



# Land Use of the Darebin Creek Catchment

The Darebin Creek Catchment has been used for a vast array of uses over the past two hundred years from Aboriginal use, European settlement, agriculture and irrigation, extractive industry as well as refuse dumping. The final uses for the Creek now include both passive and active recreation plus increased pressure from urbanisation. The following information provides details on these uses and how this has effected the Darebin Creek Catchment over the years.

## ***Koori History***

The catchment of the Darebin Creek is part of the homeland of the Wurundjeri willam people. This community is part of the Woiworing language group whose clan lands stretch from western Melbourne, across the Darebin Creek to outer eastern Melbourne. The Woiworing language group interacted with other Koori communities within the region. On a larger scale, they are also part of the Kulin Confederacy that consisted of a number of language groups.

Archaeological evidence of camping places found in the area, is generally concentrated near creeks, rivers and wetlands and suggests that the Wurundjeri willam had a strong connection to rivers and streams.



*A plaque along the Darebin Creek marks a site of significance for the Wurundjeri willam*

A range of foods that would have been abundant in warmer seasons would have been found at these sites. This infers that communities used them during warmer seasons when food and resources were available, later moving to other areas such as the high country.

Apart from fresh water, the Darebin Creek catchment provided a wide range of foods for the Wurundjeri willam that included fish and game, birds' eggs, tubers and shoots from water plants, seeds and sap as well as fruits. Other resources available to the community included firewood, timber and bark, basalt for making tools and furs for clothing.

## European Arrival

### ***Agriculture***

With the arrival and occupation by Europeans came a dramatic change in land use that left its mark upon the catchment up until the present day. The earliest activity included farming with the Silurian Sandstone soils being the first areas to be used. Areas of extensive basalt were generally unable to be used for crops and, as a result, grazing or poultry farming took place.

Following the 1850's many Chinese people began to move from the goldfields to Melbourne. This was partly a result of an increase of racist attitudes on the goldfields as well as the decline in gold found there. Subsequently, many Chinese began to develop market gardens and find work as shepherds and hawkers. Market

gardens were often found close to the Darebin Creek as the availability of water was important for irrigating crops. Two of these market gardens were located at Lucerne Farm (now the LaTrobe Golf Club) in Alphington and Sparkes Reserve, Alphington. Produce from these market gardens was sold at the Queen Victoria Market and to local residents.

Grazing of dairy stock was common within the catchment with some dairies operating within the area. Cattle often roamed without restriction onto private property and down to the creek. Major dairy farms were located at Lucerne Farm and the Darebin Parklands in Alphington.

Today, grazing of sheep and cattle is the most common form of agriculture in the rural part of the catchment. Other farming activities such as dairy farming and cropping are far less common. Farms tend to be relatively small on average the size of rural properties in the Whittlesea municipality being approximately 17 hectares with the majority around five hectares.

### ***Extractive Industries in the Darebin Creek Catchment***

Quarrying of stone began well before European occupation. The Wurundjeri willam extracted basalt and silcrete to make tools for a range of purposes including food preparation, hunting and making clothing. The production of such tools was a skilled task. Hammer stones were used to shape stone tools, producing sharp blades and axes from raw materials. Estimating where and how hard to hit the stone took a great deal of experience.

After the arrival of Europeans, extractive industries also started in the catchment. One of the first quarries in the area was the T. Adams and Co. quarry in Alphington. Although initially purchased for use as an orchard, the southern section of the site was developed as a bluestone quarry in 1890. By the time it closed in 1965, the quarry had removed six million tons of stone. A huge level of labour was initially involved in order to process the

rock, as all rock was crushed by hand and not machinery. The working conditions during the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century within the quarries were often very poor. Quarries were a major source of employment in Alphington, and despite the hardships involved, many men were forced to work in the industry out of sheer economic necessity. The historic bluestone buildings scattered throughout the catchment that still stand today are testimony to this industry. Due to the continuing availability of basalt, a number of quarries still operate today in Epping and Wollert.

### ***Open Space***

The requirement for open space has always been important to landholders and residents of the Darebin Creek catchment. As early as 1901, interest was shown in the acquisition of land for recreation. In 1929 the Heidelberg Shire Council purchased Rockbeare Park for this particular purpose. The land was used for a range of activities including yabbing, fishing, collecting leeches, picnics and sports events.

Later in 1973, local residents with the assistance of the Heidelberg Council came together to set up the Rockbeare Park Conservation Group which aimed to enhance the natural values of parts of the Darebin Creek valley in Alphington and Ivanhoe. In 1975 the Northcote Council purchased the Adams Quarry (by that stage a municipal tip) for the purpose of establishing parkland. The Rockbeare Park Conservation group later evolved to become the Darebin Parklands Association. In 1978, the Cities of Heidelberg and Northcote set up the Darebin Parklands Interim Committee of Management with the support of the City of Northcote for the purpose of coordinating the planning and development of the Darebin Parklands. In 2001, the Darebin Parklands Committee of Management merged with the Darebin Creek Coordinating Committee, and now forms the Darebin Creek Management Committee Inc.



### *Darebin Creek Environment Centre*

The Committee aims to work jointly with the Cities of Yarra, Darebin, Banyule and Whittlesea as well as LaTrobe University to advise on environment and planning issues for the Darebin Creek and manage the Darebin Parklands.

The committee seeks to ensure the preservation, restoration, environmental protection and ecologically sensitive development and maintenance of the Darebin Creek Linear Park, with a long-term aim of securing a linear park with significant recreation and conservation values.



### *Cyclists on the Darebin Creek Shared Trail*

Open space within the Darebin Creek catchment is used for a number of recreational purposes. Common forms of recreation along the creek include walking, jogging, cycling, picnicking, nature observation and dog walking. A number of private and municipal open space sporting facilities exist within the catchment.

These include a shared walking/cycling trail, golf courses, tennis courts, football and baseball fields.

### ***Educational Facilities***

A range of educational institutions exists within the catchment from primary and secondary schools and tertiary institutions, the latter including, LaTrobe University, Northern Metropolitan College of TAFE and RMIT

### ***Urbanisation***

The 1880's saw the first urban development within the catchment. This growth of urbanisation in a predominantly undeveloped area called greenfield development, began in Alphington and Ivanhoe and moved towards Settlement Rd. Urbanisation continues intensively today in the northern areas of the catchment. Approximately half of the Darebin Creek catchment is currently urban with the other half being predominantly rural. Approximately 70 percent of the municipality of Whittlesea that incorporates the northern part of the Darebin Creek catchment is rural. Here, urban development is increasing dramatically along with a growing population of 1.66 percent. Areas such as South Morang, Mernda/Doreen, Whittlesea and Epping North have been zoned for such development.

### ***Commercial and Industrial Activity***

Commercial businesses are situated in varying densities throughout the catchment. Shopping strips can be found throughout the area as well as larger shopping centres. A range of industrial businesses also operates within the catchment. Common industries include providers of automotive parts and repairs, building and construction, chemical manufacturers, food manufacturing and concrete batching and sign writing.

*For further information please contact the Darebin Creek Management Committee on 9499 4454 or visit our website at [www.dcmc.org.au](http://www.dcmc.org.au)*