

Cape Woolamai

Cape Woolamai is a 308 hectare faunal Reserve situated at the easternmost extremity of Phillip Island. First proclaimed as a reserve in 1968, it is part of the Phillip Island Nature Park.

A Natural Attraction

Abundant natural resources of state and national significance, breathtaking land and seascapes, spectacular granite cliffs, the nightly return of the Short-tailed Shearwaters, the plunging Bass Strait swells on the wide sandy beaches and an interesting story of human use spanning thousands of years make Cape Woolamai a very special place.

Geology

Cape Woolamai is the result of unique geological and geomorphological processes. It is the highest point on Phillip Island at 112m and one of the highest granite massifs in Victoria. Cape Woolamai was originally an island which, over time, has been linked to the rest of Phillip Island by a sandy isthmus. The sandy isthmus grew until vegetation stabilised the dunes at around 30m above sea level. Pre settlement vegetation was described by Smythe (1842) as "open heathy land devoid of grass" on the south-western side, with "diverse scrub of gum and prickly tea-tree - poor barren land behind" and the higher ground at the Cape as "She-oak land, undulating and producing good grass". Some of the only fresh water springs on the island are found in the area.

sand dunes
blowout 1950's



conservation
results 2007

Erosion

Today coastal vegetation all but conceals the sandy tie-bar to the main island. A few decades ago the tie-bar would have been more apparent as the sand was totally exposed. This was a result of the burning, setting of pasture and grazing practices of the farmers who owned the land following European occupation in 1870. The first reference to serious erosion was in 1874. Gnarled cemented sands (*rhizoconcretions*) litter the dunes, a stark testimony to the tree and scrub vegetation that used to grow there. Sand stabilising plants, particularly Marram Grass (*Ammophita arenaria*) were unsuccessfully introduced as early as 1870. In 1976 a major revegetation program was commenced and is still continuing, to stabilise the dune system.

Vegetation

The soil types are both sandy, alkaline and excessively drained. This together with extreme exposure to strong prevailing south - westerly salt laden winds has resulted in unique, although not rare, vegetation communities. Remnants of the original vegetation are found to be of moderate to high quality due to the presence of few weeds and two known rare species occur here.

The Crimson Berry (*Cyathodes juniperina*) and the Shore Spleenwort (*Asplenium obtusatum*) are listed as vulnerable in Victoria. A list of 38 plant species has been recorded.

Birdlife

Spring witnesses the arrival of the Short-tailed Shearwater (*Puffinus tenuirostris*) on their summer breeding pilgrimage. Over 350,000 burrows are located on the granite tip of Cape Woolamai. This is the largest colony on Phillip Island and one of the largest in south eastern Australia. The rookeries are of national and state zoological significance. Amongst the 57 other bird species listed that inhabit or visit the site are the Orange-bellied Parrot (*Neophema chrysogastor*) and the Hooded Plover (*Charadrius rubricollis*). Both species are regarded as threatened and have been listed for protection under schedule 2 of the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act (1988). Many smaller birds such as chats, finches and thornbills can also be seen.

Phillip Island Nature Park

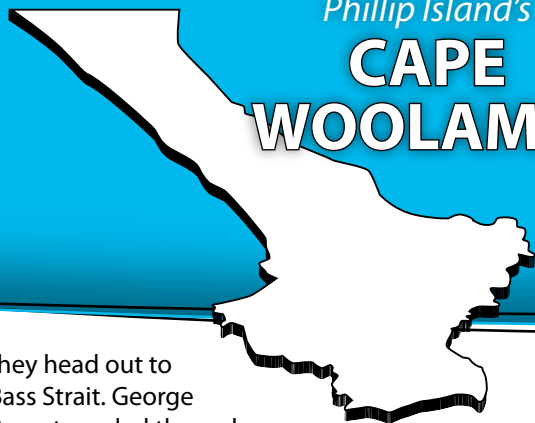
PO Box 97, Cowes, Victoria, 3922

5951 2800

schoolbookings@penguins.org.au

www.penguins.org.au





Fauna

With the return of the vegetation cover the mammalian population has begun to increase in numbers, including not only swamp wallabies (*Wallabia bicolor*) and echidnas (*Tachyglossus aculeatus*) but, unfortunately, also pest species such as foxes, rabbits, dogs and cats. Many raptors prey on the extensive reptile population that frequent the rookeries. Some of the largest copperhead (*Austrelaps superbus*) snakes on the island live in the area, a result of abundant food sources at the rookeries. Blotched Blue-tongued lizards (*Tiliqua nigrolutea*) abound throughout the cape.

Marine life

The surrounding waters of the cape provide a unique environment for a host of marine life rich in invertebrates, shellfish, crustaceans and fish. From the tip of Cape Woolamai, the near vertical cliffs provide a birds-eye view of the dolphins and whales that occasionally pass by the area on their annual migratory journeys.

Indigenous History

Cape Woolamai was part of the estate of the Bonkoolawal clan of the Boon wurrung. They were irregular visitors to the cape and must have found the area, with its wealth of natural resources for food, water, shelter and tools to their liking. There have been 48 sites found in the dunal system of the isthmus. Many thousands of years of use by the Bonkoolawal probably did not interfere with the long term balance of nature. Theirs was a truly sustainable use of country.

This was all to change when Europeans arrived.

European History

Today, fishing boats from the nearby San Remo fishing village appear dwarfed by the cliffs and ocean swell as

they head out to

Bass Strait. George

Bass struggled through

these very same waters to discover Western Port on the 5th of January, 1798. He named the

cape Snapper Head, as in profile it appeared like

the prominent forehead of a snapper. Governor King

re-drew the map Flinders produced of Bass Strait, from Bass's notes and sent it home to the Admiralty.

He re-named it Cape Wollamai after the local Sydney Eora tribe's word for snapper, wolomi.

After the island was opened to settlers in the mid 1850's, Captain Cleeland leased the two allotments that covered what is today the main part of the reserve. A small section at the summit was reserved for public land.

European settlement of Victoria and the need to supply the growing city of Melbourne with food and building materials led to the discovery and plunder of Cape Woolamai's natural resources.

Mutton-birding

The mutton bird industry began with the Chinese camped at Cape Woolamai in 1872. These seasonal visitors were engaged in obtaining beak oil from the birds for cooking and burning oil for their countrymen in Melbourne. By the late 1880's up to 300 people from all around Westernport used to camp at Bergin's beach, the future quarry site, in search of mutton bird eggs for preserving for food and the Melbourne cake industry. A party of 5 fishermen from Hastings collected 288 dozen eggs in two days in 1888. Many of the birds were also dressed and smoked for consumption, an illegal practice today, that still occasionally occurs. By 1918, when the practice was banned, up to 20,000 were taken each season.



Phillip Island Nature Park

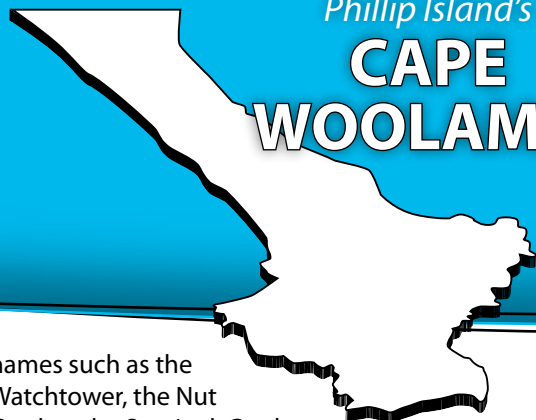
PO Box 97, Cowes, Victoria, 3922

5951 2800

schoolbookings@penguins.org.au

www.penguins.org.au





Quarry at Red Point

Quarrying for granite began in 1892 to supply stone for the facing of Equitable Buildings, Collins Street, Melbourne. The quarry employed a large number of people camped at the site with a number of small buildings constructed. Nature and time has worn away most evidence of this operation, although the loading ramp and many granite blocks with chiseled holes in the sides remain. The working face of the mine has been reclaimed for the most part by vegetation. The sinking of the Kermandie, a ketch used to transport the granite to Melbourne, brought a halt to quarrying the following year. Over the ensuing years the odd piece of granite from the mine site has been taken for various uses. Cape Woolamai granite has been used in such buildings as Parliament House, Melbourne, the Shrine of Remembrance, the Hawthorn and Melbourne Cemeteries.



Nature based tourism

Long before the Penguin Parade was an attraction for visitors, the main wildlife attraction was the nightly return of the mutton birds. In the 1880's Willie Fraser used to take visitors by boat to Bergin's beach, so named because Thomas Bergin the owner and builder of the first hotel in San Remo used to take his family and many others camping there. It had a fine, northerly aspect. Over the high country to the south coast was a place called the Rookery where visitors were hiked to marvel at the site of the mutton birds returning at sunset.

Rock stacks

In the 1930's when Phillip Island was maturing as a holiday destination, the fad was naming structures for resembling something of the urban environment. Granite stacks and unusually shaped rocks were given

names such as the Watchtower, the Nut Cracker, the Sentinel, Castle Rocks, the Mitre Rock, Santa Claus, Pulpitt Rock and the Pinnacles and were immortalised on postcards. The Pinnacles was for many years listed as one of the top 10 rock climbs in Victoria.

Recreation

Today Cape Woolamai is enjoyed by many people wanting to view the magnificent coastal landscapes, unique wildlife and marine life and play in the world renowned surf that breaks onto the pristine beaches. It is one of the few beaches on the south-eastern coastline of Australia to have consistent beach break waves on most days of the year. The surf beach is recognised as being of State, National and International Significance for surfing and State Significance for swimming and beach fishing.

Swimming is also a very popular summer activity here although it is not without its risks due to large surf, dangerous rips and occasionally sharks! It is visited by many tourists on their way to view the nightly Penguin Parade, for many the only beach that they will see in Australia. Some international visitors have little understanding of the surf hazards. The Woolamai Beach Surf Lifesaving Club is located here and have performed 1,200 rescues in its 28 years of operation. The patrol season runs from early December to Easter Sunday. Many State and National surfing titles have been and will continue to be held on these beaches together with internationally ranked professional events.

Walking and sight seeing are popular activities, the spectacular views and bird life, in particular viewing the nightly return of the Shearwaters in summer, are the main attractions. Distance and the difficult terrain however limit the numbers participating.



Phillip Island Nature Park

PO Box 97, Cowes, Victoria, 3922

5951 2800

schoolbookings@penguins.org.au

www.penguins.org.au

