

THE HIGH COUNTRY

Let's go where the air is clear, the scenery spectacular and there's a thousand different ways to enjoy yourself. The High Country's greatest asset is its unspoiled, natural beauty, but an action-packed trip awaits, if you dare. Go downhill or cross-country skiing and snowboarding; horse ride or walk the mountain trails; paraglide over and kayak down pristine, icy streams; idle along a bike trail, or puff up an alpine trail. It's all happening in a diverse, fragile and beautiful environment at the southern end of the Great Dividing Range. Mt Bogong, the highest point at 1986m, squats in the Alpine National Park. Mt Buffalo does its buffalo look-alike sprawl in Mt Buffalo National Park. Mt Baw Baw sits prettily in Mt Baw Baw National Park. And for winter playgrounds, there's the magic three: Mt Hotham, Mt Buller and Falls Creek.

Just driving along the High Country roads is as thrilling as their names suggest. The Great Alpine Rd takes a stately run beside creeks, wooded areas, farm lands and mountains till it reaches the sea. The Snow Rd tempts you to vineyards and gourmet food spots. The Omeo Hwy speeds through valleys a range or two away from Kiewa Valley Hwy, both offering glorious scenery and picnic spots, while down south, the Goulburn Valley Hwy tracks the tinkling Goulburn River.

Former gold-mining towns such as Beechworth and Yackandandah are well-preserved historical encounters, while towns at the foothills of the mountain resorts such as Mansfield, Bright and Mt Beauty are all-season holiday spots, with stacks of activities, exciting restaurants and fab accommodation. The thriving Milawa gourmet region has acclaimed wineries and impressive local produce.

Away from the mountains, Lake Eildon National Park is a water sports paradise. Spend a few days on a houseboat, do some fly-fishing or just take in the gorgeous surroundings from the veranda of one of the many attractive B&Bs.

SNOWSHOE SHUFFLE

This is winter playground territory: skiers, snowboarders and snow-kiters are all out there, breaking bits of the old bod. If that's not your scene, embrace the air and the scenery on a **snowshoe walk** where your guide takes you through snow drifts, along snow-capped ridges, through snow-dusted snowgum forests and along icy, crackly little creeks. You'll find snowshoe walks at **Mt Buffalo** (p313) and **Mt Buller** (p300), **Falls Creek** (p304) and **Mt Hotham** (p302). Love it? Take a three-day adventure on snowshoes up on the **Bogong High Plains** (p319).

TRAILS

Winter is for snow sports, but summer also makes the most of the cross-country ski trails. Every mountain has a network of short, long and in-between trails which delight nature-lovers and completely win-over doubters who hadn't realised how magnificent this region is when the blanket of white has melted away. For seriously dedicated hikers, the **Australian Alps Walking Track** (p310) is well-marked and supported.

For cyclists, the **Murray to the Mountains Rail Trail** (p308) is a blast, or hire a mountain bike and take to the trails above **Bright** (p307). Take your bike

up the chairlift to the top of Mt Buller and blast your way back down, or go with a group along the trails of **Dinner Plain** (p302) and **Mt Hotham** (p302), walking, biking or on a horse. Breeze along the rich-green trails around **Marysville** (p314).

Biking not for you? Take to the trails in a 4WD or on a tag-along tour. No? Then the **Brewery Trail** (p308) must be a goer. Whatever you enjoy, the High Country has a trail waiting.

GOURMET INDULGENCE

It's the air. Everything here grows better, tastes better, looks better. Local produce includes meats, game, cheese, fruits, berries, nuts, honey, jams, sauces and preserves. Freshwater fish and crustaceans bred in the King, Ovens and Murray rivers include trout, Chinook salmon, Murray cod, yellow perch and yabbies. Indulge every taste bud.

Start with the **Gourmet Food Trail** (p317) around Milawa. Head up to **Beechworth** (p315), down to **Marysville** (p314) or out to **Mt Beauty** (p309), stopping at the vineyards along every way, or at roadside stalls selling apples, chestnuts, mushrooms, asparagus and berries when in season.

For the ultimate wickedness, go on a **gourmet hike** (p319) where there's a reward for every step taken.

THE BEAST WITHIN

Mountains and horses belong together, and the High Country is renowned for its horsemen. Start by exploring the real *Man From Snowy River* scenery up in **Corryong** (p315). Staying out back, go by horse down the road to **Omeo** (p319) and check out the wildest goldfield of Victoria. Or head east to **Beechworth** (p315) and check out our Ned's horse-thieving ways. Time your visit to see the Golden Horseshoe Festival; the gold was so plentiful in Beechworth that a local politician's horse wore golden horseshoes.

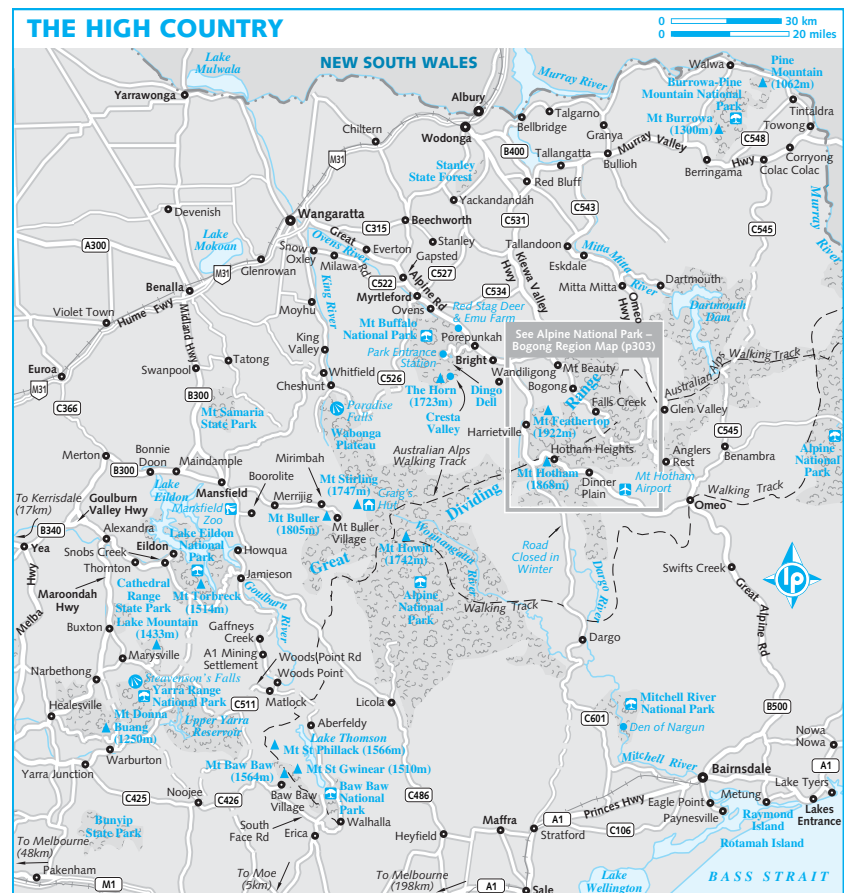
Have the total countryside experience and get in touch with your inner beast on a trail-ride up at **Dinner Plain** (p302), or down around beautiful **Mt Beauty** (p309). If you head to **Mansfield** (p305) you can join a horse-riding group and tackle the cliff-face where *The Man From*

Snowy River was filmed in 1981. Continuing the film theme, you can also take a horse ride through the **Rubicon Valley** (p312) just south of Bonnie Doon ('How's the serenity?').

BEING THERE

In this alpine environment, weather conditions can change dramatically and without warning any time of year. In winter, most of the higher mountains are snow-capped and frosts are frequent. A fine, sunny day can deteriorate into blizzard conditions, so make sure you have access to protective clothing on the slopes.

In the height of summer, you can walk or bike all day in the heat without finding water, then face temperatures below freezing at night. Bushwalkers should have a tent, fuel stove, warm clothes, a sleeping bag and plenty of water.



Sunburn is also a serious problem, even on cloudy days, so slap on a high-SPF sunscreen and wear sunnies. March flies are also a problem in summer. Take a healthy supply of insect repellent and avoid wearing dark-coloured clothing.

If you are driving up to the snowfields in winter, you are required by law to carry snow chains even if there's no snow – heavy penalties apply if you don't. Chains can be rented from local service stations and ski-hire shops. Take care as roads can be slick with ice and snow, and some can become impassable. Check road conditions with the **Official Victorian Snow Report** (☎ 1902 240 523; www.vicsnowreport.com.au) before heading out. The website features daily snow-condition reports, information, accommodation links and 'snow cams'.

If travelling in a diesel-powered vehicle, it's a good idea to purchase 'Alpine Mix' (diesel with antifeeze) at either **Omeo** (p319) or **Harrierville** (p318) – it could save you a call to the **Royal Automobile Club of Victoria** (RACV; ☎ 13 11 11; www.racv.com.au).

MOUNTAIN PLAYGROUNDS

MT BULLER

elevation 1805m

Victoria's largest and busiest ski resort has an extensive lift network, including the Horse Hill chairlift that begins in the car park and ends in the middle of the ski runs. The downhill skiing area is 180 hectares (snow-making covers 44 hectares) with a vertical drop of 400m. Runs are 25% beginner, 45% intermediate, 30% advanced. **Cross-country trails** link Mt Buller and Mt Stirling.

It's a well-developed resort with a buzzing village atmosphere all year and a complete range of facilities. In winter there's **night skiing**

on Wednesday and Saturday night. If you're not skiing, there's a **scenic chairlift** (adult/child \$20/12) and tobogganing, or go snowtubing in the snowtub park. If you're freestyling, there's a rail park, halfpipe and other terrain parks. Snowshoeing here is fantastic, especially if you're not wild about skiing. Join the **Snowshoe Guru** (☎ 1800 039 049; www.snowshoeguru.com.au; half-day from \$78) on a Back Country Experience.

Year-round staff at the **Australian Alpine Institute** (AAI; ☎ 5777 6000; www.alpineinstitute.com.au; Level 1, Community Centre, Summit Rd) run a variety of outdoor adventures, including rock climbing, abseiling and fly-fishing. Its sports hall (Level 2) and gym (Level 1) have fab indoor activities (casual visit \$10) and massages (per 30 minutes \$55).

There are art works and artefacts on display around the mountain. Ask at a visitors centre for a leaflet to see them on a self-guided walk. **High Country Scenic Tours** (☎ 5777 5101; www.highcountryscenic.com.au) runs Alpine 4WD tours to historic sites and wineries.

The only Alpine museum in Australia, the **National Alpine Museum of Australia** (NAMA; ☎ 5777 7235; www.nama.org.au; Level 1, Community Centre, Summit Rd; admission free; ☎ 10am-1pm & 4-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat & Sun in summer, 9am-6pm in winter), highlights the fascinating history of this area.

Breathtaker on High Spa Retreat (☎ 1800 088 222; www.breathtaker.com.au; massage per hr from \$110) offers the chance to soak and revive with a range of luxurious treatments, a 20m lap pool and a hydrotherapy 'geisha tub' (\$45 per 15 minutes in aromatic bath milk).

In summer, **mountain biking** is big, big, big, with the Horse Hill chairlift operating on weekends lifting you and your bike up to the plateau (all-day lift and trails access \$45). Pick up the **Mountain Biking Guide & Maps** from a visitors centre. Bike hire is available from **Altitude** (☎ 5777 7560; Village Centre; 1hr/half-/full-day \$20/40/60). Or forget the bike and just ride the chairlift all day (adult/child \$18/10).

ON THE SLOPES

If you like your skiing and boarding with sun, blue skies and gum trees, head to the High Country and hope you don't get a whiteout. You'll also find impressive resorts and a rocking *après-ski* scene. The ski season officially launches (with or without snow) on the Queen's Birthday long weekend in June and runs until mid-September. The best deals are to be found in June and September (shoulder season), with late July to August (high season) the busiest and most expensive time. The resorts have their own Alpine Resort Management Boards, with information offices (open year-round) on the mountains. There are no dedicated banks, but Eftpos is widely available.

In October the ski trails transform into fine walking and mountain-biking environments. Go to www.visitalpinevictoria.com.au for a High Country calendar of events. Several lodges and cafés remain open if you're heading up for summer activities, or just to enjoy the crisp alpine air.

TRANSPORT: MOUNTAIN PLAYGROUNDS

Distance from Melbourne Mt Buller 228km, Mt Hotham 377km, Falls Creek 386km

Direction Northeast

Travel Time Mt Buller three hours, Mt Hotham 4½ hours, Falls Creek 4½ hours

Air Altitude Aviation (☎ 1800 747 300, 9351 0311; www.helicoptercharterflights.com.au; Moorabbin Airport, Melbourne; return per 4/6 people \$3300/4600). Flights take less than an hour from Melbourne – the ultimate rockstar arrival!

Bus Mansfield-Mt Buller Buses (☎ 5775 2606, winter 5777 6070; www.mmb.com.au) runs buses between Mt Buller and Melbourne (\$140, four hours, three weekly) and Mansfield (return \$47, one hour, daily). Trekset (☎ 9370 9055; www.snowballexpress.com.au) runs between Mt Hotham and Melbourne (\$155, 5½ hours, daily) and Bright (return \$47, 1½ hours, daily). Falls Creek Coach Service (☎ 5754 4024; www.pyles.com.au) operates between Falls Creek and Melbourne (return \$140, 6 hours, daily) and Mt Beauty (\$40, one hour, daily). Reduced summer services.

Car For Mt Buller, take the Marondah Hwy through Alexandra and Bonnie Doon to Mansfield. Alternatively, head up Melba Hwy to Yea then Bonnie Doon. Mt Hotham can be reached via either the Hume Fwy (M31) and the Great Alpine Rd to Bright, or the Princes Hwy (A1) to Bairnsdale then north up Great Alpine Rd. In winter contact Mount Hotham Resort Management Board (☎ 5759 3550) to check road conditions before deciding which route to take. For Falls Creek, take the Hume Fwy and Great Alpine Rd to Mt Beauty then Bogong High Plains Rd.

Information

The **Mt Buller Resort Management Board** (☎ 5777 6077; www.mtbuller.com.au; Level 5, Community Centre, Summit Rd; ☎ 8.30am-5pm) also opens an information office in the village square in winter. Entrance fees to the Horse Hill day car park in winter are \$32 per car. You can take the quad chairlift from here into the skiing area – ski hire and lift tickets are available at the base of the chairlift. There's a free day-tripper shuttle bus service into and around the village. If you have luggage, a 4WD taxi service is available around town (adult/child \$8.50/6.50) and from the overnight car park (\$12/8). Lift tickets cost \$94/50 per adult/child. Combined lift-and-lesson packages start at \$94. University students get discounted tickets; age a bit (over 65) and you get a 50% discount; 70-year-olds ski for free!

Festivals & Events

Mt Buller holds an array of event weekends throughout the year. Check the calendar on www.mtbuller.com.au or contact the Mansfield visitors centre (p306). Highlights include the **Buller Beerfest**, in mid-January, and **Kids' Weekend**, held on the Australia Day weekend.

Eating

You'll find plenty of great dining experiences here in summer, and in winter the choice is endless. Year-round eateries include the following:

Cattleman's Café (☎ 5777 7942; base of Bourke St; mains \$9-17; ☎ breakfast & lunch Mon-Fri Oct-May, breakfast, lunch & dinner daily Jun-Sep) A top spot using local produce.

Uncle Pat's Lounge Café (☎ 5777 6494; Cow Camp Plaza; mains \$8-30; ☎ dinner Thu-Sat Oct-May, breakfast, lunch & dinner daily Jun-Sep) A family-friendly restaurant that serves pasta, burgers and stir-fries.

Supermarket (☎ 5777 6133; Athletes Walk; ☎ 10am-1pm & 4-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sat & Sun summer, 9am-6pm winter) The licensed supermarket carries all the usual stuff, gourmet items, a full range of fresh produce and newspapers.

Mt Buller Chalet (☎ 5777 6566; lunch from \$8.50, mains \$26-38; Summit Rd; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner) There's a slew of restaurants, bars and cafés at this stunning chalet.

Arlberg Hotel (☎ 5777 6260; 189 Summit Rd; lunch from \$8, mains \$24-30; ☎ lunch & dinner) There's a full range of eats from fry-ups to fine dining at this much-loved hotel.

Breathtaker (☎ 5777 6377; 8 Breathtaker Rd) Pizzas (from \$15) after 4pm, a café/tapas (from \$7.50) range of eats from 10.30am till late, and fine dining (mains \$30-50) at its Signature Restaurant.

Drinking & Entertainment

There's no shortage of entertainment here in winter, but in summer you might have to make your own fun, or just kick back at the Chalet.

Mt Buller Village Cinema (☎ 5777 6077, 5777 6000; Level 4, Community Centre, Summit Rd; adult/child \$12.50/8.50). Australia's highest cinema shows latest

releases twice a week in summer, twice a day in winter.

Kooroora Hotel (☎ 5777 6050; Village Square; 🕒 5pm-midnight in summer, 7am-3am in winter) Rocks hard and late. There's live music on Wednesday night and most weekends, with the occasional top-line act.

Ski Club of Victoria (☎ 1300 554 709; Summit Rd; 🕒 7am-midnight in winter) The 'Whitt' (Ivor Whitaker Memorial Lodge) has bands playing during winter, and there are pool tables, a bar and restaurant.

Moosehead Bar (☎ 5777 6091, 5777 7899; Summit Rd; 🕒 5pm-1am in winter) This downstairs bar has plenty of atmosphere, snazzy cocktails and taps.

Sleeping

There are over 7000 beds on the mountain, with rates varying with summer/winter seasons. **Mt Buller Central Reservations** (☎ 1800 285 537; www.mtbuller.com.au) books accommodation; there's generally a two-night minimum stay on weekends.

Monash University Alpine Lodge (☎ 5777 6577; www.sport.monash.edu.au/alpine-lodge.html; 84 Stirling Rd; dm summer/winter from \$35/65) Right near the ski-lift ticket office, this grand lodge has four bunks to a room, a pleasant lounge, kitchen, TV room and drying room.

Andre's at Buller (☎ 5777 6966; www.andresatbuller.com; Cobbler Ln; d incl breakfast summer/winter from \$240/250) A useful ski-in/ski-out position and glorious sunsets at this luxurious chalet.

Mt Buller Chalet (☎ 5777 6566; www.mtbullerchalet.com.au; Summit Rd; d incl breakfast summer/winter from \$195/335; 🍷) Famous for its splendid appearance, the Chalet offers a range of suites, a library with billiard table, well-regarded eateries, an impressive sports centre and heated pool.

YHA Mt Buller (☎ 5777 6181; www.yha.com.au; The Ave; dm \$60-70) In winter this famous little YHA offers good facilities and friendly staff. Check out its colourful history.

MT HOTHAM

elevation 1868m

If you're serious about your hiking, mountain biking and skiing, you can't do better than Mt Hotham, with stunning alpine trails from November to May, and 245 hectares of downhill ski runs. About 80% of the ski trails are intermediate or advanced, with many double-black-diamond runs. The 'Big D' lift opens for **night skiing** every Wednesday and Saturday in

winter; the village chairlift opens for summer fun from late December to early January and at Easter. **Dinner Plain** (www.visitdinnerplain.com), just down the road, is a year-round village.

You can also off-piste ski in steep and narrow valleys here, and **cross-country ski** along 35km of trails winding through snowgum glades, or across the Bogong High Plains to Falls Creek. Below Mt Hotham village is a series of trails to Dinner Plain.

If you're on a bike, get the *Conquer the Seven Peaks* booklet and hit those mountain tops. The most popular trail in summer is to **Mt Feathertop** (1922m). This crosses the Razorback Ridge starting at the Diamantina Hut (2.5km from Mt Hotham village). It's 22km return and requires sound walking shoes (and strong knees and ankles!).

Don't venture out alone. **Adventures with Altitude** (☎ 5159 6608; www.adventureswithaltitude.com.au; Great Alpine Rd, Dinner Plain) runs fabulous hiking, biking (\$15/60/90 per hour/half-/full day) and horse riding (\$80/150/200) jaunts. You won't get lost, and you'll see all the good bits: trout-filled rivers, historic huts, snowgum forests, gold mines, wildlife and views. And you get fed! Bike hire (\$15/40/60) is also available.

Fairly new in Hotham is snow-kiting. If you like some extreme action, contact **Australian Adventure Experience** (☎ 5759 3550, 0417-028 004; www.ausadventures.com; 2hr \$90) and get some air with the help of a little parachute.

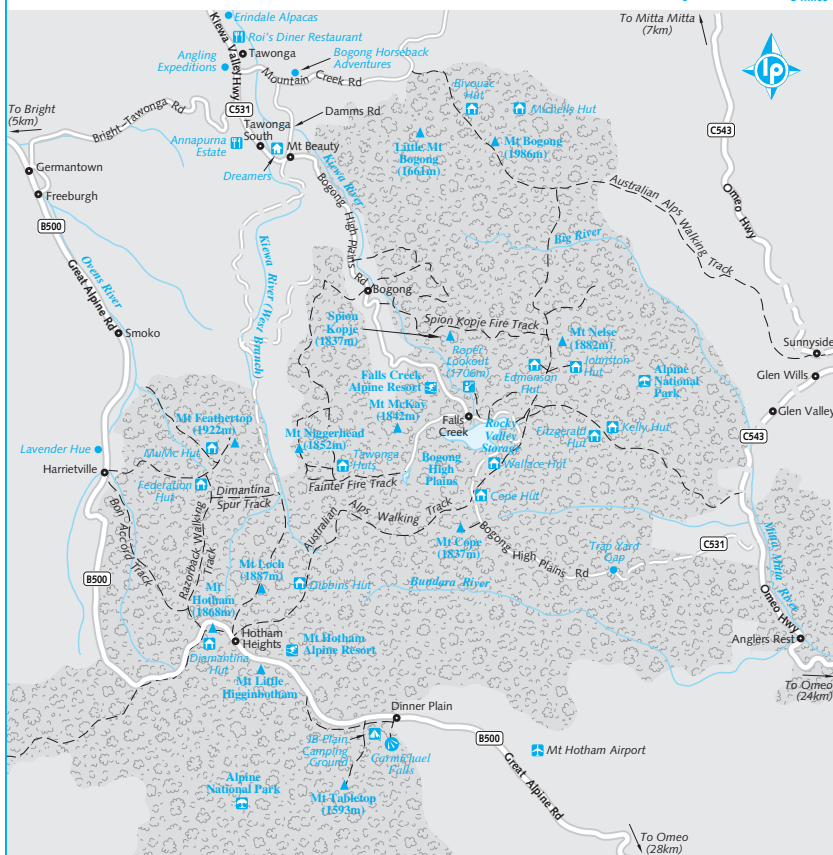
When the agony ends, head to **Onsen Retreat and Spa** (☎ 5150 8880; www.onsen.com.au; massage/treatment from \$65/135; 🕒 11am-7pm summer, 7am-9pm winter), a totally divine Japanese-influenced, indoor-outdoor experience where the body gets to feel beautiful. Ritual onsen bathing plus swim, sauna and gym is \$40.

Once the snow melts, fly-fishing begins, with **Flytrek Fly Fishing** (☎ 5159 1680, 0418 591 475; www.flytrek.com.au; 1/2-day \$175/465). Rod (that's his name) will teach you how to handle a rod. Prices include accommodation and everything you need.

Information

The ski-season admission fee is \$26 per car. Lift tickets per adult/student/child cost \$94/80/47. Lift-and-lesson packages are \$142 for adults. Lift tickets also cover Falls Creek. A free shuttle runs frequently around the resort from 7am to 3am; the free 'Zoo Cart' takes skiers from their lodges to the lifts between 8am and 6pm. A separate shuttle runs to Dinner Plain.

ALPINE NATIONAL PARK – BOGONG REGION



Helicopter Lift Link (☎ 1800 204 424; return flight \$69)

On clear days fly between Mt Hotham and Falls Creek in six minutes.

Mt Hotham Alpine Resort Management Board

(☎ 5759 3550; www.mthotham.com.au; 🕒 8am-4pm Mon-Fri Oct-May, daily Jun-Sep) At the village administration centre. Collect a range of brochures with maps for short, eco, heritage and village walks.

Festivals

Cool Summer Festival (☎ 1300 734 365; www.coolsummerfestival.com.au) Three days of music in the middle of nowhere; held in February or March.

Mountain Fresh Festival (☎ 5759 3550; www.mountainfresh.com.au) A week of food and wine with altitude; held in mid-July.

Eating

In winter, there are plenty of great eating choices here. In summer a couple of places serve meals and the small supermarket at General is open.

General (☎ 5759 3523; Great Alpine Rd; meals \$7-25; 🕒 lunch & dinner) This pub does pizzas and counter meals; it's a popular watering hole, summer and winter, offering internet access, a post office and ATM.

Zirky's (☎ 5759 3542; Great Alpine Rd; meals \$10-14; 🕒 breakfast & lunch Wed-Sun) The café here opens all year, while the Austrian-inspired restaurant (open for dinner in winter) is loved for its fine food.

Only open in winter, but with excellent reputations:

Swindlers (☎ 5759 3436; Hotham Central; mains \$16-40; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) Features an impressive Mod Oz menu, a lovely deck and grand bar that rocks till 2am.

White Room (☎ 5759 3456; Hotham Central; mains \$28-36; ☺ lunch & dinner) Fine dining and an atmospheric cocktail bar where you can chill till late.

Sleeping

Ski-season accommodation generally has a minimum two-night stay. Booking agencies:

Mt Hotham Accommodation Service (☎ 1800 032 061, 5759 3636; www.mthothamaccommodation.com.au; Lawlers Apartments) Books mountain accommodation during the ski season.

Mt Hotham Central Reservations (☎ 1800 657 547, 5759 3522; www.mthotham-centralres.com.au) Books on- and off-mountain accommodation throughout the year.

Mt Hotham Reservation Centre (☎ 1800 354 555; www.hotham.net.au; Hotham Central) Operates all year.

Summer accommodation includes the following:

Asgaard Alpine Club (☎ 1300 767 434; www.asgaard.com.au; Great Alpine Rd; s summer/winter \$55/59) The price includes breakfast and linen.

Gravbrot Ski Club (☎ 5759 3533; www.gravbrot.com; Great Alpine Rd; s summer/winter \$90/100) The price includes breakfast and dinner; bring your own linen.

FALLS CREEK

elevation 1780m

Australia's upmarket, fashion-conscious resort, Falls Creek combines a picturesque Alpine setting with impressive skiing and infamous *après-ski* entertainment. Skiing is spread over two main areas – the **Village Bowl** and **Sun Valley** – with 19 lifts and a vertical drop of 267m. Falls is also the freeride snowboard capital, with four parks and lessons on jumping berms, jibbing rails and riding boxes. The best **cross-country skiing** in Australia is also here. **Night skiing** in the Village Bowl operates several times a week. The Summit chairlift also runs over the Christmas and Easter breaks.

The best local **hiking** trails include the walk to Wallace Hut, built in 1889, and said to be the oldest cattleman's hut in the High Country.

A great **summer program** (☎ 1800 232 557) includes an outdoor cinema and guided tours: climb Mt McKay at sunset (\$25) with some bubbly and canapés; cruise over the top with Heli Link (\$99); take a giant swing, high-rope or climbing-wall

climb (\$35); or have a blast on the new skate ramp in the Village Bowl (free).

In winter the **Activities Hotline** (☎ 1800 204 424) snowsports program includes snocce (bocce on snow), snowshoe walks and dragon performances. Operators can set you up with a double-black-diamond rush with **Kat Skiing/Boating** (half-day \$69) where you hitch a lift on a heated Kassbohrer (snow kat) up Mt McKay.

Falls Creek Ski Lifts (☎ 5758 1000, 0438-458 726) offers a bungy trampoline experience, scenic chairlift rides and tennis (court hire \$10 per hour). **Parks Victoria** (☎ 13 19 63; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au) can give you info on boating and canoeing at adjacent Rocky Valley Lake. At the end of the day (or in the middle) go to **Endota Huski Day Spa** (☎ 5758 3848; www.endota.com.au; Huski Lodge) for the body beautiful.

The High Country is famous for its horse-men. Join in the fun with **Packers High Country Horse riding** (☎ 5159 7241; www.horsetreks.com; 1½hr/half-/full-day \$80/120/180), riding through river valleys and snowgum forests, down the road to Omeo.

Don't forget **mountain biking** (☎ 1800 232 557). There are downhill trails, lift-accessed trails, spur fire trails, aqueduct trails, road circuits and bike rental.

Information

The free booklet *falls creek* has stacks of info; the ☎ 1800 232 557 number will hook you up with accommodation and activities. Ski season daily resort entry is \$30 per car. Lift tickets cost \$94/80/47 per adult/student/child. Combined lift-and-lesson packages cost \$142/120/96. Lift tickets also cover Mt Hotham. An over-snow taxi service operates between the car parks and the lodges (\$31 return) from 8am to midnight daily (to 2am Friday night). Car parking for day visitors is at the base of the village, next to the ski lifts.

Helicopter Lift Link (☎ 1800 204 424; return flight \$69) On clear days fly between Falls Creek and Mt Hotham in six minutes.

Resort Management (☎ 1800 033 079, 5758 3224; www.falls creek.com.au; bottom of Gully chairlift; ☺ 9am-5pm) Has informative pamphlets including *crosscountry* (about ski trails which are also good for summer walking).

Festivals & Events

Taste of Falls Creek Festival (☎ 1800 232 557; www.falls creek.com.au/tasteoffalls creek) A food and wine festival in early January.

Mile High Dragon Boat Festival (☎ 1800 232 557; www.falls creek.com.au/dragonboats) Gorgeous, glorious dragon boats race on Rocky Valley Lake held 26 to 27 January.

Easter Festival (☎ 1800 232 557; www.falls creek.com.au/easterfestival) A giant Easter-egg hunt.

Kangaroo Hoppet (☎ 5754 1045; www.hoppet.com.au) Australia's premier long-distance cross-country ski race; held in August.

Eating

Most accommodation places make you feed yourself – quality kiosks, cafés and restaurants around. The following are open all year:

Winterhaven Restaurant (☎ 5758 3888; 7 Schuss St; mains \$18-35; ☺ dinner Wed-Sun Oct-May, lunch & dinner Jun-Sep) Great menu; bookings essential; bar open nightly from 5pm till late.

Gateway Café & Bar (☎ 5758 3646; 1 Bogong High Plains Rd; meals \$8-14; ☺ breakfast & lunch Mon-Fri Oct-May, breakfast & lunch daily & dinner Tue-Thu Jun-Sep) Busy, busy, busy. Join the fun!

Falls Creek Licensed Supermarket (☎ 5758 3355; Hub Complex, Falls Ck Rd; ☺ 10am-5.30pm Oct-May, 8.30am-7pm Jun-Sep) Feeding yourself is not so difficult!

In winter, favourites include the following two options.

Café Max (☎ 5758 3347; 27 Falls Creek Rd; ☺ breakfast, lunch & dinner) A very social café in the Village Bowl serving tasty Mod Oz dishes and *après* drinks.

Summit Ridge (☎ 5758 3800; 8 Schuss St; mains \$18-34; ☺ dinner) A rustic restaurant offering fine dining with crisp Asian flavours and an extensive wine list; feel free to scan the shelves. Bookings essential.

Entertainment

Man (☎ 5758 3362; www.falls creek.com.au/themanhotel; 20 Slalom St; ☺ 5pm-1.30am) 'The Man' hotel has been around forever, is open all year and is a top nightspot. In winter it becomes a club, cocktail bar and live-music venue featuring popular Aussie bands. Very good pub dinners and pizzas are available (\$11 to \$28).

Milch Cafe Wine Bar (☎ 5758 3770; Schuss St; mains \$12-18; ☺ from 11.30am) The café here is open all year, until 1am in winter.

Cinema Glo (☎ 5758 3407; www.fvfalls.com.au; Schuss St; tickets \$5; ☺ noon-6pm) Downstairs from Milch, this cinema shows movies on a wide screen.

Sleeping

All accommodation at Falls is above the snow-line, so in winter the lodges are truly ski-in, ski-out. The following two options are open year-round.

Alpha Lodge (☎ 5758 3488; www.alphaskilodge.com.au; 5 Parallel St; dm summer/winter from \$56/130) A spacious lodge set up with a sauna, a large lounge with panoramic views and a communal kitchen.

Frueauf Village (☎ 1300 300 709; www.fvfalls.com.au; d summer from \$150, winter 2-nights from \$470; ☺) These luxurious, architect-designed apartments have everything, with private outdoor hot tubs, plus the funky Milch Cafe Wine Bar and Cinema Glo on hand.

Accommodation may be booked via several agencies, including the following:

Falls Creek Central Reservations (☎ 1800 033 079; www.falls creek.com.au/centralreservations)

Falls Creek Reservation Centre (☎ 1800 453 525; www.falls creek.com.au/reservationcentre)

MOUNTAIN BASES MANSFIELD

pop 2850

This is an all-seasons destination that outdoor enthusiasts get really excited about. There's stacks to do, from skiing at Mt Buller to horse-back rides through the mountains, to spending the night at a zoo.

The three Mansfield police officers killed at Stringybark Creek by Ned Kelly and his gang in 1878 rest in **Mansfield Cemetery**. There's also a monument (1879) to the slain officers in the centre of the roundabout in High St.

Mansfield Zoo (☎ 5777 3576; www.mansfieldzoo.com.au; 1064 Mansfield Woods Point Rd; adult/child/family \$15/8/44; ☺ 10am-evening) is a fabulous surprise. Hand-reared animals and birds look healthy and eager for you to feed them from your bucket of bits. Two sleepy lions regard you earnestly, but decide the fence is too high. If you're older than eight, you can sleep in the paddocks in a swag (adult/child \$65/45) and wake to the dawn chorus.

If the adrenalin is still flowing, let it rush with **Adrenalin White Water Rafting** (☎ 0438-298 288; www.whitewater rafting.com.au; 1092 Upper King River Rd, Ches-hunt; big-boat rafting from \$155), which will take you out on the King River. Try the indulgence package (raft, wine, dine) and stay the night for \$295.

Want to get off-road? Join a **High Country Scenic Tour** (☎ 5777 5101; www.highcountryscenic tours.com.au;

TRANSPORT: MOUNTAIN BASES

Distance from Melbourne Mansfield 185km, Bright 326km, Mt Beauty 357km

Direction Northeast

Travel times Mansfield two hours, Bright 3½ hours, Mt Beauty 3½ hours

Bus & Train V/Line (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) coaches run between Melbourne's Southern Cross station and Mansfield (return \$39, three hours, twice daily). For Bright (\$51, five hours, daily) there's a change at Wangaratta from train to coach. From Mt Beauty, Falls Creek Coach Service (☎ 5754 4024; www.pyles.com.au) has a taxi connection with the Bright service to Melbourne (return \$140, 5½ hours, three weekly).

Car See p301. Each journey from base-town to mountain resort takes an hour.

☞ Nov-May), which has exciting 4WD day-tours from \$120 per person.

Alpine Helicopter (☎ 0428 376 619; www.alpineheli.com.au; flights from \$150) runs themed helicopter flights, such as 'Cattlemen's Huts', 'Ned Kelly Country' and 'Rivers & Waterfalls'.

Take yourselves and the little tacklers on a trail ride with one of the local horse riding companies:

High Country Horses (☎ 5777 5590; www.highcountryhorses.com.au; Mt Buller Rd, Merrijig; 2hr/half-day rides \$65/80, overnight from \$435; ☞ summer only) Takes you to the top of the world, or just splash across a creek and feel the serenity.

McCormacks Mountain Valley Trail Rides (☎ 5775 2886; www.mountainvalleytrailrides.com; 12 Reynolds St, Mansfield; 2hr/half-day \$55/80, 4-day getaway \$890; ☞ summer only) Heads off to the King or Howqua Valleys, or wherever you like.

Watson's Mountain Country Trail Rides (☎ 5777 3552; www.watsonstrailrides.com.au; Three Chains Rd, Boorolite; 1/2hr \$35/60; ☞ daily) A peaceful property where you can learn or just take off. One of the highlights is the downhill area featured in *The Man from Snowy River*.

Information

Mansfield & Mt Buller High Country visitors centre

(☎ 5775 2518, 1800 039 049; www.mansfield-mtbuller.com.au; Maroondah Hwy; ☞ 9am-5pm Oct-May, 8am-9pm Jun-Sep) In the Old Railway Station. Displays include a felt mural of pioneer women and screens featuring local personalities. The centre books general accommodation for the region (including Eildon), ski accommodation and sells lift tickets.

Festivals & Events

There are festive occasions throughout the year, plus regular café concerts and theatre productions backed by the Performing Arts Centre. Festival highlights:

High Country Autumn Festival (www.mansfield-mtbuller.com.au) Markets, picnics and a rodeo in early March.

Upper Goulburn Wine Region Vintage Celebrations (☎ 5777 3447; www.uppergoulburnwine.org.au) Local wines, musicians and chefs make for three fun days in April.

Mansfield-Mt Buller High Country Spring Arts Festival (☎ 1800 039 049; www.artsmansfield.com) Rodeo, Melbourne Cup-day picnic races, art exhibitions and bush markets in the first week of November.

Eating

This is an arty area, and the ski crowd passes through feeling ravenous – a recipe for many pleasant eating spots. High St has an annual Food & Wine on High festival over a weekend in late February.

FORTY one (☎ 5775 2951; 41 High St; mains \$8-17; ☞ breakfast & lunch) Enjoy gourmet surprises in a sunny courtyard.

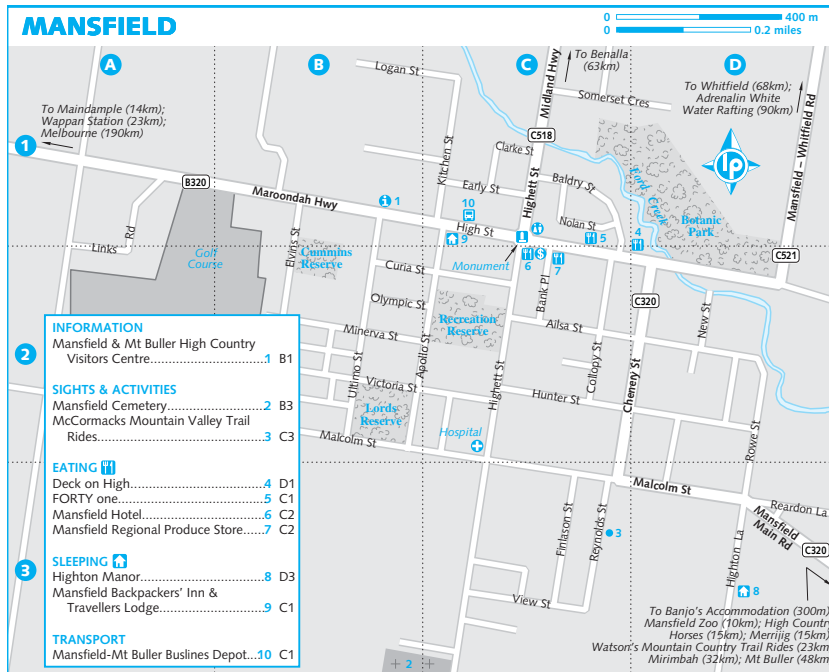
Mansfield Regional Produce Store (☎ 5889 1404; 68 High St; mains \$12-19; ☞ breakfast & lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Fri) This rustic store sells an array of local produce and artisan breads, giftware out the back and excellent meals.

Mansfield Hotel (☎ 5775 2101; 86 High St; mains \$13-25; ☞ lunch & dinner) Yes, it's a pub, but walk through to the attractive dining area and Mediterranean courtyard where kids play equipment is tucked into a large corner. The food is truly good.

Deck on High (☎ 5775 1955; 15 High St; mains \$18-33; ☞ lunch & dinner) There's a relaxed vibe at this striking bar, with its red couches and dining area up on the deck. The food is Asian fusion.

Sleeping

Mansfield Backpackers' Inn & Travellers Lodge (☎ 5775 1800; www.mansfieldtravellodge.com; 116 High St; dm \$25, s/d/f from \$85/95/185; ☞) Perfectly placed in the centre of town, with spacious dorms in a restored heritage building and large, spotless motel rooms.



There's a kitchen, table tennis and discount coupons for local restaurants and activities.

Highton Manor (☎ 5775 2700; www.hightonmanor.com.au; 140 Highton Ln; dm \$60, d stable/manor/tower \$130/\$200/\$365 incl breakfast; ☞) Built in 1896 for Francis Hightett, who sang with Dame Nellie Melba, this stately two-storey manor has beds in a group/party room, modern rooms in the stables, and lavish period-rooms in the main house.

Banjo's Accommodation (☎ 5775 2335; www.banjosmansfield.com.au; cnr Mt Buller Rd & Greenvale Ln; d/tr/q from \$90/110/130; ☞) Looking great on the edge of town, these units are self-contained, modern and spacious.

Wappan Station (☎ 5778 7786; www.wappanstation.com.au; Royal Town Rd, Maindample; shearers' quarters adult/

child \$30/15, cottages d from \$150; ☞) Watch farm activities from your deck at this sheep-and-cattle property on the banks of Lake Eildon. There's a two-night minimum stay, but bring some friends and the price will hardly change – charges for extra people are minimal.

BRIGHT

pop 2100

Most spectacular in autumn when its leafy avenues and gardens are really showing their colours, this picturesque holiday town in the foothills of the Alps is a popular base year-round. Bright (www.brightvictoria.com.au) is perfectly placed to provide access to the wonders of the **Alpine National Park**, the Falls Creek and Mt Hotham ski resorts, and a wide range of outdoor adventure activities. To top it off, the abundance of local produce, coupled with the savvy ski tourists passing through, has made for a sophisticated restaurant scene.

Trails around Bright include the 3km loop **Canyon Walk**, 4km **Cherry Walk** and a 6km track to **Wandiligong** that follows Morses Creek. Collect the brochure *Short Walks around Bright* from the visitors centre.

CRAIG'S HUT

Cattlemen built huts throughout the High Country from the 1850s on, but most iconic is Craig's Hut, built in 1981 for the film *The Man From Snowy River*. It was changed from a film set into a more substantial visitors centre 10 years later, then rebuilt in 2003. In 2006 it was totally burnt down by bushfires. Rebuilt (again) in 2007, people also go to the site for the breath-taking views.

If you're cycling, the **Murray to the Mountains Rail Trail** (below) starts behind the old train station. Bikes, tandems and baby trailers can be rented from **Cyclepath Adventures** (☎ 5750 1442; 74 Gavan St; per hr/half-/full-day \$16/20/28; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm Sat & Sun). Cyclepath also leads bike tours through the hills around Bright.

Alternatively, get off your bike and get airborne:

Active Flight (☎ 0428-854 455; www.activeflight.com.au) Introductory paragliding (\$130) or extended scenic flights (from \$180).

Alpine Paragliding (☎ 5755 1753; www.alpineparagliding.com; 100 Gavan St; ☎ Oct-Jun) Offers 10-minute high-glides from Mystic (\$130) or 30-minute thermalling flights (\$180).

Bright Microflights (☎ 5750 1555; brightmicroflights@swiftsdl.com.au) Takes you on powered hang-glider flights over Porepunkah (\$70) or Mt Buffalo (\$155).

Eagle School of Microlighting & Hang Gliding (☎ 5750 1174; www.eagleschool.com.au; flights from \$70) Will make you feel like a bird.

Back on the ground, take a yummo food-and-wine tour in a stretch limo with **Elm Lodge Limousine Tours** (☎ 5755 1144; tours \$75; ☎ 1.30-5.30pm by arrangement) or try its country pub tour on Saturday night (\$90). Speaking of pubs, **Bright Brewery** (☎ 5755 1301; www.brightbrewery.com.au; 121 Gavan St; ☎ from noon) produces a range of beers (sample five for \$9) and runs tours (ring to book a time). Love it? Be a 'Brewer for the Day' (\$320) or ask for the *High Country Brewery Trail* brochure and head off to the microbreweries at Rutherglen, Beechworth, Porepunkah, Buffalo and Jamieson.

Try abseiling (\$185 per day) or visit a glow-worm river-cave (from \$99) with **Adventure**

Guides Australia (☎ 5755 1851; www.adventureguidesaustralia.com.au), or join **5 Star Adventures** (☎ 5759 2555; www.5staradventure.com.au; 120 Great Alpine Rd) for a half-day kayaking (\$115), an alpine dinner tour (\$60), or just a coffee in their office/café. **North East Off-road Tours** (☎ 0418-579 218; www.neoffroadtours.com.au) offers alpine 4WD and tag-along tours.

Information

Bright visitors centre (☎ 1300 551 117; www.brightescapes.com.au; 119 Gavan St; ☎ 9am-5pm) Has an accommodation-booking service and Parks Victoria information.

Festivals & Events

Bright Autumn Festival (☎ 5755 2275; www.brightautumnfestival.org.au) Open gardens, scenic convoy tours and a popular gala day; held April or May.

Bright Spring Festival (☎ 5755 2275; www.brightspringfestival.org.au) Celebrate all things Bright and beautiful in October or November.

Eating

Riverdeck Cafe (☎ 5755 2199; Great Alpine Rd; dishes \$9-16; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Sit on the deck overlooking the park and enjoy the wide outdoors.

Liquid Am-Bar (☎ 5755 2318; 8 Anderson St; mains \$19-25; ☎ dinner Thu-Tue) Locals and visitors pack into this cosy shopfront with great pasta choices and robust mountain fare.

Cosy Kangaroo (☎ 5750 1838; 93 Gavan St; mains \$19-25; ☎ dinner Thu-Tue) Truly a family restaurant, with a play cubby for kids, fab coffee and a menu that includes local trout cooked to perfection.

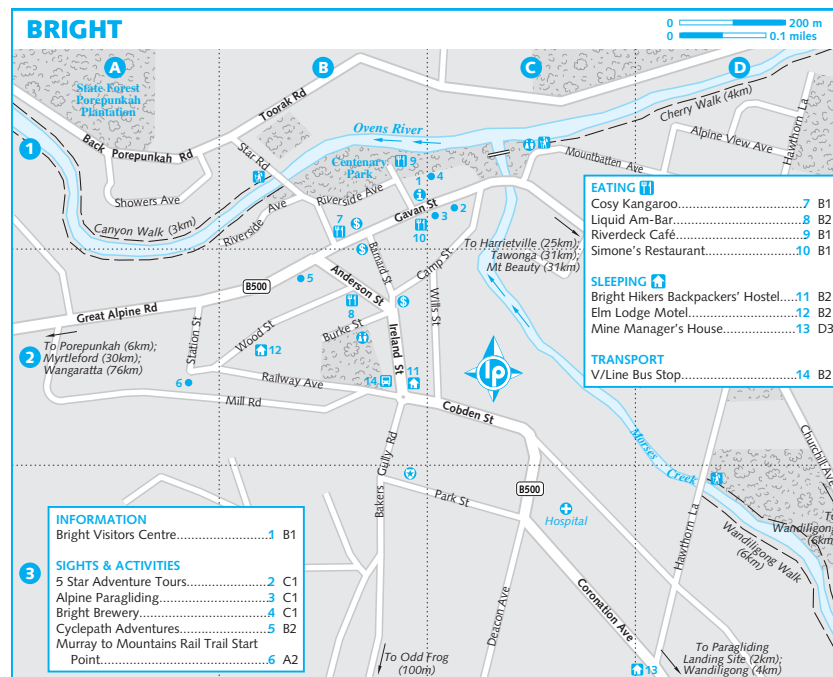
Simone's Restaurant (☎ 5755 2266; 98 Gavan St; mains \$32-35; ☎ dinner Tue-Sat) Outstanding Italian food

GET ONYA BIKE

The **Murray to the Mountains Rail Trail** (☎ 5751 1283; www.railtrail.com.au) is one of the best ways to experience the High Country as you ride (or walk) through spectacular rural scenery, enjoying river gums, mountain ash, spring blossoms and snow-capped ranges. The 94km trail follows the path of disused railways between the townships of Wangaratta, Beechworth, Myrtleford, Porepunkah and Bright.

Break up the journey and explore the area: stop off for a cold beer in a country pub, feast on some regional produce, or spend a day or two in one of the many comfortable local B&Bs.

Aficionados say the 16km between Everton and Beechworth is the best part of the trail (despite a challenging uphill section), as you're cycling through the bush. When you reach the highest point traditional vineyard **Pennyweight** (☎ 5728 1747; www.pennyweight.com.au; off Diffey Rd; ☎ 10am-5pm) is ready to offer sustenance. The landscapes and views along all the sections are tremendous. There's good signage, several toilet and water stops and all the towns en route have bike-hire facilities. If you're car-free and don't want to return via the same route, think about catching the train to Wangaratta then the local bus to Bright or Beechworth, then riding back to Wang. **Bus-a-Bike** (☎ 5752 2974) carries up to 11 people and their bikes to wherever, from wherever, along the trail. Ring to arrange your pick-up.



in a heritage-listed house, with a focus on local ingredients and seasonal produce.

Sleeping

There's an abundance of accommodation here, but rooms are scarce during the holiday seasons – book ahead. There are several caravan and camping grounds along the Ovens River.

Bright Hikers Backpackers' Hostel (☎ 5750 1244; backpackers@brighthouse.com.au; 4 Ireland St; dm/s/tw \$21/30/44; ☎) This little gem in the middle of town justifies the good reports. There's a cosy lounge for winter nights, and a huge veranda for summer lazing in the hammock.

Elm Lodge Motel (☎ 5755 1144; www.elmlodge.com.au; 2 Wood St; s/d from \$65/75; ☎) There are rooms to suit all budgets in this restored 1950s pine mill set in a gorgeous garden. The friendly owners can help you plan your activities.

Odd Frog (☎ 5755 2123; www.theoddfrog.com; 3 McFadyens Ln; d from \$190) Expect to be impressed with these contemporary, eco-friendly studios with fabulous outdoor decks.

Mine Manager's House (☎ 5755 1702; 30 Coronation Ave; d \$205) Restored to its 1892 glory, this graceful guesthouse has a gorgeous English-style garden.

MT BEAUTY

pop 1700

Nestled at the foot of Mt Bogong (Victoria's highest mountain), Mt Beauty is a handy base for Falls Creek. The pretty 2km **Tree Fern Walk** and slightly longer **Peppermint Walk** both start from Mountain Creek Picnic & Camping Reserve on Mountain Creek Rd, off Kiewa Valley Hwy. Find out about bushwalking, boating and swimming spots at the visitors centre.

Bike rides through the mountains are organised by **Rocky Valley Bikes** (☎ 5754 1118; www.rockyvalley.com.au; Kiewa Valley Hwy; rides beginner/advanced \$25/95). Bike hire is available from \$20 per half-day.

Annapurna Estate (☎ 5754 4517; www.annapurnaestate.com.au; Simmonds Creek Rd, Tawonga South; meals \$12-28; ☎ 10am-5pm Wed-Sun) is a stunning vineyard. So is the food, served all day on a lovely deck looking over the vines. Stay on for dinner on Saturday.

This is a world-renowned **trout-fishing** area, and fly-fishing trips are run by **Angling Expeditions** (☎ 5754 1466; www.anglingvic.com.au; 82 Kiewa Valley Hwy, Tawonga; trips per 1/2/3/4 people from \$205/110/90/70). Sleep over at the Tawonga Fishing Lodge (B&B from \$25), then experience this beautiful area on the back of a horse with **Bogong Horseback**

Adventures (☎ 5754 4849; www.bogonghorse.com.au; Mountain Creek Rd, Tawonga; 2hr/half-/full-day \$70/80/160).

Just 5km north of Tawonga you can handfeed the alpacas at picturesque **Erindale Alpacas** (☎ 5754 5330; www.erindale-alpacas.com.au; Reids Ln; ☞ 10am-5pm Wed-Sun & school holidays). To get here, turn off Kiewa Valley Hwy onto Red Bank Rd.

Information

The Commonwealth (with ATM) and ANZ Banks have branches in the shopping centre.

Mt Beauty visitors centre (☎ 1800 111 885; www.visitalpinevictoria.com.au; 31 Bogong High Plains Rd; ☞ 9am-5pm) Has an accommodation-booking service (enquiries@alpinshire.vic.gov.au), a working hydroelectric model and displays on the history and nature of the region.

Eating

Roi's Diner Restaurant (☎ 5754 4495; 177 Kiewa Valley Hwy, Tawonga; mains \$18-25; ☞ dinner Thu-Sun) A timber shack on the highway which is actually an award-winning restaurant, offering exceptional modern-Italian cuisine.

Bogong Hotel (☎ 5754 4449; 169 Kiewa Valley Hwy, Tawonga; mains \$16-27; ☞ lunch Sat & Sun, dinner daily) An obvious spot for a beer. Enjoy your meal looking out over the snow-capped mountains.

Sleeping

There's camping along the Kiewa River and several good-looking motels along the highway.

Braeview (☎ 5754 4756; www.braeview.com.au; 4 Stewarts Rd; B&B from \$120) Has traditional rooms with scrumptious country breakfasts served on the balcony, and a self-contained cottage with spa and white, fluffy bathrobes.

Dreamers (☎ 5754 1222; www.dreamers1.com; Kiewa Valley Hwy, Tawonga South; d from \$200; ☞) An enchanting collection of timber-and-stone cottages built around a peaceful lagoon.

NATIONAL PARKS & GATEWAYS

BAW BAW NATIONAL PARK

All walks are rewarding in Baw Baw National Park, an offshoot of the Great Dividing Range encompassing the Baw Baw Plateau and the forested valleys of the Thomson and Aberfeldy Rivers. Walk along marked tracks through sub-alpine vegetation, ranging from open eucalypt

stands to wet gullies and tall forests on the plateau. The 3km **Mushroom Rocks Walk** from Mt Erica car park leads to huge granite tors (blocks of granite broken off from the massif). The main access roads are the Baw Baw Rd from Noojee and the new South Face Rd off Thomson Valley Rd. The highest points are **Mt St Phillack** (1566m) and **Mt Baw Baw** (1564m). The higher sections of the park are covered with snow in winter, when everyone heads for **Baw Baw Village** ski resort and **Mt St Gwinear** cross-country skiing area.

There is a camping area in the northeastern section, with picnic tables, fireplaces and pit toilets. Dispersed **bush camping** (unpowered sites free) is also allowed on the Baw Baw Plateau (fuel stove only). A section of the **Australian Alps Walking Track** (p310; www.net.net.au/bushwalking/alpswalk), which starts its 655km journey at Walhalla, passes by a few kilometres from Baw Baw Village. Walkers have a designated camp site at Eastern Tyers camping area in the south of the park.

BAW BAW VILLAGE

pop 11

This small, downhill-skiing resort is a relaxed option for beginners and families, and is seldom overcrowded. There are good beginner-to-intermediate runs and a couple of harder runs. The downhill skiing area is 35 hectares with a vertical drop of 140m. Baw Baw is also a base for **cross-country skiing**, with plenty of trails, including one that connects to the Mt St Gwinear trails on the southern edge of the plateau. Ski patrols operate during the season, and **Mt Baw Baw Ski Hire** (☎ 1800 629 578, 5165 1120; www.bawbawskihire.com.au; Currawong Rd) hires skis and ski gear. The day car park costs \$35 per car if the ski lifts are operating (\$25 if they're not). Lifts per adult/child cost \$71/41 per day; lift-and-lesson packages are \$95/70. There's a new **Cactus Rail Park** for freestyle riders (or anyone who's cactus?), a toboggan park and snowplay area.

In the centre of the village, **Mt Baw Baw Alpine Resort Management** (☎ 5165 1136; www.mountbawbaw.com.au) runs things, offering general tourist information and an **accommodation service** (☎ 1300 651 136). Lodges and eateries are open year-round.

Kelly's Cafe (☎ 5165 1120; 11 Frosti Ln; mains \$16-24; ☞ breakfast, lunch & dinner) This rustic favourite is a ski-in in winter. Its pizzas are famous, but you can't really go past the bangers and mash for \$10 at lunchtime. If you're too exhausted from hiking and skiing, it will deliver.

Village Central Sea2Sky Restaurant (☎ 5165 1123; Alpine Resort, Currawong Rd; mains \$18-25; ☞ lunch Fri-Mon &

TRANSPORT: NATIONAL PARKS & GATEWAYS

Distance from Melbourne Marysville 95km, Eildon 170km, Baw Baw Village 170km, Myrtleford 290km

Direction Northeast and East

Travel times Marysville one hour, Eildon two hours, Baw Baw Village 2½ hours, Myrtleford three hours

Bus & Train McKenzie's Tourist Services (☎ 5962 5088, 9853 6264; www.mckenzie.com.au) has a service to Marysville (return \$28, 2½ hours, daily) and Eildon (return \$46, 3½ hours, daily). V/Line (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) takes you to Myrtleford (\$51, 4½ hours, daily) with a change from train to coach at Wangaratta. V/Line trains to Warragul (\$16.50, 1½ hours, daily) connect with Baw Baw Betty Transport Service (www.mountbawbaw.com.au/location.aspx) coaches. Country Touch Tours (☎ 5963 3753; www.countrytouch.com.au) shuttles between Marysville and Lake Mountain (return \$30, 30 minutes most days in winter).

Car Travel up Maroondah Hwy, turning off at Lilydale for Yarra Junction and Baw Baw; at Narbethong for Marysville; or at Alexandra for Eildon. Myrtleford is an easy drive up Hume Fwy to the Snow Rd, taking you through the Milawa Gourmet region.

dinner by appointment Oct-May, lunch & dinner daily Jun-Sep) Look out over the village or west Gippsland while you enjoy Mod Oz meals specialising in local produce.

Kelly's Lodge B&B (☎ 5165 1129; www.kellyslodge.com.au; 11 Frosti Ln; r summer/winter \$120/275) A super-friendly place in the centre of everything, with comfortable rooms and a cosy lounge. You can cook in the shared kitchen or go through to Kelly's Cafe.

Alpine Hotel (☎ 1300 651 136; Currawong Rd; dm summer/winter from \$25/30, d \$90/120) The pub has motel-style accommodation as well as a backpacker dorm on the top floor. In winter the bar-café is a good spot to hang while local bands belt-out rock covers.

LAKE EILDON NATIONAL PARK

Surrounding most of Lake Eildon, Lake Eildon National Park covers over 27,000 hectares and provides excellent opportunities for walking and camping. Various 4WD tracks lead off the road into the park and across to the lake. There are walking tracks throughout, including **Candlebark Nature Walk**. From the 1850s, the areas around Lake Eildon were logged and mined for gold, so much of the vegetation is regrowth eucalypt forest. There are several busy lakeside **camping areas** (unpowered sites per 4 people \$15) at Coller Bay in the Fraser section that are equally popular with kangaroos. Showers and pit toilets are available; no bookings are taken. A kiosk sells basic supplies at the gate to Coller Bay; admission is \$8 per car.

There's an established camping ground with toilets and showers, café and licensed grocery store at **Jerusalem Creek Marina & Camping Ground** (☎ 5774 2585; www.jerusalemcreekmarina.com.au;

501 Jerusalem Creek Rd, Eildon; unpowered sites adult/child \$10/5). You can hire a picnic boat (per two hours/day \$70/250) or a luxury 'boatel' (per night from \$100) from the marina.

If you prefer to bush camp, set up along the Eildon-Jamieson road. This road is steep, winding and unsealed in sections, but particularly scenic.

Lake Eildon was created as a massive reservoir for irrigation and hydroelectric schemes. Originally called Sugarloaf Reserve, the lake was constructed between 1915 and 1929 and flooded the town of Darlingford and surrounding farm homesteads. Today the lake covers 14,000 hectares. Recent drought years turned the area into a moonscape, but recent rain has improved this. Behind the dam wall the pondage spreads below Eildon township.

On the northern arm of the lake is **Bonnie Doon**, a popular weekend base, which reached icon status as the nondescript spot where the family in the satirical 1997 Australian film *The Castle* enjoyed the serenity.

EILDON

pop 740

This small, one-pub town is a popular recreation and holiday base, built in the 1950s to house Eildon Dam project workers. Drive across the top of the dam's massive retaining wall to a **lookout point**, boat-launching ramps and Lake Eildon National Park. A road leads around the lake to Jerusalem Inlet.

There are quiet walking and cycling trails along the pondage shores, which also give easy access to the best fishing spots. Ask at the visitors centre for the *Future Fish Eildon Fishing Trails* brochure with map.

Kids will love the touch-and-feel tanks and aquariums at the **Freshwater Discovery Centre** (☎ 5774 2208; Goulburn Valley Hwy, Snobs Creek; adult/child/family \$7/4.50/20; 🕒 11am–4pm Fri–Mon), a trout farm and hatchery that releases over one million fish each year. Alternatively, take them fishing at **Eildon Trout Farm** (☎ 5773 2377; www.eildontroutfarm.com.au; 460 Back Eildon Rd, Thornton; entry/fishing \$1/2; 🕒 9am–5pm) where you'll definitely catch a trout or salmon. Have it cleaned then buy it – you'll know it's fresh!

The lake and local rivers offer plenty of action to keep you wet all day long. **Hooked on the Goulburn Fishing Tours** (☎ 5772 2626, 0428-345 366; 1/2 people from \$35/40) takes you fishing or sight-seeing on selected sections of the Goulburn River. If you'd like to try fly-fishing, or are already hooked, go to **Goulburn Valley Fly-Fishing Centre** (☎ 5773 2513; www.goulburnvlyflyfishing.com.au; 1270 Goulburn Valley Way; fishing introductory/5hr \$45/198). Stay over in the cottages (single/double from \$105/140), which includes fishing in the private lake.

Mystic Mountains Outdoors (p314) is the only place in the area that rents out kayaks.

Stay relatively dry on a horse trail-ride through beautiful valleys, into the Great Divide and along the Rubicon Valley. **Rubicon Valley Horse-riding** (☎ 5773 2292; www.rubiconhorsriding.com.au; Rubicon Rd, Thornton; rides introductory/2hr/half-day \$45/65/90; 🕒 10am & 2pm) caters for all levels and runs overnight safaris, as does nearby **Stockman's Reward** (☎ 5774 2322; Goulburn Valley Hwy; rides 1/2hr \$35/65) towards Eildon. Tiny tots can ride ponies (\$10 to \$20 depending on age) in the yard here, or around the property.

If you prefer extreme water action, contact **Australian Adventure Experience** (☎ 5772 1440, 0417-028 004; admin@ausadventures.com) for canoeing, rafting, or rock-climbing (from \$88).

A trip further west past Yea to the **Kerrisdale Mountain Railway & Museum** (☎ 5797 0227; www.kerrisdalemtnrailway.com.au; 7523 Goulburn Valley Hwy, Kerrisdale; adult/child \$15/10; 🕒 10am–5pm Thu–Mon) is an absolute must. Countless cute trains chuff around a panoramic wildlife reserve.

The best way to experience Lake Eildon is to be on it. Hire a luxurious **houseboat** from one of the following operators, who set you up with a 10- or 12-berth houseboat (minimum hire per weekend from \$1100):

Eildon Houseboat Hire (☎ 0438-345 366; www.eildonhouseboathire.com.au)

Lake Eildon Marina & Houseboat Hire (☎ 5774 2107; www.houseboatholidays.com.au)

Information

Eildon visitors centre (☎ 5774 2909; www.lakeeildon.com; Main St; 🕒 10am–2pm) Opposite the shopping centre. Book accommodation and houseboats through Mansfield & Mt Buller High Country visitors centre (p306).

Eating

Vicki & Alberts Restaurant (☎ 5774 2865; 5 Hillside Ave; mains \$16–26; 🕒 dinner Thu–Mon) You'll be served a tasty home-cooked meal here.

Taste of Eildon (☎ 5774 2642; 1 Riverside Dr; mains \$12–19; 🕒 breakfast & lunch Thu–Mon, dinner Fri & Sat) This café-cum-gallery in the old general store sells gourmet food, wine and giftware.

Sleeping

Eildon Parkview Motor Inn (☎ 5774 2165; www.cute.com.au/parkview; 5 Hillside Ave; s/d from \$75/85) Right in the centre of town, yet with stacks of space both inside and out.

Robyn's Nest B&B (☎ 5774 2525, 0409-932 724; www.visitvictoria.com.au/robynsnest; 13 High St; d \$120–160) This magnificent B&B has private balconies looking over the Eildon Valley and Mt Torbreck. When you want to get active, hire one of Don's mountain bikes.

See left for details on hiring a houseboat.

ALPINE NATIONAL PARK

This park is a spectacular and fragile environment with diverse vegetation. Eucalypt forests range from stringybark and peppermint in the lower reaches, to blue gum, mountain ash, alpine ash and snowgum in the higher areas. In spring and summer the areas above the snowline are carpeted with beautiful wild flowers. More than 1100 plant species have been recorded in the park, including 12 that are unique to Australia.

Declared a national park in December 1989, its 646,000 hectares covers most of the High Country of the Great Dividing Range, and joins High Country areas of New South Wales (NSW) and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT).

There are plenty of access roads to and through the park, although in winter a number are closed. The opportunities for recreation and eco-tourism in the area are outstanding. **Bush camping** (unpowered sites free) is allowed; visitors should use designated camping grounds and observe fire bans. The area's many walking tracks include a major stretch of the **Australian**

CATTLE COUNTRY

When the National Trust bluntly stated in 2004 that mountain cattlemen are not as culturally important as the environment, which their activities damage, the High Country graziers were hoofing mad. In May 2005 the state government then announced a permanent ban on cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park – there was a major outcry. The **Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria** (www.mcv.com.au) is trying to preserve the 170-year-old practice of grazing. It argues that the tradition is important for all Australians, and are currently gaining scientific evidence to back their claim that grazing reduces fires and that sustainable alpine grazing is possible and sensible. They are determined to keep the heritage alive.

It's a romantic bush idyll, but the cattle grazing here each summer puts huge pressure on an environment already stressed from drought and bushfires. The damage has long been recognised. Cattle grazing has dramatically increased the spread of weeds, and caused massive erosion of moss-beds, bogs and stream banks from cattle trampling the fragile peaty soils. The National Parks Association says that about 20 plants and animals are listed as threatened by grazing in northeastern Victoria. If this complex, fragile environment has a future it will be based on sustainable management and not romantic tales of the past.

Cattle grazing in areas such as Mt Feathertop, Mt Hotham and Mt Bogong was phased out during the 1960s, and the state government has made a transitional payment to licence holders to take their cattle into the state forests. But anyone who has been to the High Country rodeos will empathise with this desire to maintain a tradition, at least in a controlled manner that the mountain men have proposed. And without their controlling presence, bushfires have recently raged through the area.

Perhaps governments need to look at the whole picture, consider the damage done by other users, find ways to get rid of the wild goats and brumbies, and perhaps join the cattlemen one summer day.

Alps Walking Track (p310) on its 655km way from Walhalla to the outskirts of Canberra.

Visitors centres can provide Parks Victoria notes, while Parks Victoria has a number of offices in the region for more specific queries.

MT BUFFALO NATIONAL PARK

Always one of the state's best-loved and most popular spots, spectacular Mt Buffalo National Park (31,000 hectares) was declared back in 1898. It was named in 1824 by the explorers Hume and Hovell on their trek from Sydney to Port Phillip; they thought its bulky shape resembled a buffalo. The main access road is out of **Porepunkah**.

The mountain is surrounded by huge granite boulders. There's abundant plant and animal life, many streams and waterfalls, and over 90km of walking tracks. The **Big Walk**, an 11km, five-hour ascent of the mountain starts from Eurobin Creek Picnic Area, north of Porepunkah, and finishes at the Gorge Day Visitor Area. Self-guided walks include the 2.5km-return **Gorge**, the 4km-return **View Point** and the 4km-return **Dickson's Falls Nature Walks**. A road leads to just below the summit of the Horn (1723m), the highest point on the massif.

In winter many roads and tracks here are closed, so always check. There are 14km of groomed **cross-country ski trails** starting out from the Cresta Valley car park. There may not be any downhill lifts operating, but hey, take a snowshoe shuffle!

The **Larder Café** (☎ 5755 1590; Dingo Dell; snacks \$7–15; 🕒 9am–5pm) has light meals, refreshments, a few supplies and some gear for hire, both in summer and winter.

In summer Mt Buffalo is a **hang-gliding** paradise, and the near-vertical walls of the Gorge provide some of Australia's most challenging **rock-climbing**. Check out the adventure companies in Bright (p307) for abseiling, caving, hang-gliding and rock-climbing opportunities, alpine-style (the more rain and snow the better!).

Nearby **Lake Catani** is good for swimming and canoeing, and has 54 camp sites.

Information

Mt Buffalo Entrance Station (☎ 5756 2320, 13 19 63; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au; Mt Buffalo Tourist Rd; 🕒 8.30am–3.30pm) A Parks Victoria office where you pay the \$10 per car entry fee and can get track information and camping permits. Collect the colourful **Mount Buffalo Plateau Vegetation Map** which shows trails and lookouts clearly.

MYRTLEFORD

pop 2700

Known as the 'Gateway to the Alps', Myrtleford is more than just an overnight stop en route to the snowfields. Ask for the **Myrtleford Discovery Trail Guide** at the visitors centre and check out the town's history as you stroll past labelled landmarks detailing each site's story.

The **Murray to the Mountains Rail Trail** (p308) follows a path close to the Great Alpine Rd from Gapsted (northwest of Myrtleford) south to Bright. **Myrtleford Cycle Centre** (☎ 5752 1511; 59 Clyde St; rental per day/weekend \$25/40; 🕒 10am-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) rents bikes and helmets.

Holiday Air Adventures (☎ 5753 5305; www.haa.com.au; 849 Happy Valley Rd, Rosewhite; flights from \$60) flies you over spectacular gorges and lakes in a Cessna Hawk XP.

Information

Myrtleford visitors centre (☎ 5752 1044; www.visitmyrtleford.com.au; 38 Myrtle St; 🕒 9am-5pm) Information and a booking service for the alpine valley area ski fields.

Eating

Alpine Gate Restaurant (☎ 1800 991 044; 38 Myrtle St (Great Alpine Rd), Myrtleford; mains \$9-18; 🕒 breakfast & lunch) A lovely spot in front of the visitors centre, with an airy ambience, chilled music and fab food.

Sleeping

Myrtleford Hotel (☎ 5752 1001; myrtleford.hotel@bigpond.com; 67 Standish St; s/d/f \$35/50/80) It's shiny-clean, spacious and there's a grand veranda.

Myrtle Creek Farmstay Cottages (☎ 5753 4447; www.myrtlecreekcottages.com; 5 Myrtleford-Stanley Rd; d \$128, child \$15) Feed alpacas and horses at this hands-on farm accommodation. The log cabins have spas and well-equipped kitchens.

LAKE MOUNTAIN

Part of Yarra Ranges National Park, Lake Mountain (1433m) has world-class facilities, with 37km of trails and several toboggan runs. It is renowned as the premier **cross-country ski resort** in Australia. In winter, ski patrols operate daily, and both summer and snow camping are allowed – there's no fee, but you *must* notify the Alpine visitors centre (see Information) of your intentions before heading out.

Walkers and mountain bikers make use of the ski trails in summer. Take the 4km **Summit Walk** (two hours return), which crosses alpine bogs and granite rock faces. It starts from Gerraty's car park.

Information

The daily admission fee is \$27 per car; the trail fee is from \$10/5.50 per adult/child.

Alpine visitors centre (☎ 5963 3288; www.lakemountainresort.com.au; Snowy Rd; 🕒 8am-4.30pm Mon-Fri Oct-May, 7am-6pm daily Jun-Sep) Has ski hire, a ski school, a café and undercover barbecue areas.

MARYSVILLE

pop 520

Sleepy Marysville was a private mountain retreat back in 1863, and by the 1920s was known as Melbourne's honeymoon capital. Today its beautiful mountain setting attracts nature-lovers, and it's the main base for the cross-country ski fields at Lake Mountain. Cross-country ski and toboggan hire is available at several places on Murchison St.

Lady Talbot Drive, which starts in Marysville, is a stunning 48km loop past some of the area's prettiest spots, camp sites and most spectacular features, including **Phantom Falls**. Popular walks along the drive include the 2km return **Keppel Falls Walk** and the 4km **Beeches Rainforest Walk**. The road is unsealed, but should be fine for 2WD vehicles in the dry months.

Spectacular **Stevenson's Falls** is Victoria's highest waterfall (82m). A short walk from the car park (parking \$2) leads to the falls, which are floodlit until midnight. There are several bushwalks from here, many quite steep, including those to **Nicholl's Lookout** and **Keppel's Lookout**.

Cumberland Scenic Reserve, with numerous walks and the Cora Lynn and Cumberland Falls, is 16km east of Marysville.

This is Mystic Mountains territory, a notion which perhaps inspired the following fun places. Check out **Bruno's Art & Sculptures Garden** (☎ 5963 3513; 51 Falls Rd; adult/child \$5/free; 🕒 garden 10am-5pm daily, gallery 10am-5pm Sat & Sun), where there's hundreds of fantasy terracotta statues in an otherworldly rainforest setting. In a similar vein is **Crystal Journey of Marysville** (☎ 5963 4373; 883 Buxton Rd; 🕒 10am-5pm Wed-Sun); have a reading, wander through the garden, or take a farm tour (ring first). Equally out-there are the 40 Meccano-based exhibits at **Manical Mechanicals** (☎ 0417-739 9072; www.manicalmechanicals.com.au; 2 Murchison St; adult \$2; 🕒 9am-4pm).

The Stevenson, Taggerty and Acheron Rivers have excellent **fishing** and magnificent settings. Pick up the **10 Best Fishing Spots** notes from the visitors centre, or fish the easy way at one of the trout and salmon farms at Buxton or Marysville.

If you just want to play, **Mystic Mountains Outdoors** (☎ 5963 7029; 631 Maroondah Hwy, Narbethong;

THE MAN FROM SNOWY RIVER

You've seen the film and probably read Banjo Paterson's famous poem, but out at **Corryong** they live the legend. It looked like so much fun in the film that the locals just had to try it – mountain horse-racing where 'the hills are twice as steep and twice as rough'. Yes, it's the **Country Wide Challenge**, Australia's ultimate test of horse-riding prowess! The race is a feature of the **Man From Snowy River Bush Festival** (☎ 6076 1992; www.manfromsnowyriverbushfestival.com.au; 🕒 Mar) – four days of whip-cracking and yarn-spinning fun.

Corryong is a pretty township ringed by mountains – a natural playground for trout fishing, canoeing, cycling and bushwalking. The **Man From Snowy River Museum** (☎ 6076 1114; 105 Hanson St; adult/child \$4/50c; 🕒 10am-noon & 2-4pm) is actually a local history museum, featuring a set of snow skis from 1870 and the Jarvis Homestead, a 19th-century slab-timber hut.

Corryong visitors centre (☎ 6076 2277; www.towong.com; 50 Hanson St; 🕒 9am-5pm) has info on the region, including **Jack Riley's Grave** (Corryong Cemetery) which is inscribed with the words, 'In memory of the Man from Snowy River, Jack Riley, buried here 16th July 1914.'

🕒 9am-6pm Oct-May, 7.30am-6pm Jun-Sep) hires kayaks (per day \$40, including a soft car rack). You can hire skis and ski gear here too.

Information

Marysville visitors centre (☎ 5963 4567; www.marysvilletourism.com; Murchison St; 🕒 9am-5pm) Info on the area's natural attractions and walks.

Eating

Fraga's Café (☎ 5963 3216; 19 Murchison St; mains \$18-27; 🕒 lunch Thu-Tue, dinner Fri & Sat) Enjoy creative meals and good coffee in an art-filled dining room or out on the deck.

Terracotta Room (☎ 5963 4004; Village Walk, Murchison St; mains \$12-18; 🕒 lunch Wed-Sun) New and inviting with a range of salads and platters using local produce.

Gilberts at Fruit Salad Farm (☎ 5963 3232; Aubrey-Couzens Dr; mains \$22-35; 🕒 dinner Fri-Mon, lunch by arrangement) In the rainforest, Gilberts offers fine, intimate dining in enchanting grounds. Their self-contained B&B cottages between the trees cost from \$110 per double.

Sleeping

Keppels Hotel (☎ 5963 3207; www.keppels.net; Murchison St; s/d \$60/70) Fresh bedrooms look out over splendid gardens.

Nanda Binya Lodge (☎ 5963 3433; www.virtual.net.au/~nandabinya; 29 Woods Point Rd; B&B s/d \$100/110-125) Guests' rooms and the large lounge open onto a deck with magnificent views over a charming garden.

Delderfield B&B (☎ 5963 4345; www.delderfield.com.au; 1 Darwin St; d from \$215) You'll see Delderfield's gorgeous garden from down the street and get

excited! The whole place displays the creativity of the owners. Total luxury just one street back from Marysville's centre.

See also Gilberts at Fruit Salad Farm (see Eating).

BEECHWORTH

pop 2650

The National Trust rated Beechworth as one of Victoria's two 'notable' towns, and you can see why. It's a living legacy of the gold-rush era. In the historical and cultural precinct, the buildings (built in the 1850s) are built from a distinctive honey-coloured local granite – you can feel the past as well as learn about it. There are many attractive shops along Ford St, for every type of shopping spree, and the scenic countryside is just made for picnics, walking, cycling and tours of the region's superb vineyards.

Visit the honey-coloured buildings on a tour of the fascinating **Historic & Cultural Precinct** (☎ 1300 366 321; tours adult/child/family \$12.50/6/25, less for just one site). First is the **Beechworth Courthouse**, where the trials many key historical figures took place (including Ned Kelly and his mother). Ned was committed to trial for the murders of constables Scanlon and Lonigan here in August 1880. Ned's cell is behind the **Shire Hall**; his mother's is behind the courthouse. Send a telegram to anywhere in the world from the **Telegraph Station** on Ford St, the original Morse-code office. Just like old times! Next door, the new **Chinese Cultural Centre** (☎ 5728 2866; www.beechworthchinese.com.au; 🕒 10am-5pm Wed-Mon) displays the history of the 6000 Chinese gold seekers from Guangdong province who arrived here in the 1850s, hoping to strike it rich. Walk through to Loch St where your tour ticket will get you into the **Burke Museum**

(☎ 5728 8067; www.beechworth.com/burkemus; adult/child \$5/3.50; Loch St; ☎ 9am-5pm). It's named after the hapless explorer Robert O'Hara Burke, who was Beechworth's superintendent of police before he set off on his historic trek north with William Wills. Also here are gold-rush relics and an arcade with 16 shopfronts preserved as they were 150 years ago.

Daily guided **walking tours** (adult/child/family \$7.50/5/15) leave from the visitors centre and feature lots of gossip and interesting detail. The Ned Kelly-themed tour leaves at 10.30am; the Gold Rush tour at 1pm. Come twilight (mystical, mysterious twilight) join Adam on **Beechworth Ghost Tours** (☎ 1300 366 321, 5720 8050; Bailedup@gmail.com.au; Sambell's Bistro, Albert Rd; tours adult/child/family \$17/7/45; ☎ 8.30pm Oct-May, 7pm Jun-Sep) and explore by lantern-light. *Whooo...*

Two-hour **Historic Town Bus Tours** (adult/child/family \$12.50/7.50/37.50) run twice a day (departing 11am and 1.30pm), or buy the self-guided tour map for \$1 and follow the 46 labelled pioneer sites.

Old brewery paraphernalia is on display at **MB Historic Cellars** (☎ 5728 1304; 29 Last St; admission \$1; ☎ 10am-4pm), a former brewery that now produces traditional cordials like ginger beer. In the same premises is the **Carriage Museum**, displaying gorgeous old horse-drawn carriages. The work of local potters features at the folksy **Potters of Beechworth** (☎ 5728 2636; www.onetreehillpottery.com.au; 56 Ford St; ☎ 10am-5pm).

The **Golden Horseshoes Monument** (cnr Sydney Rd & Gorge Scenic Dr) is where, in 1855, a horse was shod with golden shoes and ridden into town by

candidate Donald Cameron on the nomination day of Victoria's first parliamentary elections. The Victorian-era PR stunt seemed to work – Cameron was duly elected to parliament.

If you walk behind the historic precinct you'll find the **Chinese Gardens**, a tribute to the Chinese gold miners. Behind them is pretty **Lake Sambell**. If a swim beckons, you'll find that the surrounding hills look even prettier from the water.

On the northern outskirts of town lies **Beechworth Historic Park**, an area that was once potholed with gold-mining activity. The Gorge area has 12km of **walking tracks**, and most points of interest have self-guided information. Also within the park is the **Gorge Scenic Drive**, a 5km driving or walking tour (with a swim if you feel like it) to Newtown Falls.

The **Murray to the Mountains Rail Trail** (p308), from Wangaratta to Bright, detours east to Beechworth at Everton. An extension northwest to Wahgunyah is about to happen. If you need your bicycle repaired head to **Beechworth Cycles** (☎ 5728 1402; 17 Camp St).

For extreme activities contact **Beechworth Adventures** (☎ 5728 1804, 0419-280 614; www.adventureguidesaustralia.com.au; activities per day from \$165), which will take you abseiling and rock climbing around the area's stunning cliffs and crags.

Seen and done enough? Kick back at **Bridge Road Brewers** (☎ 5728 2703; www.bridgeroadbrewers.com.au; Old Stable House, Ford St; meals \$8-17; ☎ 11am-6pm Wed-Mon). It's a happy little spot behind the Commercial Hotel, with an interesting range of boutique beers and a great lunch menu. Sunday night is pizza-and-movie night (from 8pm).

YACKANDANDAH

pop 660

The beautiful hills and valleys around here will blow you away. The entire town of Yackandandah has been classified by the National Trust, which could explain why it still has a 'drapery' store! The **Yackandandah visitors centre** (☎ 02-6027 1988; www.uniqueyackandandah.com.au; 27 High St; ☎ 9am-5pm) is in the grand, 1878 Athenaeum building. Pick up the free *A Walk in High Street* brochure, which details the history of the shops, and the helpful *Yackandandah – Unveil the Mystery* booklet.

The **Yackandandah Folk Festival** (☎ 02-6027 1447; http://folkfestival.yackandandah.com; ☎ mid-Mar) is three days of music, parades, workshops and fun.

When you finish curio-shopping in the fascinating local shops, try **trout fishing** on Yackandandah Creek; visit the **Lavender Patch** (☎ 02-6027 1603; www.lavenderpatch.com.au; 461 Yackandandah Rd (Beechworth Rd); ☎ 9am-5.30pm) for some lavender ice cream; or check out the studio-gallery **Kirby's Flat Pottery** (☎ 02-6027 1416; www.johndermer.com.au; 225 Kirby's Flat Rd; ☎ 10.15am-5.30pm Sat & Sun), 4km south of Yackandandah.

An exciting new attraction is the extraordinary tour of **Karrs Reef Goldmine** (☎ 02-6027 1988; tours adult/child \$18.50/16.50; ☎ 10am, noon, 2pm & 4pm). For 1½ hours you're guided through the hard-dug tunnel to see the way it all worked. Departs from the visitors centre.

The unsealed 14km **Yackandandah Scenic Forest Drive** begins at Bells Flat Rd and travels over former gold-mining territory, much of which is now Stanley State Forest. There are also **4WD tracks** in the area.

TRANSPORT: BEECHWORTH

Distance from Melbourne 284km

Direction Northeast

Travel Time Three hours

Bus & Train V/Line (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) runs between Melbourne and Beechworth (return \$50, four hours, daily). Change from train to coach at Wangaratta.

Car Drive up the Hume Fwy to Wangaratta, head 10km east on the Great Alpine Rd then turn off to Beechworth.

Information

Beechworth visitors centre (☎ 1300 366 321; www.beechworthonline.com.au; 103 Ford St; ☎ 9am-5pm) In the Old Shire Hall. Staff run an accommodation and activity booking service, sell tour tickets, and have information on local walks and wineries. Pop in to look through the glossy photo albums!

Festivals & Events

Golden Horseshoe Festival (☎ 1300 366 321) Donald Cameron's ride on a gold-shod horse is re-enacted in a grand parade at this Easter event. Food stalls, Easter-egg hunt, music and fun.

Harvest Celebrations (www.harvestcelebration.com.au) Food and wine workshops take to the streets in May.

Chinese Moon Festival (www.beechworthchinese.com) Feasting, Chinese-dragon dancing and lantern displays in early October.

Celtic Festival (www.beechworthcelticfestival.com.au) Art, entertainment, food, music and mayhem in mid-November.

Eating

Beechworth Pantry (☎ 5728 2456; 77 Ford St; mains \$8-19; ☎ breakfast & lunch) Exciting sandwiches, plus stacks of other gourmet meals.

Green Shed (☎ 5728 2360; 37 Camp St; mains \$27-28; ☎ lunch Fri-Sun, dinner Wed-Sun) A former printery, now a cosy place where the meals are a pure delight.

Beechworth Provender (☎ 5728 2650; 18 Camp St; sandwiches from \$7; 9am-5pm) Crammed with delectable local produce, such as Milawa cheeses, anti-pasto, and everything you need for a gourmet bush-picnic.

Wardens (☎ 5728 1377; 32 Ford St; mains \$26-35; ☎ breakfast, lunch & dinner Wed-Sun) Simply the best!

Sleeping

There are oodles of B&Bs and self-contained cottages in the area; see www.beechworth.com/accommodation.

Tanswells Commercial Hotel (☎ 5728 1480; tanscom@bigpond.net.au; 50 Ford St; s/d incl breakfast \$45/65) Neat rooms above an interesting old pub.

La Trobe at Beechworth (☎ 5720 8050; www.latrobeat.beechworth.com.au; Albert Rd; s/d/ste incl breakfast from \$75/110/160, self-contained cottages from \$170) This was the Beechworth Lunatic Asylum for over 130 years – there's a walking tour (collect the map) through the heritage gardens. The Art Deco buildings are now full of pleasant rooms.

Freeman on Ford (☎ 5728 2371; www.beechworth.com/freemanonford; 97 Ford St; d/deluxe incl breakfast from \$165/250) In the 1876 Oriental Bank, this glorious place offers Victorian luxury, right in the centre of town. The owner, Heidi, will make you feel very special.

HIGH COUNTRY ROAD TRIPS

MILAWA GOURMET REGION ALONG THE SNOW ROAD

Forget skiing. Take the **Snow Rd** and follow your senses! Good food and wine is a normal part of life here: there are so many small-scale, local, hands-on specialists that you just have to stop, taste and graze. Events during the year (www.milawagourmet.com) showcase the talents of local chefs and producers.

To get started, head off the Hume Fwy near Glenrowan and you'll eventually (hours, days later) drive out onto the Great Alpine Rd near Myrtleford. The highpoints are around **Oxley** and **Milawa**. At Oxley, wineries include **John Gehrig Wines** (☎ 5727 3395; www.johngehrigwines.com.au; Gehrig's Ln; ☎ 10am-5pm) with its rare varieties like verjuice. Don't drive too fast or you'll miss the old general store, which is now **King River Cafe** (☎ 5727 3461; Snow Rd; mains \$11-26; ☎ lunch Mon & Wed-Sun, dinner Wed-Sun), where local wines from producers like Pizzini, Christmont and Moyhu are served with scrumptious food.

In Milawa, **Milawa Mustard** (☎ 5727 3202; www.milawamustard.com.au; Old Emu Inn, The Cross Roads; ☎ 10am-5pm) has tastings of its handmade seeded mustards, herbed vinegars and preserves, while the **Olive Shop** (☎ 5727 3887; www.theoliveshop.com.au; 1605 Snow Rd; ☎ 10am-5pm Thu-Mon)

is an olive 'gallery' with oils and tapenades for sampling. A few metres west over Factory Rd, try about eight different honeys at **Walkabout Apiaries** (☎ 5727 3468; Snow Rd; ☞ 10am-5pm).

Next stop is the famous **Brown Brothers Vineyard** (☎ 5720 5547; www.brownbrothers.com.au; Bobbinawarra Rd, Milawa; ☞ 9am-5pm). The winery's first vintage was in 1889, and the winery has remained in the hands of the same family ever since. As well as the tasting room, there's an attractive restaurant, gorgeous garden, kids play equipment and picnic and barbecue facilities.

The **Milawa Cheese Company** (☎ 5727 3589; milawcheese@netc.net.au; Factory Rd; ☞ 9am-5pm) is 2km north of Milawa. From humble origins, it now produces a mouth-watering array of cheeses to sample or buy. It excels at soft farmhouse brie and pungent washed-rind cheeses. Blow your taste buds over in the old butter room at **Milawa Chocolates** (☎ 5727 3500; ☞ 11am-4pm Fri-Wed), or pop around the back to the **Muse Gallery of Milawa** (☎ 5727 3599; www.musegallery.com.au; ☞ 10am-5pm Thu-Mon) to heighten a few other senses.

Rose Hill Estate Wines (☎ 5727 3930; jo@rosehillestatewines.com.au; 1400 Oxley Flats Rd; ☞ 10am-6pm Fri-Mon) is where specialist Kevin enthuses about his latest wines as you taste them.

Further north is **EV Olives Groves** (☎ 5727 0209; www.evolfives.com; 203 Everton Rd, Markwood; ☞ 10am-5pm), where the fruity taste of the oils, olives and tapenades will have you buying your next year's supplies.

Wood Park Wines (☎ 5727 3367; Whorouly Rd, Whorouly; ☞ 10am-5pm Wed-Mon) has wine tastings at its picturesque vineyard, but ring first as it's a bit of a hike (signposted off the Snow Rd).

Some of the area's gorgeous food and wine producers have restaurants attached, or try **Milawa Gourmet Hotel** (☎ 5727 3208; cnr Snow Rd & Factory Rd, Milawa; mains \$16-27; ☞ lunch & dinner) – a traditional country pub serving meals with gourmet flair.

There are charming B&Bs, country houses, old inns and boutique hotels in the region. Stay if you dare – you may never go home! Find your nest at www.milawagourmet.com/v5/accommod.htm.

GREAT ALPINE ROAD

Australia's well-loved **Great Alpine Road** (www.greatalpineroad.info) flows through the Ovens Valley past the mountain playgrounds on a 308km route from Wangaratta to Bairnsdale. It's Australia's highest year-round-accessible sealed road. If you're not hurtling along it hell-bent on arriving at the ski slopes, you'll notice it winds

past forests, rivers, vineyards and farms on its scenic way over Mt Hotham down almost to the Tasman Sea. Along the way there's farm produce, cafés and a range of accommodation.

Two wineries you'll pass are **Michelini Wines** (☎ 5751 1990; www.micheliniwines.com.au; Myrtleford; ☞ 10am-5pm) and **Gapsted** (☎ 5751 1383; www.victorianalpswinery.com.au; Gapsted; ☞ 10am-5pm). Both offer tastings in beautiful surroundings.

Look out for dusty old **Ovens Hotel** (☎ 5751 1628; Ovens; mains \$12-26; ☞ lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Wed-Sun) hiding behind the vines. It's a popular place for a drink, especially when a blues band jams in the beer garden.

Between Myrtleford and Bright, stop at the **Red Stag Deer & Emu Farm** (☎ 5756 2365; www.alpinelink.com.au/redstag; Hughes Ln; ☞ 10am-4.30pm). You may get to bottle-feed a baby deer, or be fed yourself – the lunches are delicious and the views amazing.

One of the cutest little towns en route is **Harrietville** at the base of Mt Hotham, where you'll see **Lavender Hue** (☎ 5759 2588; www.alphalink.com.au/lavenderhue; Harrietville; ☞ open 10am-4pm Thu-Mon) spread along the Ovens river. Stop and visit for a total sensory experience.

OMELO HIGHWAY

Stretching almost 300km on its journey from the Murray River to the coast, the Omeo Hwy (C543) passes through the heart of the High Country, and takes in some of Victoria's most scenic and diverse countryside. The highway is unsealed in several sections (between Anglers Rest and Mitta Mitta), and snow often makes it difficult to pass in winter, but at any time it is a memorable drive.

The first section of the road from Tallangatta follows the flatlands of the Mitta Mitta River between wooded mountains. It's a totally serene section. **Mitta Mitta** is an old gold-mining settlement, and a track leads from the highway to the former Pioneer Mine site, one of the largest hydraulic sluicing operations in Victoria, yielding some 15,000oz (425.25kg) of gold over 16 years. For unique accommodation, head to **Bharatralia Jungle Camp** (☎ 02-6072 3621; cgotto@msn.com; Omeo Hwy, Mitta Mitta; tents per person \$25) just 2km north of town. The luxurious tents are set in a charming animal retreat, and there's a camp kitchen, barbecues and meals are available.

At **Anglers Rest**, beside the Cobungra River, is the **Blue Duck Inn** (☎ 5159 7220; www.blueduckinn.com.au; Omeo Hwy; mains \$18-27; ☞ lunch & dinner Wed-Sun), popular with anglers, canoeists and bush-

ALPINE TOURS

Here are a few more high-altitude tours to tempt you. Most 4WD tours or walking tours only run from November to late May.

Hedonistic Hiking (☎ 5755 2307; www.hedonistichiking.com.au; 1-/5-day tours \$120/1600) runs walks ranging from dead-easy to challenging, always including a gourmet food experience, a glass of wine and a lively chat about the culture, nature and history of the area.

Epicurious (☎ 0407-261 510; www.epicurioustravel.com.au; 3-/5-day tour \$1290/1590) offers luxury, all-inclusive cycling and walking holidays that combine spectacular High Country scenery with fine food and accommodation.

Mountain Top Experience (☎ 5134 6876; www.mountaintopexperience.com) can provide food-parcel drop-offs and car shuttles (from \$30) for walkers on the Australian Alps Walking Track (p310). It also has a range of 4WD tag-along tours (per day \$100) and 4WD hire.

River Mountain Guides (☎ 0414-989 134; www.rivermountainguides.com.au; per day from \$350) runs snowsports and treks around the Bogong High Plains. Four people can take a three-day snowshoe shuffle with food and camping gear provided for \$370 per person. Go, go, go!

walkers for its hearty meals and barbecue area by the river. Self-contained units here sleep up to eight people (from \$120 a double).

Finally, 30km south of Anglers Rest, is pretty little **Omeo**, a town where you co-exist with history. Omeo's origins date back to the gold-rush days of the 1850s when it was Victoria's wildest, remotest goldfield. It attracted many Chinese gold diggers who built a **Chinatown** in the area behind the Omeo Service Station.

Omeo offers the only all-weather access to Dinner Plain and Mt Hotham, a 30-minute climb with amazing views. You must carry chains in winter – hire them at **Omeo Service Station** (BP; ☎ 5159 1312; www.omeoskithire.com.au; Main St, Omeo).

You'll find tea rooms, cafés and top-quality pub food in town. The stunning Art Deco **Golden Age Motel & Bar** (☎ 5159 1344; www.omeoregion.com.au/goldenage; Day Ave; s/d/f \$85/99/175) includes the James Washington restaurant (mains \$14 to \$29, open for dinner daily). Stay over in the top-quality rooms and enjoy the grand veranda. Another good choice is the historic **Omeo Bank House** (☎ 5159 1405; www.omeoregion.com.au/bankhouse; 154 Day Ave; d/tr \$130/150). Its rooms hold a mix of queen-size, king-single or bunk beds. Check out other accommodation options at www.omeoregion.com.au or contact **Omeo visitors centre** (☎ 5159 1552; www.omeoregion.com.au; 199 Day Ave; ☞ 9am-5pm). Pick up a brochure to the **Historical Gold Mining Site**, the **Oriental Claims**. These days the site is a monument to the pioneers, and is full of wildlife (if not gold).

THE BEST ROAD OF ALL

Well, the best and the worst! The spectacular 165km drive south from **Jamieson** to **Baw Baw Vil-**

lage should not be undertaken lightly. The first section to Woods Point is delightfully rough, snaking alongside the Goulburn River. You'll pass forests, hills and a series of derelict gold-mining settlements, many of which were destroyed by the 1939 bushfires (or finished off in the 2007 fires). About 20km south of Jamieson, **Tunnel Bend Reserve** has a **camping ground** (unpowered sites free) with picnic facilities, and some good swimming spots in the Goulburn River.

Woods Point, 55km south of Jamieson, is a tiny, historic gold-mining town in a deep valley on the upper reaches of the Goulburn River. The friendly old **Commercial Hotel** (☎ 5777 8224; 1 Bridge St; B&B per person \$50) is a dusty pub filled with travellers who don't want to take the road out of town. Why? The next section is a narrow, twisting track strewn with sharp rocks and potholes. Road verges piled with loose gravel drop away into deep, wooded valleys. The dispute over who owns this section of road has left it unmaintained for yonks. Don't expect to hurry as you rattle and jolt the 55km to **Aberfeldie**, shocking your shock absorbers and tracking the crystal creek which eventually grows into the Goulburn River.

Finally, you cross the wide, smooth concrete dam wall over **Thomson Dam**. Stunning! Whiz along the sealed Thomson Valley Rd to the fabulous new South Face Rd, a gravel road that was cut through in 2008 to give access to the Baw Baw ski resort. South Face Rd runs for 30km through bush over Western Tyers River Bridge and Christmas Creek Bridge to Baw Baw Tourist Rd, just higher than the entrance box. Another 8km to the village, and yes, the drive may have been worth it!

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