

LEX LOCI'S TRAVELS

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An irregular one-pager from The Public Land Consultancy

Lex seeks the Bunyip in various lakes and swamps

Lex is contemplating the uncertain boundary between myth and reality. In Europe they have griffins and unicorns; in China, fire-spewing dragons. And out at sea, the monstrous kraken.

In Australia we have an equivalent beast, but not one celebrated on flags or coats of arms. Somehow, the bunyip just doesn't have that heraldic quality.

Lex would dearly like to see a bunyip, but only at a safe distance. So he's cautiously checking out various swamps and rivers around Victoria.

He makes his way to West Gippsland, to the town of Bunyip on the river of the same name, and to the town of Tooradin (the Boonwerrung word for bunyip) by the Westernport mangrove swamps. If any still inhabit these waters, they're not emerging to greet our Lex.



One theory is that the bunyip is a collective memory of the extinct diprotodon

Across to Geelong, to Lake Modewarre, which the Wadawurrung people called Moodiwiri. It was here, as the escaped convict William Buckley recorded, that people and dogs had disappeared. There

was no mystery: they had been taken by the bunyip. The same had happened at the Jeringot wetlands on the Barwon.

So Lex approaches these waters with trepidation. A little farther west, he revisits [Lake Bullen Merri](#) to see the channel between it and Lake Gnotuk. According to Djargurdwuring tradition, it was carved out by a bulldozer-sized bunyip.

On to Fiery Creek near Ararat. Here was, once, the most tangible evidence of the bunyip. For many years the Djab Wurrung people gathered annually to re-carve into the hillside the outline of a giant beast their ancestors had dragged from a waterhole. The outline was visible until the 1860s, and fenced off by the white pastoralists, but has since been obliterated.

So it is across the Victorian landscape. We lose knowledge of the meanings of place-names, and the people who lived in those places, and their traditions. Perhaps this evolution is inevitable – although we reject the ideologically driven distortions of the [‘history wars.’](#)

These bunyip-creatures and their stories are, in a sense ‘intangible heritage’ – even though they don't enjoy protection under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*.

The bunyip may not be emblazoned on our national coat of arms, but it will certainly continue to enrich the wider Australian culture.

See you there! Lex Loci



We offer our respects to the Indigenous peoples who are custodians of these traditions. Various sources, notably [a presentation](#) by Prof Ian Clark to the La Trobe Society, August 2017.

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