

An Albion Ardeer Creek Walk

By

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Today we will be walking along Kororoit Creek in Albion and Ardeer. In particular, the stretch between Forrest St and Ballarat Rd. We will go up one side and down the other. The round trip takes about 2 hours and covers 3-4 km.

We begin at Forrest St and head upstream; the creek on our left; on the bike/footpath that was put in around 20 years ago. There was quite a bit of revegetation done at this time too, which is now reasonably established. It's pleasant enough to stooge up and down the path for a bit of exercise, but we will be taking a few small detours to take in some places of interest.

Like many areas in the western suburbs this stretch of creek is of interest for its layers of history, its natural features, flora and fauna. As this area was neglected for so long in terms of development and in terms of people's consciousness, it is amazing what has survived. There are patches of remnant vegetation that, despite the advent of sheep grazing, invasion by weeds and feral animals, stand as a testament to the pre-colonial landscape.

So, starting at Forrest St, we head upstream. The first feature we encounter is a large pool. If you read the sign (hard, because it has graffiti all over it), you will discover that this pool was for many years the Sunshine swimming pool. There was some infrastructure here: changing shed, toilet etc. You can see the remains of some concreting and a footbridge when the water level is low enough. Apparently there was a sluice gate at the downstream end to dam the water up temporarily too.

Local legend has it that this pool is bottomless. Even when the creek is in flood this pool is quite still while above and below it is a raging torrent. Depending who you talk to, either a swimmer or a horse and cart went down in this pool, Divers were brought in but couldn't find the bottom or the victim. The pool fell into disuse when the Albion Explosives Factory upped its operations during WWII and the creek got polluted.

Moving on up the path, we pass Selwyn Park and the Albion Tennis Courts, where we make our first detour. Just off the path is a fantastic rocky escarpment. A little clambering among the rocks brings you out onto a ledge, 3-4 metres above the water, with a fine view of this pool and the escarpment on the opposite side. This is our first encounter with remnant vegetation. A quick glance will reveal Kangaroo grass, acacias, she-oaks, and kangaroo apples. Indigenous women would use the

kangaroo apple as a contraceptive. They would boil the leaves and drink the tea. Today this plant is used as the basis for the pill.

Evidence of Aboriginal settlement abounds along the creek, and there are many sites where stone implements may be found. You will appreciate that I can't tell you exactly where out of respect to the original inhabitants. If you contact the Wurundjeri or AAV they may tell where they are. Alternatively, if you learn what to look for you will find it readily enough. Not too far away in Keilor, evidence of Pleistocene settlement has been found and dated to around 40,000 years ago. It would be ridiculous to suppose that they went to Keilor and not to another creek only a few kms away.

Moving on, we come to the power line easement. As it cuts a swathe through the suburb, it presents quite a view across the plains. I like to use this view to imagine what the plains would have been like. The early explorers and settlers (like Hume and Hovell, Charles Grimes and John Batman) all describe looking over a seemingly endless prairie covered with tussocky grasses, a myriad of wildflowers and small clumps of she-oak. Several million sheep and rabbits soon changed that though, so now we are left with gazing up the power line easement and imagining.

Under the power lines on the creek is another rocky escarpment. This one has been quarried. By whom no-one seems to know. The quarrying has revealed some of the local geology though. The basalt plain that the creek flows through is reckoned to be around 5 million years old. Likely sources for the lava are the numerous extinct volcanoes that dot the plain: Mt Cotterall, Mt Derrimut, Mt Kororoit and Mt Aitkin are all fairly close by, as are Mt Macedon and the You Yangs (though their lava is considerably older at around 250 million years old). Looking at the quarried face you can see layers indicating several discrete lava flows and a few layers of volcanic ash.

There are a few stepping stones here you can use when the water is low.

Slightly further on, we go off the path opposite the end of the new retirement village, and head left out to a corner where there is more remnant veg (Kangaroo grass, pink bindweed and a few other wildflowers) and another pool. By now you will be getting the idea that the creek, rather than being a continuous flow is more a series of pools connected by trickles. This area for me is notable for its reptiles. Apart from snakes, of which there is no shortage, there is a heap of bluetongues and, most remarkably, Black Rock Skinks. Not quite as big as a bluetongue, they are a large jet-black lizard with raised ridges on their back and little white dots on the top of the ridges. You have to be lucky to see one though.

Just around the corner is a weir that can be used for stepping-stones if you wish to cross.

Above the weir the creek has been dug out and made very regular. This stretch up to Ballarat Rd has been completely transformed. I suspect that this section was once a reedy, marshy wetland, as it is fairly flat and lowlying. It would have been dug out in the days when creeks were thought of as mere drains. Hopefully we are a bit more enlightened now. It is interesting that the wildlife tends to gather in the remnant sections. The birds, lizards and even the rabbits and foxes prefer them. There is an incredible variety of bird life along the creek, both native and exotic. I could give you an exhaustive list but heres a few standouts: reed warblers, scrubtits, boobooks, azure and sacred kingfishers, yellow-tailed black cockatoos, collared sparrowhawks, brown falcons, fantails, zebra finches and many, many more.

We will hurry through this bit, pausing only to note a few aboriginal artefacts exposed by erosion. Hurry along a short section of Ballarat Rd and cross the creek at the Yallourn St Bridge. We head downstream past a small market garden of prickly pears, lemon trees and some greens.

As we move back down the dig out section of creek you get a view of the conjunction of Jones Creek (made into concrete drain) and a bit of rocky escarpment on the other side.

It is interesting to note a change of consciousness among the people who live along the creek, or maybe more so in the people who build along the creek. The older house all face away, presenting an almost fortified back fence, shutting out nature and proclaiming the creek as dangerous and undesirable. The newer and renovated houses embrace the creek with picture windows, access gates in the fences and frontages onto the creek. The path always has walkers and bike riders on it.

Back under the powerlines it starts to get interesting. The path, never formal on this side, becomes even less so, and we enter the largest tract of remnant grassland. It goes from here all the way back to Forrest St. Its extremely rocky, so be advised that solid footwear is essential. The older residents tell me that this area was always wild and even the kids wouldn't play on it because it was too rocky and prickly. Apart from the now obvious kangaroo grass, there is a lot of interesting vegetation here, but you have to look for it. It's all tucked away in nooks and crannies but its there: bluebells, red-leg grass, bindweed, lilies. We make our way up the hill and are rewarded at the top with a fine view across the creek of the cliff that we sat on earlier, And we can continue on past the old swimming hole, make our way under Forrest St and the adjacent railway line, cross the creek at the footbridge and make our way back to where we started. Refreshed, revitalised and ready for a restorative ale.

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