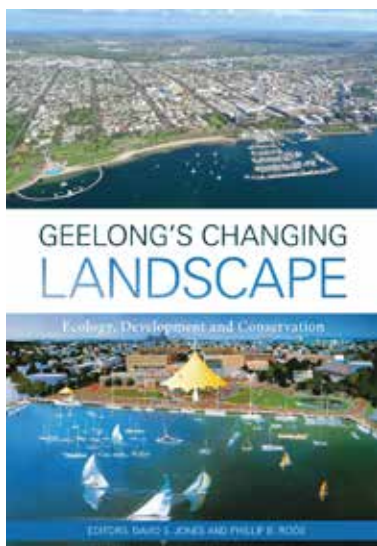


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Geelong's Changing Landscape: Ecology, Development and Conservation

David Jones and Phillip Roös (Eds.)

2019

CSIRO Publishing

Melbourne

Paperback, 344 pages

Colour plates, illustrations, photographs

RRP \$69.99

Reviewed by Katrina Burge

A history in which the main agent is the land, not the people, makes for fascinating reading. The editors have assembled a comprehensive collection of scholarly essays treating different aspects of the Geelong region. Their goal is to:

translate the historical evolution of Geelong, with a particular emphasis upon its natural and cultural values, their tensions with accommodating growth and 'advancement', and the ideas and visions that created contemporary Geelong and are shaping its trajectory today. (p. 1)

Like many regional areas, Geelong has been the subject of numerous 'hobby' histories and local passion projects, and the authors draw on these resources, augment them and make them accessible to a wider audience. Chapters cover such diverse topics as the geological bedrock that is literally the foundation of Geelong (Peter Dahlhaus, 'The Lay of the Land: The Geological Evolution of the Landscape'), the growth of suburbs (Louise Johnson, 'The Geelong Suburban Dream: Origins, History and Future'), the changing face of migration (Kate Kerkin, 'Emerging Cultures'), the decline of manufacturing (Matt Novacevski, 'The Post-Industrial Landscape of Geelong') and the challenges of town planning (Kirsten Kilpatrick, 'Land Use Planning Challenges Facing the Geelong Region'). The book explores many topics that would generate useful models for inquiry questions.

A key strength of the book is the foregrounding of Geelong's Indigenous past and present, and the many *Wadawurrung* place names still used in the region—including Geelong (*Djilang*) itself—are testimony to its enduring Indigenous custodianship. The chapter by Uncle Bryon Powell and *Tandop* David Tourier blends Indigenous insights and Western science in an evocative creation story of the region, its landscape, flora and fauna. The chapter is accessible and engaging as, for example, it characterises different parts of the landscape as 'supermarkets' providing particular food resources, but it also presents a powerful argument about the need

for 'crafting a society that respects the qualities, narratives and cultural richness of these lands and waters we call *Wadawurrung Country*' (p. 77).

The book has numerous well-chosen black-and-white illustrations and several pages of colour plates. The plates are mainly practical rather than decorative, with maps featuring heavily. While you will not find von Guérard's *View of Geelong* here, you will find Jan Senbergs' counter-historical painting *Geelong capriccio* (if Geelong were settled instead of Melbourne), which is a useful reminder of the randomness of historical events and development.

As someone born and bred in Geelong, reading this book meant revisiting childhood haunts, remembering family stories and solving dimly remembered mysteries. Does that mean it's only of interest to those who share that background? Not at all. The growth of Geelong is a microcosm of processes replicated throughout this country, where timeless Indigenous custodianship is disrupted but not destroyed by settlement, and cities grow, decline and change through economic and demographic processes. The main strands of Australian history are explored through their effects on the landscape of one particular region. Whether it's riding on the sheep's back or booming in the gold rush, or learning to make good coffee and dealing with climate change, the themes explored in this book can be applied to many areas of the curriculum. While it is of particular relevance to the many teachers who teach within both History and Geography, whatever aspect of Australian History you are teaching, you'll find something in here that will enrich your understanding. This isn't a book to read in a sitting but one to browse for snippets, exploring whatever aspects pique your interest at the time.