

DICKSON

First Nations people have lived in, visited and travelled through this region for some 20,000 years or more.

This Inner North suburb and gateway to the city is threaded with unusual places and filled with stories.

The European history of this area dates back to the 1830s – the earliest years of inland settlement. In 1838, the merchant trader Robert Campbell fenced off over a thousand acres where Dickson and Downer lie today, adding them to his Duntroon Estate. His old coach road through Dickson's playing fields led to a string of water holes along the base of Mt Ainslie and eventually the city's first post office. In 1856, smaller farms were established along Duntroon's western fence, very close to where Dickson Library is now. By the 1920s, a stock route had formed on the outer edges of Dickson, where Majura and Phillip Avenues are now.

Sheep grazing and shepherds on old Duntroon, small farms worked by families, travellers on the old coach road and old Yass Road, stockmen on stock routes, returned soldiers on soldier settlements, pilots arriving in biplanes at the very first Canberra Aerodrome, scientists working at CSIRO's Dickson Experiment Station, guests at the luxurious Motel Canberra with its cocktail lounge — all preceded urbanisation here starting in 1958.

Named after Sir James Dickson (former Queensland Premier and one of the founders of the Constitution), the Dickson "division" was given legal definition in 1928. Downer was split off to form a separate suburb in 1960 when Antill Street was built.

In 2024, Dickson's Sixties Classic shopping centre will be 60 years old. Where once emus boldly roamed in native grasslands, a talented community with a dynamic urban centre has risen.



ABOUT US

Dickson Residents Group is a local community association of volunteers. Advocacy is central to what we do.

We are an active member of North Canberra Community Council, the officially recognised peak community body representing the interests and concerns of residents' associations for the Inner North District of Canberra. We liaise with the ACT Government, our community and other groups to promote and enhance the cultural, social and environmental wellbeing of Dickson residents.



**DICKSON
RESIDENTS
GROUP**

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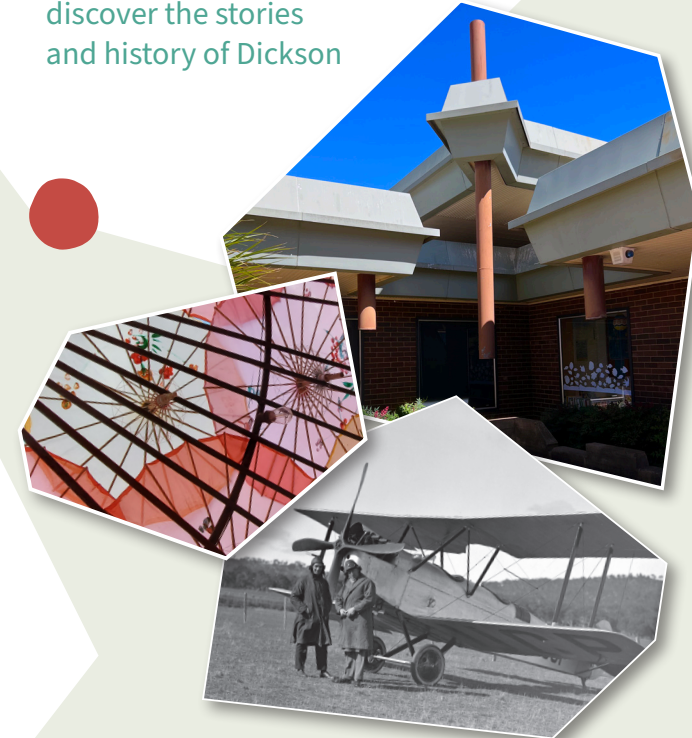
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DICKSON DISCOVERY WALKS

self guided walks

discover the stories
and history of Dickson



**DICKSON
RESIDENTS
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DICKSON DISCOVERY WALKS

CHINATOWN WALK

20
mins

20 mins, 550m return, paved and partly shaded

This walk starts at the Confucius statue on the corner of Cape and Woolley Streets (where a railway to Yass was originally meant to go), travels clockwise along Woolley past a large number of restaurants and several popular cafés, finishing at Badham Street. From here, either continue east to the shopping centre, retrace or circle back.

The limestone Confucius statue was a gift to the people of Canberra in 2010 to celebrate the tenth anniversary of signing the Sister City Agreement between Canberra and Beijing. Gough Whitlam, who gave a major speech to unions at the former Hotel Dickson in 1974, was credited with making Asian food 'respectable' to middle class Australia.

Dickson's shift from predominantly automotive industry services to Asian dining began with the Golden Phoenix in 1965 followed by Rasa Sayang in 1979, closely followed by the Shanghai Chinese at the former Motel Canberra in 1980. A former skating rink was replaced by Ruby Chinese in 1982. The New Shanghai, which opened across the road in 1984 at 23 Woolley Street (now The Scholar), was owned by actor Jackie Chan's parents Lee-lee and Charlie Chan. Ruby Chinese 1982, The Scholar, Tak Kee Roast Inn 1988 and Dickson Asian Noodle House 1993 are still operating, together with several Asian supermarkets, a specialty Asian butcher, and a variety of other restaurants and popular cafés.



SIXTIES CLASSIC HUB WALK

30
mins

30 mins, 850m return, paved and partly shaded

This walk starts in Taglietti Square outside the library, travels clockwise around the library and church past the earliest shops, finishing at the Tradies Club's entrance. One of the Club's many former highlights, vintage trams, can be visited inside the Club via the Hotel entrance at the rear. From here, either continue west to Chinatown or circle back.

Attractive covered walkways, generous shop windows, open courtyards and a relaxed pedestrian-friendly layout make Dickson's shopping centre a Sixties Classic. Comprehensively designed by the architect-planners Clarke Gazzard Yeomans in 1962, the compact retail core combined a major supermarket with a leading department store, church, post office, banks, library, small shops, offices, health and medical facilities. Flanked by a public swimming pool complex across the road and Canberra Tradesmen's Union Club at its doorstep, the Centre remains a hive of activity. Both the scale and orientation of buildings maximise solar access into public spaces, while separation from cars keeps it safe for visitors. Anchoring the centre's main square with its distinctive Modernist library has helped define the character of the centre as a welcoming supportive community space with a strong urban design framework.



AERODROME WALK

45
mins

45 mins, 1.6km return, mostly through parkland on a gravel track, partly shaded

This walk starts at Dickson Baptist Church next to the heritage sign, travels east along the green corridor past Dickson Pool to visit two more heritage signs, finishing at Dickson Wetlands overlooking the pond. From here, either retrace or circle back via the quiet leafy streets of Dickson.

Most of Dickson was part of Duntroon Estate from 1838. At the start of World War I, Walter Burley Griffin identified Dickson as the national capital's future Industrial Area. At the end of World War I, a Soldier Settlement Scheme granted vacant blocks of land on the urban fringe to returning soldiers. Edward Shumack, from a local farming family with properties in Lyneham that stretched westward to Weetangera, was granted 459 acres.

But in late 1920 Griffin showed the city's first Canberra Aerodrome (1924-26) here, on Shumack's soldier settlement block, near a surveyed railway line to Yass where Woolley Street is now. Pilots began landing biplanes here in 1923 and the Aerodrome officially opened in March 1924. In 1925 the Royal Australian Air Force's 3 Squadron, based in Richmond, began extensive aerial survey missions of the Territory for the Federal Capital Commission using this Aerodrome. Three signs along a Canberra Tracks aviation heritage trail tell the story of why the Aerodrome was significant, the first aviation disaster in the Territory that happened here, and the importance of aerial photography technology in the earliest stages of building the capital.



CHINATOWN WALK

20 mins

20 mins, 550m return, paved and partly shaded

1. Confucius statue 2010 by Jiaxiang Studio Shandong. A gift to Canberra, this lovely limestone statue honours the Sister Cities agreement with Beijing.
2. Copacabana Disco 1979-1986. Notorious nightclub operated upstairs, featuring Saturday Night Fever dance floor. Originally the Athena restaurant, later re-named "Katz". Building exterior updated in the 1990s.
3. Railway to Yass. Walter Burley Griffin's railway from Queanbeyan to Yass (surveyed 1913) was to run here, with a station where ABC Studios are now on Northbourne. The federal government's decision at the end of WWII to shift Griffin's Industrial area to Fyshwick released land north of Braddon for the first postwar residential district.
4. New Shanghai 1984 (now The Scholar). This was the first restaurant owned by Jackie Chan's family. Specialising in Shanghai, Cantonese, and Szechuan cuisines and notable for its banquets.
5. Tak Kee Roast Inn 1988 – One of the originals, this restaurant was also owned and started by the Jackie Chan family who owned New Shanghai across the road. It specialised in barbecue meats from the beginning.
6. Ruby Chinese 1982 (formerly 'Rollerworld' roller skating rink). One of the originals, the restaurant was started by a Hong Kong couple who met in Sydney. Specialising in Cantonese cuisine, it was among the first in Canberra to introduce barbecue meats, fire bowl, steamboat, and Yum Cha.
7. Dickson Asian Noodle House 1993. Started by Lao couple, the Rangsis, the restaurant specialises in Thai, Lao and Malaysian cuisines.
8. Rasa Sayang 1979-2022. The second Asian restaurant to open in Dickson, Rasa Sayang featured Singaporean, Malaysian and Hong Kong Chinese dishes. Forced to close by the pandemic, now a burger joint.
9. Hotel Dickson, Orient Courtyard 1966-87. Dickson's first big hotel, designed by Peter Muller, owned by Tooth and Co brewery. Featured live jazz, a popular bar, and an Indian restaurant, Rav's. Prime Minister Gough Whitlam gave a major speech to the unions here in 1974.
10. Motel Canberra 1956-83, Shanghai Chinese 1980-83. One of the first three Asian restaurants in Dickson that formed the nucleus of Chinatown opened in Dickson's luxury motel (also known as The Ethos, by architect Brian O'Connor). Motel Canberra was Dickson's very first building (1956).
11. Golden Phoenix 1965. The very first Asian restaurant to open in Dickson, this is now the Vietnamese House restaurant.

SIXTIES CLASSIC HUB WALK

30 mins

30 mins, 850m return, paved and partly shaded

1. Start at Canberra Tracks sign in Taglietti Square. Dickson district centre has an impressive pedigree. George Clarke and Don Gazzard were Australia's leading urban designers for almost 20 years, with outstanding international credentials. Their designs for Dickson's open air hub with covered walkways blazed the way for a new people-centred approach nationally.
2. Dickson Library 1969 by Dr Enrico Taglietti. Taglietti is regarded as one of Canberra's most significant 20th century architects. This was his first civic building, and internationally renowned. Modifications to the building removed its central mezzanine feature and altered the original colours.
3. Dickson Woolworths 1966. The building incorporates a deep sheltered walkway along its public edges, and large shop windows.
4. Commonwealth Bank 1965. Original building contained a very small bank plus a number of other shops fronting all four sides.
5. Dickson Post Office 1965. Designed to be consistent with the modernist style and materials of other buildings.
6. Dickson Chambers 1965. Arcaded main façade plus secondary frontage provides flexible ground floor tenancies. Early ground floor shops included 2 banks (National and ANZ) and a chemist. Note the use of marble.
7. Dickson Milk Bar 1965 and first set of shops. Greek families established many of the early shops including the first restaurant, and continue to own many of the buildings.
8. JB Young's 1965. A well known local department store was part of the original shops. In 2020 the last department store here, Harris Scarfe, closed.
9. Dickson Baptist Church 1964 by Leighton Irwin & Co. Note the use of unusual screen walls to allow light through, multiple spires on the roof, and Besser block construction.
10. Dickson Pool 1964 by Figgis & Jefferson. Note the classic 'butterfly roof' and same Bowral brick as used at the shops (specified in 1962 for the whole shopping centre). Built by AV Jennings. Learner's pool added in 1969.
11. Dickson Health Centre 1980, also by Dr Enrico Taglietti. Note the use of many similar features to the library, using lower cost brick construction.
12. Tradesmen's Union Club 1964 designed and built by Civil and Civic. 'The Tradies' has contributed a vital social space since the shopping centre's beginnings. Its dining area famously featured vintage trams for many years. One of those can still be visited through the hotel entrance off Cape Street.

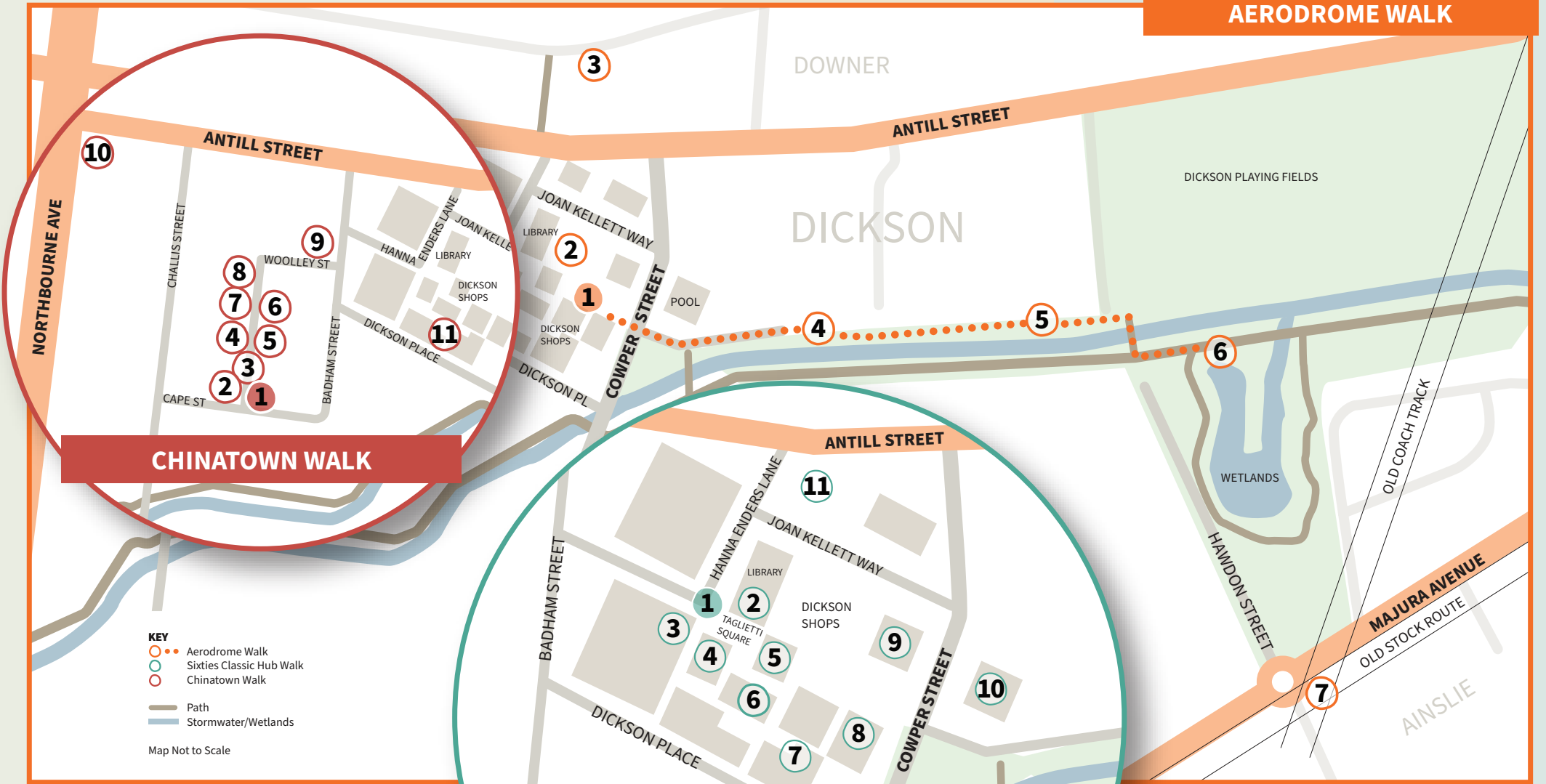
AERODROME WALK

45 mins

45 mins, 1.6km return, mostly through parkland on a gravel track, partly shaded

1. Start at Heroes of the Air, Canberra Tracks sign, near the church. This sign lies 30m east of Duntroon's 1838 western boundary and fenceline. The 1920s Aerodrome stretched beyond that to allow for future expansion. In total it covered 173 acres, with a giant central ring and lockspits marking the 4 corners of the landing area. These were all concrete and whitewashed for maximum visibility from the air.
2. Shumack's gate. When local hero Ted Shumack returned from WWI in 1919 he was granted a soldier settlement block, next to his homestead in what is now Lyneham. Shumack herded his sheep through a gate in the middle of what is now the carpark. A third of his new block was commandeered by the RAAF for the 1920s Aerodrome.
3. 1926 Air crash site. This is where the Territory's first fatal aviation disaster occurred, that killed the two RAAF 3 Squadron crew members. They are buried at St Johns Church and Queanbeyan's Riverside Cemetery. Both graves are now properly marked and can be visited.
4. Landing Ground 1924-27. The landing ground begins as you pass Majura tennis club. Until 1959 the stormwater channel didn't exist, so this ground was flat and treeless. The earliest aerodromes had no runways. The windsock stood south of here on Marsden St.
5. Aerodrome centrepiece. A second Canberra Tracks sign and ground marker indicate where a giant ring used to be. This was the most significant structure on the site and remained visible from the air until its demolition in 1958, when the stormwater channel was being built.
6. Birthplace of aviation. Walk over to the last Canberra Tracks sign near the pond. A second Aerodrome was created in Majura Valley in late 1926 for the opening of Parliament House, which eventually became Canberra Airport. The landing ground in Dickson continued to be used by Larkin Airlines (based in Adelaide) until mid 1927. It reverted to sheep grazing, and in WWII became part of CSIRO's Dickson Experiment Station.
7. Main gate from Duntroon. Two ground crew, an officer, and a truck carrying petrol drums for re-fuelling met biplanes. They entered via a gate where the old coach road had been. After the fatal air crash, the wreckage of the DH9 biplane was removed. The bombsight of the plane was salvaged and is now on display at the Canberra and District Historical Society, Curtin.

AERODROME WALK



CHINATOWN WALK

SIXTIES CLASSIC HUB WALK

