

A Stone Upon A Stone Corangamite Arts

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Corangamite Arts

Corangamite Arts has established the Corangamite Dry Stone Walls Heritage Trail which takes in 10 sections of the most diverse and significant walls in the district. Information boards at each site provide valuable details on the walls.

Brochures for the self-drive Trail are available from Visitor Information Centres in Colac, Camperdown, Terang, Port Campbell, Mortlake and Warrnambool. They have also published with diagrams and illustrations the research on the history, styles, functions, building techniques and the builders of the walls

If these Walls Could Talk: the Report of the Corangamite Dry Stone Walls Conservation Project, Corangamite Arts, 1995 is available from the above Visitor Information Centres as well as Information Victoria 356 Collins Street Melbourne and by mail order for \$23 inclusive from Corangamite Arts PO Box 115 Terang 3264.

The Corangamite Dry Stone Walls Heritage Trail

The most impressive and extensive network of dry stone walls in Australia is found in the Western District of Victoria. The Corangamite Dry Stone Walls Heritage Trail established by Corangamite Arts includes some of the most significant walls in the region, at Pomborneit in the Stony Rises on the Princes Highway east of Camperdown, at Derrinallum, in the shadow of Mount Elephant on the Hamilton Highway and at Kolora to the west of Mount Noorat on the Terang Mortlake Road and the Terang Darlington Road.

The western plains of Victoria are among the world's greatest basalt plains. The volcanic activity over millions of years has shaped the landscape which is generally flat except for the volcanic cones. These volcanic cones, some time in the past, spouted out the lava which then formed the stones covering the plains. The youngest eruption points are less than 10,000 years old. The volcanic cones most visible in the Corangamite region are Mounts Porndon, Elephant (the lighthouse of the Western District), Leura, Noorat and Shadwell.

The natural landscape was given new form and function by immigrants from the British Isles who began arriving in the middle of the 19th century. Realising the fertility of volcanic plains, they set about clearing the land first of natural vegetation and then of the surface stones in order to introduce stock and grow crops. The stone cleared from the ground provided the earliest, most convenient and practical building material. Although most of the existing walls were built after the gold rush and after the introduction of the rabbit, there is evidence of dry stone walls in the western district from the late 1840s. These were carefully built after the paddocks had been cleared of stone in order to create enclosures, protect cultivated paddocks, livestock, homesteads, crops and as barriers against fires. A greater need for fencing arose when many shepherds and itinerant station hands fled to the goldfields to seek their fortune.

From the 1870s many pastoralists began to rebuild earlier walls in an attempt to make their properties rabbit-proof. Several construction devices were used: overhanging copestones; wooden slats projecting under the copestones; wire stretching out from the top of the wall; trenches about a metre into the clay base (presumably impenetrable for the rabbits), plugging of holes in the wall to prevent the rabbits colonising the walls; and even asymmetrical walls with stepping stones up one side and a sheer wall on the other with overhanging copestones to prevent them coming back. The rabbit wall built by the Manifold brothers at Purrumbete in the 1880s is perhaps the most significant wall in the district standing up to two metres high. It originally ran continuously from Lake Corangamite to Lake Purrumbete. (photo)

Dry stone walling although slow and back-breaking work is a skillful craft and in earlier times was handed down from one generation to the next, creating stone walling families. Each wall is in fact two walls because the craftsmen or cowans would lay two rows of stone about a metre apart, filling in the centre with smaller stones.

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