

Eric the Red Site

The Eric the Red fossil locality is marked by a large rusty ship's anchor embedded in concrete close to the access track to the rocky shore platform, only a few hundred metres from the Point Franklin locality. Named after the wreck of the American ship "Eric the Red", this locality is actually not where the ship came to grief. It ran aground on a reef at the mouth of Parker River at the south end of Blanket Bay and according to local historian Cate Cousland the hull of the wreck can "sometimes be seen at the river mouth at low tide".

According to Wayne Gertz, Museum Victoria Discovery Centre administrator, "The vessel itself was wrecked on the final leg of its otherwise uneventful voyage from New York to Melbourne, carrying a cargo of exhibits for the USA pavilion at the 1880 Melbourne International Exhibition – silverware, toys and pianos were among its diverse manifest. Assorted artefacts and timber from the wreck washed ashore in the weeks following the wreck of 1880, and many of these items are now in various family and public collections in towns and farmhouses near Cape Otway; indeed some of the timber from the hull and deck was repurposed for construction in houses and sheds around Apollo Bay.

"An interesting coincidence was that the ultimate intended destination for the cargo of Eric the Red was the Royal Exhibition Building in Carlton Gardens in Melbourne – this is also the destination for the fossils we have extracted from the site, as Museum Victoria's Palaeontology Collections and laboratory are in the basement of the Exhibition building. Even more coincidentally, the crewman on the ship responsible for the cargo was a Mr. Pickering." David Pickering is the Museum Victoria's Vertebrate Palaeontology Collections manager and is responsible for all the vertebrate fossil specimens collected in Victoria, including the Eric the Red site.

Only a handful of fossil bones have been found at the Eric the Red site and it has largely been over-shadowed by its much richer neighbour – Eric the Red West, which we will cover in the next episode.

Reference:

Cate Cousland "Travelling the Great Ocean Road... a journey through time and place". Petticoat Publishing 2007. p.142.

Image: (coming soon) The rusty anchor at the Eric the Red site. Photographer: Wayne Gertz