Welcome Centre
Collect a site map and explore ways to research your family links. Book the Bonegilla Function Space for a family reunion or arrange accommodation if you plan to stay a few days. Refreshments and memorabilia are available. Pre-booked guided tours depart from here.

The Beginning Place
Introduces why people came to Australia searching for a new beginning and features the Whispering Wall.

Recreation Hut
The task of placing people in blocks had deep pit latrines. There were flush toilets in Block 19 from the beginning but other blocks had deep pit latrines. The communal laundry and shower hut is available in the recreation hut.

Kitchen and messes
Each block at Bonegilla had its own kitchen and mess halls. The Department of Immigration followed dietary guidelines similar to those used by the Australian Army. Migrants queued for food, cared for their own crockery and cutlery, and used by the Australian Army.

Chapel
Chaplains and church associations helped cater for the needs of all religions. Church groups offered solitude and opportunities for developing new social networks. Currently off limits to the public.

Accommodation huts
In the early years women and children were housed separately from the men. In the latter years, huts were modified to accommodate family groups. Large families were sometimes allocated adjacent cubicles.

Staff club / Employment office
The Hume Public Service Club was used by centre staff for recreation. There were usually 200 to 300 employees at any one time working as employment officers, health workers, cooks, patrol men, welfare officers and childcare attendants. Many migrants won their first Australian job at the centre.

Bonegilla Function Space
A picnic and private function space that features an interactive play space, a memorial plaque sculpture and a passage, an interactive play sculpture. Open to the public except during private functions. Bookings essential for private functions.

Ablution Hut
Note how far the ablution, laundry and shower hut is from the accommodation huts. This was typical of the camp layout. The communal laundry became facilities for socialising. There were flush toilets in Block 19 from the beginning but other blocks had deep pit latrines.

Demolished or removed
Accommodation huts and other buildings were sometimes relocated within the reception centre as per accommodation needs.

Bonegilla Migrant Experience
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Box 923, Wodonga, VIC 3699
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Block 19 Bonegilla is the last remaining block of more than 24 blocks that made up the Bonegilla Migrant Reception and Training Centre, which received and trained migrants to Australia following World War II.

The centre was big and at its busiest housed up to 8000 people, occasionally in tents but usually in large accommodation huts. Women and children were housed separately from men, until huts were partitioned into cubicles for families.

When the centre first opened, each week saw hundreds of people arriving from Melbourne docks. The trains, known as “red rattlers”, offloaded passengers at the Bonegilla siding. Luggage was collected and then people were ready for the short trip across to the migrant reception centre, where staff prided themselves on serving a hot meal within an hour of arrival. Later migrants, particularly the Dutch, arrived by plane through Australia’s only international airport in Sydney.

Initially, only displaced persons from refugee camps in Europe were selected. As demand for labour increased and Australian immigration officials realised they could not meet the government’s migration quota, the opportunity to migrate was opened up to the assisted migrants. Every person over 16 years, whether assisted migrant or displaced person, signed a contract stating their willingness to work for two years in any job, in any part of Australia.

Qualifications, work experience and education were not considered. When your job allocation ran out, you were expected to return to Bonegilla to wait for your next opportunity.

Today the centre touches the lives of millions of Australians. One in 20 Australians have had either a parent, brother, sister, uncle, aunt or grandparent who spent time at Bonegilla before work allocations dispersed them Australia-wide.