Follow the route of Australia’s first steam railway, still evident after 150 years, and discover the early heart of Melbourne. A self guided walking and light rail trail from Flinders Street Station to Sandridge, now known as Port Melbourne.
INTRODUCTION

THE TRAIL
The Sandridge Railway opened in 1854 to serve what was then Australia’s busiest shipping port.

This trail follows the original train route from Flinders Street Station to Port Melbourne. Made up of three sections, this trail involves a walk, a tram ride, and an opportunity to explore.

1. Walk from Princes Bridge in the city to Spencer Street.
2. Ride on the light rail tram, route 109 from Spencer Street along the former Sandridge railway line to Port Melbourne.
3. Explore the waterfront area of Beacon Cove and Port Melbourne.

You can follow the entire trail on foot via Flinders Walk and the Sandridge Light Rail Trail which are both marked on the map below.

The terrain is flat following a formed path with just a few stairs as marked.

DISABLED ACCESS
Wheelchair users can follow the trail from the start by proceeding along Swanston Street, and down Flinders Street to join Flinders Walk at Queens Bridge. All the 109 trams are wheelchair friendly but must be joined at stop 125A just past Clarendon Street or alternately at the corner of Swanston and Collins Streets.

SERVICES
Tram Services on weekends are every 10-12 minutes, except before 11am on Sundays when they run every 30 minutes. On weekdays trams run every 8 minutes and every 4 minutes during peak periods. (The tram journey from Spencer Street to Port Melbourne on the 109 is within Zone 1). For further information call METLINK on 131 638 or visit www.metlinkmelbourne.com.au

TIME REQUIRED
The Flinders Walk section takes approximately 15 minutes and the tram section around 10 minutes. Spending approximately half an hour at the Port Melbourne end the entire return journey takes one and a half to two hours.
The trail begins on the river side of Flinders Street Station where it meets Princes Bridge. Take the bluestone steps down to Flinders Walk which follows the platform where the Sandridge trains once pulled in. Note this platform has retained its name ‘Melbourne’, the name of the Hobson Bay Railway Co’s original terminus.

After a hump in the path, where the former Elizabeth Street Creek joins the Yarra, you will pass under the foot bridge to view the long, grey Sandridge Railway Bridge. It crosses the Yarra where a rocky waterfall once provided a dividing line between fresh and salt water, and also a barrier preventing ship access further upstream.

In 1835 John Fawkner, one of Melbourne’s founding fathers, landed just below the waterfall with his settlement party in the ‘Enterprize’. Then in 1837 Queens Wharf was established nearby. There was a natural deep pool below the falls that provided an ideal anchorage and was later widened to form a turning basin for larger shipping. The first customs house was built in Flinders Street in 1840. It was rebuilt in 1876 and is now the Immigration Museum.

The present Sandridge Railway Bridge was the third structure to carry the railway line over the river. Built by David Munro & Co, and opened in 1888, it was the first railway bridge in Victoria to use steel girders. It is to be redeveloped as a cycle and pedestrian link.
Cross the road at Queens Bridge then Queens Wharf Road (watch for trams). You’ll see five huge figureheads reminding us this was formerly Queens Wharf and the turning basin, now flanked by Enterprize Park.

Overhead to your right is the railway viaduct from Flinders Street to Spencer Street. First built during 1888-91 and duplicated in 1913-15, the viaduct provided the final link in Victoria’s railway network joining all lines to the east, west and north of Melbourne.

Behind the viaduct on the far side of Flinders Street you can just see the large classically designed former Customs House – now the Immigration Museum.

On your right you’ll pass the Banana Alley vaults (1891-92). Originally known as the Viaduct Buildings, the vaults contained a banana store and numerous produce agents.

At the end of the vaults is Queens Bridge. If you look back to Sandridge Bridge you can see how abruptly it terminates, making way for the city’s more recent developments – Southbank and Crown.

The museum is hosting an exhibition about Station Pier (the original end of the Sandridge Railway), entitled ‘Station Pier – Gateway to a New Life’, from October 2004 till September 2005.

Follow the riverbank around the Aquarium, cross King Street and proceed through Batman Park (Batman was another of Melbourne’s founding fathers), to the tram stop No.124 in Spencer Street. Here you can join the 109 tram to Port Melbourne.
Joining the tram you’ll cross the river then pass the red brick Tea House on your right, a survivor of the historic 19th century stores and warehouses in this area. The tram turns right off Clarendon Street and joins the route of the original Sandridge Railway line. Soon the tracks pass over the original railway ballast and under overhead railway stanchions installed when the railway was converted from steam to electric traction in 1919.

On the right is the Southbank Tram Depot, where a collection of early Melbourne trams, including the Restaurant Tram, is usually on show. The tram then stops at the former Montague, North Port and Graham railway stations before terminating at Port Melbourne.

Montague, North Port and Graham stops all retain the red brick and bluestone and asphalt ‘platforms’ more commonly associated with their earlier railway station identity. The Port Melbourne railway station is still intact.

Just past Montague the tram follows the middle of the Railway Reserve, which here retains its original 100m width. Locals initially used the ‘long paddocks’ each side of the railway tracks for grazing livestock. The borough council later turned the paddocks into ornamental gardens. They are now landscaped all the way to Port Melbourne.
The tram crosses Beach Street ‘pulling in’ alongside the Port Melbourne station. Facing Rouse Street the former Swallow and Ariell Steam Biscuit Manufactury, now residential apartments, commenced manufacturing ‘ships biscuits’ here in 1854, the year the railway opened.

You can explore the area behind Beach Street and Beacon Cove to discover the new face of Port Melbourne, especially along Bay Street, Stokes Street and Rouse Street. Strategically located near the Sandridge wharfs it was the first industrial establishment of its kind in Victoria.

East along Beach Street there is a relic of the 1934 Victorian Centenary Bridge, which carried traffic over the pier railway sidings. It was demolished in 1991. Station Pier is still a busy place hosting some twenty international cruise liners each summer, visiting naval ships and the daily Bass Strait ferry.

Going home you can catch a tram back or walk all or some of the trail, from Port Melbourne. However if you have time, you might like to explore the area behind Beach Street and Beacon Cove to discover the new face of Port Melbourne, especially along Bay Street, Stokes Street and Rouse Street.
to walk to Beacon Vista (see map) to see the ‘leading light’ beacons erected in 1924. These were to guide ships approaching the pier. From Beacon Vista you can see how they ‘line up.’ From there you can walk through the park back to Graham light rail stop.
In 1852, just one year after the Victorian gold rushes began, Victoria’s population was exploding. Each week dozens of ships were dropping anchor in Hobson’s Bay offloading thousands of diggers and hundred of tons of cargo onto the beach at Sandridge.

As the Yarra River was too narrow and shallow for larger ships to pass upstream, merchants and diggers were left to pay huge sums to catch a cart or a ferry to carry their luggage and goods to Melbourne. Entrepreneurs saw an opportunity to take people and goods direct from Sandridge to the city and formed the Hobson’s Bay Railway Company. The government set aside a railway reserve, which starting from Sandridge Beach, curved initially north-eastwards before running in a direct line to the city. It crossed the Yarra River near Queen Street to end at what was to become Flinders Street Station. Construction of the railway commenced in early 1853 and was completed in 18 months at a cost of £388,000.

Following the opening of the Sandridge line, Victoria entered a long railway boom. In 1857 the Hobson’s Bay Co built a branch line to St Kilda. It was soon joined by further private railways to Hawthorn, Brighton, Essendon and Geelong. With the exception of the Sandridge line, none of these railways were profitable and it fell to the Victorian Government to continue railway development.

However, by 1861, the Sandridge Railway was carrying over half a million passengers and 150,000 tons of freight annually. In 1865, it merged with Melbourne’s remaining private railway companies forming the Melbourne & Hobsons Bay United Railway Company. In 1878, this new company was in turn taken over by the Victorian Railways Department, becoming part of a 1,600 kilometre network of railways radiating from Melbourne. Railways had become a great catalyst for economic progress, carrying over five million passenger journeys and a million tons of freight a year – from imports to locally manufactured goods and farm produce. Within the next two decades the Victorian Railway system would treble in size.
The Sandridge line had a social as well as an economic impact. Thousands of troops travelled the line to sail from Station Pier (formerly Railway Pier) and Princes Pier for the First World War battlefields. Later, at the conclusion of the Second World War, the line carried thousands of displaced persons and assisted immigrants from Europe and Britain to start a new life in Melbourne and beyond. The one-millionth Australian post-war migrant arrived at Station Pier in 1955.

Sandridge Railway continued to serve the Port Melbourne piers for over 120 years but, with the decline of immigration by sea after 1970 and the move to containerised cargo handling, the importance of the railway declined. It became a local passenger service and was converted to light-rail tram operation in 1987.

On the morning of 12 September 1854, thousands, including officials in top hats and stove pipe trousers and colourful crinolined ladies assembled along Flinders Street and the railway route, to witness Melbourne’s first steam train. The Lieutenant-Governor Charles Hotham and Lady Hotham were presented with copies of the train’s timetable and the company’s by-laws printed on silk. Behind a small locally-made engine were two first class carriages for dignitaries, one second class carriage for other guests and an open wagon carrying a regimental band. At precisely 12:20 pm, amid clouds of smoke, steam, showers of sparks and much tooting of the whistle, the train pulled out, completing the 2 mile (4.5 km) journey in just 10 minutes.

The press happily observed that the first railway journey in Australia had been accomplished without loss of life, limb or luggage!
EARLY DEVELOPMENT ALONG THE LINE

When the Montague Street Station was opened (1883) it serviced a residential neighbourhood which had a few shops, the Golden Fleece Hotel, State School No. 2784 (1886) in Montague Street and St Barnabas Anglican Church (1878). Just north of the station was the Montague railway shipping and customs shed (c.1919). It was used for holding cargo railed up from Station Pier. The shed later fell into disuse and was demolished for the Southbank Tram Depot. The next station, North Port was first named Raglan Street (1859), then North Sandridge (1867) before adopting its present name. By the 1870s it was in a well settled residential area, with the Lord Raglan Hotel (1864) and numerous local tradespeople and shops. Further away from the station there were mostly empty mud flats except for the recreation reserve (1874) and Kitchen’s Soap and Candle Works in Ingles Street. Beyond Kitchen’s Soap Works there was an abattoir, several boiling-down works, and manure and glue factories. The recreation reserve was the home of the formidable Port Melbourne Football Club. A win on Saturday was good for business at local hotels as barrackers made their way home or to the North Port Station. South of the station the original Port Melbourne loco depot was retained by the Victorian Railways until 1888 when a new depot was built at North Melbourne and the old site was demolished for housing. Just past Graham station is the Graham Street overpass, built to avoid the bottleneck caused by rail traffic.
Queenscliff and other destinations around Port Phillip Bay. The ‘Bay’ steamers docked at two wing piers, one of which still exists. After 1945 Station Pier and railway was kept busy receiving boatloads of immigrants.

The Port Melbourne railway station building (1890) is a neatly constructed suburban red brick station, listed on the Victorian Heritage Register.

When the railway opened in 1854 it ran beyond Port Melbourne Station onto Railway Pier, which extended 500m out into the deep-water of Hobson’s Bay. The large Station Pier was rebuilt between 1922 and 1930.

Both piers handled cargo ships, passenger ships and a fleet of excursion steamers that operated trips to Sorrento,