

# Coolart Wetlands & Homestead



## Visitor Guide

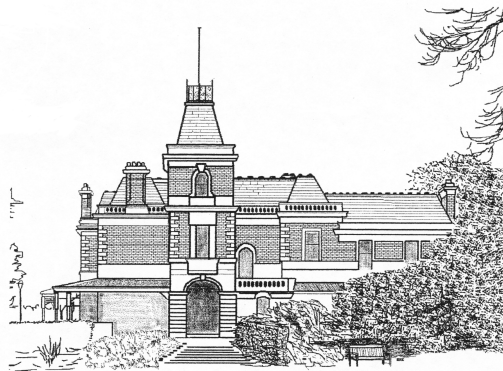
Coolart Homestead is a magnificent late Victorian mansion situated on the shores of Western Port Bay. This historic farming property was bought by the Victorian government in 1977 in recognition of its historic buildings and significant wetlands. Today you can explore this tranquil property and its many different landscapes and relax in a place where history and conservation meet.

### Location & access

Coolart Wetlands and Homestead is located 80 kilometres south east of Melbourne on the Mornington Peninsula. Lord Somers Road, Somers, Melways reference map 193 J9. The park is open daily from 9am to 5pm. Gates close at 5pm sharp.

### Wheel chair access

Wheelchairs may be borrowed from the Visitor Centre for people with limited mobility. The Minsmere Hide and Wetlands Observatory are accessible by wheelchairs. The observatory is best approached by the path opposite the stables.



## Things to see & do

### Walks

There are a series of walking tracks throughout the park which allow you to explore coastal woodlands, wetland areas, lagoons and the formal gardens which surround the homestead. An enjoyable part of the woodland walk is crossing the bridge over Merricks Creek for magnificent views from the beach overlooking Western Port Bay and Philip Island.

### Explore the historic homestead

The historic homestead dates from 1895 and features a superb collection of historic photographs and letters. Other historic buildings include the barracks, meat house and buttery.

### Bird watching

Coolart is a wonderful place for bird watching and its diversity of habitats means that you might see over 60 species in one day. You will see birds everywhere, but the best places to watch them are from the Minsmere Hide and the wetland and woodland walks. The formal gardens can also be rewarding.

### Visit the Wetlands Observatory

Sweeping views of the wetlands through one-way glass windows provide a perfect hideaway for spotting ducks, swans, swamphens, grebes, Marsh Harriers and many other bird species. An Audio-visual presentation - 'Introducing Coolart' is shown in the Wetlands Observatory each day at 1:30 pm or by prior agreement for schools and groups. This introduces visitors to Coolart's history, its wildlife and management of the park.

### Explore the gardens

Coolart's gardens were designed in 1938 for Tom and Gertrude Luxton by David Mathews, the curator of Footscray Gardens. Trees from all around the world can be found here including the exotic Ginkgo from China and the majestic Blue Atlas Cedar from Algeria and Morocco.

### Picnic

The Homestead lawns are the perfect location for a leisurely picnic or if you prefer, free electric barbeques are available in the picnic area.

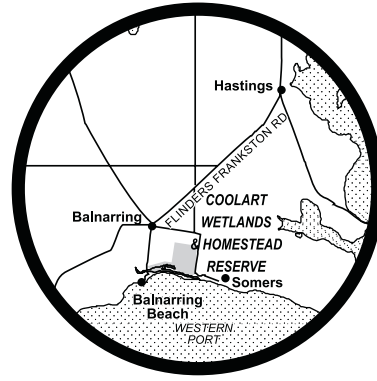


# The Woodlands Walk

The Woodland Walk begins just outside the Visitor Centre, and features 4 loop options. You can choose the one that is best suited to your time schedule and energy levels.

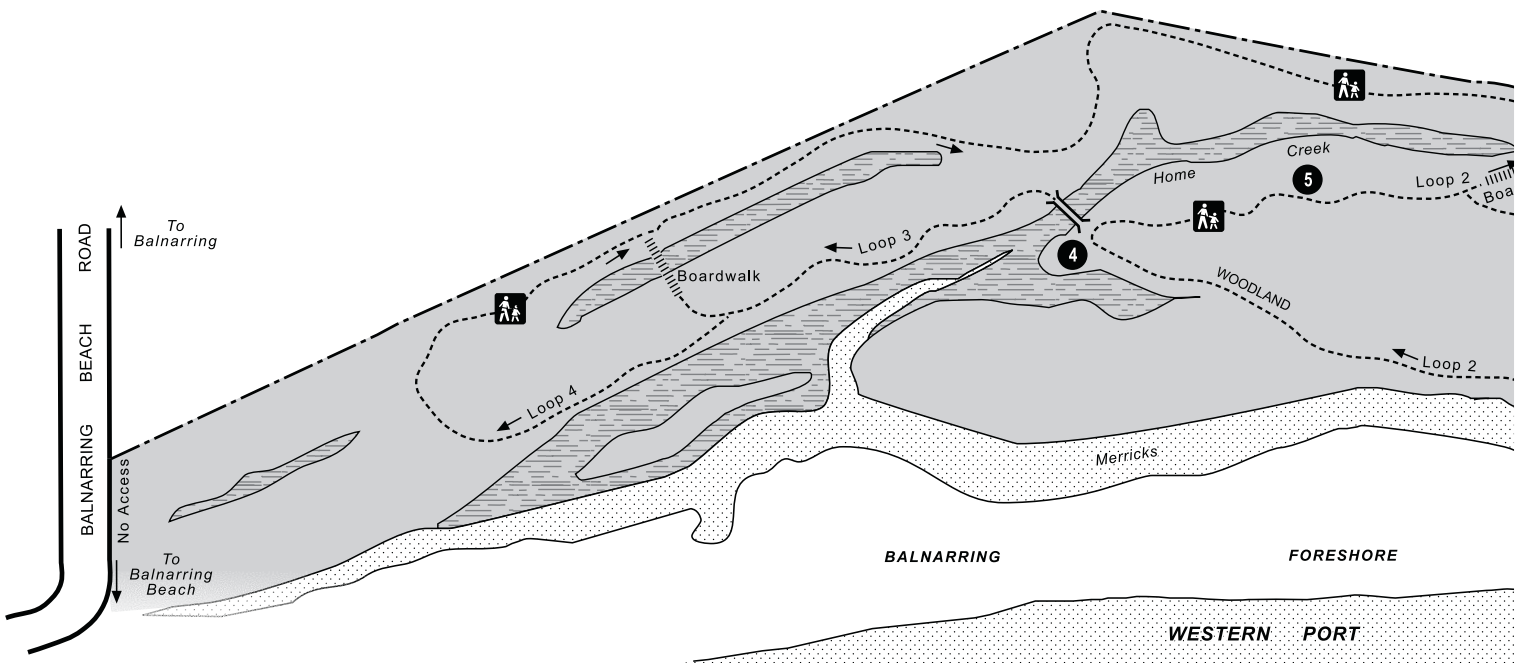
- Loop 1      1 km      0.5 hours
- Loop 2      2 km      1 hour
- Loop 3      2.7 km    1.5 hours
- Loop 4      3.1 km    2 hours

Loop 2 features several stops marked by numbered pegs. Separate notes for the Woodland Walk help to explain the ecology and environmental issues in our coastal woodland.



Coolart Wetlands & Homestead Reserve		Recreational Facilities	
	Road		Barbecue
	Walking track		Bird hide
	Gate		Car park
	Reserve		Family walk
	Water body		Friends of Coolart
	Wetland		Plantshop
			Park information
			Picnic table
			Toilets
			Information stop

Cartography by Spatial Vision, 2000  
 M/6807



To  
Balharring,  
Hastings and  
Frankston

Farmland

LUXTON  
DRIVE

No Access

Agroforestry

Minsmere Hide

Lagoon

Farmland

LORD  
SOMERS

BEACH  
HILL  
AVENUE

ROAD

Entrance  
Gate

To  
Somers

SOMERS CHILDRENS SCHOOL CAMP

Visitor Centre  
& Ranger Office

Garden  
Dam

Farmland

WOODLAND

WALK

WALK

Creek

RESERVE

WALK

Observatory  
Welllands

Observatory

Homestead

Garden

Farmyard

Stables

Crake  
Hide

Crake  
Hide

BBQ

WC

P

6

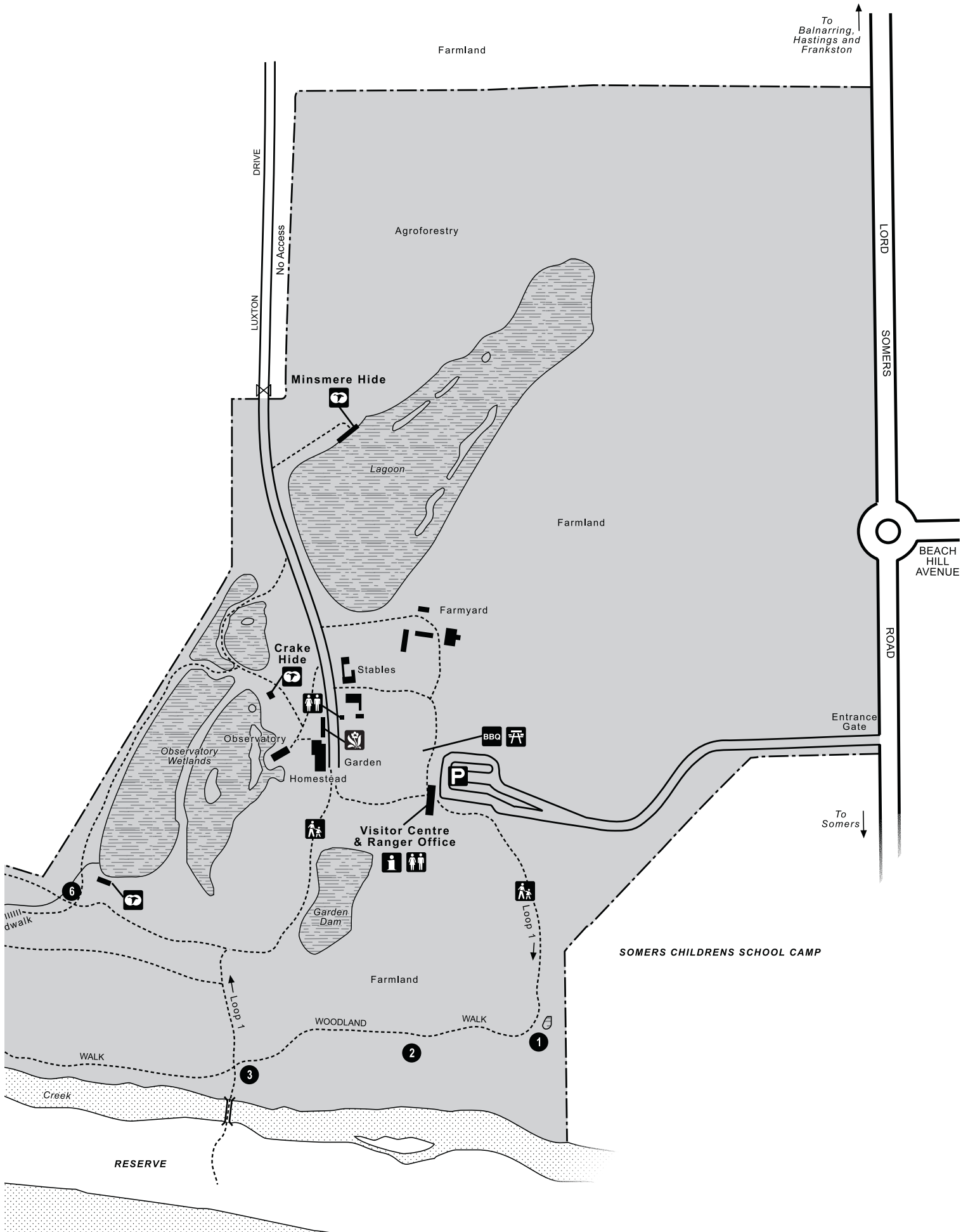
3

2

1

Loop 1

Loop 1



## Further Information

Parks Victoria  
Information Line  
Call 13 1963  
Parks Victoria website  
[www.parks.vic.gov.au](http://www.parks.vic.gov.au)

## Caring for the environment

Please help us look after Coolart Wetlands & Homestead by adhering to the following guidelines:

Take rubbish away with you for recycling and disposal

Plants and animals within the reserve are protected by law and must not be disturbed or removed

Camping is not permitted

Horses and motorbikes are not permitted in the reserve

To protect wildlife dogs are not allowed in the reserve at any time

Leave the area as you find it

## Get involved – Join the Friends of Coolart

Restoring habitat diversity can have healthy benefits to you and your community and volunteering is a great way to get involved... anyone can do it! The friends of Coolart have been making a difference in this park since 1979. You can make a difference too by joining the Friends of Coolart. Membership forms are available from the visitor centre or call 13 1963

## Healthy Parks Healthy People

*Visiting a park can improve your health, mind, body and soul. So, with over four million hectares of parkland available to Victorians, why not escape to a park today!*



## History

Prior to European settlement, the Bunurong people were the original inhabitants of the area. The name Coolart is derived from the word "Colourt" or "Callert" which was their name for the nearby Sandy Point.

European settlement began in 1840 when Henry and Alfred Meyrick found excellent grazing land, and despite difficulties with dingoes and water supply, began farming a selection of almost 16,000 acres. The Meyricks moved to Gippsland in 1846, but their name lives on in the nearby town of Merricks.

One of Coolart's oldest buildings is the "Barracks" built in the 1860's. This building, along with the buttery, meat house and part of the stables, were built of hand-made bricks. Another interesting building is the century old machinery shed which is in the farmyard, housing some heritage farming implements.

In 1895, Frederick Sheppard Grimwade bought the estate and had the imposing homestead built as the family's country retreat. Grimwade was a partner of a large chemical and pharmaceutical company that was to become Drug Houses of Australia. The Grimwade photographs displayed downstairs in the homestead, recall the style and prosperity of those early days.

By the 1900's a formal garden had been added to the earlier orchards and vegetable gardens, with a croquet lawn, tennis court, geometric paths and flower beds.

The late Tom Luxton purchased Coolart in 1937 and immediately had the property declared a sanctuary for native wildlife. This set the course for Coolart's future. The Luxton family owned and lived at Coolart longer than any of the previous occupants since settlement. In 1938 the then curator of the Footscray Gardens, David Matthews, was engaged to re-design the layout of the garden for Coolart, a design which is still enjoyed today. You can see the original garden plan on display in the Luxton room of the homestead.

## Luxton Lagoon

When the present Luxton Drive was first formed in the 1850's as the entrance drive into Coolart homestead, it dammed a shallow, seasonal paperbark swamp. In 1939, Tom Luxton raised this embankment, and in 1958, during a drought, he hired a bulldozer to form islands on the lagoon. Very soon Australian White Ibis, which were not common in southern Victoria at the time, began to roost in the trees surrounding the lagoon. In winter

1961, six pairs of Australian White Ibis nested for the first time. Their numbers increased to more than 500 breeding annually. From early July to November or longer, the air is full of the coming and going of ibis carrying sticks for nest building or food for their rapidly growing chicks.

## Flora & fauna

Birds to look out for include Yellow Robins, Superb Fairy-wrens and Honeyeaters. On warm days Blue-tongue Lizards and Longnecked Tortoises can be seen basking in the sun. The mammals at Coolart are mostly nocturnal and usually only become active at night, however if you look carefully you may be lucky enough to spot a koala, swamp rat, echidna or even a ringtail possum.

## Wetlands

Coolart features a natural creek system and artificially created wetlands. The upper and lower wetlands were constructed in the 1980s to provide a haven for a multitude of birds. These wetlands areas differ from the main lagoon in size, shape, water depth and vegetation. This variation attracts different species of birds to different areas of the wetlands. The reeds within the wetlands shelter reed-warblers, crakes and rails. The best time to see the elusive crakes and rails is when water levels drop and the birds are attracted out onto the muddy edges to feed.

## Being a volunteer

Hanging out with friends can be good for your mind, body and soul. Throughout the world there is growing recognition of the vital contribution parks make to a healthy environment, to the health of the individuals and to a healthy society. Restoring habitat diversity can have healthy benefits to you and your community and volunteering is a great way to get involved in your environment... anyone can do it!

There are over 300 different Friends Groups helping us maintain the health and integrity of our reserves. You can join the Coolart Wetlands and Homestead Friends Group in caring for these special places and become a Friend. For more information call Parks Victoria on 13 1963 or visit [www.parkweb.vic.gov.au](http://www.parkweb.vic.gov.au)



Short-beaked Echidna ©MT

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Healthy Parks  
Healthy People®