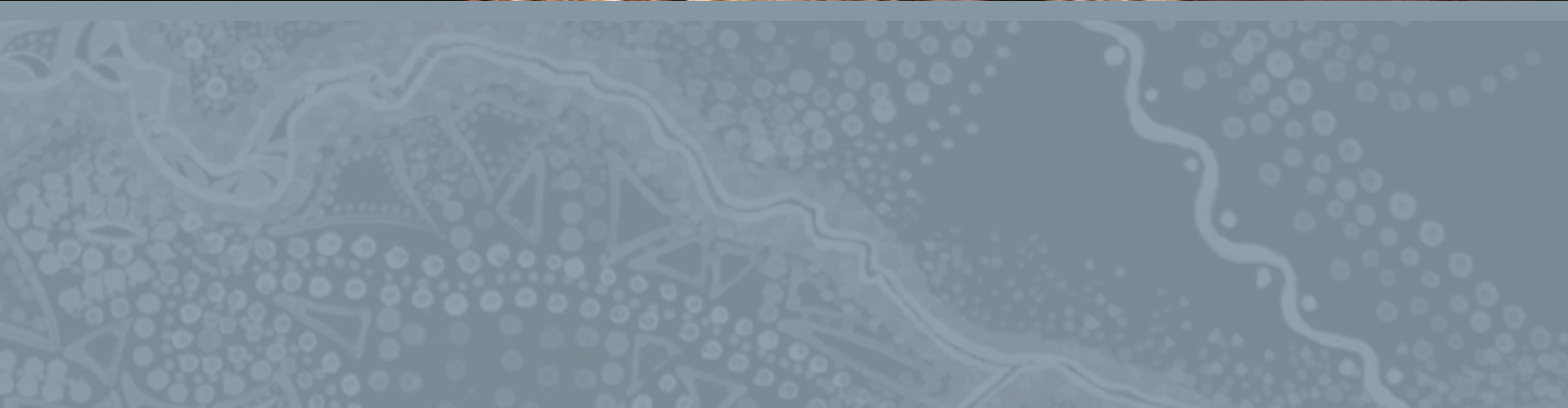


RIVER JOURNEYS

The Swan and Canning rivers are central to Perth's identity and provide a playground which contributes to the vibrant city community. A project to link key areas along the Swan River's southern foreshore, delivered through a range of media, is capturing the river's natural and cultural heritage while enriching visitors' experiences and encouraging custodianship of the area.

by Ben Ansell





The Swan Canning Riverpark covers 72.1km² of river reserve and adjoining public lands, and supports a diverse range of plant and animal life, of which some are endemic to the region. The Swan River, or *Derbal Yerrigan* as it's known in the Noongar language, is 72km long and the intersecting Canning River (*Djarlgarro Beiliar*) is 110km long. Together, these two rivers and their tributaries drain a catchment area of 2090km², stretching and snaking their way from Wickiepin in the Wheatbelt to the Indian Ocean at Fremantle.

This area has significant historical, natural and cultural values. A project to celebrate these values, and enhance visitor experiences along the Riverpark foreshore has begun. It aims to improve riverfront access and facilities, while increasing the community's awareness of the natural and cultural heritage of the Swan Canning Riverpark. It has three key themes – cultural, environmental and historical – and has been designed to encourage visitors to take 'River Journeys' to reflect on the river's unique history and stories. Various forms of interpretation have been brought together to deliver the experience, including information, pause points or interpretation nodes, virtual trail guides, and short audio clips, enabling visitors to engage with Aboriginal culture through oral history, connecting emotionally with the storyteller.

A VISION FOR THE RIVERPARK

The River Journeys project has been in the making for a number of years and is part of a greater vision for a Riverpark Trail, to create a continuous recreation network through the Swan Canning Riverpark from Fremantle to Guildford on both the northern and southern shores of the Swan and Canning rivers. The network of trails seeks to improve visitors' connection with the rivers and enhance understanding and enjoyment of the Riverpark. This ambitious project includes a range of recreational opportunities including short- and long-distance walking and cycling circuits, and improved access to the river edge. It includes interpretation



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Main The stunning Blackwall Reach, otherwise known in Noongar as *Jennalup* – the place of feet.

Photo – Marc Russo

Background The 'Nyungah Dreaming along the Swan' painting by Noongar artist Charmaine Cole has been used throughout the interpretive material.

Above Engraved quotes tell a unique story about each site.

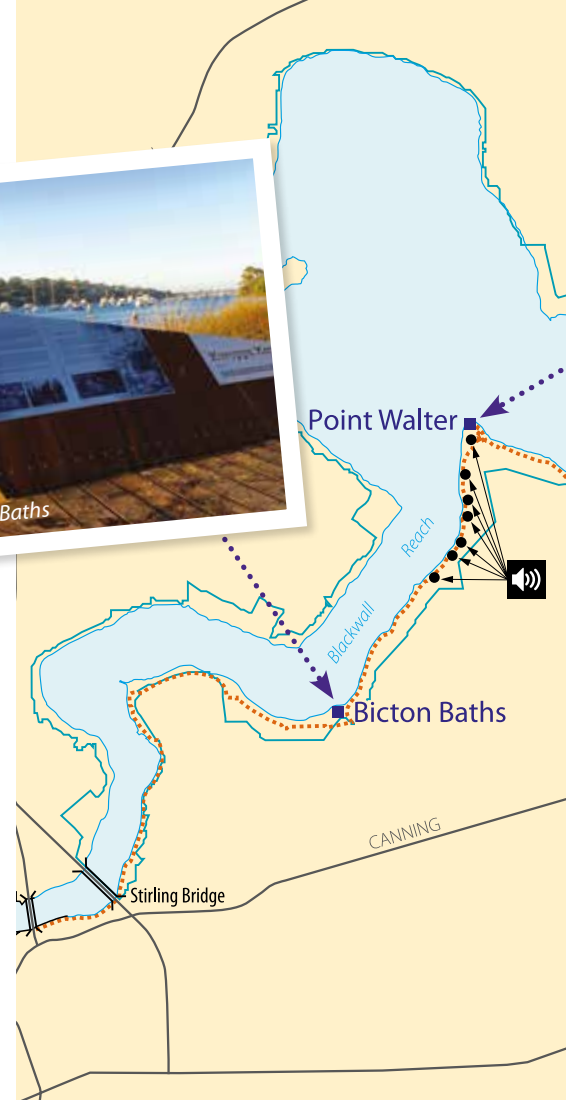
Opposite page

Far right Interpretive nodes have been designed to complement the landscape.

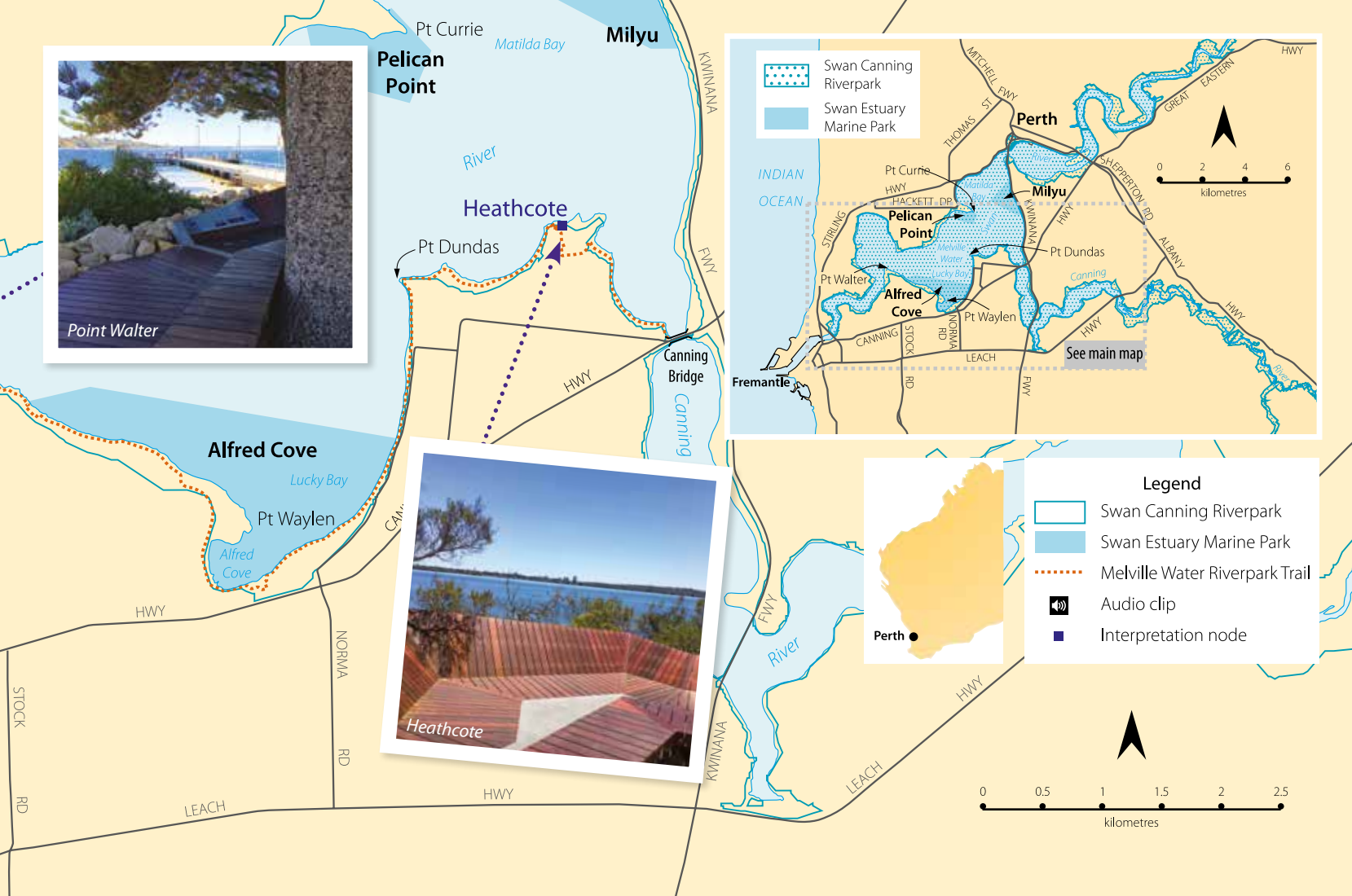
Photos – Ben Ansell/Parks and Wildlife

nodes at key visitor locations along the path to communicate the Riverpark's natural and cultural values.

The project has been developed as part of the draft *Riverpark Trail Masterplan* and the *Marli Riverpark Interpretation Plan* (*marli* refers to the 'black swan' in Noongar). Integral to developing the *Marli Riverpark Interpretation Plan*, was the establishment of a Noongar Advisory Panel to integrate cultural heritage information and provide advice for the plan. The panel includes members of the Whadjuk Noongar community, the traditional owners of the Perth region, who speak for country in the Swan Canning Riverpark area. The panel guided how messages about Whadjuk Noongar cultural heritage values of the rivers should be told, and identified important themes, stories, and key locations to ensure heritage values are upheld and protected.



The Riverpark Trail vision was realised in 2015 when the first phase was rolled out, linking key areas along the Swan River's southern foreshore. The first section is in the City of Melville with three interpretation nodes, and two trail guides implemented. This section of the Riverpark was an ideal location for the pilot project, as the foreshore area is easily accessible and receives high visitation all year round. In total, 19 interpretation nodes have been identified along the Swan and Canning rivers, with an additional five nodes selected by the Noongar Advisory Panel, due to their cultural significance to the Whadjuk community. Heathcote, in Applecross, was one of these areas due to the area's cultural significance as a men's ceremonial site. The aim is for this project to become an impetus to roll out more interpretation nodes and trail guides across the Riverpark.



“Engraved quotes run along the aluminium frames telling a unique story about each site and welcome visitors to the Riverpark.”

ENVIRONMENTAL, CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The three new interpretation nodes installed over summer 2015–16 are at sites at Bicton Baths, Point Walter and Heathcote. Designed and installed in partnership between Parks and Wildlife and the City of Melville, these nodes are designed in a shape and style that provides minimal visual impact while enticing users to a focal point, drawing their attention to information. The interpretation nodes are wooden deck structures that link into existing pathways, and are shaped to create a multi-use space providing seating, interpretation and improved foreshore access. The nodes meet universal access

standards, increasing recreational opportunities for a range of people.

The interpretation draws on visual, audio and artistic elements to help visitors engage in a variety of ways. Engraved quotes run along the aluminium frames telling a unique story about each site and welcome visitors to the Riverpark, while interpretation panels filled with images and stories of historical events build a picture of the area. The information is presented in Noongar and English to help acknowledge the past, present and future connections to the area. The panels also prompt visitors to download various apps to access trail guides and audio stories shared by Whadjuk elders about the cultural heritage of the river.



Each interpretation node is unique and shares a variety of site-specific stories. For example, the Point Walter node shares the story of how *Djunda* the Charnock woman created the prominent white sand spit, while the Bicton Baths node showcases its diverse history as a one-time oyster farm, an animal quarantine station, and then the home of the Melville Amateur Water Polo Club.



Riverpark visitors can also discover the change in the Swan Estuary marine ecosystem moving further upstream to Heathcote, where seagrass habitat provides protection and food resources for an array of species, including western school prawns, blue-swimmer crabs, gobbleguts and seahorses.

“When you come here to Point Walter, to this white part, you are standing on the white hair of Djunda the Charnock woman, who left some of her hair here when she went back up to the milkyway.” – Whadjuk elder Marie Taylor, 2014

VIRTUAL TRAIL GUIDES

A key part of the project is the inclusion of two virtual trail guides that intersect and link the interpretation nodes. A virtual

trail guide is an online trip planner, which provides detailed maps, descriptions of trails and points of interest, that can be accessed via a smart phone or computer. Similar to the interpretation nodes, the long-term intent of the virtual trail guides is to develop multiple guides for segments and loops of the Riverpark, eventually covering the majority of its path network.

The virtual trail guides are hosted on various phone apps, such as the Geotourist app and the Trails WA app (see also ‘In review’ on page 34). Interpretive information on these apps are presented in the form of ‘points of interest’, which generally relate to the location identified on the trail map. The guides feed into the interpretation nodes, serving as an information portal, enabling people to access more information about the

ecological, historical, and Noongar cultural and heritage values of the local area.

Fremantle Traffic Bridge to Canning Bridge is one of the virtual trail guides that intersect the interpretation nodes. Titled ‘Melville Water Riverpark Trail’, this 16km trail stretches along some of Perth’s most precious southern foreshore reserves, boasting impressive views of the city’s skyline. The trail is walker and cycle-friendly, and can be enjoyed any time of the year. While not marked by directional signage, the trail does have a number of points of interest, that can be accessed on a mobile smart phone.

In addition, running along the limestone cliffs of Blackwall Reach Reserve (known as *Jennalup* to the Whadjuk people) is a second trail guide named *Jenna Bididi Yorga*, which translates

“The health of the river is very important. Before the pathways our rivers were the roadways of our life, we went up and down the river hunting, gathering and it was food provided for all and all came from the river.”



Above The Melville Water Riverpark Trail takes in beautiful views of the city.

Opposite page

Top left Seats along the way cater to those who want to stop and rest.

Far left Whadjuk elders Noel Morich and Marie Taylor were filmed in key areas along the foreshore to capture stories for use on the nodes and trails guides.

Photo – Theo Orr/Anthropos Australis Pty Ltd

Above right Paths guide walkers and cyclists on a journey of discovery.

Right Information along the way enriches the visitors’ experience.

Photos – Ben Ansell/Parks and Wildlife

to “women’s feet walking on a path” in Noongar. This 1km trail guide focuses on the relationship the Whadjuk people have to this area of the river, being traditionally a place for women and children.

WHADJUK ELDER FILMING

A key strength of the project is the participation and engagement of Whadjuk Noongar people. Parks and Wildlife staff worked closely with Whadjuk Elders Marie Taylor and Noel Morich, who are both members of the Noongar Advisory Panel, to ensure the project connects

to cultural heritage and is implemented in a culturally sensitive way. In order to reflect the Noongar tradition of delivering stories and sharing information orally, four Whadjuk elders were filmed telling stories about the cultural significance of each site, creating a resource which benefits the Whadjuk elders and the wider community, by gathering stories that have not yet been recorded.

“The health of the river is very important. Before the pathways our rivers were the roadways of our life, we went up and down the river hunting, gathering and it was food provided for all and all came from the river.”

– Whadjuk elder Noel Morich, 2014

The filming was done at Heathcote, Point Walter and Bicton foreshore interpretation nodes, including Blackwall Reach. The film has been edited into 13 audio clips and one video trailer. They are available on the Explore Parks WA website, as well as on the Geotourist app.

DISCOVER MORE

‘River Journeys’ is a first for the Riverpark and has provided an exciting opportunity for Parks and Wildlife and the City of Melville at a time when cycling and walking are growing in popularity. This has improved the connection and engagement with the Riverpark’s heritage, and

enhanced local infrastructure, increasing the aesthetic and amenity values along the southern foreshore. And the best part? It’s right on Perth’s doorstep.

Do it yourself

Trails WA and Geotourist apps are available for download from Google Play and Apple iTunes. Head to parks.dpaw.wa.gov.au/park/swan-canning-riverpark for more information.



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