ROSSTOWN RAIL TRAIL

City of GLEN EIRA

A guide to the route of the former Rosstown railway line. Follow the extinct railway route, which started as one man's innovative dream and became his personal folly.

❖ Rosstown Rail Trail ❖

Introduction

This is a guide to the route of the former Rosstown Railway for rail enthusiasts, walkers, cyclists or motorists. Walk, cycle or drive it. Whatever way you go, enjoy it.

The Rosstown Rail Trail charts the original course of the private line which was the life long dream of William Murray Ross. From start to finish, the railway line was plagued with problems ranging from a lack of funds to construction delays. This brochure observes the contribution of one entrepreneur who made our City and its surrounds what it is today.

Trail summary

The Rosstown Rail Trail is a generally flat route following local streets and linear parks. The trail is suitable for all ages and can be followed by bike, car or by walking.

Start: Elsternwick Railway Park (Melway Ref: 67 F3)

Finish: Oakleigh Junction (Melway Ref: 69 E7)

Length: 8.5km (with an optional detour of 3.1km)

Time: Walking - approx. 3.5 hours (excluding detour approx 1 hour)

Cycling - approx 1.5 hours

Caulfield – a potted history

Little development of Caulfield occurred until the 1850s when gold was discovered in Victoria. In the building boom created by the gold rush, wealthy merchants and professional men established a number of large "country mansions" in the Caulfield area. The district became known as Caulfield, most probably after the prominent Melbourne builder John Caulfield who died in 1879.

In the mid-1800s the area was a mixture of swamps, sandy heathland, farms and market gardens and was riddled with dirt tracks that made access difficult.

The City of Caulfield started as a district roads board in 1857.

The City of Moorabbin grew from a roads board established in 1862.

For the first 25 years of Caulfield's municipal life, board/shire members met in "Mood Kee", the house of Cr Harold Pennington. He was paid 10 pounds a year to cover the cost of candles, fuel and the room. The annual general meeting was held in a tent in the backyard. Caulfield Town Hall (now home to Glen Eira City Council) was built in 1885.

Glen Eira City Council was formed on 15 December 1994 following the merger of the former City of Caulfield and part of the former City of Moorabbin.

Experience all Glen Eira has to offer...

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Council can provide this document in alternative formats on request.

For more information:

Recreation Services:

For all sports club information, parks and gardens enquiries and free *Out & About* brochures:

Phone: 9524 3470

Email:
recservices@gleneira.vic.gov.au

Website:
www.gleneira.vic.gov.au/recreatn.htm

Online guides

Interactive leisure guide:
www.gleneira.vic.gov.au/project/

Facility hire:
www.gleneira.vic.au/facilityhire

Service Centre:

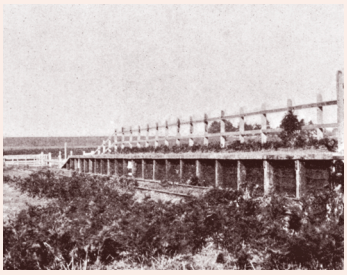
To report any maintenance issues in parks or halls.

Phone: 9524 3333

Get out and about in Glen Eira!

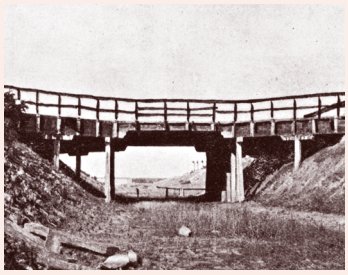
City of GLEN EIRA

The Rosstown railway



If you think your map is out of date because Rosstown isn't shown, don't worry, you won't find it on any map produced since 1909. Re-named by Caulfield Council in the early 1900s, Carnegie now stands where Rosstown once was. The Rosstown railway suffered the same fate as the town, its route now obscured by parks, roads and housing.

The dream



Carnegie Station was once called Rosstown Station – named after its creator William Murray Ross. Born in Liverpool, England in 1825 – Ross emigrated to Melbourne in 1852. One of his many ambitions was to build a sugar beet mill in close proximity to the city, served by a dedicated railway line to transport the processed sugar from the mill to Elsternwick.

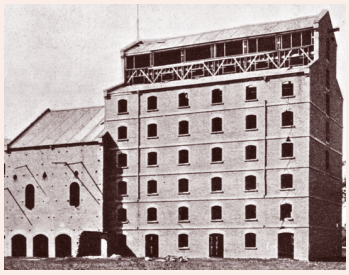
Construction of the railway began in September 1883 and was first completed only two months later in November 1883. But shoddy workmanship and inferior materials prevented official approval being given for its use. It was four years before construction was resumed in 1887, which culminated in the improved and completed railway in 1888.

During the time between the first construction and the reconstruction, Ross sought approval to connect his railway with St Kilda by a line from Elsternwick through Elwood, the Sea Beach Line, but this never eventuated.

The one-train line

The railway was never used for its intended (or any other) purpose, and quickly fell into disrepair. An unsubstantiated claim by William Ross states that he ran one train on his completed railway on 14 November, 1888. This single excursion was said to carry, among others, Thomas Bent, the prominent politician and future Victorian Premier and, considered by some, a notorious land speculator. But, thanks to Willliam Ross and his dreams, we are left with a historic, signposted route to walk, cycle or drive along.

The Rosstown sugar beet mill



The sugar beet mill that the railway was constructed to serve was built by Ross in 1875 on what are now Neville and Miller Streets, Carnegie (Melway Ref: 68 H7) was also doomed to failure.

Local market gardeners were angered at the loss of their public source of water and peat when the government sold Ross a tract of land known as Lemann's Swamp Reserve (now Koornang Park and its surrounds) to provide his sugar mill with a continuous supply of water.

Despite the suitability of the local soil, a ready supply of water, support from businessmen and politicians, Government approval and rail transport, the mill still did not succeed. Ross lacked the support of the market gardeners, who preferred to grow other crops, and he faced increasing competition from the embryonic cane sugar industry in northern Australia.

After unsuccessful attempts to sell the mill to a brewer or to use the building as a rabbit processing plant, a hospital or an abattoir, Ross dispensed with his caretaker to save costs. The unprotected building was then exposed to thieves and vagrants who stole equipment and occupied the mill. Coupled with mounting debt, the mill succumbed to disuse and was finally demolished in 1908.

By the turn of the century, Ross had constructed a railway line and a huge processing plant, neither of which were ever used. A man who followed his dreams, no matter what the cost, Ross died in 1904 shortly after the break up of his second marriage.

William Murray Ross

Born 1825 – Died 1904

William Ross emigrated to Melbourne from Liverpool, England in 1852 and established himself as a manager of an insurance company. He became a magistrate and was appointed to government boards and committees and had a circle of business and political associates which included Thomas Bent, who was a Councillor on both Moorabbin and Brighton Councils for more than 40 years, as well becoming a State MP and Premier. The suburb of Bentleigh is named after him.

Ross and his wife Leila moved to the market garden district of Caulfield to breathe some country air. They purchased The Grange, a house between the present Grange, Leila and Wild Cherry Roads.

He bought land extensively, naming his holdings Rosstown, after himself. A 19th century entrepreneur, he borrowed and mortgaged heavily, formed companies and built a sugar beet mill and railway and conceived other plans. Very few of his schemes succeeded. He owned 1000 acres in Caulfield and believed the value of the estate would increase with the construction of the mill and railway. He said in his memoirs that he could have sold his holdings for £1,000,000.

Ross's second marriage ended in 1903. The Grange fell into disrepair and was sold by the bank of New South Wales in 1909.

Photos provided by DF Jowett, Public Records Office and the Newspaper Collection, State Library of Victoria.

❖ Rosstown Rail Trail ❖

A Time has all but obliterated this innovative rail scheme, but some evidence is still visible.

B Site of one of the four unused Rosstown Railway platforms.

C Princes Park was once a swampy waste ground, the railway being raised here on an embankment.

D This area has a checkered history. Now a linear park, it was once used as a council waste dump.

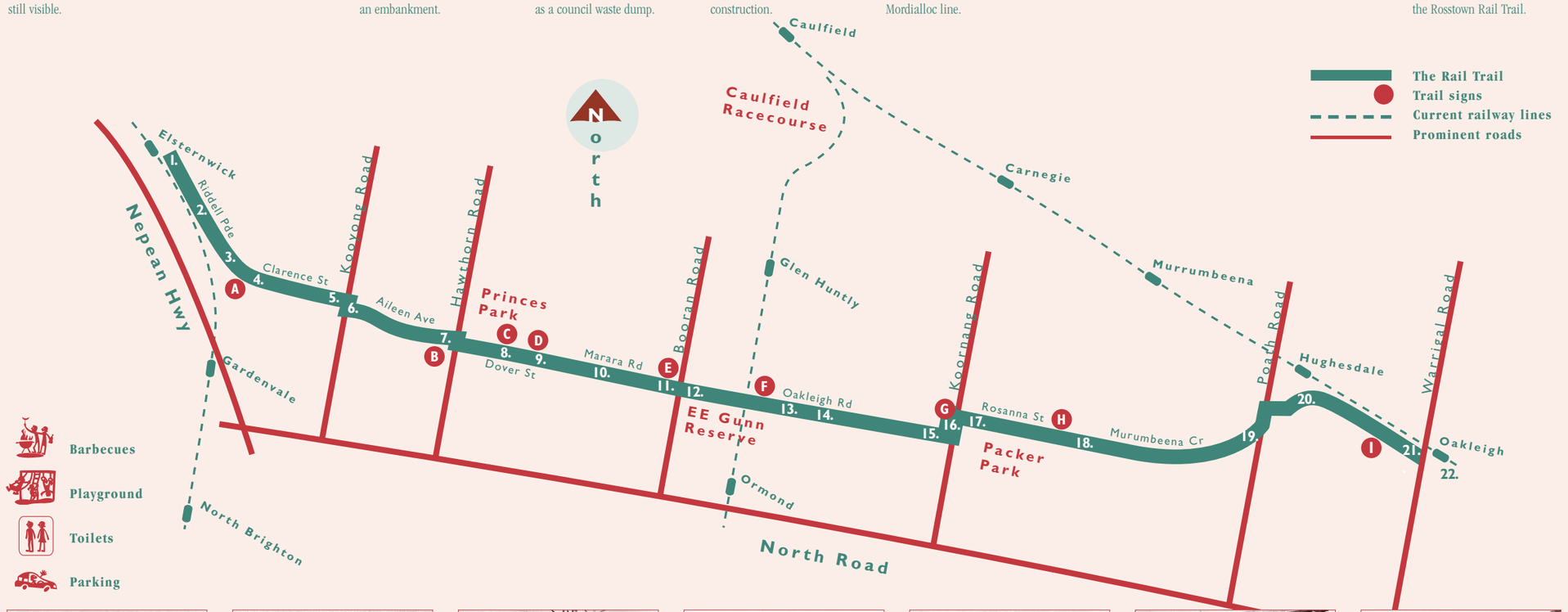
E The Booran Road platform and bridge was built as part of the second construction.

F The underpass was built to allow the railway to pass unimpeded under the Mordialloc line.

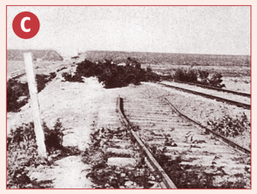
G The sugar beet mill stood just to the rear of the platform on the corner of Neville Street.

H Tennis and bowls clubs and a playground now all stand on the former railway tracks.

I The meeting of the Rosstown Railway and Gippsland Line, this ends the Rosstown Rail Trail.



B
Hawthorn Road


C
Dover Street

D
Bambra Road

D
Council landfill 1949

E
Booran Road

G
Sugar beet mill

H
Rosanna Street Reserve

Trail Description

1. The Route begins in Riddell Parade at the south end of Elsternwick Railway Park (Melway Ref: 67 F3).

In 1883, the Rosstown Railway left the main Brighton line close to the junction of Archibald and Gisborne Streets and Riddell Parade, but during reconstruction, Victoria Railways (VR) built sidings, and simplified the layout, taking the Rosstown tracks up to the Elsternwick platform.

A shallow cutting contained the track, main line and sidings. The present day deeper cutting, which takes the Brighton line under Glen Huntly Road, has only two tracks. On the opposite side of the station there is a noticeable step where the narrower cutting was made in the wide one.

2. Proceed down Riddell Parade to where it curves away from the present day railway.

Here the Rosstown track left the main line at the original junction. After reconstruction there was a short siding and water tank and the line curved round on the right of Riddell Parade.

3. Continue down Riddell Parade (which becomes Clarence Street) and take a short detour. Turn right at the roundabout into College Street and stop at the small bend on the left.

Immediately to the left of No. 52 is the site of the original Garden Vale platform built in 1890 – the first of the never-to be-used stations. The current Gardenvale Station on the Sandringham line was built in 1906. On the right was the planned site for the junction for the Sea Beach Line (see historical page) to St Kilda, another non-event.

4. Retrace your steps to the roundabout and turn right into Clarence Street.

Gladstone Parade and College Street originally stopped on either side of the line until they were joined in 1913.

5. Continue along Clarence Street to Kooyong Road.

The line ran between Clarence and Parnell Streets, to the right.

6. Turn right into Kooyong Road and first left into Aileen Avenue.

To avoid cutting through higher ground between Aileen Avenue (which follows the curve of the line to the right) and Seaview Street (to the left) the line curved south and then straightened eastward again.

On the right is the Orion Estate - a subdivision with planetary names which was promoted by an estate agent who anticipated the government would purchase the line in 1885.

7. Continue along Aileen Avenue to Hawthorn Road and turn right and immediately left into Dover Street. Turn and face the bus stop in Hawthorn Road.

Behind the bus stop is a house and a brick garage and this is the site of an unused platform. The line crossed over swampy ground here, so was raised on an embankment following an old government road (Dover Street).

8. Continue down Dover Street to Princes Park on the left.

A double section of track was laid along this part of the line which never served any purpose. What is now Princes Park on the left, was originally a wetland and was used by Caulfield Council for rubbish landfill, but this was stopped in 1936 when a refuse destructor was built on the corner of Dover and Sussex Streets.

9. Continue to the end of Dover Street turn right into Bambra Road and immediately left into Marara Road.

The cutting through Bambra Hill started opposite the second house on the right. Early in the 1900s, this area was waste ground in a badly eroded state. The railway had been disassembled, the tracks being taken to Tasmania to construct a private line.

10. Continue up Marara Road. A linear strip of parkland runs to the left.

This park follows the original line of the railway which cut into Bambra Hill. Spoil from the cutting (which then had varying grades) was used for the Dover Street embankment. The line originally rose and crossed Booran Road on the level, but during reconstruction the grades were improved and a bridge built at Booran Road.

11. If walking or cycling, cross over Booran Road into EE Gunn Reserve and follow to the end.

Drivers should go left into Booran and right into Woodville Avenue to the end and turn right into Dorothy Avenue then drive into the park at the far end.

The cutting continued along the present left boundary of the EE Gunn Reserve. (Originally Ormond Park, it became EE Gunn Reserve in 1927 when the earthworks were levelled for sports areas.) During reconstruction, a loop was included to join the line to the Mordialloc line at North Road Station (now Ormond Station). The connection was never made due to one of Ross's disputes with VR.

12. From the park, go under the railway underpass right into Royal Avenue and left into Oakleigh Road.

The railway bridge passes under what is now the Frankston line - originally the Caulfield to Mordialloc run. Ross waived his rights to compensation or reservation of land where his line and this one would cross. The Mordialloc line opened in 1881 running between Glen Huntly and North Road Stations and when Ross laid his first tracks in 1883, VR refused to let them cross on the level. He agreed to have an embankment and underpass built, being reimbursed by the government for two thirds of the cost. Ross allowed space for four tracks to go under but only one was ever laid.

13. Continue along Oakleigh Road to Grange Road.

The line ran to the left of Oakleigh Road. Between Royal Avenue and Grange Road the railway reservation was sold by the National Bank to Caulfield Council which filled in the cutting that ran just past Lillimur Road to establish a linear park. The further section along Oakleigh Road went to a private buyer and is now all residential.

14. Cross over Grange Road to Melton Avenue on the right.

Grange Road was named after "The Grange", Ross's house located between the present Grange, Leila and Wild Cherry Roads. Opposite Melton Avenue, the line curved away to the sugar mill for which it was built.

15. Continue down Oakleigh Road and turn left into Koornang Road and go up to Neville Street – first on the left.

On this corner was the Sugar Works Platform and behind it, extending past Miller Street, was the seven-storey sugar mill. Construction of the mill began in 1875. It was never used. When the building began to decay, locals went boating on a nearby swamp on timber from the mill and had races up the internal ladders.

16. Here you can continue along the railway or take a 3.1km detour (approx 1 hour).

Detour –
A. Continue along Koornang Road and turn left into Munro Avenue. On the left are Koornang Park and Lord Reserve.

Turn right into Railway Road.

Around 1879 Ross tried to interest VR in building a branch line from Rosstown Station (now Carnegie) to the mill. Although this did not eventuate, the government reserved land which now forms the curving Railway Road.

B. Continue down Railway Road over Glen Huntly Road turn right into Neerim Road and immediately left into Toolambool Road. Continue to the end and turn right into Rosstown Road.

It seems Rosstown Road and the Rosstown Hotel in Dandenong Road, Carnegie are the only public references to Ross that remain.

C. Turn right into Koornang Road

and continue down to Rosanna Street & turn left. End of detour.

17. If not taking the detour – cross over Koornang Road into Rosanna Street almost opposite Neville Street.

Rosanna Street follows the line of the railway with the tennis club, reserve and RSL Bowling Club now situated where the tracks ran.

18. Go to end of Rosanna Street and cross Murrumbeena Road to Murrumbeena Crescent.

The line followed the crescent on the right hand side which is now all residential, having been sold by the National Bank between 1917 and 1929.

19. At Kangaroo Road turn right and then left at the roundabout to Poath Road. There is no direct way through so turn right into Freda Street - rejoin line at Hughesdale Kindergarten.

Oakleigh Council purchased the section from Poath Road in 1929.
The Hughesdale Community Centre and the Lion's Club home now stand on the former railway reserve.

20. Freda Street turns left and curves along the old alignment, to Galbally Reserve. Here drivers will have to park and follow the remaining route on foot. Take the path to the right of the plaque set in a rock and follow the curve of the reserve boundary.

The path becomes the Station Trail, on the former Rosstown railway reserve, alongside the main tracks to Gippsland. It is apparent how the two lines ran side by side before joining near Warrigal Road.

21. The trail ends at the pedestrian level crossing. To catch a last glimpse of the Rosstown reserve, walk up to and cross over the Warrigal Road overpass and look back. You will see where the reserve tapers in at the former junction.

22. Walkers can return to Elsternwick by taking a train from Oakleigh to South Yarra and changing there onto the Sandringham line.