

MITCHELL RIVER NATIONAL PARK (14 250 hectares)

Park overview

Mitchell River National Park extends along both sides of the Mitchell River from the Tabberrabera district near Dargo, to Iguana Creek. The park is known for its spectacular scenery and remote character, including the rugged and remote Mitchell River gorge, the rainforest fringing the river and tributaries, and its Aboriginal and European history. Except for small areas in the southern and northern boundaries, the park is surrounded by State forest. Former farmland around Tabberabbera, part of which was the site of a proposed dam, has been incorporated into the park, The Mitchell River is the main water supply for the towns of Bairnsdale and surrounding districts.

The park is jointly managed with the Gunaikurnai people and will be granted as Aboriginal title.

Park location and access

The park is located in East Gippsland, approximately 25km north of the Princess Highway between Stratford and Bairnsdale. There is a network of four-wheel drive and two-wheel drive roads and tracks which provides access to the three major recreational areas on the western side of the river. Road access to the eastern side of the Park is via a system of four-wheel drive dead-end tracks. There are relatively few easy access points to the Mitchell River for vehicles.

Conservation attributes

The southernmost occurrence of dry rainforest with its dominant species of Kurrajong is found on the rocky slopes of the Mitchell River Gorge. Warm temperate rainforest of Kanooka, Sweet Pittosporum, Lilly Pilly and Yellow-wood is found along the river gorges and within moist gullies. Silver Top Ash occurs on the broad flat ridge tops with gum and stringybark on the sheltered slopes and drainage lines. Manna Gums occur along the open watercourse of the Mitchell River. Former pasturelands at Angusvale and Horseshoe Bend, contain a variety of introduced grasses mixed with native grasses. Approximately 65% of the park in the catchments of Cobbannah, Sandy and Bald Hills Creeks and is zoned for 'Conservation', with the aim of protection of sensitive natural environments and to provide for minimal impact recreation activities and simple visitor facilities, subject to ensuring minimal interference to natural processes. The Mitchell River is a proclaimed Heritage River.

Recreation use

Popular recreation activities in the park include camping, bushwalking, picnicking, nature study, horseriding, whitewater canoeing and rafting, four-wheel driving and horseriding. Mitchell River has a reputation as one of the best white-water rafting or canoeing trips in Victoria. A popular overnight walking track follows the Mitchell River through the park. Visitors come to view the many spectacular scenic features, such as the Den of Nargun, Billy Goat Bend lookout, and the Mitchell River Gorge and the rainforest. Car touring by

four-wheel drive enables access to the more remote regions of the park. There are a range of camping opportunities, particularly at Angusvale. Deerstalking is permitted on the eastern part of the park in season. Approximately 35% of the park adjacent to the river, is zoned for Conservation & Recreation, and Recreation Development 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 park has a rich Aboriginal cultural history which tells of conflict between different tribes as well as Europeans, dreaming stories, journeys, food gathering and community life. Two clans of the Gunaikurnai Tribe inhabited the park; the Brabuwooloong east of the Mitchell River and the Brayakooloong to the west. The Den of Nargun is one of many places of great cultural significance to the Gunaikurnai people, especially Aboriginal women.

Grazing runs were established on the undulating country between Dargo and Tabberabbera between 1845 and 1847. In 1857 gold was discovered in the foothills. The alluvial fields along the Mitchell River and its tributaries were worked from the late 1850s to early last century. Reef mining began in the area in the 1860s. Relics of early European exploration, settlement, gold sluicing and farming, including the Glenaladale Weir on the Mitchell River constructed in 1881 are found in the park. The site of the Angusvale Hotel is evident at Horseshoe Bend.