The Otway Journey

The shape of the week program we are developing at present is about walking on the land understanding song lines and the changing landscape. So the journey will start at Colac off the train, follow the Beechy Rail trail to Gellibrand, welcome to country at the Gellibrand River - an important point to enter country. Then progressing up the to the top of the Otway Ranges, across to Triplet Falls, descending through the ranges to the Redwoods, into the coastal valley on the Great Ocean Road into remnant temperate rainforest. The journey continues to explore the coastal paths of Point Franklin - a beach dinosaur fossil excavation site, Cape Otway and the Lighthouse, a leg of the Great Ocean Walk around Cape Otway to Rainbow Falls and onto Aire River and the estuary and confluence of the Aire, Calder and Ford rivers. There will be opportunities to fish and hunt eel and cook up the catch and also canoeing through the estuary and upriver on the Aire river.

The themes of the journey are to walk over and observe clues of the layers of the formation, habitation, occupation, environmental change and use - from the time of dinosaurs and ancient flora to the indigenous habitation and management over millennia, then the use and industry from the beginning of colonial occupation from the sea and forest industry. We will ponder on modern understandings of our collective impact on the land, looking back over the way the land has changed and been understood in many different ways. Our journey will focus on, mindfulness, environmental diversity, biology, geography, personal and social capabilities.
Day 1: Volcanic Plains to Rainforest

Gellibrand: A Welcome to Country and the Otways

An introduction to the Otways and Song Lines at Gellibrand

The journey begins at the crossroads of environments. After travelling through the Victorian Volcanic Plains to arrive at Gellibrand, the group finds themselves on the border of the Otways. With the guidance of local indigenous elder Richard Collopy, staff and students, now collectively Journeyers, walk to the local historic ochre site and introduced to the Maar people and the stories of the Ancient Songlines in the area.

We begin to look for the changes in the environment, from the colour of nearby paddocks, the topography of the land to the colour and leaf structure of the trees. Students are also encouraged to observe other features of the land, such as evidence of human occupation and the natural history of the area.
Connecting with Land from Gellibrand to Beech Forest in the Heart of the Otway Ranges

Riding and walking along the historic Beechy Rail Trail

Using a combination of mountain bikes, walking and e-bikes we follow the Beechy Rail Trail away from Gellibrand through paddocks, areas of cleared and growing timber for forestry and into steep gullies of rainforest. Students learn about the importance and environmental impacts of the different land use and how different priorities have changed the use of the area through history. They consider the changes the environment went through after European colonization and question what the view may have looked like 300 or 3000 years ago. The Rail Trail also offers the physical challenge of journeying through the land. The journey activity can be tailored to different skill sets and group goals by changing the mode of transport.
Day 2: Rainforest to Ancient Coast

Waterfalls and Rainforest

A flexible morning visiting a variety of the beautiful areas rainforest and waterfalls
The journey continues by exploring the wilderness of the rainforest, providing the rare opportunity for students to experience 300 year old trees and biomes that few are lucky to enjoy.

This module offers the opportunity to spend time exploring some of the key sites and walks in the depths of the wild Otways. These activities can be tailored to the different learning goals for the group.
Options include:
• The Otway Fly
• Mait’s Rest
• Triplet Falls – Night time Glow Worm Discovery
• Beauchamp Falls
• The Redwoods
• Hopetoun Falls
• Melba Gully – Night time Glow Worm and marsupial walk
Coast, Heath and Ancient Lands

A walk with Indigenous elder Richard Collopy along the song lines of the coast where dinosaurs once roamed and ancient inhabitants lived sustainably for millennia.

We progress to the coastal area where we find ourselves walking along songlines that skirt the coast investigating evidence of original inhabitants life. The walk passes by dinosaur digs and we again think about the changes in the land. What would it have looked like when the dinosaurs roamed the area? What would this have looked like when Koorie lived traditionally with the land? How do you think it will look in the future?

We drink from fresh water aquifers that have percolated through layers of rock from the Murray-Darling Basin over tens of thousands of years. With help from a tribal elder we look for food sources on the rocks and question why piles of shells are buried in sand in middens that are thousands of years old.

The day ends around a fire under the stars on Cape Otway in Eco pods - structural tents - having explored the Lighthouse on the Cape considering the beginning of colonial settlement of the area and the maritime disasters that prompted the construction of the lighthouse.
Day 3: Sand dunes, Rainbow Falls and Estuaries

Walking the Great Ocean Walk to Aire River Estuary

A day walking the songlines along the coast through coastal dunes, visiting the culturally and biologically significant Rainbow Falls and hearing stories from the past and present.

Journeyers continue along the Great Ocean Walk from Cape Otway along cliff tops and along the beach, scrambling up and down dunes and scrambling over rocks to explore Rainbow Falls and the adjacent coastal caves and fresh water springs.

The destination is Aire River valley and the National park campground on the banks of the Aire River to set up camp for the next two nights. After cooking dinner journeyers enjoy another night of fireside camaraderie and starlight.
Day 4: The Ancient Coast to the Rivers

Canoeing and Ancient Aquaculture Practices

Canoe up the Aire River, spending time learning and practicing food gathering methods that have been used for thousands of years. Depending on weather and the seasonal condition of the river, there are options to canoe up the river to a traditional eel fishing ground and cook lunch over an open fire, construct rafts, try fishing, swim or explore the area on foot.
Day 5: Rivers and Home

Leaving the land and community a better place

Giving back to the community and land by undertaking a project such as cleaning up the environment, contributing to future groups or helping with the end of camp activities

Waking up to the birdcalls of the estuarine birdlife and the sound of surf in the distance students have the opportunity to appreciate the beauty of the river wetlands as they prepare their final breakfast and pack up their tents in preparation for returning home.

Activities for the morning could include working with National Parks staff to maintain the Aire River area, tree planting on the Beechy Rail Trail, gear maintenance or preparing for the next journeymers.
Student Negotiated Components

Other options are available

Because there are so many areas of interest and different ways to be in this wild and ancient landscape we are happy to collaborate with students and teachers to plan a journey that suits the wishes of the participants whether they are interested in outdoor education, history, environmental science, ecology, indigenous cultural and historical studies, art, leadership, team cooperation or personal development.

We are at present developing a 24 hour solo experience and looking at compiling resources that we hope the participating journeyers will contribute to for those who come after!