



Point Gellibrand Coastal Heritage Park

Visitors Guide

Point Gellibrand is arguably the richest heritage site in the history of Victoria. It was the first permanent settlement and seaport and was crucial to the initial growth of Victoria. From the ancient meetings of Victoria's indigenous peoples, to the backbreaking labour required to build a colony, and the tireless efforts of local conservationists, the history of Point Gellibrand is a fascinating story.

Location

In the 1840's Point Gellibrand was defined by Nelson Place, Cole Street, The Esplanade and the rocky eastern foreshore. Today it is a much smaller area bounded by Kanowna Street, Fort Gellibrand, the Eastern Foreshore and the Dockyard. Access is via Nelson Place, Williamstown. Melways Ref: Map 56 F11

Traditionally Point Gellibrand was a major food gathering site for the Yalukit-willam as the Mangroves located there are important fish and bird breeding grounds. While a shortage of freshwater meant that the area was unsuitable as a camp, indigenous people of Victoria frequently used the area for gatherings and ceremony.

Things to See and Do

Point Gellibrand hosts a number of active and passive recreational opportunities: Immerse yourself in Victoria's colonial past by visiting Fort Gellibrand, retrace Ned Kelly's steps along Battery Road, marvel at the ingenuity of our early mariners at the Timeball Tower or step back to a time when Point Gellibrand's piers were the only gateway to a new colony.

Early Settlement

In 1836 John Batman stepped ashore, and named the area Point Gellibrand in honour of his close friend London barrister Joseph Tice Gellibrand. The first steps to establishing the colony of Victoria, were to set up efficient navigational communication and to locate suitable materials and labour with which to build.

For the keen birdwatcher or nature enthusiast 'The Bay Trail' provides a safe and accessible means by which to view this rich landscape by foot or bicycle. Users should note that this is a shared pathway and be mindful of others on the trail.

Timeball Tower



Timeball Tower circa 1890's

Pre-Settlement

Point Gellibrand forms part of the Yalukit-willam traditional lands, that extended from the northern shores of Port Phillip Bay to Wilson's Promontory. The indigenous name for the area is Koort Boork Boork, which translates as 'Sheoak, Sheoak, many'.

Navigating in the 1800's required an accurate chronometer and a sextant to determine the location of the ship. In 1849 a

Timeball Tower was built to aid ships in setting their chronometers, and was in use until 1926. This tower was relocated a number of times until 1861 when it was moved to its current location at the original site of the electric telegraph station.

Gellibrand's Bluestone Quarry

In 1838 Gellibrand's quarry was opened up as a key source of bluestone for Melbourne's first buildings, roads and piers. This heavy work cutting, transporting and laying rock was carried out by convict labour and prisoners worked the quarry in leg irons. When not at the quarry prisoners were held in appalling conditions in large boats called hulks on Port Phillip Bay. Present day Battery Road is made from this bluestone and it is a widely accepted belief that Ned Kelly worked on the retaining wall in 1873. To this day Battery Road remains a testament to the cruel back breaking work carried out by Victoria's convicts.

Growth of a Colony

With the discovery of gold in Victoria in the 1850's the colony experienced a major growth period. Point Gellibrand was integral for any distribution of goods within the colony and increasingly piers were under pressure to meet demands for the loading of the sheep, wool and wheat which were to form the backbone of Victoria's economy. Ship building and repairs were a major industry on the point and by 1854 another vital means of transportation and distribution the Point Gellibrand Railways were being constructed.

Fort Gellibrand

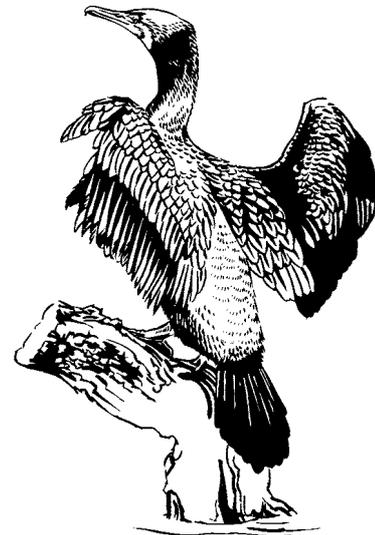
Increased wealth to the new colony also meant an increased fear of invasion. From 1860 – 1880 Point Gellibrand Fort was constructed. The Fort was the mainland's first, and played a key role in developing the military, navy and government in the colony.

This nine-gun battery stood along a prominent bluestone wall and was the earliest defence against attacks on Melbourne's ports and shipping. Central to Fort Gellibrand were the 'Disappearing Guns' a clever design that enabled the gun to roll back from its elevated position after shooting. The Fort which remained in active service until Federation, is now restored thanks to local support and can be viewed during open days.

Changing Landscapes

Point Gellibrand's rich industrial history has not been without its impacts on the natural environment. Prolific stands of sheoaks have been lost to firewood and boat-building, the basalt outcrops have been quarried and soil has been seriously compressed as Point Gellibrand heaved under the weight of industrial pressure for more than 150 years.

Today's naturally wild landscape and sea views are a credit to the local community who have fought to keep it that way. In the 1990's 'Save Point Gellibrand Action Group' lobbied to save the Point Gellibrand environment, and now increased emphasis is placed on the conservation of this fragile coastal ecosystem.



Great Cormorant © MIT

Point Gellibrand is home to an intriguing volcanic phenomenon. Millions of years ago Melbourne's west was alive with volcanic activity. As lava flowed to the shoreline at Point Gellibrand, a build up of gasses in the lava created a large bubble three meters in diameter. This geological anomaly, which is most prominent at Shelley beach, is considered to be extremely rare.

Shelly Beach was highly degraded just three years ago, but extensive revegetation by local conservationists has done much to restore the area. Plantings of Coastal Saltbush, Pigface, Knobby Clubbrush and indigenous grasses not only enhance the visitors experience but provide important habitat areas for the numerous wader birds that frequent the area.