

YARRA RANGES NATIONAL PARK (77, 190 hectares)

Park overview

Yarra Ranges National Park is located within Victoria's Central Highlands and encompasses the headwaters of the Yarra, O'Shannassey and Taggerty Rivers. It also encompasses the major closed water supply catchment area for Melbourne and major water storages. The park is renowned for its tall trees, old growth forest, fern gullies, and snow play areas. State forest abuts the park on all sides, except for the Lake Mountain Alpine Resort.

Park location and access

The park is bordered by the townships of Healesville, Warburton, Narbethong and Marysville. The Maroondah Highway provides the major main road access to the park. Other access roads include the Marysville–Woods Point Road, the Warburton–Woods Point Road and the Lake Mountain and Mount Donna Buang Roads. There is an extensive network of fire and management vehicle access tracks within the catchment for fire protection and water supply purposes. Public use of these tracks is prohibited to protect water catchment and water supply values. Some four-wheel drive access for recreation is provided outside the catchment area, mostly on tracks, which are seasonally closed. There are a number of walking tracks some of which are located within the water supply catchment.

Conservation attributes

The park protects diverse vegetation types, including extensive, undisturbed areas of old-growth Cool Temperate Rainforest and Wet (Mountain Ash) Forest, and sub-alpine vegetation communities at Lake Mountain. Old-growth forests are a feature of the park and have high conservation value as their extent outside the park has diminished significantly since European settlement. The park supports large areas of mature forest important for conserving hollow-dependent fauna species; there are twenty rare or threatened flora species and twenty-one threatened fauna species, including Leadbeater's Possum.

The Designated Water Supply Catchment Area of the Yarra Ranges National Park is an essential component of Melbourne's water supply system, providing high quality water to the metropolitan area, the Yarra Valley and Mornington Peninsula. More than 80% of the park is zoned for conservation and water supply and is largely closed to public access to protect water quality. There are four reference areas in the park.

Recreation use

Recreation activities in the park include walking, picnicking, nature study, car touring, cross-country skiing, angling, cycling, rock climbing and hang gliding. The park contains the nearest snowfields to Melbourne for cross-country skiing and snowplay—at Lake Mountain and Mount Donna Buang. Tourist drives such as across the Black Spur enable visitors to view the spectacular mountain forest scenery, including tall trees and rainforest. There are popular picnicking facilities at Fernshaw, Badgers Weir, Dom Dom Saddle, Camberville and Lake Mountain. There are day walks from the popular picnic areas and longer walks around

the perimeter of the catchment. Some 10% of the park, being outside the catchment near Warburton, McMahons Creek and Lake Mountain, is zoned for conservation and recreation, and for recreation development.

History

The park lies within the lands traditionally associated with the Wurundjeri people (south of the Great Dividing Range) and the Taungurung people (north of the Range). Numerous Aboriginal archaeological sites have been formally recorded to date. By the 1840s squatters had occupied surrounding areas but did not permanently settle the densely forested terrain of the Yarra Ranges.

Goldfields opened up around the Warburton to Reefton Spur area in the 1850s and 1860s. The Yarra Track provided access to the Woods Point goldfields via Healesville, Fernshaw and Cumberland. The tall trees of the Yarra Ranges attracted wide interest and, from the 1880s, townships such as Marysville, Fernshaw and Warburton became popular tourist destinations.

Diversions for Melbourne's water supply commenced in 1886 with a weir on the Watts River, followed by the O'Shannassy and Maroondah Dams (1920s) and the Upper Yarra Dam (1957). The Closed Catchment Policy saw the removal of Fernshaw Township, which was in the Maroondah Reservoir Catchment, in 1885 and the cessation of most human activities in the catchments. Outside the closed catchments, temporary sawmill settlements and timber tramways expanded from the 1880s to 1950.