

Keep Moving - Active Observation

As we move around, we tend to tune in only to a narrow focus of the ground and sights ahead. We can easily ignore many of the sights, sounds and smells around us.

These notes provide some ideas to enhance your observation of all that is around you, and can be applied on any walk or ride, whether in bushland or on a suburban street.

Stop and look up!

Have you ever soaked up the feeling of lying on your back under a tree, seeing the wonderful patterns of the branches and leaves and of clouds in the sky?

Lying on the ground may not be an option with aging knees and hips. Another way to observe what is above is to hold a mirror in your hand or use your mobile phone screen. If walking through bushland, this is a great way to observe the tree canopy – and keep an eye on the ground ahead at the same time.

Stop and listen!

Paths along our waterways will have several changes of elevation and micro-environment, often over a very small distance.

Feel textures!

Walk through the grass instead of on a path. How different does this feel and sound underfoot? Pick up leaves and crush them – especially eucalypts – savour the scent.

There are particular spots where it is good to stop for a moment and observe.

➤ Under a bridge:

Listen – how do the sounds here compare with those on the bridge approach?

If it is a road bridge, traffic sounds may be more muffled, or there may be a rumble as each vehicle passes.

How might the sounds vary at different times of day?

Sense – is it cooler? Does the air smell damp?

Look around – is the soil moister under rather than away from the bridge?

Are there different plants? Are there signs of birds or animals that may live or forage here? What might they be looking for?



High St-Merri Creek Bridge



➤ On a bridge over a stream:

Look into the water – are there any fish or insects?

Are there birds in the shallows, or diving for insects on the water?

Play 'pooh sticks' – this appeals to the child in us all

Walk or cycle on low bridge over Merri Creek

➤ Near rapids, and by still water:

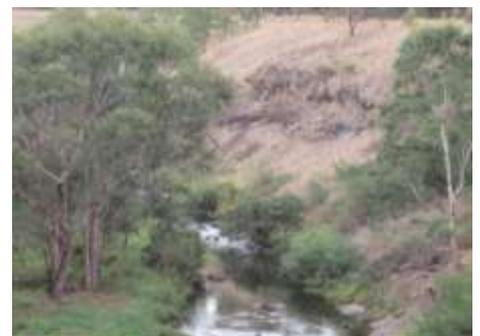
How do the sounds compare in these two spots?

By still water, can you hear any frogs?

Notice the stream bank – is it low, with an area prone to flooding?

Is there a rocky cliff?

Is the bank quite different on either side?



Low and high banks, Merri Creek

➤ **On a ridge:**

How far can you see? Is there a distant view?

Notice the soils, rocks, plants – are they different on the ridge, and on each side of the ridge? Might this attract different birds or animals?

How might this spot feel different in a different time of day or season, or just in different weather?



Skyline from Merri Creek lookout

Take a moment to contemplate your surroundings.

You may find a spot where there is little sign or sound of the human-built, suburban world; soak up the sights, sounds, smell of the bush around you. Notice the difference in feel between high and low spots in the landscape.

Think about the people who have walked this way over the centuries, and how it may have been for them.

The Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation, who are the traditional owners of the land we now know as the City of Darebin – are there places where they may have sheltered, or met in groups for trade or ceremony? What food may they have gathered?

Early European settlers – if you are at one of the major road crossings of Darebin or Merri Creeks, how long might it have taken to cross the creek before the bridge was constructed? Might it have been at times impassable?

What impact has development had on the natural environment, and the lifestyle of previous settlers?



Merri Creek near Dwight's Falls by Henry Gritten, 1818-73
Source: State Library of Victoria