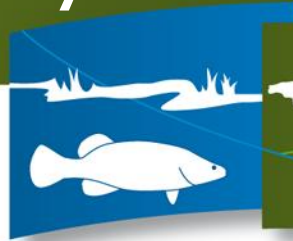


European influences on our waterways

Fact Sheet



NORTH CENTRAL
Catchment Management Authority
Connecting Rivers, Landscapes, People



Connecting Rivers, Landscapes, People

There is a social value in understanding the background history that has shaped the society we live in today along the Loddon River. Historic sites and areas provide a rich resource for use in education, which aids in nurturing understanding and respect of the diversity of cultural heritage within the community.

Profound changes to the landscape occurred at the time of European settlement. Land clearing and occupation by the settlers, particularly along watercourses, displaced the Aboriginal people from their traditional land and deprived them access to many of their most abundant food and water sources.

This fact sheet briefly outlines the major historical European events along the waterways within the project area: the Loddon River (downstream of Cairn Curran) and Tullaroop Creek (downstream of Tullaroop Reservoir).

Early explorers

Major Thomas Mitchell was the first European to look over the great ironbark forests, the open volcanic plains and the vast level floodplains of the Loddon catchment.

On 1 July 1836, Mitchell approached the Loddon River not far from the current location of the Fernihurst township. At this point he reported ponds surrounded by 'yarra' trees or river red gum, after which he termed the river 'Yarrayne'. His diary records talks of 'strong yarra trees fixed on the brink of the stream' and 'steep banks thickly covered in grass' (Munro 1992).

Mitchell camped on the banks of the Loddon River in the Fernihurst district and found '... one of the most beautiful spots I have ever seen, the turf, the woods and the banks of the little stream which murmured through the vale had so much the appearance of a well kept park that I felt loath to injure its surface by the passage of our cart wheels' (Stevens 1969).

Mitchell renamed the river to the Loddon on 27 September 1836 near the present site of Newstead as it resembled a little stream in England he recalled.

In 1838 overlander Joseph Hawden explored the Loddon River. They followed the Loddon River from Serpentine Creek to Fernihurst before heading west. Their path returned to the Loddon River, which they followed to the Murray River. The following diary entry dates 7 February 1838.



An early sketch of the Loddon River, or Yarrayne as it was known. Source: Reflections from the Kinypaniel (1992)

'Pursued the course of the Yarane (or Yarrayne), which was perfectly dried up, except that every seven or ten miles we saw a little water in its bed.

The country continued generally to be of the same description as on the previous two days; in some places, however, the soil was light, and appeared to have been deposited by the Yarane or, more probably, by an entire inundation of the country in rainy seasons; the dray wheels sometimes sunk in it up to the axles.'

Early pastoralists

On hearing Mitchell's glowing descriptions, pastoralists flocked to the area to take up runs in the southern catchment areas and on the banks of the Murray and the Loddon rivers. Much of the better land was occupied by the 1840s, forcing settlers to take up land in the less well watered country in the west of the catchment.

In the south, brothers Hector and Donald Simson built a grand bluestone house on Green Hill on the banks of Tullaroop Creek in the 1840s. As it was the usual practice to wash sheep before shearing in those days, the Simson's built a bluestone wall across Tullaroop Creek to form a sheep wash (Willis 1988).

In 1840 the first company of white men crossed the Loddon River and took up land near the current township of Laanecoorie for a sheep run.

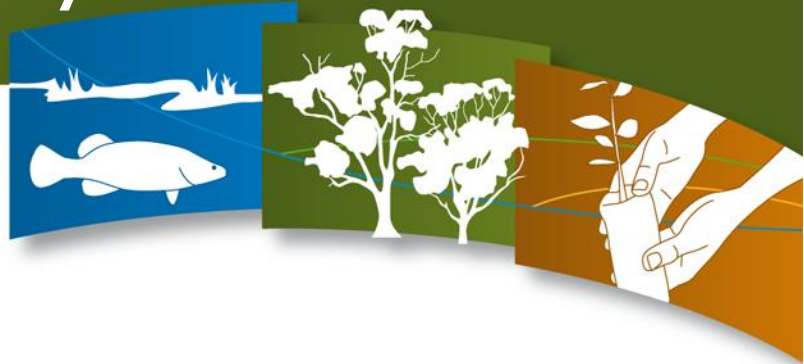
The floods of 1870 washed away the first bridge over the river at Laanecoorie and totally devastated the thriving farms along the river's course. This flood lasted for a fortnight and submerged the plains between Bendigo and the Murray

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under a sea of water (Back to Bridgewater Committee 1971).

The wide river at Laanecoorie has long been a favourite recreation spot. In 1875 the Tarnagulla and Llanelly Courier reported:

'The house (a Hostelery) is situated on the banks of the most beautiful sheet of water on the Loddon, where there are two or three capital boats for aquatic amusement or fishing. There is a large garden well stocked with fruit of all descriptions, sloping gently down to the river, on the banks of which is a pretty harbour and boat house ...Picnics are often held here' (Cain undated).

Gold mining

The gold rush in the 1850s brought a massive influx of thousands of gold miners to the Loddon catchment who established townships including Maryborough and Bendigo. The rich alluvial deposits of gold were soon exhausted and while the population declined, many gold miners remained in the region and took up land for agriculture or started businesses.

The impact that the gold rush had on the stream systems in the Loddon catchment cannot be overstated. Gold mining activities fundamentally changed the nature of many of the waterways in the catchment.

Carisbrook's location at the junction of Tullaroop and McCallums creeks originally gave it an excellent supply of good quality water.

Breweries, a tannery and a steam flourmill were established at Carisbrook because of its good water supply. However, the extensive mines at Clunes discharged their sludge into the creek, silting it up and making the water unfit to drink. At a well-attended, enthusiastic public meeting in 1888, several speakers outlined the problem to Carisbrook of its once excellent water supply destroyed by mining (Willis 1988).

Bridgewater was a town formed out of necessity. When the miners at Inglewood had polluted the only available water with their mining techniques by 1860, it was necessary to camp at the Loddon River and travel daily to and from their claims (Back to Bridgewater Committee 1971). There was originally a punt about a mile below the present bridge used as a crossing for Cobb & Co coaches. A bridge was built in 1862, the first of many across the Loddon River. This was followed by a brewery, flour mill and several hotels. The railway was opened in 1876 (Back to Bridgewater Committee 1971).

In the 1860s there were many acres of ground under cultivation by the Chinese on the banks of the Loddon River. They used a system of irrigation by means of a common pump that conveyed water over the ground in wooden pipes, having openings at intervals from which water flowed into tanks, from these the Chinese drew large watering cans full of water to water their vegetable plants (Back to Bridgewater Committee 1971).

Provision of domestic and irrigation water

Fredric Godfrey was the first to use the Loddon water for irrigation in 1850. Using Aboriginal labour he deepened a natural depression from the Loddon River to the Kinypaniel Creek ensuring the Boort Lake was permanently full (Munro 1992).

In 1873, a flour mill was erected at Bridgewater and water from the Loddon River was diverted to the mill, by means of a race and a weir being constructed across the Loddon River. This was the first diversion licence to be issued in Victoria (dated 1876). The Bridgewater Weir was opened in 1885, the fourth of its kind along the Loddon River (Back to Bridgewater Committee 1971).

The first attempt to erect the Loddon Weir commenced in 1924. However, floods washed away the foundations that 40 men spent seven months to build. Following this disaster, the weir was cut alongside the river. Finally the weir was completed in 1927 and the river re-routed through the new structure (Munro 1992).

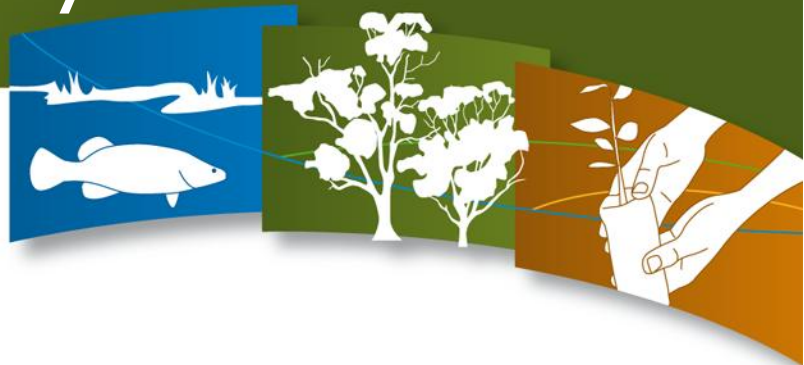
The desire and means to harness and use the Loddon and Kinypaniel waters became a contentious issue among selectors. This led to the constitution of the Loddon United Water Trust in 1882 (Munro 1992).

In 1889, the construction of the Laanecoorie Weir began less than one kilometre upstream of the Laanecoorie township. It took three years to build and was the first

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structure of its kind in Victoria (Cain undated). In 1909, the main embankment of earth was partially destroyed by a great flood but was repaired and raised a further metre.

Irrigated agriculture did not begin on a large scale in the Loddon catchment until the construction of the Torrumbarry Weir in 1919 (reconstruction completed in 1996) and Laanecoorie Reservoir in 1935. Further storages were built including the Cairn Curran and Tullaroop reservoirs in the 1950s to cater for the needs of irrigated agriculture.

Would you like to find out more?

To find out more please contact:

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Or visit our website at

www.nccma.vic.gov.au

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