



- **The Shine Dome** Courtesy of the ACT Heritage Library, ACT Administration Collection.
- **Commonwealth Ave Bridge** Courtesy of the ACT Heritage Library, Canberra Times Collection.
- **Black Mountain** Courtesy of the ACT Heritage Library, Canberra Times Collection.

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A heritage tour of **ACTON**

A SELF-GUIDED TOUR



NATIONAL TRUST

CONSERVING AUSTRALIA'S HERITAGE

The suburb of Acton was gazetted in September 1928, making it one of Canberra's first suburbs. The name 'Acton' was given to the grazing property situated in the area of Molonglo River and Sullivans Creek by Lieutenant Arthur Jeffreys RN, in 1843. Acton, bordering Lake Burley Griffin, Black Mountain and the central business district of Canberra, contains many early historical places as well as the large precincts of the Australian National University and the National Museum of Australia.

1. LAKE BURLEY GRIFFIN

When Charles Scrivener defined the site of the present capital in his 1909 survey he foresaw an ornamental lake next to the city. Walter Burley Griffin took up this concept in his 1911 plan for the capital and proposed a lake which formed a water axis dividing the parliamentary zone from the commercial centre. But the lake proposal had to contend with a host of critics and doubters, monetary restrictions, several planning changes and insistence by Prime Minister Menzies before work began. It was not until April 1964, when the meanders of the Molonglo River were flooded by the construction of the Scrivener Dam, that the lake as we know it today was finally formed. It is now a focal point for the capital.

2. COMMONWEALTH AVE BRIDGE

Commonwealth Avenue

Commonwealth Avenue Bridge marks the eastern boundary of Acton. It is one of two bridges crossing Lake Burley Griffin. Construction began in March 1961, before the Lake was formed, and it was opened to traffic in November 1963. From any viewpoint its seemingly simple construction can be considered to be an excellent example of skilled engineering blended with a high level of aesthetic quality and form. These qualities were noted by the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies, during a ceremony marking the inauguration of the Lake in October 1964 when he described the bridge as 'the finest building in the National Capital'. Notice how the bridge is aligned with Capital Hill and City Hill and how it forms the western boundary of the Parliamentary Triangle. It is worth making the effort to drive or walk underneath the approaches of the bridge to see the blocks of granite. These were taken from London's old Waterloo Bridge across the Thames and presented to Australia to exemplify the historic links in the British Commonwealth of Nations.

3. ACTON PARK BY THE LAKE

Access can be gained either from Commonwealth Avenue or the footbridge over Parkes Way leading from Acton House.

It is worth taking a stroll through this park which follows the foreshore of the West Basin between Commonwealth Avenue Bridge and the National Museum of Australia. You will be rewarded with a view of the museum buildings rising from Acton Peninsula, Black Mountain and its landmark tower, New Parliament House and flag pole, and the buildings of Yarralumla emerging from the trees. For the more adventurous there are bikes to be hired which can be ridden at a sedate pace around the foreshore, or hired boats to peddle, paddle and sail on the lake.

4. ACTON GEOLOGICAL SITE

West Basin, Acton Peninsula.

Low outcrops of dark grey, recrystallised limestone occur along a 100 metre stretch of Lake Burley Griffin foreshore just north of the National Museum of Australia. The term 'Limestone Plains' figures prominently in early descriptions of the Canberra region and it is most likely this outcrop, and others that are now submerged by the waters of the Lake, from which the term originates. The limestone was formed by the accumulation of shells from small marine animals approximately 420 million years ago when the area was covered by a warm, shallow sea. At this time there was an abundance of life in this sea indicated by the presence of fossil trilobites and corals in the sediments that were formed. Life on land was just beginning in the form of land plants colonising the water margins. The outcrop is the only accessible, clear and continuing exposure of limestone in the suburban part of Canberra.

5. NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIA

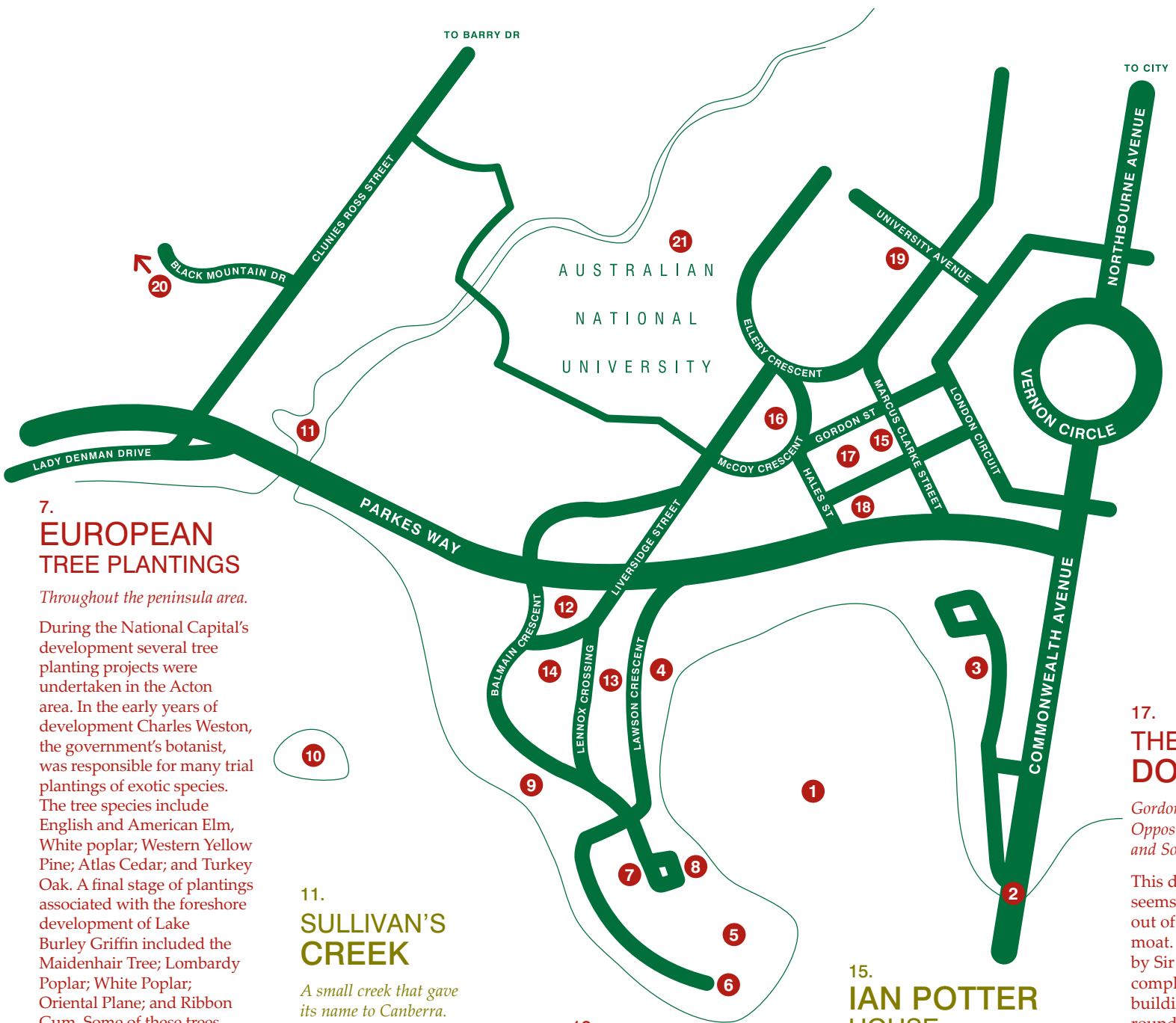
Acton Peninsula.

The National Museum of Australia was opened in 2001 to commemorate Australia's centenary of federation. The Museum tells the story of Australia. It has been developed to research Australian history, develop and maintain a national collection of historical material and to create exhibitions and programs exploring our cultures, heritage and history. The museum's programs and exhibitions are based on three main themes presented in specific galleries: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and history; Australian society and history since 1788; and the interaction of people with the Australian environment. Allow several hours for your visit.

6. REMNANT INDIGENOUS VEGETATION

South western corner of the Peninsula within the grounds of the National Museum.

Before the arrival of Europeans the vegetation of the Acton area consisted mainly of open grasslands dominated by Kangaroo grass. The low lying plains of the Molonglo River were subjected to cold air drainage which induced frost hollows and created a micro-climate that inhibited tree growth. However, some isolated pockets of unusually favourable soil and ground water conditions did support large Eucalyptus trees particularly in the south western corner of the Peninsula. The trees are estimated to be between 150 and 250 years old. Other prominent native species in the Acton area is the Ribbon Gum but these were planted during the 1960s as part of the landscape development of the Lake foreshores.



7. EUROPEAN TREE PLANTINGS

Throughout the peninsula area.

During the National Capital's development several tree planting projects were undertaken in the Acton area. In the early years of development Charles Weston, the government's botanist, was responsible for many trial plantings of exotic species. The tree species include English and American Elm, White poplar; Western Yellow Pine; Atlas Cedar; and Turkey Oak. A final stage of plantings associated with the foreshore development of Lake Burley Griffin included the Maidenhair Tree; Lombardy Poplar; White Poplar; Oriental Plane; and Ribbon Gum. Some of these trees have died or been removed and many are now located in the precinct of the National Museum of Australia. It is worth taking the time to locate and identify these trees as you travel throughout the

11. SULLIVAN'S CREEK

A small creek that gave its name to Canberra.

Sullivan's Creek has its origins on the slopes of the hills forming the northern border of the ACT. It runs through the suburbs of North Canberra, the Australian National

13. LENNOX HOUSE COMPLEX

Lennox Crossing.

Lennox House is a complex of early buildings originally

17. THE SHINE DOME

Gordon Street. Opposite National Film and Sound Archive

This dome-shaped building seems to be slowly rising out of a surrounding moat. It was designed by Sir Roy Grounds and completed in 1959. The building complements the rounded hills surrounding Canberra. Sixteen peripheral arches spring from the water in the moat to support the shallow concrete dome, which is 46 metres in diameter and weighs 710 tonnes. The

15. IAN POTTER HOUSE

Corner of Marcus Clarke St and Edinburgh Ave.

This building was completed in 1929 for the Federal Capital Commission as a hostel for female government staff

19. CANBERRA SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Corner of Childers St. & University Ave.

The School of Music is a six-level educational complex located on the edge of the Australian National University. The architectural style is Late Modern/Brutalist which is characterised by its prominent grey, off-form concrete and brick walls, reminiscent of the cubist art form, which can be seen as stark and confronting. It is orientated inwards with its performance hall surrounded by administrative rooms as a barrier against external noise from the busy streets nearby. The building is of particular social importance in Canberra providing a concert hall, Llewellyn Hall, of 1,500 seats and is considered one of the best performance spaces in Canberra.

20. BLACK MOUNTAIN

Access by car from Clunies Ross St.

Black Mountain dominates the landscape in and around Acton. It forms a forested backdrop to Lake Burley Griffin and the Telstra Tower on its summit, acts as a landscape marker throughout much of the Canberra area. Regenerated eucalypt forest covers most of the Mountain. A network of trails on the mountain

area. You may find a tree recognition guide helpful.

8. THE PREGNANT PINE

Eastern end of Acton Peninsula, now in the grounds of the Museum of Australia.

One tree worthy of a particular mention is a Pencil Pine. The tree is estimated to be about 120 years of age and is believed to be associated with the first grazing property in the ACT established in the 1820s. During the years when the Canberra Hospital occupied this area of the Acton Peninsula the tree was adjacent to the main entrance. It became known as the 'Pregnant Pine' because of its non-symmetric, bulging shape and its light hearted association with the many pregnant women who gave birth in the hospital. You can see this tree from the National Museum car park.

9 & 10. SPRINGBANK ISLAND

West Basin, Lake Burley Griffin. Viewed from Lennox Crossing.

Springbank Island, with its grassy slopes and tree-lined shore, was formed during 1963 when the Molonglo River plains were flooding to form Lake Burley Griffin. Previously, it had been a small hill within the property of 'Springbank', established in 1831. The island now has a small access jetty and can be used by arrangement with the ACT Government as a barbecue, picnic and function area.

University, and into Lake Burley Griffin at the foot of Black Mountain. It was formerly known as 'Canberry Creek' taking its name from the first established grazing property 'Canberry' which occupied the flood plain area of the Molonglo Creek near Black Mountain and the Indigenous groups who lived in the area. The name was later altered and given to the new Federal Capital, Canberra.

12. ACTON HOUSES

Liversidge St., Balmain Cres. & Lennox Crossing

Take a stroll or a drive along these streets on the edge of the university precinct and you will notice several early 20th century houses contrasting against more modern buildings. Constructed between 1913 and 1929, these government houses were built by the Federal Capital Commission to house public servants who were being posted to fill positions in the newly re-established departments of the capital city. They were purposely located in Acton as it was near to the early administrative centre of the city and an easy walk to work. Their varied architecture and fabric, mainly weatherboard (but two were built of rendered brick) illustrates the changes in design from the beginning to the end of the Federal Capital Period of Canberra. The houses are now used by the Australian National University.

known as the 'Bachelors' Quarters' or 'Single Men's Quarters'. Constructed between 1911 and 1913, these buildings are significant as the first residential accommodation for Government staff involved in the establishment of Canberra. Although under threat of demolition in the early 1990s, the buildings were saved because of their historical, social and cultural significance to the development of Canberra as the national capital. The complex has been continually occupied at one time or another since the days of the bachelors by community groups, university students and now functions as a child care centre. It is interesting to contrast this type of accommodation during the early days of Canberra to that of the more senior public servants who occupied houses in nearby Balmain Crescent.

14. OLD CANBERRA HOUSE

35 Liversidge Street.

Old Canberra House was designed by J.S. Murdoch, architect for the Federal Capital Authority and completed in 1911 for the first Administrator of the ACT. Later occupants were the Federal Capital Commission Chairman Sir John Butters and UK High Commissioners for 20 years. The building is now the property of the Australian National University and houses several research centres.

renamed Government Staff transferred from Melbourne. It is designed in the shape of an 'H' and is a significant example of its architectural style. The building was converted to community use in 1972, and leased by the Australian Academy of Science in 1985. While the interior of the building has been substantially rebuilt, the exterior still exhibits its Georgian Manor-like features. It was known as Beauchamp House until 1986, when the name was changed to honour stockbroker, financier and philanthropist Sir Ian Potter, the major benefactor towards the building's refurbishment.

16. NATIONAL FILM AND SOUND ARCHIVE

(Former Australian Institute of Anatomy) McCoy Circuit.

Designed for the Federal Capital Commission, this building was completed in 1930 to house the Australian Institute of Anatomy. The symmetrical, two storey building is faced in Hawkesbury sandstone and encloses an internal courtyard. The marble finished foyer leads to arcades and cloister off which are twin exhibition halls in facing wings, both with mezzanine galleries. Look for the Art Deco decorative features with their distinctive Australian fauna and Aboriginal motifs. The building now houses the National Film & Sound Archive and is open for visits. It is becoming popular with Canberrans because of the historical films that are regularly shown.

which is sheeted in copper, is larger than St Peter's in Rome and St Paul's in London. Described as unconventional and futuristic in design, it was the first building in the ACT to be placed on the National Heritage List. The building is the conference centre for the Australian Academy of Science and was formerly known as Becker House. In 2000 it was renamed to honour Professor John Shine, a pioneer of gene cloning who contributed \$1 million towards its renovation.

18. ACTON HOUSE

(Formerly Hotel Acton) Corner of Edinburgh and Marcus Clarke Streets.

Acton House was built as a major hostel in 1927. It was constructed, along with other hostels to overcome the acute housing shortage that affected Canberra at the time. It functioned as a hostel until 1930 when it closed completely. It was later occupied by the Patents Office and was part of the new Canberra University College, a fore runner to the Australian National University. In June 1946 it was recommissioned as a hostel for married couples moving to Canberra, a role it maintained for nearly thirty years. From 1976 it has housed various Government agencies but it has now been incorporated into a new residential and business complex.

provides a variety of walks ranging from gentle strolls to steady climbs. A wide range of bird and plant species can be observed in the early mornings and late afternoons. A drive up to the mountain's summit will be rewarded with spectacular views of Acton, Lake Burley Griffin, and the city centre and beyond. A trip to the viewing platform on Telstra Tower will give you a panoramic view of Canberra and its suburbs.

21. AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Northern Acton.

The Australian National University was conceived in the mid-1940s to serve Australia's needs for postgraduate training and advanced research. In 1961 its functions were extended to include undergraduate teaching. The university is unique among its contemporaries as the only Australian university established by an act of Federal Parliament. It is also one of Australia's most research-intensive universities, with a high ratio of academic staff to students. More than 14,000 students study at the university with over 3,300 overseas students from over 100 countries. It offers graduate and undergraduate students degree courses in a range of disciplines including Arts, Law, Mathematics, Engineering, Information Technology, Economics, and the Sciences. The campus is open to the public.