

DAMASCUS COLLEGE BALLARAT OPENS THE MURNONG TRAIL

Three years of hard work, passion and determination culminated at the opening of the Murnong Trail on Monday, November 2. The Murnong Trail is an 800 metre looped walking trail located in the bushland of the Damascus College 50 acre site. The bushland at Damascus College is traversed by several well-worn tracks, one of which has now been developed as the trail.

The presence of the murnong plant, but not its cultural significance was noted at Damascus in a plant survey in 1962. Fifty years later, Science teacher, Mr David Neate, having just returned from a professional development session on indigenous agriculture, was surprised to

discover a sizeable patch of murnong in flower on a casual walk through the College bushland. "Its short flowering season, and its similarity in flower to several introduced weeds, had hidden it from view," he said.

"In December 2012, a fierce storm throughout the region felled many of the seedling eucalypts in the College bushland, leaving a huge mess to clean up. What we did not anticipate was the explosion of growth following this weather event, with a superb wildflower display that now graces part of the hillside."



Due to the rarity and its significance to the Wadawurrung people, the trail has been named in honour of the humble murnong. In 2014, the Damascus Sustainability Committee received a \$10,000 grant from the Department of Environment and Primary Industry to clear and replant the bushland and create the trail accompanied by interpretative signage. With the dedicated support and knowledge of Bryon Powell, Wadawurrung, the murnong trail began its journey of creation.

As a Catholic school, Damascus College encourages in its faith development programme an attitude of stewardship of the environment, and this is put into practice in several ongoing conservation projects around Ballarat as part of the College's Christian Personal Development Award.

Some environmentally conscious students are part of a Green Group who have assisted in trail working bees, and many students planted 500 trees and shrubs in the vicinity of the trail.

Amelia Johnson, a Year 10 student of Damascus College, created drawings of the murnong and other native plants, which will be showcased on the interpretative signage throughout the trail. Amelia said that she is very passionate

about the environment and feels a sense of duty to protect it. “I also love to draw and was thrilled to be involved in the creation of the pictorial elements to be used by the College to showcase the murnong trail,” she said.

Damascus College will use the trail as a resource across several disciplines, including Science and Humanities. “As part of our plans to increase the trail’s usefulness, students will be involved in creating interactive resources to be accessed via an interpretive leaflet,” said Mr Neate.

Murnong was the staple food crop for the indigenous peoples across south eastern Australia, and was especially noted by early European explorers such as Major Mitchell for its abundance in the grasslands of Western Victoria. It has disappeared over much of its former range as a result of livestock grazing and the development of exotic pastures and crops.



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