

## SONGLINES ARE EVERYWHERE

When British settlement in Australia began in 1788 the colonists were essentially blind to Aboriginal technology. The manicured environment they saw had been carefully shaped by constant burning off and it looked for all the world like an English gentleman's estate. However it was nevertheless thought of as the 'natural' state of affairs. These misapprehensions permeate our history books and continue to influence our thinking right up to the present day. So in this sense we have been brought up to be virtually blind to many aspects of our Aboriginal heritage.

It is exactly the same situation with Aboriginal trade and travel routes, which are known as Songlines. The reason they are called Songlines is because the landmarks, ecological features and creation stories along each route were coded into a song. Aboriginal people had to learn hundreds of these songs that had verses patching into each other, thus enabling them to diverge at any given point onto a different trail and a different song.

These Songlines criss-crossed the whole of Australia with the important travel routes covering many hundreds of kilometres. These major Songlines were even coded celestially, so that the various landmarks were represented in the constellations. For instance once such celestially coded Songline goes from Alice Springs to Byron Bay.

Now just pause and think about this for a minute. Why would people from Alice Springs want to travel to Byron Bay and vice versa? The answer is both simple and stunning.

People from the central desert wanted to go to the far east coast to see the ocean and witness the local people working in cooperation with dolphins to catch fish. Every dolphin was known by name and responded to their name in working as a team to drive shoals of fish to the shore. Aboriginal people would net the fish and then share the fish evenly with the dolphins. On the other side of the ledger people from the far east coast of Australia wanted to travel to the central desert to see the majestic Uluru for themselves.

When settlers first arrived in Melbourne in 1835 they simply got on their horses and in their carts and started spreading out into the hinterland. They of course followed the ridge lines, valley lines and easy contours that seemed to be remarkably free of trees and offered convenient travel routes. These Songlines then became established cart tracks and were progressively gravelled then bitumenised.

So whilst Melbourne itself was established on a surveyed one mile square grid of north-south and east-west roads, all the meandering roads out of Melbourne were originally Aboriginal Songlines. If you take an aerial view in your mind's eye, you can see all the main roads radiating out of Melbourne. Geelong Road, Ballarat Road, Calder Highway, Sydney Road, Plenty Road, Heidelberg Road, Maroondah Highway, Dandenong Road and Nepean Highway. They were all originally Songlines, but are not recognised as such, and our kids at school are not taught this part of our heritage.

It is in fact quite easy to identify Songlines and being on the Yarra, Warrandyte has an abundance of them. You can for instance be certain that any shallow rapids area on the Yarra was the point at which a Songline crossed the river. The street where the Police Station is situated is one such place where the Songline taking you to Research crossed the river to follow the Research-Warrandyte Road. Barely a couple of hundred metres further up where the bridge stands, is where the Songline to Kangaroo Ground starts. Take a trip along the Kangaroo Ground road and see how it follows the ridge line and gives you 360 degree views. It is of course also a Songline.

Another good example is Tyndals Road. Take your kids along it and enjoy the panoramic vistas to the east and west. Tell them, 'Hey kids, this is an Aboriginal Songline, You know this because you can see for miles.' Originally the Tyndals Road Songline branched off from Doncaster Road to follow Old Warrandyte Road. It then went past the Donvale Christian College, followed the ridge line and dropped down into Pound Bend. However it is now bisected by Warrandyte Road where a cutting has been put in.

Much of Warrandyte Road itself was also a Songline. The route followed the ridge line as it does today past Warrandyte High School, but the original Songline then followed Melbourne Hill Road. With a little bit of thought it is relatively easy to identify the original route of these Songlines by seeing where cuttings and diversions have been put in.

So if you have any information that could help to map these local Songlines and restore knowledge of this part of our heritage, please let me know.