Many places are important to us because they tell us about who we are, and the past that has formed us.

Pathways, waterways and railways are significant because they represent methods of transport for people, goods and services across the vastness of the continent. More importantly, they were the lines of communication for individuals, commerce and the nation and remain a vital link with our pioneering past.

Perhaps the most significant communications link was the Overland Telegraph, a remarkable feat of exploration and technological achievement, which not only linked Australia from south to north but also linked Australia to the world. The physical evidence of iron poles and wires has largely disappeared and evidence of the telegraph is seen primarily in the buildings and artefacts of the stations that remain along the route. These days it is essentially a museum, unlike the Upfield railway line, the Newcastle waterfront, the Yarra River or the Yarra Track, the subjects of this issue of Histori c Environment.

Each of the papers in this edition discuss to a greater or lesser extent the historical, social, cultural and economic significance of places, and acknowledge the changing nature of use over time, as well as the continuing value and recognition of these places in contemporary society.

Susan Marsden’s paper, Newcastle waterfront looks at the historical changes by which the people of Newcastle shaped [the waterfront] and were shaped by it. She not only focuses on the maritime activities of the town, but also the importance of Newcastle's history as one of the biggest ports in the world, a regional centre and an essential railhead for the district. The impact of new technology, work practices and labour markets is seen through the eye witness accounts of the men and women affected by change.

In his paper, Melbourne and the Yarra: an uneasy relationship, Tony Dingle explores the changing perceptions of Melburnians to the river that subdivides the city. Since white settlement, most people have abandoned or condemned the river. However, the last 10 years have seen a remarkable transformation and, as Tony Dingle observes, ‘Melbourne has suddenly embraced the Yarra wholeheartedly’ after ignoring its potential for decades.

Tony Dingle traces the impact of settlement on the river, from the early landing of Fawkner (on the present site of the Crown Casino) through its various metamorphoses as port, scenic waterway, sewer, drain, floodplain and leisure centre. Particular references to the press reports of the day and the cyclical campaigns to ‘improve’ the Yarra show the diversity of reactions among the local population.

While early campaigns focused on the natural beauty of the river upstream, Dingle notes a changed stance in the press of the 1980s. Today, it is the former dock areas which claim the attention of ‘a new crowd’ — tourists and locals alike — in an essentially urban environment.

The Upfield railway line safe-working system: a unique heritage is more than simply a paper of local value and interest. The fate of industrial heritage sites, particularly those which require continued use in a post-industrial society, are often not given the prominence of more aesthetically pleasing natural or man-made heritage sites. David
Maloney describes the Upfield railway line as a dinosaur, but unfortunately 'this dinosaur is now a skeleton' when once upon a time we could have retained it, muscles, skin and all, as an anachronistic relic of Victorian ingenuity. What remains is carefully documented throughout the paper and placed in historical context.

Maloney completes his paper with a short discussion on some of the issues concerning conservation of the Upfield line and the importance of its Heritage Victoria registration.

While David Maloney's paper focuses on the intrinsic structure of a railway line, a quite different pathway is the subject of Peter Evans' paper *The Yarra Track*. Essentially carved out of the bush in the 1860s as a gold route, the Yarra Track quickly became more important as a conduit for the fledgling logging industry. The paper emphasises the track's 'rich assemblage of cultural sites (mostly archaeological in nature)' and highlights the importance of short sections of the original 1864 track that remain undisturbed.

Each of these papers offers a wealth of material for the historian, archaeologist and conservator, subtly underlining the multi-disciplinary approach that is a vital ingredient of contemporary cultural studies. Indeed, this small collection is an appropriate precursor to the coming issue of *Historic Environment* devoted to the topical theme 'cultural tourism'.

Coincidentally, two of the book reviews also follow the theme of pathways, waterways and railways: *Wrecks on the reef: A guide to the historic shipwrecks at Port Phillip Heads*, written by Ross Anderson and reviewed by Alistair Gilmour; and *Melbourne's Marvellous Trams* by authors Dale Budd and Randall Wilson, reviewed by Robert Green.

Heritage Victoria has recently brought out several themed publications, including *The Bay, Barwon and Beyond: Heritage Places of Geelong* (reviewed in *Historic Environment* Vol. 14, No. 1) and *Wrecks on the Reef*, our third book review in this issue, Warrock written by Michele Summerton, reviewed by Michael Pearson.

Each of these attractive, compact and affordable publications is of value, both to professionals and to interested citizens, offering new knowledge and insights into aspects of cultural heritage.