

ALPINE NATIONAL PARK (661 775 hectares)

Park overview

The Alpine National Park extends from central Gippsland to the New South Wales border where it adjoins Kosciuszko National Park. Within the park are some of Australia's most stunning alpine landscapes, including Victoria's tallest mountain peaks, escarpments and grassy high plains and the headwaters of many of Victoria's major rivers and streams. The park can be generally described as steep, rugged with significant remote and wilderness sections. The ski resorts of Hotham, Falls Creek, Mount Buller and Mount Stirling adjoin the park and most of the park is contiguous with State forest. Adjoining the park are a series of historic and cultural features reserves that cover former mining settlements and workings (Howqua Hills, Grant, Mount Wills, Mt Murphy).

Park location and access

The Alpine National Park can be accessed from many points around its perimeter; in the north access is available from Mansfield, Whitfield, Harrietville, Mount Beauty and Mitta Mitta and in the south from Heyfield, Maffra, Dargo, Omeo and Buchan. A limited number of sealed two-wheel drive through roads exist. Much of the park has two-wheel drive access to certain points of interest, such as camp grounds, picnic areas, ski resorts and scenic lookouts. A network of four-wheel drive roads provide a range of scenic touring routes that link areas of interest and allow access to steep, remote and scenic areas, often with limited facilities. Many roads are seasonally closed due to snowfall and due to wet and erodible conditions. Large areas of the park are only accessible on foot.

Conservation attributes

The Park supports a wide variety of vegetation types, including about one third of Victoria's native flora species. Over half the State's land bird species and 40% of the mammal species are also found there. Twelve of these species, including the Bogong daisy-bush and silky daisy, are found nowhere else in the world. A number of plant and animal species are rare, vulnerable or endangered. Vegetation types range from the alpine herbfields, heathlands, tussock grasslands, mossbeds and snowpatch communities found on the high plains, to sub-alpine woodlands of snow-gum, tall wet forest including Alpine ash, open forests of peppermint and mountain gum and drier forests and woodland on rocky slopes and escarpments.

The park is home for a variety of animals that have adapted to survive the severe winter climate, including threatened species such as the smoky mouse, broad-toothed rat, powerful owl, spotted tree frog and she-oak skink. Of special note is the rare mountain pygmy-possum, the world's only exclusively alpine marsupial that stores food to last throughout the winter. Its special habitat — boulder slopes with heathland and snow gums — is only found in a few places within the Victorian and New South Wales Alps.

Bogong moths inhabit the Bogong and Dargo high plains and peaks between November and April, away from the heat of the inland plains.

Many of Victoria's major rivers have their headwaters in the park, and part of the headwaters of south eastern Australia's largest river system, the River Murray, are located in the Alps. Many of these river systems provide drinking water for surrounding towns and cities.

Recreation use

Popular recreation uses include bushwalking, nature study, viewing of historic sites, cross-country skiing (with downhill skiing at adjoining resorts), camping, canoeing, cycling, two-wheel drive, four-wheel drive touring, mountain biking and horse riding in the warmer seasons. The Australian Alps Walking Track winds through the Alpine National Park and into New South Wales and the ACT. The Australian Bicentennial National Trail suitable for horse riders, walkers and mountain bike riders also passes through the park.

Approximately half of the park is zoned for conservation and recreation use. In addition, there are eight wilderness zones covering approximately 138 000 hectares where self reliant recreation is the primary focus. There are also a number of remote and natural areas in the park.

History

Historically, Aboriginal people crossed tribal boundaries and travelled hundreds of kilometres to meet on the highest peaks of the alpine region. They came from as far as the coast and the southwest slopes of the mountains for intertribal corroborees, settling of disputes, trading, marriages and the initiation of young men. During these visits, Aboriginal people feasted on Bogong moths, which provided a nutritious food source over several months. Aboriginal people lived in the alpine region during other seasons, particularly in the lower valleys. Through their cultural traditions, the Bidawal, Dhudhuroa, Gunaikurnai, Jaithmathang, Taungurong and Nindi-Ngudjam Ngarigu Monero identify the Alpine National Park as their Traditional Country.

The European history of the park includes exploration, tourism, timber harvesting, gold mining and fire, and the park contains a range of values associated with these activities and events. Pastoralists moved into the eastern part of the alps from the Monaro region in the 1830s and commenced grazing on public land. Summer grazing continued on the high plains until recently. In the 1850s, gold discoveries in and adjacent to the park at Omeo, Cobungra, Harrietville, Shady Creek and Mitta Mitta, saw the commencement of a series of gold rushes. During the next 30 years gold was found at many locations including at Crooked River, Buckwong Creek, Mount Wills, Sunnyside, Dart River, and Howqua River. As the easily won alluvial gold petered out, interests turned to large scale reef mining, dredging of rivers and sluicing operations. Mining of gold reached a peak by 1910, and then gradually declined. Mining continued in a limited way into the 1920s, with a temporary revival in the 1940s and 1950s. The last reef mine in the park closed recently. The evidence of former mining today can be seen as remnants of alluvial workings and races along many streams, and shafts and tailings at many reef gold mine localities. Many examples of mining machinery, building ruins, cemeteries and mining tracks remain and are afforded heritage protection.