

# TOOTGAROOK WETLAND HISTORY



European Settlement started around the Tootgarook Swamp in the 1830s and, since then, the swamp has had to endure a great many changes and adversities. Impossible to ignore, it wasn't long before European settlers realised some of the swamp's unique values. Aside from the excellent quality drinking waters, limestone, and reeds for thatching, the swamp had other interesting aspects.

In the early days, the site was used as part of James Purves cattle run and took after its indigenous name, the Tootgarook Run. The property changed hands around the time of reclamation (the official permission to drain the swamp) in 1866. Consequently Boneo Drain (now called Chinamans Creek) was cut into the swamp in 1877 in an attempt to drain the Tootgarook swamp. Around this time the property was in the hands of Captain Rolls and, later in the 1880s, it was sold to J. Lovie. In those years, some parts of the property were mined for limestone. These pits are still visible today.

In the 1920s, in the wake of the break of the most severe drought of the 20th century, the property was bought by Walter Hiscock. Walter Hiscock then acquired John Cain's "Karia Compost" business and, looking to expand it, found a suitable peat deposit to mine in the Tootgarook Swamp. (John Cain's original house can be seen on the left adjacent property when leaving Boneo Park. This is the oldest standing building in Rosebud.)

Walter Hiscock redesigned the product now named "Cicada" and constructed a fertiliser factory on the west side of the property, selling his product Victoria wide to market gardens and orchids. The ruins of the factory still exist today.

The depression came in the 1930s and Cicada, like many other businesses, dissolved. Once again, the Tootgarook Swamp veered in a different direction for the Hiscocks, more as traditional agriculture. Sheep, cattle and horses and some dabbling in market gardening occurred.

Despite several attempts to drain the swamp, the hydrological (groundwater) function of the swamp remained, allowing it to bounce back and protecting it from a century of human disturbance.

In 2001 the Hiscock Estate was placed on the market after being held for nearly 80 years. The McNaught family purchased most of this land, which included most of the Tootgarook Wetland, with the aim of protecting the wetland and the 60 hectares of Moonah Woodland. Then a massive clean-up and restoration was required, as the property had been allowed to deteriorate for many years. It was soon decided that the only practical way of protecting this land was for it also to have a commercial purpose.

In 2004 the market garden land fronting Boneo Road was purchased to be used for an equestrian centre. The equestrian centre use started initially with agistment, and the indoor arena was completed in 2006. Progressively the competition equestrian facilities and infrastructure were constructed, with the restaurant being completed in 2019 to provide the facility that you see today.

Meanwhile the clean-up continued in the wetland and woodland. In January 2013 a Trust for Nature conservation covenant was placed on the most significant 200 hectares of the property and, with the benefit of offset funding, the work geared up into what is believed to be the largest clean-up on private land in Victoria.

Today we have demonstrated a sustainable example of protecting environmentally highly significant land with the equestrian centre and restaurant acting as a gateway to this property. It has taken nearly 20 years, and we now have a property for you to explore and enjoy.