

Aboriginal History on the Bellarine

The lifestyle of the local indigenous people was considered to be luxurious compared with other places in Australia due to the abundance of seafood and game. Tree dwelling animals such as possums were plentiful in the red gums that covered the peninsula. Eels were trapped in the water that flowed into the bay.

In Portarlington shore shellfish such as mussels, and mud oysters were gathered in large quantities. Remains of the giant sea snail can still be seen in middens or cooking areas, in the Portarlington cliffs along the foreshore.

During the day women and children gathered the edible vegetation and small animals and shellfish from the shallows between Fisher and Gellibrand Streets. Men fished the deeper waters for larger fish and hunted Kangaroos and other animals out beyond our current golf course.

The 'Cave' was women's business while Steeles Rock was men's business. At night groups would camp in the warm sand near where the Caravan Park is located. It has been suggested that a stream flowed through the football ground across Sproat Street into the bay. This was the source for fresh water. Today, the stream has been sealed off but you can see how it flowed near the old netball courts near the entrance from Sproat Street.

To escape the heat the indigenous people were sited at East Bellarine on what is now Spray Farm, and on the site of Baker's, Daily's and Renfrey's farm, at the Bellarine dam, at the waterholes, Drysdale. They would sit around a campfire singing, often painted with coloured ochre from the cliffs near Gellibrand Street.

In 1969 the National Museum of Victoria visited Portarlington and toured the middens area. One midden in Indented Head was sealed over to create the entry to the boat ramp. The Museum staff were particularly interested in the area around Steeles Rock and the Cave and stated that were worthy of protection. By 1977 the area was considered of historical importance in Victoria. The Victorian Archaeological Survey while stating the site was of scientific importance was unable to commit to preserving the site. During the 1950s the cave was used to store stolen goods, and it has also been used to provide shelter. In the 1980s another group from

Museum Victoria visited Portarlinton and were given a guided tour of the area and an introduction to the native grasses grown nearby.

Some of the community are aware of the historic significance of the area. It's time for our rich indigenous history to be preserved and shared. How can this be achieved?