Encountering place: tripping to the Point

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Abstract

The Nepean Peninsula, a tiny sliver of land at the end of the Mornington Peninsula, Victoria, Australia, has lured humans over eons. Together with the Bellarine Peninsula it forms the gateway to Port Philip Bay at the Heads. It shields the Bay from the tumultuous forces of Bass Strait. Here generations have been drawn to the seaside, to an inspirational coastal landscape.

Today hurtling at 100 km per hour down the Mornington Peninsula Freeway one reaches decision point in less than an hour: the coast road or the inland road? Next looms the junction of the Old Melbourne Road and the Nepean Highway. Another decision: which road will be quicker? Where will the traffic snarl be this time? One is oblivious to the remnant moonah woodland which once covered the land; unaware of the seascape to either side; no longer in tune with the rhythm of the tides. And yet people today still feel that sense of relief and freedom of escape from the metropolis with their first ‘sniff of the briny’. Through contemporary accounts and visual material this paper explores the roads that have been travelled to get to the Nepean Peninsula: by land and sea.

Context: the Nepean Peninsula

On the Nepean Peninsula one can still imagine the movements of the indigenous peoples; the arrival of the first European settlers, their hardships, their isolation, their decision to abandon the site because of the lack of fresh water. It is also possible to see what they saw almost two centuries ago: an inviting bay with undulating hills covered in open vegetation in the near distance. The contrast from bay to ocean side is remarkable: the landscape character becomes manifest ‘as a silhouette against the sky, sometimes gently undulating’ as on the bayside, ‘sometimes serrate and wild’ as on the ocean side (Norburg-Schulz 1984: 40). The relationship of one to the other, provides a context for understanding the whole: ‘a beautiful strip of land lying between ocean and bay with an identity of its own’(Brown et al 1923). A number of roads – St Johns Wood Road, Hughes Road, St Paul’s Road, Ocean Beach Road, Back Beach Road - cross the Peninsula and take you from the warm, quiet, lapping waters of the bay to the colder, crashing, surf rollers of the back beach. Bridgewater Bay, Koonya, St Paul’s, Sorrento and London Bridge, largely inaccessible at high tide, reveal extensive rock platforms, nearshore reefs and deep rock pools at low tide – a paradise for swimmers, surfers, snorkellers and those with a curiosity to see and explore the hidden treasures thus briefly revealed. The views from the tops of the sand dunes and the Pleistocene dune limestone cliffs encompass much of today’s Mornington Peninsula National Park, from Cape Schanck that ‘jagged headland’ ‘softened by a haze of spray’ that ‘marks the turn of the coast northwards’, to Point Nepean, ‘the eastern head of the opening to Port Phillip Bay’; across the ocean from Queenscliff ‘a little Venice in the distance’ to Cape Otway; and across the land, bayside, ‘all that is most picturesque of Port Phillip Bay presents itself, blue and beautiful from the majestic mass of Arthur’s Seat’(Brown et al 1923). Mount Martha, Mount Eliza, to the city of Melbourne, Mount Dandenong and Mount Macedon in the distance.

Connecting with place ...

Over three decades my husband and I have grown to love this landscape, to understand its language, to be comfortable with its rhythms, to respect the tumultuous forces of nature, and to appreciate its gentler side. Our daughters learnt to explore, to see, to touch, to taste, to smell, and to hear this landscape from babyhood. Now they treasure the knowledge of that gift. Over the years, as we have come to know the fragility of this environment, we have witnessed major development, particularly in the housing sector, and to a lesser extent in the commercial area. Here the relationship between routes and roads and the natural environment, and the impacts on the natural environment, are clearly visible. Today only 5 per cent of the natural vegetation still remains on the Mornington Peninsula, much of it in the National Parks. Weed infestations are rampant, and the indigenous vegetation struggles to survive (Calder 1975). Inappropriate development and over development alarmingly continue to threaten this fragile environment. In the seventies, Calder recognised ‘an awakening to landscape values and their importance to the human spirit’, and warned that ‘it is time we took stock in case our material affluence is blinding us to spiritual poverty’ (Calder 1975: 13). In 1989, Forster noted that ‘For too long our society has been satisfied with repairing damage to our environment’, and that ‘growing urbanisation is now threatening many of the environmental values that attracted people to move to the area’ (Forster 1989). At the beginning of the twenty-first century the Peninsula seems to be in the grip of another boom facilitated by ease of access, and the problems articulated in the seventies and eighties need ever more urgent measures to address them. A colleague suggested that if you decommissioned the freeway, development would cease overnight! Nonetheless it is here in this fragile and unstable dune environment (Keble 1988: map867) that the appreciation and understanding of land and culture is still possible, through the experiences of following routes on foot or in a vehicle: reading the roads and tracks, learning the signs, discovering the layers of meaning, respecting the richness of detail.

Encountering place ...

This paper examines how we encounter place; through images, perceptions, and representations; through time; history, topography; flora and fauna; through finding a way of accessing this extraordinary land/seascape. Norberg-Schulz argues that ‘to protect and conserve the genius loci in fact means to concretize its essence in ever new historical contexts’ (Norberg-Schulz 1984: 18). In order to be able to identify and continually refine and redefine the spirit of a place, a place must be experienced as meaningful. Italo Calvino in his Invisible Cities writes:

You walk for days among trees and among stones. Rarely does the eye light on a thing, and then only when it has recognized that thing as the sign of another thing: a print in the sand indicates the tiger’s passage; a marsh announces a vein of water; the hibiscus flower, the end of winter. All the rest is silent and interchangeable; trees and stones are only what they are (Calvino 1997: 13),
Today, too many people's experiences of their environment are fragmentary and fleeting. A place, a landscape, does not give up its secrets in a hurry. It requires training, imagination and local knowledge. Calvino continues:

However the place may really be, beneath this thick coating of signs, whatever it may contain or conceal, you leave [the Nepean Peninsula] without having discovered it. Outside, the land stretches, empty, to the horizon; the sky opens, with speeding clouds. In the shape that chance and wind give the clouds, you are already intent on recognising figures: a sailing ship, a hand, an elephant... (Calvino 1997: 14).

If we are to avoid future generations becoming mere sightseers, tourists with no respect for the place, or visitors who leave without having discovered it, humans in the twenty-first century need to relearn, rediscover and reclaim the signs, the paths, the roads and languages long forgotten. Unmade roads and tracks along the beaches or over the dunes initially gave humans access to the Nepean Peninsula landscape; many of these same routes, now far below tar sealed highways, or tangled and overgrown, still have the potential to give us access to the land/seascape today. Because here the unmade sandy roads contribute immeasurably to character of place, the few pockets of streets that have eschewed the advance of the bitumen are fiercely protected by their residents against future incursions.

**Boonwurrung routes, footprints in the sand**

A peninsula is almost an island, the Nepean Peninsula and its Point, a destination not a place to pass through. Paths reveal human presence over eons. Along the cliff tops, middens have been exposed over time by wind and salt erosion. The broken shells and bones and stones are the remains of numerous feasts and banquets by Boonwurrung peoples thousands of years ago. Evidence of numerous middens has enabled researchers to document routes used by the Boonwurrung people. Route 1 begins from Melbourne and follows the coast around the Mornington Peninsula along Port Phillip Bay, round Point Nepean, along Bass Strait, up Western Port Bay to The Inlets, opposite French Island. Route 2 does a loop around the Peninsula cutting inland at Sandy Pt (Sullivan 1981: 120). It is awe inspiring to know that the route along the cliff tops, overlooking Bass Strait, has been traversed by humans for at least 6000 years (Sullivan 1981: 123). Indeed it now appears that Point Nepean itself is one large midden and as such a place of high cultural heritage significance to the Boonwurrung traditional owners. The historian and theorist Paul Fox makes it clear that 'the European record authorised indigenous dispossession' arguing that 'in the colonial narrative, time begins with European arrival and occupation' (Fox 1994: 7). Indeed, Fox continues, 'to settle a colony required one to overlook, not to speak, to cultivate in an attempt to mask the presence of the other, and to transplant in an attempt to fictionalise land into landscape' (Fox 1994: 22). The Nepean Peninsula is 'a treasure chest' – 'a rich map of the past' that will eventually allow the reconstruction and acknowledgement of the life of the Boonwurrung people. Caroline Briggs, traditional elder, told the local community that:

Our stories recall how the area that we now call Port Phillip Bay, was once a wide grassy plain where hunting, and cultivation of the yam daisy took place. Our stories recall how the sea rose, and how Bunjil stopped the seas from rising and flooding the whole land. The traditional dances of the Boonwurrung told of great events, of earthquakes and of the sea rising. The last of the great dances or Nargees held by the Boonwurrung was at Emerald Hill in St Kilda in the 1840s.

**Country transformed: early european settlement**

While middens have been documented at the Sisters and Sullivan Cove (Sullivan 1981: 123), little if any physical evidence remains of the first European settlement in Victoria, near Sorrento on the Nepean Peninsula. This settlement lasted briefly from October 1803 to May 1804, when it was removed to Tasmania. ‘Extensive settlement was not begun until after the establishment of Melbourne in 1835, when its proximity and easy access to Melbourne by boat made it a prime area for grazing leases and for acquiring many resources needed in the new settlement’ (Sullivan1981: 12). At Point Nepean the land of the Boonwurrung was stripped by the settlers’ stock: according to Moonin Moonin in 1839 there were no “param” ‘Tappoak’ at Port Phillip, too many Jumbuck (sheep) and “Bulgana” (bullocks, cattle) plenty eat it must all gone missing’ (Fox 1994: 11-12). During the late 1830s and 1840s lime burning became a thriving industry on the Nepean Peninsula. Large dips and hollows in the woodlands or tea tree scrub document the activities of lime burners, for here limestone was queried to be taken to local kilns. By 1845 records indicate that some seventeen kilns were burning lime in the area and twenty limecraft were taking lime to Melbourne and returning with much needed supplies (Bridges et al 1992: 41-42). To support this industry, as well as grazing, agriculture and timber supplies for Melbourne, much of the vegetation, predominantly she-oaks and banksias, was cleared. Tea tree and moonahs grew in its place and changed the pattern of the landscape. Betty McMeekin reminds us that:

For half a century Anthony's Nose, at the foot of Arthur's Seat, was a barrier to communication with the more settled areas from Mornington to Melbourne, and on the peninsula itself roads were almost impassable tracks. So the early families found themselves dependent on the sea for transport, for human contact and for the necessities of their daily lives (2004: 3).

The 1850s brought many changes to Point Nepean following the discovery of payable quantities of gold in Melbourne's hinterland. Traffic through the Heads increased enormously. With the influx of population came disease. When the Ticonderoga arrived in 1852 with dozens of passengers ill with fever, the Government found it necessary to set up a Quarantine station well away from the city. It repossessed the land of the early pastoralists and access to the area was barred. Later in the century the Point was reclaimed for fortifications in order to protect the Empire’s ‘city of gold’ from potential international threats. In 1959 Jean Field recalled ‘The Quarantine Station is “out of bounds” for the average citizen, as is also the extreme tip of the Nepean Peninsula overlooking the Rip... A high barbed wire fence and a large iron gate, guarded night and day by a sentry, bar the way, and only authorised persons are allowed to enter’ (Field 1963: 56). In the 1850s and 1860s many artists also set sail for Melbourne in the hope of striking it rich on the goldfields. Eugene von Guérard, S T Gill and John Skinner Prout all painted aspects of the Heads over this time, providing contrasting views to the hazards so often associated with the...
notorious Rip (James 1999: 12). Von Guérard’s great love was landscape painting, particularly wilderness subjects, which he depicted with scientific accuracy, ‘evoking the German romantic belief in the presence of divine power in every detail of the natural world’ (Clark 2005: 13). S T Gill made the diggings a genre of his own providing anecdotal, heroic and pathetic experiences of everyday life. Von Guérard documented a landscape that was threatened by the very fact of colonisation. In contrast, Inglis tells us that the Argus in 1854 reported on colonial society’s growing enchantment with the seaside as a resort: passengers on the Lady Bird’s trip down the bay from Melbourne enjoying a pleasant excursion with a band of musicians accompanying the party and lovers of the ‘light fantastic’ dancing the soles off their shoes! And those on the Citizen in the absence of a jetty at Queenscliff wading ashore to explore the area, visiting the local hotel and on reboarding dancing all the way home (Inglis 1999: 3).

Health and leisure resorts …

Evidence of the healthful leisure activities of the later nineteenth century and early twentieth century European middle classes who frequented the Nepean Peninsula is also to be found. The Federated Australian reported in 1900 that ‘The Back Beach is never without its crowd of ladies and children drinking in the healthful breezes of the place’ (Inglis 1999: 13-17). Sorrento was the destination. In the 1870s well-known Melbourne citizens were attracted to the area as an escape from the tensions of life in the city. The most enterprising character was George Seth Coppin. His story is told elsewhere (Winzenried: 1994). But his vision was for a bustling seaside resort, accessible by paddle steamers, capable of carrying hundreds and eventually thousands of people. Today we see that it was Coppin who had the foresight to set aside the ‘500-yard strip of land’ along the Bass Strait coast which we now know as the Mornington Peninsula National Park. Fox suggests that ‘to occupy the European colonial landscape was to inhabit a site which had to speak both of European ownership and its limits’ (Fox 1994: 8). From Sorrento to the Divide, Coppin constructed paths, tracks, rotundas, pavilions and seats from which to take in the landscape and observe the views and vistas, such that visitors encountered this landscape quite differently to the Boonwurrung people. Pamela Gullifer writes that ‘much of the interpretation by Europeans was in their aesthetic sublime tradition, totally transposing the aboriginal view of the landscape’ (Fox 1994: 5). Isaac Whitehead captured ‘the invigorating conditions which attracted hordes of Melburnians’ to the Nepean Peninsula in his painting Ocean Beach Sorrento, 1871, by dramatically depicting the meeting between land and sea, suggesting ‘a restorative communion between people and an undistilled nature’ (James 1999: 11-12). Several medical men publicly extolled the health giving properties of this area, themselves acquiring properties along the ocean beach. They have left accounts of idyllic, carefree, isolated holidays along the very beautiful ocean beach on this ‘picturesque little peninsula’.9

By sea and road and track they continue to come …

Yet travelling to Sorrento must have been quite an undertaking in the 1870s. Jack Ritchie tells us that Dr Graham (who took up land at Roseville, beyond Fowler’s beach) ‘used to speak of taking a vessel called the Golden Crown to Dromana and then driving by horse and trap along the beach’ (Ritchie 1966: 5). The artists von Guérard and Louis Buvelot sketched and painted the area so we today have an idea of the landscape at the time. Von Guérard depicts the beautiful bay of Port Phillip in Schnapper Point from ‘Belleura’, 1870, with great clarity of vision: the protected beaches bounded by elevated open grazing land sloping down lightly treed cliffs to catch the breeze (James 1999: 8). Buvelot is less interested in the large scale grandiose view in his painting Mount Martha from Dromana’s Hill, 1877, than in introducing the viewer to a more intimate tranquil sunny familiarly Australian scene. Buvelot’s ‘enchantment with the blonde lighting, the grey and olive hues’, ‘the fall of light and shade and atmospheric effects’ is clearly evident in this sunny scene, the air heavy with salt, painted at low tide – the wide beach on which Dr Graham travelled clearly visible (Gray 1978: 158). Ritchie confirms that ‘The road from Sorrento towards Melbourne only ran to the eastern Sister, and from there on coaches drove to Rosebud on the beach, then said to be 100 yards in width with hard, sandy flats.’ Most people travelled by boat, the first regular service being by the paddle steamer ‘Williams’ which did the run Queenscliff-Portsea-Sorrento-Dromana-and Snapper Point (Mornington). She was replaced by the ‘Golden Crown’ which did regular Sunday excursions in 1874 taking two and a half hours from Sandringham Railway Pier to Queenscliff and Sorrento. She was in turn superseded by the ‘Ozone’ (1886) and the ‘Hygeia’ (1890), each capable of carrying several hundred people. In three years these commodious vessels carried over 150,000 passengers to Sorrento. The ‘Weeroona’ with a capacity for 2000 passengers was brought into service in 1910 (ceasing operations in 1941).10 Dr Gunst built his Longford Cottage close to the old Melbourne road – a considerable distance from either bay beach or ocean. ‘It is believed the selection was based on a proposal to build a railway to Sorrento, and the house would have been close to a projected Station’ (Ritchie 1966: 7).

In the novel The Getting of Wisdom Laura who appears to be Henry Handel Richardson herself, describes a holiday in Sorrento in circa 1885:

Old Anne was wailing on the jetty, having hitched the horse to a post: she had driven in, in the Shandrydan [a light two wheeled cart or any old, rickety conveyance] to meet Laura. For the cottage was not on the front beach… it stood in the bush, on the back beach, which gave to the open sea. Laura took her seat beside the old woman in her linen sunbonnet, the body of the vehicle being packed full of groceries and other stores; and the drive began. Directly they were clear of the township the road as good as ceased, became a mere sandy track, running through a scrub of ti-tree… About a couple of miles out, the old woman alighted and slipped a rail; and having passed the only other house within cooee they drove through a paddock… Another slip rail lowered, they drew up at the foot of a steepish hill, beside a sandy little vegetable garden, a shed and a pump. The house was perched on top of the hill… Between the back of the house and the beach rose a huge sand-hill, sparsely grown with rushes and coarse grass… When you had laboriously attained the summit of the great dune, the sight that met you almost took your breath away: as far as the eye could reach, the bluest of skies melting into the bluest of seas, which broke its foamy-flecked edge against the flat, brown reefs (Ritchie 1966: 7).
Beauty beyond compare ...

There was an artists’ camp on the back beach at Sorrento in the 1890s. While the Heidelberg School is named after the area north of Melbourne where Tom Roberts, Arthur Streeton, Frederick McCubbin, Charles Conder and others painted in the summer of 1889/90, the artists painted in numerous locations around Melbourne and Sydney. The bay around Port Phillip provided them with excellent plain air subjects, where they could work directly in front of the motif and capture momentary light effects. Indeed Jane Clark observes that ‘an intense relationship with his native land is the foundation of McCubbin’s art’. ‘Nature under our Australian sky seems to me like a shy reserved person,’ he once explained, ‘but you have only to wait and watch her varying moods, and you will find all the beauty you can desire’ (Clark 1988: 101).

Part of the unique quality of this landscape stems from the fact that sea and sky can meet or divide, totally unobstructed, depending on climatic conditions, seasonal weather patterns and diurnal changes. It is still possible here to get a sense of scale, of wide-angle limitless vision, for here the open space reveals a vast sky. Clouds are dynamic players in the sky vault. Here in the continually changing atmospheric conditions, light becomes a live and strongly poetic element. Barcan and Buchanan observe that:

One thing is clear to scholars who work in contemporary Australian Cultural Studies: space isn’t an emptiness, a void to be filled, the neutral scene for action. Rather, space is imagined — called into being — by individuals and the cultures of which they are a part (Barcan and Buchanan 1999: 8).

Imagination was still tempered by practicality in the 1890s. Jack Ritchie recalls that ‘it was always Mr Fowler’s practice to take down a cow with them for the Christmas holiday period. The cow was shipped to Sorrento on the Charlotte Fenwick and then led to the Back beach. Who would think of a cow as an item of luggage for the Christmas holidays?’ (Ritchie 1966: 9).

Stepping into the twentieth century ...

While stone villas may remain as one of the more permanent reminders of settlement, only few remnants of the tram tracks of the Sorrento Tramway, the roughly hewn limestone paths that became the extensive life saving tracks, and early structures are still visible. Other journeys are now only recorded down a cow with them for the Christmas holiday period. The cow was shipped to Sorrento on the Charlotte Fenwick and then led to the Back beach. Who would think of a cow as an item of luggage for the Christmas holidays?’ (Ritchie 1966: 9).

Little changed in the early decades of the twentieth-century. In 1909 H E Prior records in the Watta-mola journal:

This new year, the call of the wild in the shape of an invitation to Camp Watta-mola near Sorrento tempts a few of us... A pleasant trip down the bay, but too long for the advance ideas of one who looks forward to the time when during summer months, one will leave Melbourne at 5.30 pm, have his evening meal at 7.00 pm in his seaside house at Sorrento, leave there at 8.00 am and be at business in the city by 9.30... Vehicles are in great demand, but we secure an ancient looking concern drawn by a pair of mature steeds... A drive of about three miles over a road winding in and out the thickly clustering ti-tree, and we reach Watta-mola prettily situated in a small clearing, surrounded by ti-tree, honeysuckles and she-oaks (Ritchie 1966: 12-13).

The area referred to in Sorrento as ‘The Camps’ was quite isolated at this time and Prior and his mates lived off the land fishing and shooting. Any visitors were thus viewed as trespassers!!! In the 1920s Jack Ritchie remembers, at the age of five, being taken to the Bridgewater Camp:

We would travel down on the Weeroona and then drive out, loaded with stores and luggage, in Mr Bill Clark’s trap. Those were the days when the steam tram still ran from the point above the pier to the Sorrento Ocean beach. The trip to the camp seemed to take hours; firstly along the White road and then from the Hughes road corner through deep black sand tracks with the horses struggling up each rise... With cars and roads today the area is only a few minutes from Sorrento but in the 1920s we were really quite isolated (Ritchie 1966: 14-15).

Of cars and carparks and quicker access ...

The life of the Vicar of St John’s Anglican Church Sorrento, during the period 1886 to 1959, gives further insight into travel on the Nepean Peninsula:

Each Sunday the vicar had to travel to Dromana and back in time for the evening service... At first the only means of travel was on horseback or by horse and trap... In 1916, with quicker transport due to better roads and with the occasional use of parishioners’ cars, a Holy Communion service at 7.45 am was introduced. Then in 1922 a car was made available for winter travel and the first parish car, a Ford with an Australian body, was bought in September 1923. This, of course made the vicar more mobile, so he was then able to hold two services each Sunday [mornings and evenings]... By 1945 it was possible to drive up and down from Melbourne in a day (Centenary History 1973: 3, 10-11, 13).

By 1923 however it was noticed that the nineteenth-century resorts of Sorrento and Portsea were no longer living up to the expectations of earlier years and it was proposed to set up a fund to put things right. Some of the ‘charms’ noted were from Coppin’s legacy: tracks cut, and good limestone paths laid down, leading from one vantage point to another, seats and rotundas erected ‘with a wonderful artistic sense for harmony with the landscape’ for rest and shelter. Many were no longer in good repair. The needs identified included restoration,
maintenance and possible completion of Coppin's original schemes. A proposed fund was to be established for works including new car parking and 'artistically built public dressing rooms for men and women on the beach' at Portsea (Brown et al. 1923). In 1926 the Catholic Archdiocese perceived Sorrento to be 'a small seaside place now attended from Mornington, and it has a church large enough for present requirements. The Fathers could not get a living from local resources, though the people are most anxious to have a resident priest and a school (Cooper 1994: 33). Only two years later Sorrento was designated 'the poorest parish in Victoria', and deemed 'in greatest need' in the Melbourne Diocese (Cooper 1994: 35). Yet the place did not cease to inspire. A late work by Arthur Streeton, Point King Sorrento, 1920, shows him fully immersed in his surroundings; 'a sense of seclusion and intimacy', manifested through quick open brush strokes, speaks of the many happy holidays he spent here (James 1999: 22-23). In contrast, an early work by Penleigh Boyd, simply called Sorrento, 1922, in its breadth of vision, 'audacity of scale' and 'painterly execution' from a high viewpoint engenders a 'panoramic sweep of the Bay' (James 1999: 21-22). This breathtaking hazy 'blue and gold' depiction led one Sydney critic to write: 'One has only to look at his series of Portsea canvases to observe that the beauty of that sacred place has come to him as a vision to be disclosed [and] in revelation of which he, glorious youth, is only providence's proud instrument' (James 1999:21). Penleigh Boyd returned often to paint the Bay; future generations of the Boyd family were also to find solace and inspiration in this landscape.

That the Nepean Peninsula remained an isolated place in the twenties must not be forgotten. Austin Cooper tells us that the establishment of an Oblate mission at Sorrento 'did not end problems associated with being on the edge of Australia's centres of population. Oblates on preaching assignments had to travel the long two-hour bus journey from Sorrento to Frankston and then take a train to Melbourne' (Cooper 1994: 38). Yet in the 1930s advertisements appeared for a new Ocean Park Estate at Koonya, to be Melbourne's newest seaside resort, accompanied by a photo of a 'magnificent ocean bathing pool entirely enclosed by a reef 100 yards x 60/70 yards'. The gullible prospective buyer was told 'No matter how rough the open sea may be within the pool the water is like a mill pond, except at high tide when the reef is covered by water'. Post war development was not necessarily welcomed or seen as advantageous or sensitive. Ritchie remembers the late 1940s and 1950s as periods of extensive sub-division when all the Blairgowrie area north of Melbourne Road, and east of St John's Wood Road, through to the Ocean Park was opened up. 'While some of these sub-divisions provided roads following the natural contours to maintain scenic interest, others...were sub-divided into small blocks on a rectangular pattern and with no provision for reserves for recreation or public services for the future'. Up to the early 1950s the Nepean Highway followed what is now the Loop, but late in 1952 the new straight section above the current Blairgowrie Yacht Squadron Clubhouse was made (Ritchie 1966: 15-16; Briggs 2005). From the 1950s Sorrento area underwent a profound change: the local population increased and numerous people were able to afford holiday houses in the area. The lean-to affair from the Watta-mola camp became the fibro shack of the fifties. The Oblate novitiate too was moved to Sorrento at the beginning of 1950 and soon Sorrento became a popular holiday place for Oblates from other communities. Cooper tells us that such visitors were warned that 'irreparable damage could be done to these young men (the novices) if any unseemly conduct, in their estimation, were to take place. Consequently visiting oblate fathers must never appear in public unless clothed in ordinary priestly garb.' At this time the churches in Rye and Portsea were extended and a new church was opened in Sorrento in 1963 (Cooper 1994: 36, 50-1).

To some writing in the 1950s development signalled a real sense of loss. Jean Field in These Joyous Sands writes 'To my way of thinking, a great deal has been lost since the days of the paddle steamers and the little steam train. Children today have none of the excitement which we had when we were young. What is there to get excited about in a motor car? And what can compare with a picnic on a fine paddle steamer' (Field 1962: 50). Neil Briggs in his reminiscences of childhood at Blairgowrie in the fifties concurs: life without the mod cons was an adventure, though he admitted that having to rely on tank water, with no electricity or refrigeration was sometimes a challenge for his mother (Briggs 2005). Today the car is part of the pattern of the lives of millions of Australians. Yet the advent of the car dramatically altered our view of the landscape. John Brack's painting The car, 1955, is an iconic symbol of that change: he 'hasn't painted the car in the landscape but the landscape in the car'. Ian Burn argues provocatively:

Driving a car, you think you are in a landscape, you feel part of the landscape, it washes over you in successive waves. But you are in a car, locked inside a form of transport designed specifically for the nuclear family, taking a Sunday afternoon drive out of the city like everyone else. You are both placed and displaced in the landscape. The car which gives access to the countryside also isolates you from the outside world...The landscape, the culturally-manufactured image of 'nature', glimpsed only through the car windows...becomes an extension of our suburban lounge-room (Burn 1988: 182-3).

**Slow driving ...**

How many people have stopped their cars, stepped out and seen the banksias at Rye? (James 1999: 2). You cannot know the landscape as it flashes past at 100 km per hour. Once you leave the bitumen and turn into a dirt road you need to alter your driving habits and be open to new experiences. Today people have no innate code of conduct once they step out of the car into the car park in a National Park. They need to be educated, to alter behavioural habits and to observe the signs. More importantly they need to learn to identify what it is they see. As Tuan observes, the visitor 'has a viewpoint', while the local 'has a complex attitude derived from his immersion in the totality of his environment' (Tuan 1974: 63). The evocative and poetic qualities of the Nepean Peninsula do not reveal themselves immediately. Only over a period of time, and by visiting at various times of the day in all seasons, can one begin to fathom its moods, its soul, its many colours; and to touch its memories. Here beauty is something to be discovered and revealed, not invented and imposed. If we let them, the tracks and roads give us access to the complex weaving of texts that together constitute place, known here as the Nepean Peninsula.
The Vatta-mola Log", copy of original NHS archives
Tuan (1974) p. 63
Belgrave, Victoria.

Endnotes

1 It was here that the Boonwurrung peoples watched the arrival of the first
European settlers in 1803. The indigenous population on the Mornington
Peninsula dwindled rapidly after European settlement began in the late 1830s.

2 An expirate of water /undrowned men places by the horizon, and as unrolled
as the bosom of unpolluted innocence, presented itself to the charmed eye,
which roamed over it in silent adoration" - with these reflective words J.H.
Tuckey, First Lieutenant of His Majesty's man-of-war Cullucia, recalled his
feelings as he gazed for the first time on the southern waters of Port Phillip Bay
on a warm spring day in early October 1803. Quoted from Edgar French, The
Miracle at Scott's Shed - a History of the Blairgowrie Yacht Squadron 1952 -
Assessment and Panel Report, December 1999, p. 5. Elsewhere, in the same
year. Lieut. Tuckey wrote: "The face of the country is beautifully picturesque
swallowing into gentle deviations of the brightest verdure ... covered by a profusion

3 Groups such as the Nepean Conservation Group Inc. (formerly, Sorrento-
Portsea-Blairgowrie Conservation Group Inc.) do not have the finances or
resources to cope with the demands being placed on them. In many instances
volunteers are doing the work that should be undertaken by State or local
authorities. In many instances local governments are frequently overridden by the Victorian Civil and
Administrative Appeals Tribunal. Refer to the Nepean Conservation Group Inc.
Newsletter which comes out quarterly, and to the Minutes of the AGM held on

4 Tourism has much to answer for: for example the Komiti tours that promise to
show you Europe in 21 days, or the bus tours that show Japanese tourists
Victoria in a day, or the Parks Victoria brochure that invites you to see Port
Nepean in three hours.

5 Two examples on the Nepean Peninsula are the Bridgewater Bay and Diamond
Bay Road Maintenance Schemes wholly run by volunteer residents.

6 David Johnson has been commissioned to do an indigenous archaeological
study of the Port Nepean area through Parks Victoria and Point Nepean
Community Trust Shared Planning Team, 2005. Refer also to Richard Cotter,
Boon Wurrung: People of the Port Phillip District, Lavendar Hill Multimedia,
2001

7 Caroline Briggs, addressing the Parks Victoria and Point Nepean Community
Trust Shared Planning Team Community workshop on indigenous heritage at
Point Nepean, held at Badele Hall, 25 July 2005. Smith tells us that "the
drowning of Port Phillip Bay was remembered in Aboriginal oral tradition". Mr W
Hull, JP in 1839, gave the following account in to the Select Committee of the
Victorian Legislative Council on the Aborigines: 'Black say that their uncle
(unspecified for all progenitors) recalled when Hobsons Bay was a kangaroo
ground. They say 'plenty catch kangaroo, and plenty catch possum there' and
Murray (an Aborigine) assumed me that the passage up the Bay, through
which the ships came was the River Yarra, and that the River once went out at the heads,
but that the sea broke in, and that Hobsons Bay, which was once hunting
ground, become what it is'. Refer to Refer to Hilary Sullivan's An Archacological
Survey of the Mornington Peninsula, Victoria, August 1981, Victoria
Archaeological Survey Occasional Reports Series, No 6. Refer to the NHS Peninsula Story 1850s to the present, Mornington Peninsula Regional
Gallery
Kebbe, R.A. 1988, The Mornington Peninsula, Geological Survey of
Victoria, Moorabbin 17, Department of Mines, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.
Refer to the map "Sorrento geologcal survey No 867 zone 7".

8 Refer to publications by the Nepean Historical Society, especially Bridges,
yesterday, Fourth Edition, Sorrento, Victoria, p. 190. Remainants of the
perforated casks sunk in the sand to collect fresh water for drinking are on
display at the Sorrento Historical Museum, Old Mechanics Institute, Sorrento.

9 Note in the 1876 An advertisement for Sorrento consisting mainly of description and promotion. NHS Archives

10 Refer to publications by the Nepean Historical Society, especially Bridges,
yesterday, Fourth Edition, Sorrento, Victoria, p. 190. Remainants of the
perforated casks sunk in the sand to collect fresh water for drinking are on
display at the Sorrento Historical Museum, Old Mechanics Institute, Sorrento.

11 The advertisement was run by Albert Ragan Real Estate of Frankston, NHS
archives. It can be seen as a forerunner of the glossy property advertisements
now available everywhere.

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recalled his childhood growing up in the area in the 1950s.
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