



Manjaree Heritage Trail

The information for this trail is taken from the Old Shoreline Heritage Trails series and is designed to give the walker a brief glimpse into what this area was like prior to European settlement.

The distinctive features of the Swan River's mouth – limestone hills, a shallow estuary blocked by a rocky bar, a sandy and swampy isthmus – were created by events 6000 years in the past. That may seem like a long time ago but for the Whadjuck people, who lived here at Manjaree, it was well within their own time.

They knew that there had been great changes in the coastline. During the last ice age the growth of the polar ice caps locked up the water and the sea level fell to such an extent that the coastline moved to beyond Rottneest, which in those days was a mountain range. The river Derbal Yaragan, came down its present course to Fremantle, crossed the present city centre to the vicinity of Fishing Boat Harbour, and continued across another 30km of coastal plain. Today's river mouth was then a high limestone ridge, linking Rous Head in the north with Arthur Head in the south.

With the melting of the ice, the sea level rose beyond its present level, flooding the Fremantle area. The rising sea filled the river and its banks with sand. It drowned the limestone ridge which ran across the present mouth of the river. So when the sea returned to normal, and the river's old course was blocked with sand banks, the limestone ridge was gradually broken away. Its residue remained as a rocky bar across the river's mouth.

The rocky bar sheltered the estuary from the sea. Whereas upstream the river was deep, here it was relatively wide and shallow. This made the estuary a good place for crossing the river. Its shallows were also a good place for catching fish. For Midgegoorong and his people, Fremantle was a significant place. This was where Colonial settlement began. This was the first land to be turned into private lots and public infrastructure – this land which Midgegoorong's people had looked after, and to which they belonged.

The people who lived here knew the ancient history of the area. They told of how the land had once extended past Rottneest, but had been inundated by the sea. This history had been passed down through hundreds of generations. So Fremantle is also significant to the world, as the site of one of the oldest oral traditions in human history.

Walyalup was the country on both banks of Derbal Yaragan. Manjaree was on the south bank near the mouth and the headland, and was perhaps an important meeting place. Certainly it was a crossroads, because Manjaree was significant for precisely the same reason that Fremantle was settled – it was at the mouth of the river, where tracks converged.

1. **Cantonment Hill** – Was a landmark known as Dwerda Weearidinup, place of the dingo spirit, and was probably a good living place. From his account it seems that Captain Fremantle met a group of people living there, during the first month of settlement reciprocal visits were made, and goods were traded. (Fremantle believed that the people practically lived on Zamia nuts. Trying them unprocessed, he became very ill.) The area continued to be a regular living place for at least two decades.
2. **The River** – Was known as Derbal Yaragan. It was created by movements of the Waugal, the powerful, serpent like dreamtime spirit.
3. **The River Crossing** – Was at Ferry Point which ran out into the river where the railway station is now. This channel had to be swum, so some of the women and children might go the long way round (via Herrison Island) and meet up with the others at Bibra Lake.
4. **Tracks** – A complete network of tracks known as bidi, covered the region and early Colonial roads probably followed these routes. From Ferry Point tracks ran along the river bank, to a crossing at the lower Canning River, to Bibra Lake, and South to Rockingham. Beach Street no doubt follows a track, and the old shoreline round to the headland may have been a track.
5. **Round House** – From 1831 the Round House was the most conspicuous symbol of the new settlement, standing like a fort on the headland. It became notorious as the last place people were put before being taken to Rottneest Island. Relatives would visit Aboriginal prisoners to talk to them from outside the walls.
6. **Whaling Station** – The stranding of whales used to be an occasion for large gatherings, feasting and merriment. There were often scraps and residues near the tryworks, so Bathers Bay became an important place during the first two decades of settlement.
7. **Native School** – The old Port Office, or Harbour Master's office (located at about the present position of the railway crossing at the end of Marine Terrace) was used in 1841 to establish a Native School. Eighteen Aboriginal children were taught by a Mrs Robertson.

Your comments on the trails are invited and can be forwarded to;

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