



## Summer Newsletter 2010/11



The new Aboriginal Heritage Trail includes an interpretation of an Aboriginal stone hut. Inset, Brad West with a traditional eel trap.

## New heritage trail provides insight on Cape's first people

A NEW Aboriginal cultural site has opened at Cape Otway Lightstation helping people to learn more about the culture and lifestyle of the region's traditional, spiritual peoples of Gadabanud country.

The Aboriginal heritage trail includes an artistic interpretation of the stone huts of the Cape's first people, a large-scale contemporary mosaic representing a billabong, plus a collection of traditional weapons and tools.

The interpretation sites are located on a traditional Aboriginal trade and fishing route which is nestled among important archaeological sites and middens. The amazing diet of the Gadabanud included seafood, mammals, birds, reptiles, plus fresh

water fish and eels. The Gadabanud were highly efficient hunters and gatherers who wove eel traps from grasses, created beach fish traps with a series of stone corrals, and had both river and ocean going canoes. They wore intricately decorated cloaks made from possum skins to keep them warm in winter.

The interpretation site which includes a "keeping place" with a bark canoe and other relics, was jointly funded by the Federal Government and Cape Otway Lightstation.

Almost 40 Indigenous and non-indigenous people have created the body of work over the past 5 years.

People employed at the heritage site are from regional Aboriginal families and share their knowledge of the Cape's edible plants.



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**Book launch: Morrie Fenton's daughters Jan Walton and Claire Fenton from Adelaide, joined Ian McKellar, historian Donald Walker and Victorian RAAF Radar Association president Alec Culvenor at Cape Otway.**

## Historical threads reveal Eye of the Needle's wartime story

A NEW book sheds light on Cape Otway Lightstation's top secret role in defending Bass Strait in World War Two.

*Defending the Eye of the Needle, a history of Cape Otway from 1939-1945*, was officially launched at the Lightstation in December.

In 1848 the life-saving lighthouse beam first shone over the treacherous waters of the narrow shipping channel, referred to as the Eye of the Needle, between Cape Otway and King Island.

For its time the lighthouse employed cutting edge technology. Then almost a century later, in 1942 the highly secret technical wonder known as radar arrived at the Cape. Its primary purpose was to detect and report upon all shipping, and potential enemy submarines and minelayers.

Historian and author Donald Walker, who launched the book, said: "It (the radar station) would for the next three years, perform no less a vital role than the lighthouse. The difference was that it would see through rain, fog or darkness, any suspicious ship, submarine or aircraft that threatened our security."

When Britain and Australia declared war on Nazi Germany in September 1939 the Australian Government believed the country was under no threat of invasion, but should "prepare for sporadic raids".

It re-established World War One lookout stations at Gabo Island, Wilsons Promontory and Cape Otway and minesweeping flotillas began work, but in late 1940 a German ship evaded detection and laid dozens of mines in Bass Strait which claimed two ships including

the SS City of Rayville just off Cape Otway. In 1941, 32 coastal locations, including Cape Otway, were identified as posts for air warning and shipping surveillance.

Before the radar stations could be commissioned Japan entered the war in early 1942 and one of their submarines surfaced near King Island where its crew unpacked and assembled a small aircraft, which made a three-hour reconnaissance flight over Cape Otway and Melbourne.

In June 1942 what became known as 13 Radar Station began operating at Cape Otway, using technology imported from Britain.

Melbourne's Ian McKellar, who co-authored *Defending the Eye of the Needle* with the late Morrie Fenton said: "Although they didn't discover any intrusions, Cape Otway was an important training field."

He said young servicemen, such as Morrie Fenton, were trained at the Cape before being posted to 400 different radar stations throughout the Pacific in a service that employed 6,000 people.

Mr McKellar became intrigued by radar station technology and then the great human stories and camaraderie associated with them, prompting him to work on the book with Morrie Fenton, who died in September.

The Cape's radar unit ended its watch in 1946, but the bunker, known as the 'Doover' to safeguard its secrecy, remains in tact and is one of the many points of interest visited daily by tourists from around the world.

*Defending the Eye of the Needle* is available for sale at the Lightstation.

## Lighthouse pioneers share their triumphs and tribulations

YOU can eavesdrop on a private conversation between Cape Otway's second lightkeeper Henry Bayles Ford, and his wife Mary Ann, during the summer holidays.

You'll find Henry drafting a letter, calling for better working conditions and pay.

At the insistence of Mary Ann, who birthed seven of their nine children at the Lighthouse, he makes a bid for better wages. Mary Ann urges him to request two cows to

keep the family in milk and butter. You can also catch a glimpse of the tremendous demands placed upon Mary Ann Ford as she educates her children, grows and prepares their food, makes their clothes, cares for shipwreck victims, and fills in as assistant lightkeeper.

A range of Characters of the Cape performances are offered daily and bring the region's rich maritime heritage to life.

## Schools enjoy Cape adventure quests

MORE than 1,500 children from Melbourne and south west Victoria have taken on the Lighthouse Keeper's Quest Program during 2010.

Lightstation manager Paul Thompson said children from years four through to 10 had undertaken the Lighthouse Keeper's Quest challenge, adapted to each school's needs and curriculum, for half a day through to five days.

"Very often the schools stop off for a day or two as part of their journey along the Great Ocean Walk which gives them a historical context for the region, which is so rich in history with everything from shipwrecks through to World War Two spies," Paul said.

"The program gives students a real experience of Australian pioneer life through the daily challenges of keeping the lighthouse operational."

Advance bookings for 2011 are strong.

"We get excellent feedback from students and teachers and a lot of repeat business," he added.

"Moonee Ponds Central School has been coming here for five years, Haileybury College one of the top academic schools in the State will be here for the third time in March, and St Damian's Primary School at Bundoora has been sending their year six classes here for three years."

A holiday camp for children in years seven, eight and nine will be launched for the September school holidays.

Read more about it on the Lightstation website: [www.lightstation.com](http://www.lightstation.com)

## Keeping kids busy

CAPE Otway Lightstation is the perfect destination for a family day out during the holidays - there's lots to see and do in the heritage precinct, plus every primary school aged child receives a free Kidzone @ The Cape learning and activity pack.

Children will need to keep their eyes peeled and may need to ask friendly Lightstation staff for information to help them complete the Lightstation quiz.

The pack includes the chance to colour-in and win two nights' accommodation by working out the signal on the flagstaff.

Once kids have climbed the lighthouse and taken in the amazing views, they can learn about the Cape's first people on the Aboriginal Heritage Trail, and discover the historic Telegraph Station & World War Two radar bunker. Families are welcome to picnic in the grounds or eat at the Café.

