POINT COOK – COASTAL PARK AND MARINE SANCTUARY

Point Cook was named after John M Cooke, the ship’s mate of HMS Rattlesnake. The Rattlesnake arrived from Sydney in September 1836 with Police Magistrate Captain William Lonsdale and a detachment of troops to take official charge of the new settlement at Port Phillip. Its commander, Captain Hobson, later charted part of the bay and named many of its features. In some versions of the name the ‘e’ on the end of Cooke’s name is preserved. A beach recreation area has been developed at Mel 199 E3 with toilets, play equipment and barbecues. A path follows the shore towards the Point Cook Homestead, passing a yellow triangular sign marking the southern end of the Marine Sanctuary. The Homestead, built in 1857, was originally the centre of the pastoral holdings of the brothers Thomas and Andrew Chirnside, who later built the Werribee Mansion. The homestead was a popular destination for Melbourne’s upper crust who would catch a ferry here to picnic in the grounds, admire the racehorses, or hunt. The Chirnsides were keen ‘acclimatisers’, releasing deer, pheasants, hares, rabbits and foxes on their property. The buildings were derelict for many years but have now been restored and are open to the public on weekends.

The Point Cooke Marine Sanctuary is centred on basalt reefs from lava flows of the ‘Newer volcanics’ [Cross-ref - Coastal landforms] during the last two million years. It protects marine life on one of the least disturbed reef ecosystems in Port Phillip Bay. You will often find sea urchin shells, called ‘tests’, washed up on the shore. A common spherical one is Amblypneustes ovum. A larger but more squat-shaped species is Heliocidaris erythrogramma, the commonest sea-urchin in southern Australia. Sea-urchins are omnivorous, grazing on seaweeds and occasional animal material.

Marine Care Point Cooke is a community group which works to raise awareness of the local marine environment and carries out environmental monitoring.

Part of the Point Cook Coastal Park and Cheetham Wetlands is included in the Port Phillip Bay Ramsar wetlands [Cross-ref - Coast animals and plants].

CHEETHAM WETLANDS

This land used to be occupied by the Cheetham Saltworks. Much of the saltworks is now being developed for housing, but the Cheetham Wetlands remain in public ownership. The area is an important bird habitat. Black-winged stilts are commonly seen feeding in the lagoons or flying overhead with their long pink legs trailing behind.