

BAW BAW NATIONAL PARK (13 530 hectares)

Park overview

Baw Baw National Park north of the Latrobe Valley consists of a distinctive sub-alpine plateau and surrounding forested uplands. It contains the headwaters of the Tyers River and tributaries of the Thompson and Aberfeldy Rivers, which provide water to Melbourne and towns surrounding the park. Although similar in some respects, the park is considerably isolated from the rest of Victoria's high country and has similarities with Tasmania's vegetation. The park is surrounded mostly by State forest and also by the Walhalla Historic area in the south-east (covering parts of the major goldfields of the Aberfeldy - Walhalla area) and the Baw Baw Alpine Resort.

Park location and access

Baw Baw National Park is located about 120 km east of Melbourne and 50 km north of the Latrobe Valley. The main access to the plateau is from the Mount Erica and St Gwinear carparks along signposted roads off the Thomson Valley Road, north of Erica. Access through the Thompson and Aberfeldy River valleys on the eastern side of the park is via the winding Walhalla Road. Many of the tracks in the Thomson and Aberfeldy Valleys are suitable for four-wheel drive vehicles only, and is typified by steep grades. Many roads and tracks are closed during the winter months. The Baw Baw Plateau itself is only accessible to walkers and skiers beyond the Mount Erica and St Gwinear carparks.

Conservation attributes

Baw Baw National Park contains a diverse array of vegetation types and plant species, extending over an elevation range of 1100 metres. The Baw Baw Plateau features wet alpine heathlands and thick spongy beds of sphagnum moss surround clear pools of water; extensive sub-alpine woodlands dominated by snow gum; tall open forests of Alpine Ash, Shining Gum and Tingaringy Gum on upper slopes of the range and forests of Mountain Ash, Messmate and Silver Wattle at lower altitudes; dry forests of Silvertop, Messmate and Peppermints in the Thomson and Aberfeldy River valleys. The park is home to the endangered Leadbeater's Possum, Victoria's state mammal emblem, which inhabits the Mountain Ash forests, and the critically endangered, endemic Baw Baw Frog. The Conservation Zone occupies some 60% of the park, being the plateau and the surrounding montane slopes. One reference area and part of the Thompson River and Aberfeldy River Heritage Rivers and a remote and natural area are included in the park.

Recreation use

There are many recreational opportunities in the park, including: walking the Australian Alps Walking Track and the many other trails, cross-country skiing on the plateau, white water rafting on the Thomson River, fishing in the Thomson and Aberfeldy Rivers; and cycling and horseriding on formed roads. A vehicle-based camping area is located on the Aberfeldy River. Deer hunting is permitted seasonally in part of the park. The Conservation and Recreation Zone covers approximately 40% of the park, comprising the Thomson and Aberfeldy River Valleys.

History

Through their cultural traditions, the Gunaikurnai identify the park as their Traditional Country. The park has had a long history of European use, including grazing, gold mining, timber harvesting and tourism. On and around the Baw Baw Plateau, cattle grazing and, to a lesser extent, sheep grazing, was undertaken between 1860 and 1975. Timber harvesting occurred in the park, initially associated with mining and later for sawlog production and paling splitting.

In 1862 a gold rush took place near Matlock. Access to the diggings helped to develop the district linking Reefton-Aberfeldy and Tanjil-Matlock. Prospecting parties were active throughout the ranges, and rushes followed quickly at Donnelly's Creek, Fultons Creek and the now famous township of Walhalla. Gold prospecting was undertaken in the lower part of the park, however, the Baw Baw Plateau itself was not gold bearing and tended to be avoided. Mining relics, huts and timber tramway alignments and the heritage listed Walhalla Tramway Bridge are reminders of the Park's mining and forestry history.

The Baw Baw Plateau was promoted as a tourist destination from as early as 1906 when the Public Works Department commissioned the development of the 82-km Warburton to Walhalla Track. Skiing of the plateau became popular commencing in the 1940s.