

Layer Upon Layer

Point Nepean allows you to explore its layered history without venturing indoors.

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Military layer meets natural beauty.

When we think about learning history, we tend to think of museums which, let's face it, are almost always inside and often somewhat stuffy. Whereas, when you're on the road, often the last thing you want is to be indoors.

Point Nepean, on Victoria's Mornington Peninsula, is essentially an outdoor museum. It has 560 hectares of land and many layers of history – from pre-European settlement, involvement in both world wars, to the mysterious disappearance of a Prime Minister.

Natural geography layer

Views from Point Nepean take in the calm waters of Port Phillip Bay, the rugged coast of Bass Strait, and the meeting of the two. The Rip, one of the most dangerous port entrances in the world, is fascinating to see up close.

The surrounding waters form a Marine National Park and the land area was declared a National Park in 1988. Though

far from lush, the area is rich with flora and fauna. I encountered an echidna happily oblivious to interested onlookers, snuffling around in the middle of an afternoon.

Indigenous layer

Point Nepean is Boonwurrung country that was home to indigenous Australians for many thousands of years before European settlement. This layer of history is less overt during a visit but is suitably acknowledged.

European settlement layer

In 1803, the first 'Victorian' settlement, just up the road at Sorrento, was short-lived due to the lack of fresh-water. By 1943, eight years after the founding of Melbourne, more successful settlement of the Mornington Peninsula was underway, including right on Point Nepean. In the 1850s, the area was unexpectedly forced into service as a quarantine station. Hundreds of passengers on a ship travelling from Liverpool to Melbourne were seriously ill, with typhus

and measles. Desperate to protect the new colony, officials ordered the ship to stop offshore from Point Nepean and fly the yellow flag. The need for quarantine continued at such a rate that within two years, specific buildings were constructed, including accommodation, hospital wings and disinfection systems for luggage and clothing. Though we now see this region as a luxury beachside holiday spot, life for people in quarantine was far from rosy: 'There was but one bath, and no lavatories of any kind...serious inconvenience must necessarily occasionally be experienced,' was the summary of one enquiry into conditions.

The quarantine station was pressed into service again for cases of influenza mainly for soldiers returning from Europe at the end of WWI and again, more recently, for refugees from Kosovo in 1999.

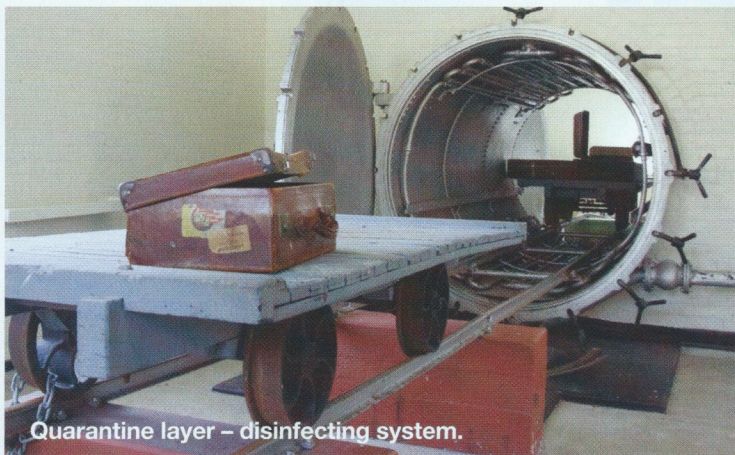
You can explore gravestones, plaques and buildings from this era, including



Military Memorial.



The Harold Holt Memorial



Quarantine layer - disinfesting system.



An echidna explores the park.

recreated disinfection systems.

Military layer

A little known fact of Australian history is that first shots of both world wars were fired from Point Nepean.

For World War I, it was the very first of any allied country. A warning shot was fired at a German steamer that tried to leave Melbourne just after war was declared. The ship's subsequent return to port created another first - prisoners of the war.

The first Australian shot of World War II was again a warning shot across the bows of a ship but this time one trying to enter Port Phillip Bay without identifying itself.

The heavy artillery that produced these shots was decommissioned after World War II. Areas of the point remain inaccessible due to the risk of unexploded ordinance from a later period when the Officer Cadet School of the Australian Army was stationed here. The tunnels and gun placements can be explored but are somewhat rudimentary in

their signage and restoration, so take either your sense of imagination or the self-guided audio tour with you.

Harold Holt layer

I visited Point Nepean with my teenage nephew, who had never heard of Harold Holt, Australia's Prime Minister in 1967, let alone that he had vanished whilst swimming at Point Nepean. 'You mean it would be like if Malcolm Turnbull went missing today?', he kept saying, incredulous that his education had not covered this fascinating event. Holt, who had a holiday home at Portsea, swam here in order to escape public scrutiny. Visitors on even a calm day would have no difficulty concluding that Holt drowned, however this did not stop conspiracy theories about abduction by aliens or defection via a Chinese submarine!

Today

The current use of Point Nepean is exploration by visitors, except for the

second weekend in January, when it is overtaken with a polo event (remember this is next door to Portsea, home to the rich and famous). What would quarantine patients and soldiers stationed here during earlier layers of history make of silk-wearing horse riders knocking a ball around with long croquet sticks? That's the thing with outdoor museums - further layers of history continue to be added.

For more information: <http://parkweb.vic.gov.au/explore/parks/point-nepean-national-park>

You can drive within the first half of the National Park and, from there, you need to either walk, cycle, or catch the shuttle bus (\$10 - which can be used in a hop-on / hop-off style). There are extensive walking tracks coving areas away from the road. Facilities and staff presence are limited. Paths and sites are exposed so take water and sunscreen. A bay beach is accessible for swimming from near the entrance.