



CITY OF  
MITCHAM

# Brownhill Creek Heritage Trail





Brownhill Creek, hand tinted print by Mrs Day Ca 1950.

**This walk may be undertaken as a single walk or in two parts.**

The going is mostly level and on well-made tracks. Not all parts of the walk are suitable for wheelchairs or strollers.

Walk one starts at Mitcham Reserve and goes to the Lions Club picnic area. Walk two proceeds from the Lions Club picnic area to the end of Brownhill Creek Road. A fold-out map is provided inside the back cover.

In summer take care when walking as snakes live in the area. Walking tracks can be quite muddy after heavy rain, so wear suitable footwear. The park may be closed on days of extreme fire danger. You may take your dog on this walk provided it remains under your control on a lead at all times. Please note that dogs are not permitted in the Brownhill Creek Caravan Park.

For more information on the history of Brownhill Creek or the Mitcham district visit [www.mitchamcouncil.sa.gov.au](http://www.mitchamcouncil.sa.gov.au)

Images (unless noted), text and concept by City of Mitcham Local History Service.

## Introduction

This walk takes you through Brownhill Creek valley from Mitcham Reserve through Brownhill Creek Recreation Park to the former market gardens at the end of Brownhill Creek Road.

Brownhill Creek is valued by the community as a unique cultural landscape and an important natural environment. It is of great significance to the first inhabitants, the Kurna people who named it 'Wirraparinga' – place of scrub and creek. One of the first settlers in the area, Pastor William Finlayson observed up to 150 indigenous people camping in the area at one time.

The Brownhill Creek Reserve, a 3.5 kilometre linear strip of land either side of the creek, was set aside by the South Australian Government in 1841 as a "Reserve for Public Purposes", making it one of the oldest public reserves in Australia. On 15 July 1915 Brownhill Creek was proclaimed a "National Pleasure Resort" under the control of the South Australian Tourist Bureau. It remains a very popular recreation place to this day.

During the 1840s farmers and gardeners settled in Mitcham Village and deep within the valley beyond the reserve. The area contains many remnants of early colonial occupation including the heritage listed manure pits, bluestone and sandstone quarries, significant European trees, early cottages and remnants of the early market gardens.

By the late 1850s settlers had stripped the lower valley of most of its trees for timber and grazing land. Willows and poplars were planted throughout the reserve in the 1890s to stabilise the creek due to the de-vegetation.

By the early 1900s twenty three families lived at the end of the valley, grazing livestock and farming market gardens. Three and four generations of families lived there for nearly a century but by the 1970s most of the farms had vanished.

Six quarries and two stone crushing plants operated in the valley from the early 1900s. By 1935 all quarry operations had closed down.



Keystone Bridge and Ford Crossing Charles Petts Ca 1915.

## **WALK ONE – The Reserves**

Mitcham Reserve to Lions Club Picnic area and return.

An easy walk with some gentle slopes.

Distance approximately 3 kilometres.

Time allow approximately 1 hour.

Park in Mitcham Reserve carpark off Evans Avenue. Travel along Neweys Road to enter Brownhill Creek Recreation Park opposite Blythewood Road. Follow the creek along a narrow unsealed walking path to reach the Lions Club picnic area. Cross the bridge and return along the Wirraparinga walking trail on the eastern side of Brownhill Creek Road to the Park entrance then back along Neweys Road to return to Mitcham Reserve.



Near old Belair Road ford Mitcham 1920s. [SLSA 280/1/27/64]

## **1** Mitcham Reserve and Keystone Bridge

In 1840 the South Australia Company laid out Mitcham Village, a new village of one acre lots with a traditional English style green. Mitcham Reserve is part of the original village green. The stone obelisk near the Norman Walk entrance marks the site of the first chapel and school house built in 1847 and the place where the community meeting to form the District Council of Mitcham took place in 1853.

The Keystone Bridge over Brownhill Creek was built in 1875. Before it was built, travellers to the hills crossed a ford between the bridge and present day road. The rotunda was built in 1929 as a memorial to WW1 servicemen.

The massive River Red gums along the creek, some reputed to be over three hundred years old are indigenous to the area.

**Walk from the Mitcham Reserve under the Belair Road Bridge (weather permitting). Alternatively cross Belair Road, taking care as you cross. Head right and then turn left into Neweys Road.**



Rev. Drummond's house, Newey's Rd.

## 2 Neweys Road

The left hand side of Neweys Road (formally Torrens Avenue) was agricultural land for 120 years.

Rev. Ralph Drummond, one of the founders of the United Presbyterian Church in South Australia, built a six roomed stone cottage at the present day 14 Neweys Road around 1840.

Thomas Newey ran a horse bus service from Mitcham to the City. He purchased the property in 1876. The Newey family lived there until 1904.

After World War 1 William Richardson farmed the land under the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act. The land remained a market garden until it was subdivided in 1940. The family operated a market garden there until the 1960s when the land was subdivided for housing. Mitcham Council purchased some of the land for the WA Norman Reserve.

**Continue along the single lane portion of Neweys Road and at the junction with Northbrook Avenue, turn left onto the unsealed Wirraparinga walking trail which leads to Brownhill Creek.**



Swimming Hole 1890s.

### 3 Swimming Pool

Follow the track a further one hundred metres and you may hear water flowing over a concrete wall.

A stone wall built across the creek in the early 1890s created a popular swimming spot until 1902. When Thomas Newey complained to Council that the swimming hole was interfering with his market garden Council resolved that 'all dams on the creek in the Reserve be destroyed and no further bathing be allowed'. However, in 1929 the Council built a weir across the creek and constructed a swimming pool, 100 yards (90 metres) long with a diving board and change rooms.

The pool fell into disrepair after World War II. The weir and concrete side walls are still visible.



Swimming Pool 1930s.

#### **4** Kaurna Shelter Tree

**Continue for approximately 45 metres along the trail taking care at the rocky outcrop as you descend towards the creek.** The track on the left leads down to the creek flats and the former swimming pool. The magnificent hollow River Red gum, on the opposite side of the creek is a Kaurna shelter tree and thought to be around 300 years old. Twenty five metres further along, the two oak trees on your left are believed to have been planted in 1888 as part of a Council tree planting program. Several other oak trees can be seen along the trail.

#### **5** Pine Grove

**The trail rises steeply and passes through a pine grove on the hill. Pause at the top of the rise to catch your breath and enjoy the view.** After the pine plantation you can see a small quarry on your right.

#### **6** Grey Box

Further up the slope is a conservation zone incorporating remnant grey box woodland rated uncommon in the southern Mount Lofty Ranges. It is worth exploring the side tracks to the creek and up the slopes if time and energy permits.

#### **7** Creek Ford

About 100 metres past the quarry, opposite a large dead gum, the original Brownhill Creek Road and ford crossing can be seen. The crushed rock along the path is part of the original road built from locally quarried rock.



White Bridge and Mitcham Water Works pipes Ca 1900s.

## 8 Mitcham Lions Club Picnic Area

This picnic area was originally a quarry with two distinct quarry faces. Thousands of tons of stone were extracted here between 1860-1915. Roger's freestone quarry produced high quality dressed sandstone for many colonial buildings in Mitcham and Adelaide.

The former Brownhill Creek bluestone quarry which now forms a back drop to the picnic area operated between 1870-1915 and was a major supplier of stone for housing, commercial buildings and roads. It was used as a Council rubbish dump from the late 1930s to mid 1950s. The quarry access road can be seen at the end of the carpark.

## 9 The White Bridge

'Mundy's Bridge' replaced a ford crossing in 1864 after strong lobbying from Brownhill Creek residents. Council agreed to the bridge after residents contributed twenty three pounds (\$47) towards the project. The bluestone abutments are still visible today.

The reinforced concrete deck which replaced the timber structure in 1919 was one of the first in South Australia. When the bridge was painted white to improve visibility it became known colloquially as the 'White Bridge'. **Cross Brownhill Creek Road and turn left. Follow the Wirraparinga walking trail back towards Mitcham.**



Caravan park Ca 1950s.

## 10 Cast Iron Drinking Fountain

About 50 metres beyond the White Bridge, under a large oak tree on your left is one of the original drinking fountains from the Mitcham Water Works. The water works were built in 1879 to supply clean drinking water to local residents. Mitcham Village residents could not receive water from the two new reservoirs which supplied the rest of Adelaide as it was at a higher altitude.

For the next 50 years the water works reticulated spring fed water from Ellison's Gully to an underground brick tank near McElligott's Quarry and then to drinking fountains and stand pipes in Brownhill Creek and Mitcham Village.

## 11 Viney's Bluestone Quarry

Approximately 100 metres further on your right is Viney's bluestone quarry. It provided stone for colonial buildings in Parkside, Eastwood, the Mitcham Institute and many houses throughout Mitcham.

**Continue along the walking trail until you reach the Brownhill Creek Caravan Park. Cross the road and enter the Park via the gateway just before the office/kiosk.**



Charles Petts and his daughter at Monarch of the Glen Ca 1910.

## 12 Caravan Park

The State Government established Brownhill Creek Caravan Park in 1954, providing a Ranger's residence, ablution blocks, mains water and sewer. Kevin Hill the first Ranger lived there for over 25 years.

Originally, Brownhill Creek Road passed through the middle of the camping area until the mid 1970s when it was diverted for safety reasons.

## 13 Monarch of the Glen

The imposing burnt out River Red gum by the creek (adjacent to the laundry block) is known as the "Monarch of the Glen". Thought to be 400 years old, it is a Kaurna shelter tree and is also said to have been a temporary home for pioneer families, itinerant workers and families during hard economic times from the 1840s to the 1930s. The tree was also a popular meeting place for local teenagers in the 1920s to the 1950s.

Near the base of the tree is a memorial made from the foundation stone of the Brownhill Creek chapel/school.

**Exit the caravan park and return to the trail.**

## 14 McElligott's Crushing Plant and Quarry

Across the road from the stone building near the Caravan Park entrance, the four large concrete blocks are remnants of the McElligott's Quarry rock crushing plant. It was the biggest quarry in the valley and operated from 1850 until 1934. Blocks weighing up to 10 tons were loaded by hand onto a horse drawn trolley and taken down to Mitcham Station. Stone for the Outer Harbour breakwater came from here.

Mitcham Council used the quarry as a rubbish dump from 1957 to 1985 and developed the top of the hill as the McElligott's Quarry Reserve.

**About 30 metres past the Caravan Park entrance, on the right, energetic walkers can scramble up to the reserve on the Peter Nelson Walking Trail for spectacular views of the Adelaide plains and Brownhill Creek valley.**

## 15 Plane Tree Avenue

The avenue of oriental plane trees from the Park entrance to the White Bridge was an initiative of Mitcham Council to beautify the reserve.

The Premier of South Australia, Tom Price, planted the first Plane tree at a ceremony on 29 June 1907. Premier Tom Price lived in Hawthorn and is buried in Mitcham Cemetery. His initiatives included a government owned electric tram system, the SA Government Tourist bureau and a better share of the Murray River's water resources. The Advertiser newspaper reported that the avenue was to be named the 'Tom Price Memorial Avenue', although the name was never formally adopted by Council.

Although the Brownhill Creek Recreation Park was set aside as a reserve as early as 1841, its resources were exploited with extensive quarrying, timber harvesting and stock grazing occurring for many decades.



Plane tree avenue Ca 1910.

## 16 Brownhill Creek Monument

This commemorative monument was built in 1954. Before you leave the Park take a few minutes to read the plaques.

## 17 Grainger's Quarry

As you leave the reserve the last two houses on the bend were built in the early 2000s in what was Grainger's quarry. The quarry face is at the rear of the two properties. Grainger's one of the first sandstone quarries in Brownhill Creek operated spasmodically from 1848 to 1916. St Michael's Anglican Church in Mitcham was built from stone donated by the first quarry owner John Grainger.

The quarry opened up occasionally between the 1930s and 1980s to supply small quantities of dressed stone for building additions including to St Michael's Church.

**Continue along Brownhill Creek Road to the path on your left. Cross over the footbridge and turn left along Neweys Road.**

## **18** Fuller's Houses – No.1 and No. 3 Neweys Road

The two houses directly opposite the footbridge facing the reserve were built for Frederick Fuller's family about 1918. Three generations of the family lived there for 95 years.

The long building behind 1 and 3 Neweys Road was a dairy built in 1917 and converted to a residence around 1940.

The cottage at 5 Neweys Road was built in the 1920s after the original 1860 bluestone cottage was demolished.

## **19** Anderson/Scott/Fuller Quarry

Frederick and his family were significant operators in Mitcham's quarry industry from the 1890s to 1950. By 1920 the Fuller family owned most of the land on the southern side of Neweys Road through to Blythewood Road.

The land on the left of Neweys Road remained agricultural land for 170 years. Local milkman, Mr Dynon kept his horses there until the 1960s. In 2014 the land was subdivided for housing.

**Retrace your steps along Neweys Road and return to Mitcham Reserve.**

## WALK TWO – Making a Living

Mitcham Lions Club picnic area to the end of Brownhill Creek Road

An easy walk along the Wirraparinga walking trail and on the side of a sealed road with some gentle slopes. The path switches from one side of the road to the other, but is clearly signed.

Distance: 6.5 kilometres.

Time: Round trip 1.5 hours (at a brisk pace). This walk starts from the carpark at the Mitcham Lions Club picnic area then travels east along the shared path past many historic sites and remnants of commercial market gardens to the end of Brownhill Creek Road. Retrace your steps to the starting point.



Seven Pines picnic area 1980. [Pamela Oborn]

## **1** Mundy's Quarry Ruins

Henry Mundy worked a bluestone quarry here and lived with his family in a two room stone cottage in the gully south of the bridge from 1868 to 1903. About 200 metres on your right the road to Mundy's cottage and the quarry is still visible today. Mundy's home can be identified by the old fruit trees and small pile of stones visible from the boundary fence. Rock blasted from the quarry was broken up by hand. Mundy's quarry and a second one in the area both closed in 1916.

There are several caves in the hillside, one of which was said to hide a ship's deserter in 1843. The police trooper Alexander Tolmer later to become Commissioner of Police became stuck in the cave searching for the escapee only to find it empty.

**Leave the car park and walk east along the shared path.**

## **2** Seven Pines Picnic Area

On the curve of the creek on your left, note three substantial dome-shaped pines. The trees which are some of the largest specimens of Stone Pines (*Pinus Pinea*) in Australia are over 120 years old and survivors of an original group of seven trees. These magnificent trees are on the National Trust of South Australia Register of Significant Trees.

In 1891 George Prince, a local businessman donated seven Stone Pine seedlings to Mitcham Council to assist in revegetating the reserve. Six seedlings were planted at equal spaces along the curve of the creek and the seventh was planted across the creek. A journalist reported in the "Adelaide Observer" in 1893 that:

*"It was a blazing hot day in February and brown hills skirting the Valley of the creek seemed to simmer with heat. All along the road, the scarcity of trees is most noticeable but there are pines planted within substantial and ugly square railings. The majority of them were frightened of their guards or the cattle. Anyhow, their growth is the reverse of vigorous. Had a few willows been planted and fenced nearer the creek, the result might have been today more appreciative".*

The 'Seven Pines' did eventually thrive to become the focus of a popular picnic and camping spot before the Caravan Park was established.

## **3** Mundy's Crushing Plant

Opposite the Seven Pines picnic area behind the small semi-circular parking bay, you can see stone ruins of Mundy's crushing plant and loading bay.



Brownhill Creek from Copelands Hill 1890s.

#### 4 Copeland's Farm

In 1873 the 152 acre Copeland's farm and dairy was established on the hillside on your right. Three generations of the family occupied a four roomed stone cottage here for over 90 years. The family supplemented their income with wood cutting and carting.

There was very little native vegetation on the slopes during the Copeland's farm occupation. Introduced species such as Olive have spread at an alarming rate once grazing ceased.



Brownhill Creek School and Chapel.

## **5** Brownhill Creek Chapel and School

The rammed earth house across the creek is on the site of the Brownhill Creek chapel and school. By the early 1870s the Brownhill Creek community had grown to 16 families including 50 children. The building funded by the local community was a place of worship on Sundays, a school room on weekdays and a community meeting place after hours. Local resident Joanna Grigg laid the foundation stone in 1874. Mr Bradley a stonemason of Mitcham built the chapel from stone quarried in the valley.



Brownhill Creek School students 1920s.

The one teacher Brownhill Creek Public School operated from 1892-1924. There were only three teachers during that time - Miss Jean Baron 1892-1894, Miss Harriett Ward 1895-1901 and Miss Helen Lewin 1902-1924. Student numbers varied from 20 to 34.

When the school closed the local children climbed up the hill to Belair Primary School in Sheoak Road or rode their bikes to Mitcham Primary School.

The only marriage to take place in the chapel was between Anne Grigg and Charles Orchard both of Brownhill Creek on 13 July 1892. The chapel was the focus of community activities until the early 1930s. It became a private residence and was damaged by fire in 1945 and was completely destroyed by a major bushfire in January 1955.

The chapel ruins under the shade of deciduous trees planted each Arbour Day by local school children were a popular picnic area until the current house was built.

The little footbridge over the creek and the deciduous trees are the only reminders today of the Brownhill Creek chapel and school.

## **6** Manure Pits

Continue walking along the Brownhill Creek Road. Around the next bend you will find the state heritage listed manure pits. Stop and read the interpretive signs at the pits.

**The remaining section of the walk is 1.6 kilometres to the end of the Brownhill Creek Road on the side of a narrow winding road. Take care and watch out for local traffic and cyclists on the dead end road.**

## **7** The Plantation

Five hundred metres along the road just before a sharp bend is an avenue of substantial Sugar Gums along the edge of the road. Peer through the undergrowth and you will see eucalypts, Walnut, Carob and ornamental trees planted by the Merkel family in the early 1890s. Locals referred to the trees as 'The Plantation'.



Mr WF Curtis loading cabbages for market.

## 8 Merkel and Grimes Market Gardens

Approximately 150 metres past the plantation the road narrows to a single lane and winds its way for about 800 metres to the end of the road. Three and four generations of Merkel, Curtis, Grigg, Williams and Foster operated market gardens here until the 1970s.

The early settlers cleared the land, straightened the meandering creek and drained the swamps to establish their market gardens. Brownhill Creek market gardeners supplied the district and the East End Adelaide Market with celery, potatoes, onions, cabbage, cauliflower, stick beans, peas, carrots, parsnips, turnip, swede and beetroot as well as apples, stone fruit and citrus.

After World War II the number of gardens and the population gradually declined. The commercial gardens ceased operating by 1994.

The Merkel and Grimes gardens are hidden behind a high fence on your left. Two stone cottages C1860s are visible at the ends of the driveways.

Peter Merkel an immigrant gardener from Germany arrived in Brownhill Creek in 1857. Peter and his wife Francis had eight children and lived here for the rest of their lives. Peter was a councillor for five years. The Merkel family operated a market garden here for over seventy years.



Curtis Farm 1979.

## 9 Curtis Market Gardens

The narrow flats either side of the creek used to be heavily cropped with vegetables. Note the old pump shed, well head, storage and implement sheds.

The stone cottage at 405 Brownhill Creek Road was built C1860-70s and is the start of the Curtis family market garden which continued to the end of the sealed public road.

## 10 Grigg's Market Garden

The bluestone house at 438 Brownhill Creek Road was built for Joseph Grigg (Snr) in 1878. The hill above the house used to be completely cultivated with vegetable plots. The old stone building by the gate of 440 Brownhill Creek Road was one of the original outbuildings built in the 1860s.

Look down the private dirt road on your left to the culvert over the creek and see if you can tell where the creek was realigned to maximise the crop growing area.

Just beyond the the bend you can glimpse one of the many small quarry faces in the valley which supplied stone for the local cottages, dry stone walls and stone linings along the creek banks.

**The walk finishes at the end of the public road.**



Curtis Farm 1979.

## Short Hill Climb Option

The stone cottage at the base of Sheoak Hill and Pony Ridge Road, Belair was Foster's garden.

The road ends here. You can retrace your steps back to the carpark or if you are feeling energetic take the short steep track on your right signposted "Yurrebilla" for a good view across the former Grigg, Foster and Williams' market gardens.

**Allow 30 minutes for this return walk option.**

Note: this path is sometimes used by mountain bike riders so take extra care on the return walk downhill.

Some items of interest as you retrace your steps along Brownhill Creek Road:

### **11** Cottages, 423 Brownhill Creek Road

Amongst this group of cottages and outbuildings it is rumoured that the stone building incorporates a two room stone cottage built in the mid 1840s by Charles Whittle an early Mitcham settler.

## **12** 'Park End' Cottage

Two hundred and fifty metres past the eastern reserve boundary, on your left, is the five roomed cottage, 'Park End' built in the early 1890s for the Copeland family.

In 1990s the current owners renovated the old cottage and replaced thousands of feral olive trees and shrubs with native plantings.

The drystone retaining wall about 50 metres past the 'Park End' driveway, marks the site of a three room timber and iron cottage built by the Copelands in the early 1890s.

A little further on a small quarry face and pine plantation on the lower hill slope can be seen on your left.

## **13** Council Quarry above the Junction

Approximately 200 metres along the road opposite the pine plantation is another small quarry face partially hidden amongst the vegetation. Mitcham Council opened the quarry in 1896 to provide stone for an arched bridge over Brownhill Creek in Hampton Street, Hawthorn.

**When you reach the manure pits, re-join the shared path on your left.**

## **14** Native Revegetation

As you continue your walk back to the Mitcham Lions Club picnic area note the areas which have been revegetated by community groups and schools.

The Sugar Gums just east of Mundy's stone crushing plant were planted in the late 1950s or early 1960s by Kevin Hill the resident Caravan Park Ranger.

Sulphur crested and yellow tail black cockatoos are common visitors to this area as well as an occasional koala and echidna near the picnic area.

**This completes Walk Two.**



## Legend

### WALK ONE – The Reserves

- 1** Mitcham Reserve and Keystone Bridge
- 2** Neweys Road
- 3** Swimming Pool Site
- 4** Kuarna Shelter Tree
- 5** Pine Grove
- 6** Grey Box Woodland
- 7** Creek Ford
- 8** Mitcham Lions Club Picnic Area
- 9** White Bridge
- 10** Cast Iron Drinking Fountain
- 11** Viney's Bluestone Quarry
- 12** Brownhill Creek Caravan Park
- 13** Monarch of the Glen
- 14** McElligott's Crushing Plant and Quarry
- 15** Plane Tree Avenue
- 16** Brownhill Creek Monument
- 17** Grainger's Quarry
- 18** Fuller's Houses
- 19** Anderson/Scott/Fuller Quarry



### WALK TWO – Making a Living

- 1** Mundy's Quarry Ruins
- 2** Seven Pines Picnic Area
- 3** Crushing Plant
- 4** Copeland's Farm
- 5** Brownhill Creek Chapel and School
- 6** Manure Pits
- 7** The Plantation
- 8** Merkel and Grimes Market Gardens
- 9** Curtis Market Gardens
- 10** Grigg's Market Garden
- 11** Cottages, 423 Brownhill Creek Road
- 12** 'Park End' Cottage
- 13** Council Quarry
- 14** Native Revegetation