



Fascinating facts

Darebin Parklands: Escaping the Claws of the Machine

14 September 2011

Endangered quolls

Quolls (also known at the time as native cats) were prolific along the Darebin Creek in the 1800s. They were killed as pests because they ate locals' backyard chickens, and were also hunted for their fur, which was popular with London ladies and was fashioned into muffs, stoles and hats. A family of quolls was once discovered living in Misses Kendalls' Rest Home in Ford Street, Ivanhoe. By the 1930s quolls were rare across Victoria, but Darebin Creek was one of only three places where they could be found (along with Lake Corangamite in western Victoria and Gelantipy in East Gippsland).

Award winning wine

The Darebin Parklands once produced internationally acclaimed wine. The vintage from Rockbears Estate, a large landholding on today's parklands site, included 300 gallons of riesling and 30 gallons of pinot. Riesling from the Darebin Creek was exhibited at the Colonial International Exhibition of 1873 in London.

Elephant in the room

In the 1970s it wasn't uncommon to find elephants and camels in the Darebin Parklands, as visiting circuses used to agist their beasts there.

Scenic motorway

In the 1920s, the Metropolitan Town Planning Commission planned 66-foot wide motorways running down each side of the Darebin Creek, between Alphington and Preston, including a new section straight through the middle of what is today the Darebin Parklands. By today's standards this would be environmental vandalism but in the 1920s the motor car was seen as a technological advance that allowed passengers freedom to escape the city and enjoy scenic views and the natural environment.

Rats, filth and stench

Homes around Darebin Parklands now routinely sell for more than \$1 million. But when the parklands was a tip, receiving everything from abattoir waste to industrial sludge, the stench, smoke



and rats that swarmed from the tip into houses and gardens made locals' life a misery. Many Alphington residents sold up and moved to get away from the filth and smell.

Bicycles

Bikes have always been big on the Darebin Creek. The Fitzroy Bicycle Club advertised a 'moonlight run' to the Darebin Creek Hotel in September 1881. Such advertisements littered *The Argus* in the 1880s, with clubs from as far afield as Mentone and Sandringham making the journey.

Preston rail plan

Remnants of Melbourne's historic inner and outer circle railway lines remain, with artifacts such as the Chandler Highway railway bridge. But an equally ambitious – and almost as abortive – plan for a railway line from Alphington to East Preston has been all but forgotten. The Alphington to East Preston Railway Act was passed in 1948. The plan was for a branch line at Alphington railway station with the line heading north through residential Alphington (plans were made to relocate the timber houses). Railway stations were planned for Darebin Road, Dundas and Bell streets and Plenty Road, with the service terminating at Broadway, East Preston.

Major engineering including bridges and underpasses were planned. One version of the plan foreshadowed a viaduct with 50-foot pylons over the Darebin Creek floodplain and the working quarry on the Darebin Parklands site. The railway was costed at £240,000 in 1948 (\$12.5 million by today's values, allowing for inflation). It was eventually shelved in the 1960s. By this time the car was king in Melbourne.

Artists' inspiration

The Darebin Creek inspired Heidelberg School artists. Renowned painter Tom Roberts painted *A Quiet Day on the Darebin Creek* in 1885. The painting shows two artists wearing a blazers, caps and boots painting near a tranquil pool on the creek. There is conjecture about whether it depicts the Darebin Parklands. Also unknown is who the artists are; it could be a self-portrait.

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Darebin Parklands: Escaping the Claws of the Machine, a project of the United Nations of Australia award-winning Darebin Parklands Association, is published by Melbourne Books. It is available online at www.dpa.org.au for the special pre-release price of \$29.95. It will be launched on 13 November at Darebin Parklands Discovery Day.

Photos/images: High resolution images and photo opportunities available
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