cost of 322,693 pounds, 17 shillings and ten pence.

The trains carried mostly dairy products, pigs and sheep, newspapers and mail, fertilizer, fish, timber, machinery, beer, groceries and people. When the railway was closed in 1992, due in part to competition from road transport, it was only carrying supplies for the oil fields in Bass Strait.

The meandering path of the Great Southern Rail Trail from Leongatha to Foster illustrates the difficulties the surveyors had finding a passable route for a railway line through South Gippsland. Ideally, a railway line should be straight and level - it requires five times more energy to pull a train up a gradient of 1 in 100 than for a level course and an increase of 25 percent for each degree of curve. There was certainly no ideal route between Leongatha and Port Albert - the hills at Nerrena, Dollar and Foster were impassable for trains and it was necessary to make a circuitous detour of 50km via Fish Creek and Foster. From Leongatha the railway had to detour south to Koonwarra where it was possible to cross the hills there in a relatively deep and narrow valley cut by the west branch of the Tarwin River (the valley is formed where the river has cut its course along a fracture or fault in the rocks). Then, in order to avoid the Foster hills, the track detoured further south to Fish Creek from where about 6km east a route was found over the Hoddle Range via a relatively low pass. From there the railway turned north and descended along a very steep sided fault escarpment to the coastal plain at Foster.

Alongside the trail there is a diversity of plant communities, including wetlands, swamp scrub, lowland forest, damp forest and heath - there are important remnants of the vegetation that was here before agriculture changed the countryside. The main tree species include Messmate, Swamp, Strzelecki, Manna and Blue Gums and Narrow-leaf Peppermint.

Most of the rocks alongside the trail are about 100 to 50 million years old and include sandstone, coal and basalt lava. Some of the sandstone contains fossils of dinosaurs and primitive plants, fish, birds and early mammals. In the Hoddle Range the rocks are about 400 million years old and the gold found at Stockyard Creek (Foster) came from them. About 100 million years ago Australia was attached to Antarctica and located near the South Pole; after the two continents separated, Australia slowly drifted north to its present position - the immense geological forces involved fractured (faulted) the earth's crust - blocks of sandstone and other rocks pushed up along these faults form the Gippsland hills (and the traps for the oil in Bass Strait). The Foster area is the most seismically active area of Victoria and relatively minor earthquake tremors occur occasionally, no doubt associated with movement along faults in the area.