

# LEX LOCI'S TRAVELS

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*An irregular one-pager from The Public Land Consultancy*

## Lex does Social Distancing at Point Nepean

At first sight it seems a pleasant spot. Lex has spotted a cape barren goose, a pelican, and a few pacific gulls. But not so long ago this was a place of shipwrecks, and disease, and the apparatus of war.

**Point Nepean is a National Park which commemorates two types of value: the natural and the historic. Amongst its various roles, this was a quarantine station.**

As a peninsula it was readily isolated. Police patrolled a double fence-line across the neck, to stop passage in either direction. Here, ships flying the dreaded yellow flag arrived with smallpox or typhus or cholera, to disembark their sick passengers. Here, citizens of Melbourne who had succumbed to leprosy or tuberculosis were locked away. And here, many of them were buried.

**As we head into a new pandemic, Lex hopes we won't need quarantine stations. He winces at the memory of Royal Park and Fawkner Park transformed, in times of crisis, into temporary camps.**

Overlooking the entrance to Port Phillip, Point Nepean was also a place of military defence. Lookouts scanned the horizon for the French, the Russians or the Germans, depending on the geo-politics of the day. Curiously, we had no qualms about the Confederates in the American Civil War – their raider CSS *Shenandoah* was effusively welcomed into the Bay.

It was across the bows of one German ship that the first shot of World War One was fired, in August 1914. Point Nepean's military connection survives, in the form of no-go areas, signposted 'No Entry: unexploded ordnance!'

This military function meant that in 1901, Point Nepean came under the control of the newly-formed Commonwealth – although it wasn't until 1931 that the transfer document was signed, appropriately backdated.



*The dreaded yellow flag, which once signaled 'disease aboard,' now guides visitors to the quarantine station.*

To Lex's immense delight, its period under Commonwealth control, and its subsequent reversion to the State, served to illuminate some of the many legal complexities inherent in public land administration. Remember when the Howard Government wanted to sell it off as a private spa resort?

*Anyway, Lex is practicing social distancing, and minimising human contact. He still gets around Victoria – usually as a cyber-visitor, investigating the curiosities of public land on-line. Sometimes he steps out, to uncrowded places such as Point Nepean – but you won't find him at the MCG or Luna Park or, from this week, at the pub or the coffee shop. ■*

See you there! *Lex Loci*



*Point Nepean is in  
Bunurong Country*

*Sources: [Nepean Historical Society](#), [Heritage Council](#),  
[Parks Victoria](#), [Lancashire Design](#)*

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