

# Lake Wendouree

Coordinates: 37°33′0″S 143°50′0″E﻿ / ﻿37.55000°S 143.83333°E﻿ / -37.55000; 143.83333

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**Lake Wendouree** is an artificially-created and maintained shallow urban lake located in the suburb of the same name in the city of Ballarat, Victoria, Australia. The name Wendouree comes from a local aboriginal word *wendaaree* which means 'go away': a story is told that when settler William Cross Yuille asked a local indigenous woman what the name of the swamp was, that was her reply.

Lake Wendouree is one of the smallest of a complex of natural wetlands which includes nearby Lake Burrumbeet and Lake Learmonth on the plains of the Central Highlands.

The swamp was dammed following the Victorian gold rush in 1851 and since the 1860s it has been a popular recreational lake for Ballarat's citizens. <sup>[1]</sup> Lake Wendouree now holds significant historical, environmental and recreational values to the Ballarat community. The lake hosted the rowing and canoeing events during the 1956 Olympic Games.

During its history, the shallow lake has dried up during drought conditions, the most recent an extended period between 2006 and 2011.

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## History

### Origins

In ancient times Lake Wendouree was originally a stream which flowed to the west but a lava flow caused it to be dammed on three sides and it now drains to the east, eventually into the Yarrowee River.

### Lake Wendouree



The lake filled with water in 2006, looking towards central Ballarat and beyond to Mount Warrenheip

<b>Location</b>	Ballarat, Victoria
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<b>Lake type</b>	artificial
<b>Primary inflows</b>	Gong Gong Reservoir, various
<b>Primary outflows</b>	Gnarr Creek outlet, evaporation
<b>Basin countries</b>	Australia
<b>Max. length</b>	2 km
<b>Max. width</b>	1.4 km
<b>Surface area</b>	2.38 km <sup>2</sup>
<b>Average depth</b>	2 metres
<b>Water volume</b>	3860 megalitres
<b>Shore length</b> <sup>1</sup>	6 km
<b>Surface elevation</b>	450 metres
<b>Settlements</b>	Ballarat

<sup>1</sup> Shore length is not a well-defined measure.

The swamp was known to Europeans as "Black Swamp" due to its dense dark reeds. It was later known as "Yuille's Swamp" after William Cross Yuille who settled just south of it.

## 19th Century: From Dam to Recreational Lake

When Ballarat was first surveyed in 1851 by WS Urquhart the swamp was recorded as Wendouree and the misunderstood aboriginal word became the official name.

Plans to dam the outlet stream that flowed from the swamp began as early as the first surveying and the bank raised and pipes installed and it became the first permanent water supply for the burgeoning gold rush settlement.

A corroboree was observed at the Wendouree Swamp in March 1857 by a Ballarat Times reporter.<sup>[2]</sup>

In 1864 a rowing course was first cut through the reedy swamp and the first steamboats arrived. Within a decade it had become the recreational focus of Ballarat, a popular destination and by the 1880s dozens of paddle steamers, ferries, yachts and rowers were using the lake's waters and newly built boat sheds and the establishment of Victorian era gardens around its banks.



Sailing boats on the lake in 1905

## 20th Century: Olympic Venue

Lake Wendouree which hosted the rowing and canoeing events for the 1956 Summer Olympics.<sup>[3]</sup> An Olympic monument now marks the end of the course.

Apart from private bore water the lake quickly ceased being the city's private water supply with the introduction of new sources including the Gong Gong Reservoir.

## 2000s Drought



Lake Wendouree dry lake bed caused by recent drought conditions.

The Drought in Australia caused Lake Wendouree to dry up in 2006. Despite warnings by the local council and news publications, local enthusiasts have been combing below the surface of the dry lake bed for artifacts, including antique glass bottles. The activities of many local clubs and centres including boating



No Swimming

clubs, rowing clubs and recreational fishing<sup>[4]</sup> were suspended indefinitely and the dry lake had a large tourism impact on Ballarat.

A better than expected winter rainfall in 2010, as well as storm water and wetland works in 2008/2009 saw the lake return just short of capacity. It is expected that it will reach full capacity in 2011.

## Wildlife

The reed beds and islands provide sanctuary for a variety of wildlife. Of the recorded 166 species, the most commonly seen waterbirds are: Black Swan, Duck, Dusky Moorhen, Swamphen, Coot, Musk Duck, Great Crested Grebe, Silver Gull and Little Pied Cormorant. Information boards at the Fairyland Wetland Walk provide details about species and habitats.

About 100 native water-rats are scattered around the shore and are sometimes seen in Fairyland at dawn and dusk. The diversity of pondlife is rich and attracts numerous school groups making visits for environmental science field studies.

## Transport

A vintage electric tramway operates around the lake. The volunteers of the Ballarat Tramway Museum have preserved fifteen trams and memorabilia from Ballarat's tramway era. Attracting twenty thousand passengers each year, it is one of Ballarat's most popular tourist attractions. Double-decker horse-drawn trams began carrying visitors to the Ballarat Botanical Gardens in 1887.

Paddlesteamers have used the lake in the past for both transport and as a tourist attraction and the most popular one, the Golden City is being restored for return to the lake<sup>[5]</sup>.

## Recreation

Boating has long been an important sport and leisure activity on the lake and for many years local schools have held the "Head of the Lake" rowing regatta there.

The track around the lake provides an interesting 6 km challenge to walking, cycling and running enthusiasts who complete the circuit in their thousands each week, irrespective of the weather. For serious athletes, the record for running the 6 km lap of the lake is 16 minutes and 10 seconds, set in 1992 by Marathon Olympian Steve Moneghetti.

In recent years, it has been the venue for the annual Goldfields Festival and Springfest extravaganza.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> ^ "Lake Wendouree". <http://www.ballarat.com/lake.htm>. Retrieved 2008-04-04.
- <sup>2</sup> ^ Bate, Weston (1993). *Life After Gold: Twentieth-Century Ballarat*. Melbourne University Press. ISBN 0522844758.
- <sup>3</sup> ^ 1956 Summer Olympics official report. p. 42.
- <sup>4</sup> ^ Gullifer, Brendan 165,000 trout to be put in Lake Wendouree The Courier 28 Oct, 2010
- <sup>5</sup> ^ <http://www.goldencitypaddlesteamer.org.au/>

## External links

- Ballarat Accommodation and Tourism Directory
- Ballarat Tramways website
- City of Ballarat
- Central Highlands Water

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