

Yarra valley Aboriginal Sites of Significance

- **Aboriginal sculptures at William Ricketts Sanctuary:** Mt. Dandenong, Melways 52 H10.
- **Coranderrk Aboriginal Cemetery:** Barak Lane, Badger Creek, 300 Kulin graves, Melways 277 K9.
- **Battle of Yering Memorial Rock:** Site of battle between Border Police & Wurundjeri, 13/01/1840.
- **William Barak Memorial at Brushy Creek:** Stone monument plaque and tree, Melways 37 C7.
- **Barngeong Birthing Site:** At the confluence of Brushy Creek and Yarra is a Wurundjeri birthing and female initiation site where William Barak was born, Melways 24 K6.
- **Gawa Wurundjeri Resource Trail:** 340m bushland walking trail at Watson's Creek with 9 resource markers along the way, Melways 272 D5.
- **Pound Bend South Memorial Rock:** Dedicated to Reserve & 1852 corroboree site, Melways 23 C12.
- **Wurundjeri Stories Walk:** Start at Pound Bend tunnel & follow signage, Melways 23 A11.
- **Pound Bend North Memorial Rock:** Dedicated to Reserve & 1852 corroboree site, Melways 23 C9.
- **Moorrul Viewing Platform in Kangaroo Ground:** Interpretive panels, memorial, Melways 271 E11.
- **Tikalara Park:** Aboriginal living area occupied by Major Newman in 1837, Melways 22 C11.
- **Fish Farms at Finns:** Traditional fish & eel trap area, yabbie & mussel farms, etc, Melways 33 B3.
- **Yingabeal - the Scar Tree at Heide Museum:** Not just a canoe tree, also Marker Tree at junction of five Songlines (walking trails), Melways 32 E5.
- **Bolin-Bolin Billabong:** Eel and duck hunting site adjacent to corroboree ground, Melways 32 C8.
- **Bunjilaka Centre:** Melbourne Museum Carlton, 'First Peoples Exhibition', Melways 2B J9.
- **Birrarung Marr:** Celebrating Wurundjeri culture, displays, etc, along riverside walk, Melways 2F K6.
- **Koorie Heritage Trust:** Federation Square, Melb., Interactive displays, souvenirs, Melways 1A P10.

BARNGEONG

The Traditional Wurundjeri Birthing Place and Female Initiation Site at Brushy Creek

This pamphlet was produced by Reconciliation Manningham, in close cooperation with the Wurundjeri Tribe Council and the Manningham City Council, with the aim of increasing public appreciation and knowledge of sacred and significant sites along the Birrarung (Yarra River) in Manningham. The Barngeong Birthing Place, where the famed 19th Century civil rights figure, William Barak, was born, is one such place.

On 25th October 2013, a special ceremony was held, led by Wurundjeri Women Elders, to formally re-dedicate the site. This began with a private ceremony at the confluence by the Wurundjeri women and was then followed by a public celebration. This included a smoking ceremony and traditional women's dance which was taught to all the women attending.

This was a landmark event that was probably the largest women's ceremony held by the Wurundjeri since colonial settlement 1835, and it was a significant step in the process of reconciliation.

For information on the activities and contact details of Reconciliation Manningham, please visit our website at:

[HTTP://WWW.RECMAN.ORG.AU](http://www.recman.org.au)

Or contact the Secretary, Jim Poulter, on 9842 3598



BARNGEONG

BRUSHY CREEK IN WONGA PARK



Led by Elders - Aunty Alice Kolasa (left), Aunty Doreen Garvey-Wandin (right), Aunty Vicki Nicholson-Brown (with beanie), Aunty Irene Morris (5th in line, left) and Aunty Diane Kerr (6th in line, right) - the Wurundjeri women return from their private ceremony at Barngeong Gorge on 25th October 2013 to begin the public celebration. (Photo, courtesy of Barbara Oehring)

The Wurundjeri
Birthing Place
& Initiation Site
*One of Manningham's most
significant Aboriginal sites*

A Sacred Women's Site In Manningham

Barngeong is the traditional Aboriginal name of Brushy Creek in Wonga Park, a tributary of the Yarra. Manningham is fortunate to have a number of sacred and significant sites within its boundaries, and Barngeong is certainly one of the most important – it is of State and National significance.

Bunjil's Cave in the Grampians and the Wurundjeri male initiation site of Hanging Rock in the Macedon Ranges are a couple of very few sites that rank ahead of the Brushy Creek birthing place in terms of heritage significance in Victoria.

As a **Women's Site** however, Barngeong most probably ranks number one in Victoria. This is because it is not only a traditional birthing and female initiation site, but it is the known birthplace of the famed 19th century Wurundjeri leader, the internationally renowned William Barak.

How Barngeong was preserved in Wurundjeri Story and Song

For many years, the location of William Barak's birthplace was mistakenly believed to be a cave in Lilydale, but this is incorrect. It was wrongly identified as such by Robert Brough-Smyth, who was Secretary of the Aborigines Protection Board in the mid 18th century. More than simply a mistake, it would seem that he was at least in part motivated by the wish to establish favour with the owner of the property on which the cave was located, David Mitchell, who was the father of Dame Nellie Melba.

Extensive research on the subject by Nillumbik author, Mick Woiod, has however unquestioningly established the Brushy Creek and Yarra River confluence as the true location of the birthplace of William Barak.

Traditional stories and songs indicate where the camp was located and this is consistent with camps commonly being located on high ground at the confluences of major creeks with the primary river. The houses at these sites always had their doorways facing northeast, with the backs of the huts therefore toward the Barngeong Birthing Place. This was for two reasons, first that the backs of the houses were against the cold south-west winds and second, male faces had to be averted from the location. This is why Wurundjeri women Elders have decided to keep the exact location undisclosed.

Until it fell over only a few years ago, a Ring Marker Tree stood as a signpost to Barngeong only a couple of hundred metres away. It can be fairly safely assumed that an **Arched Birthing Marker Tree** probably also marked the actual birthing site itself at Barngeong.

Such marker trees were created by tying two sapling gums together to grow in the form of an arch, with a single trunk growing above the twin trunked arch. An arched marker tree signifying a birthing spot stood for many years on the ridge above Mullum-Mullum Creek on what is now Newman's Road, near the corner of Webster's Road.

Birthing as exclusively Women's Business

Women were entirely responsible for the care of the site and the preparations for birthing. Men were forbidden to enter birthing sites unless at the express invitation of women for specific ceremonial purposes other than a birth, which was entirely women's business. The role of men was only to leave food at a designated spot and otherwise pace up and down in worried anticipation.

Following the birth, the mother was smoked with herbs, the child ritually daubed with ochre, the umbilical cord cut and the placenta buried. The child was then introduced to their father who was often also

presented with the umbilical cord which he placed around his neck.

The child's totems would then be confirmed by the family. Totems signifying spiritual relationships or spiritual protectors which linked the child to their language group, tribe, clan, family, moiety and skin group were predetermined and involved no individual choice. These totems are usually an animal or bird. The child's personal totem or spiritual protector was however determined by the parents. This would be according to some environmental sign that occurred prior to or at the birth. The child's warning totem was decided after the child was about age two or three, but it remained a secret to the child and parents.

The Ceremonial Inclusion of men in Female Initiation

Birthing places were also used as female initiation sites and in some language groups, such as the Woiwung, the language of the Wurundjeri, these rituals involved men. When a girl came of age, the Wurundjeri ritual of **Murrum Turukuruk** was conducted whereby the girl was inducted into womanhood.

This involved two smoking fires being lit and the initiate being dusted with powdered charcoal by women of her family. Food was placed on a stick like a shishkebab and held by the girl. The young men of the tribe would form a row and stamp their feet in unison as they slowly approached and encircled her.

The young men would then throw sticks or flowers toward the initiate and vow to protect her as a sister. They would then each take food from the stick she held, chew it and spit it into one of the two fires, then return to their line formation facing the girl. The sticks or flowers were then collected by the women and buried or otherwise destroyed in the fire. Men and women would then participate in a common ritual dance to end the ceremony.