



Story told: Aboriginal elders Glenn James and Uncle Alf Turner, and Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation board member Neville Atkinson admire the new signage unveiled today.

Picture: Simon Bingham

'Pioneers' story told

SIGNS PLACED ALONG 'THE FLATS' TELL THE STORY OF ABORIGINAL SETTLERS



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More than 74 years after Aboriginal people began living on "The Flats" between Shepparton and Mooroopna, their story is finally being told in signage along a 4.3 km walk through their former bush home.

Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation board member Neville Atkinson welcomed the project at yesterday's launch, saying it was "a long time coming".

"The lights are going on now and shining in a dark corner — and people can be informed about what happened here," Mr Atkinson said.

"The Flats", off the Peter Ross-Edwards Causeway, became home to scores of Aboriginal families after they

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— **NEVILLE ATKINSON**

walked off the Cummeragunja Mission at Barmah in 1939.

A 1946 police report listed 130 people aged from newborn babies to 80 years old living in the area.

People lived in tents or huts made from hessian or tin, and fished the Goulburn River for food or hunted for rabbits.

Aboriginal elder Alf "Boydie" Turner, who lived at Barmah and later at Mooroopna, remembered visiting "The Flats" as a youngster.

"All my mates were there," he said.

"I used to jump on my bike and go down to 'The Flats'.

"They were good times when everyone first came here — there was plenty of work during the war."

Mr Turner also remembered the Queen's visit of 1954, when hessian bags were placed along the causeway to prevent Her Majesty from seeing the humpies and tents.

"Everyone was waiting for the Queen to come through so she could see," Mr Turner said.

"People thought they might get some help out of it — but it wasn't so.

"The hessian sacks stayed there for weeks."

The new signs outline the history of the Cummeragunja

walk-off, life on "The Flats" and subsequent development of the Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-Operative.

They also tell the story of the thousands of Aboriginal people who served in both world wars and the Vietnam War.

Former Indigenous Australian soldier Glenn James spoke proudly of the people who lived on "The Flats" at yesterday's launch.

"They were hard times," Mr James said.

"They were the pioneers — they were resolute and gems in our lives.

"Everything we have done comes from what they have done."

The signs and pathway on the southern side of the causeway is a joint project between Greater Shepparton City Council, RiverConnect and the Yorta Yorta Nations Corporation supported by the Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority and Parks Victoria.