

Dandenong Ranges National Park



Living Bush Nature Walk – Self Guided Trail Note

This great Ferntree Gully walk enables you to experience beautiful native bushland, including spectacular fern gullies and tall eucalypt trees. Discover features of the bush that you may not have been aware of before – not only things to see, but also to hear, touch and smell – along this 3 km medium grade track. Allow about 1.5 hours for the walk.

Head through the archway at the top carpark of the picnic ground, turn right along the track just behind the playground to start the walk. Numbered posts beside the track indicate points of interest.

1. An early park

The Wurundjeri Aboriginal people were the first to inhabit the slopes of the Dandenong Ranges, setting up long term camps in the warmer seasons. The hills provided them with food, clothing and warmth.

European settlers also recognised the special quality of the hills. Many took up land, built houses and established farms, but 168 hectares of bush at Ferntree Gully were reserved for public recreation in 1882. A further 59 hectares were added in 1927 to create a permanent National Park.

Many historical features remain, including the picnic shelters at this stop, which were built in 1947. The shingle roofs were replaced after they were burnt in the 1962 bushfires.

2. The fern gully

As you wander past the creek you will notice many different types of fern. Both Rough and Soft Tree ferns grow in this area, suited to the moist, damp conditions. Crimson Rosellas and possums like to feed on the young unfurling fern fronds, whilst insects and spiders find suitable homes on or under the bark.

3. Home among the gum trees

Mountain Grey Gum (*Eucalyptus cypellocarpa*) tower around you. They are easily recognised by their smooth grey bark, long dark green leaves and flattened gumnut stalks. These mature trees have hollows ideal for possums, birds and gliders on their trunks, small holes among the roots shelter lizards and native bush rats.

4. Feel the forest

The forest is a mixture of textures. You can find rough and smooth bark on different trees. Some plants have leaves which are white and woolly underneath, such as Blanket-leaf (*Bedfordia arborescens*) whereas the Musk Daisy bush (*Olearia argophylla*) has leaves that feel like leather.



Blanket-leaf ©

5. Life in a rotting log

When a tree falls it creates homes for different animals and plants. Lizards and snakes may shelter or lay their eggs in the log. Spiders, centipedes and termites also live here and help to break up the wood.

You may see logs with different kinds of fungi growing on them. Fungi help to create tunnels through the log which offer an easy route for worms. The worms help to break down the rotting wood completely and return the nutrients back to the soil.



Fungi ©



For further information

Parks Victoria
Information Centre
Call 13 1963
or visit the
Parks Victoria website
www.parkweb.vic.gov.au

Caring for the environment

Help us look after your park by following these guidelines:

Please take rubbish away with you for recycling & disposal

All native plants & animals are protected by law.

Please do not disturb them in any way

Solid fuel barbecues and the use of heat beads are not permitted

Firearms are prohibited

Wildlife feed and handling is not permitted

Dogs and other pets are not permitted in the Park

Observe parking signs and park gate closing times

6. Alive with music

Rest on the seat here for a while and listen to the peaceful sounds of the bush – running water, wind and bird calls. Some of the birds you may hear are Grey Fantails which have a high, squeaky song, Yellow Robins with a rapid 'pip-pip-pip', the bell-like clink-clink of the Crimson Rosella or the scratchy screech of the Sulphur Crested Cockatoo.



Eastern Yellow Robin ©

7. A foothold in the forest

You have now reached the top of the fern gully. As you enjoy the cool, damp area under the tree ferns notice the ferns growing on the fibrous trunks of the large tree ferns. These Filmy and Kangaroo Ferns are called epiphytes – they use the tree ferns to gain a foothold and reach the light.

8. Higher and drier

As you can see, the plants growing here are quite different from those in the gully. It even smells different! Instead of Mountain Grey Gum, the tall eucalypt trees here are Messmates (*Eucalyptus obliqua*). Check their leaves – the two halves meet the stem at different points – and their bark, which is stringy.

Common shrubs here are Prickly Moses (*Acacia verticillata*) which has sharp prickles and Hop Goodenia (*Goodenia ovata*) a low shrub with yellow flowers in spring.

Look up to see why the plants are different here – more sunlight reaches the forest floor, resulting in drier conditions.

9. Settlement pressures

A National Park so close to urban areas can have some complicated management problems. You can probably hear one of these problems – traffic on nearby Mt Dandenong Tourist Road.

Numerous roads go through the park, linking the houses and townships of the Dandenong Ranges.

Heavy traffic can disturb both the fauna and flora of the area. Many native animals are struck by vehicles on the roads, and litter and garden waste are dumped down the hill. Introduced species such as foxes, cats and dogs threaten our fauna and weeds, like ivy and montbretia choke native vegetation. How would you deal with these problems?

10. Hopping through the forest

If you are quiet, you may see a Swamp Wallaby as it hops through the forest, searching for juicy grasses and shrubs to nibble. The wallaby feeds early in the morning or at dusk and usually rest during the heat of the day.

Native bush rats scurry along the track and make small tunnels in the vegetation. These help them move freely and escape predators.



Swamp Wallaby ©

11. Regeneration

Not long ago the gully you are about to cross was completely degraded. Heavy foot traffic had eroded the banks of the creek and greatly disturbed plant life.

Friends groups, school children and volunteers, in conjunction with Parks Victoria staff, have spent many hours weeding and replanting the area. This is just one small area in Dandenong Ranges National Park where weed control and revegetation projects are being undertaken.

Ask a ranger or Parks Victoria Information Centre staff on 13 1963 how you can help with these vital projects.



Kids with Ranger ©RA

Healthy Parks Healthy People

Visiting a park can improve your health, mind, body and soul. So, with over four million hectares of parkland available to Victorians, why not escape to a park today!

Updated June 2008

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