

LERDERDERG STATE PARK (20,180 ha)

Park overview

Lerderderg State Park encompasses scenic and geological gorge formations surrounding the Lerderderg River as well as the volcanic cone of Mount Blackwood. The adjacent and separate block called the Pyrete Range forms part of the park. The park is known for its remote setting and the 300m deep Lerderderg River gorge is a dominant feature. Private land abuts the park to the south and the Wombat State forest abuts to the north and west.

Park location and access

The park can be accessed via the Western Highway approximately 90km west of Melbourne. Gateway towns include Blackwood, at the northern end of the park, Greendale on the western side and Bacchus Marsh near the southern end. Within the park, access to the Lerderderg River is limited to a small number of two-wheel drive roads (O'Briens Crossing and McKenzies Flat). There is a network of four-wheel drive tracks, and some are seasonally closed. A network of walking tracks enables access to the river and many historic features in the park.

Conservation attributes

A range of vegetation types, including a riparian Blue Gum and Manna Gum community of State significance and 23 significant plant species present in Lerderderg State Park, together with nine significant animal species. The vegetation changes dramatically from north to south in accordance with the rainfall gradient. Dry Stringybark-Box forests are found near the gorge mouth, and Box-Ironbark woodlands along the high ridges of the south. There is a change to taller, damper Messmate-Peppermint-Gum forests along the northern boundary of the park. The river margins support Blue Gum and Manna Gum, while grevilleas, wattles and hakeas are found in steep and rocky sections. Late winter and spring are the best times to see the spectacular display of wildflowers. The Lerderderg River is a proclaimed Heritage River and there are 3 reference areas in the park.

The invasive Cinnamon Fungus has been recorded at a number of sites within the Park. The fungus seriously affects native vegetation and causes the death of susceptible species. The disease spreads naturally but is accelerated through the transport of infected soil and gravel by road-making machinery and other vehicles. Park management aims to limit spread of the fungus, by restricting access to infected areas and vehicle hygiene measures. Walkers are encouraged to clean footwear after visiting the park. Nearly half of the park comprising the Lerderderg River and surrounds south of O'Briens Crossing is zoned 'Conservation' with the aim to protect sensitive natural environments and provide for minimal impact recreation

activities and simple visitor facilities, subject to ensuring minimal interference with natural processes.

Recreation use

Many visitors enjoy the rugged nature and remote setting offered by the park. There are three picnic areas that are readily accessible from main roads - at Shaws Lake, McKenzies Flat and O'Briens Crossing, where there is also a small camping ground. Popular recreation activities include picnicking, nature study, walking, viewing historic sites, camping, four-wheel driving, short walks and overnight bushwalking and day walks along the gorge. Half of the park is zoned 'Conservation & Recreation' to protect less sensitive natural environments and provide for sustainable dispersed recreation activities and small-scale recreation facilities without significant impact on natural processes.

History

The Wurundjeri and the Wathaurung are Aboriginal tribes known to have lived in the area. European occupation of the area commenced during the 1830s when squatters took up large pastoral runs around Bacchus Marsh. Gold was first discovered at what is now the township of Blackwood, in 1851. The area was rich in alluvial gold and large nuggets were found chiefly in the bed of the Lerderderg River and its tributaries in what is now the Wombat State Forest and Lerderderg State Park. Miners sank small holes and used sluice boxes, pumps and water wheels. Later, water races were cut to provide water to sluice finds on the flats, gullies and hillsides. A tunnel was cut through a spur to divert the Lerderderg River and enable mining along a 500m section of the dry riverbed. Quartz mining followed and many deep shafts were sunk. Ore was treated using steam and water powered crushers. These mines peaked by the 1890s, with little mining after 1910. Relics of goldmining can be found throughout the state forest and the park in the form of water races (many of these races now form the routes for walking trails), eroded gullies, mine shafts, the diversion tunnel, mullock heaps, and remains of stone dwellings and stone walls.