

Victoria

Australia's smallest mainland state covers just 3% of the country but it is the proverbial good thing in a small package. Whatever your walking mood, Victoria will almost certainly cater to it: alpine experiences, razorback ridges, peachy-postcard beaches, moody cliffs and forests both thick and thin. You can camp alone on alpine summits or you can snuggle into the freshly pressed bed sheets of a B&B at the end of a day. About the only thing you can't do is suggest that Victoria lacks a diversity of walking experiences.

The Great Dividing Range ends its east-coast journey in Victoria, and though you won't find the range's highest peaks here, you will find its greatest array of walks. At the very tail of the range, rising from the agricultural plains of the Wimmera, there is the rocky heaven of the Grampians, standing like a sandstone wave.

Along the coast, the Great Ocean Road is only now burgeoning into the sort of walking destination such beauty demands. And while you might expect the coast between Australia's two largest cities – Sydney and Melbourne – to be a sprawling mass of humanity, it is as green on the ground as it is on a map. This coast is lined with national parks, including a pair of Victorian parks that are among the country's finest coastal showpieces: Wilsons Promontory and Croajingolong National Parks offer wilderness and wildlife on tap.

Even close to Melbourne you will find surprisingly dramatic landscapes: Werribee Gorge cut deep into the land, Mornington Peninsula bays battered by Bass Strait, and the sharpened ridge of the Cathedral Range.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Witnessing nature's resilience as **Wilson's Promontory** (p175) sprouts anew from the ashes of a bushfire
- Balancing atop the knife-sharp ridge of the **Cathedral Range** (p135) as you head for the lyrebird-inspired Farmyard
- Emerging from farmland and bush onto castaway **Milanesia Beach** (p143) on the Great Ocean Walk Highlight
- Watching sunset light from atop **Mt Difficult** (p152) in the Grampians
- Conquer the highest mountains in the **Victorian Alps** (p155) with their exposed peaks, pretty snow plains, rocky crags and tall forests
- Seeing wildlife and a wild coast as you walk the beaches of **Croajingolong National Park** (p180)

■ TELEPHONE CODE: 03

■ www.parkweb.vic.gov.au

■ www.visitvictoria.com

ENVIRONMENT

Victoria is like greater Australia in microcosm, with desert-like landscapes in its west, extensive stands of temperate rainforest in the east, mountains in between and strings of beaches along the length of the coast. The southern reaches of the Great Dividing Range, which runs east to west through Victoria, buffer the north of the state from rain and cold southerly winds, producing drier and warmer conditions and places such as Big Desert and Little Desert.

Sixteen landform and vegetation regions are recognised in Victoria, ranging from the semiarid mallee in the northwest, to grassy woodlands on the western plains, to tall, wet forests with pockets of temperate rainforest

in the highlands and eastern coastal areas. The wetter forests of the south contain the tallest hardwoods in the world – a tree on the Watts River, a tributary of the Yarra, was measured at 132.6m in 1872, and is still listed by Guinness as the tallest tree ever recorded (the area is now closed as catchment, so the tree may still be standing).

Victoria has a decent share of the national wildlife, with pretty much all of the pin-up creatures found here. Koalas are common in some of the heavily wooded areas of the south, while platypuses and wombats are widespread throughout the state. Grey kangaroos are common in cleared lands adjacent to bushland, and especially around the Grampians, though red kangaroos are

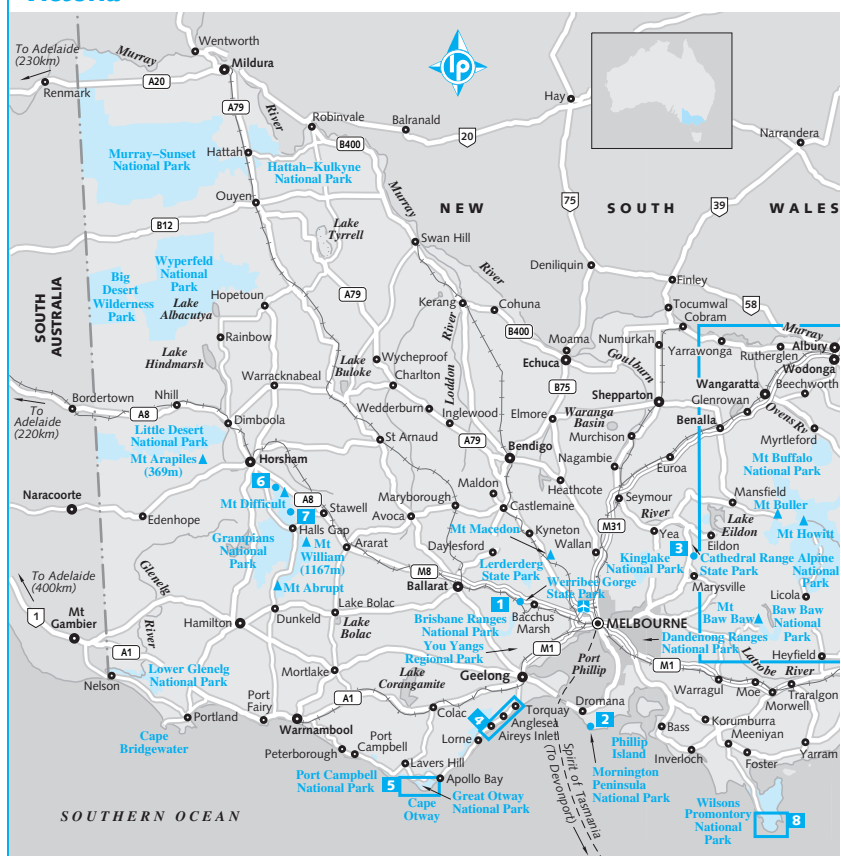
found only in the mallee country, outside of the areas covered in this chapter.

INFORMATION

When to Walk

Like much of southern Australia, the most comfortable walking times are spring and autumn, though Victoria is a perennial – there is a walking track somewhere here that beckons at any time of year. In summer the Victorian Alps are at their best, yet it is almost too hot in the state's other great range, the Grampians. In winter the rugged coast is at its most powerfully impressive, with storms in Bass Strait lashing the coast. You might get wet, and it might be windy, but it will be a scene worth witnessing.

Victoria



Maps

State-wide road maps are easily obtained at specialist map shops, bookshops and newsagents. Topographical maps for walkers are published by the state government's mapping agency, Geospatial Information, in the Vicmap series. All but the far northwest corner is covered at 1:25,000, while several Outdoor Leisure Map sheets (also Vicmap) focus on popular areas (at various scales) such as the Grampians, Wilsons Promontory, Cathedral Range and the Great Ocean Road. These usually contain some natural history and walking information.

For details of maps covering individual walks, see the Planning section in the introduction to each walk.

Books

Lonely Planet's *Victoria* will be a handy guide as you skip between walks. *Victoria's National Parks*, published by See Australia Guides, makes for good planning material, with sections on each national and state park in Victoria.

State walking guides include *Take a Walk in Victoria's National Parks* by John and Lyn Daly, which contains more than 200 walks in 35 national parks; *Tyrone Thomas' 120 Walks in Victoria*; *Weekend Walks Around Melbourne* and *Day Walks Around Melbourne* by Glenn Tempest; and *Day Walks Victoria* and *Day Walks Melbourne* by John and Monica Chapman and John Siseman.

Information Sources

For general information on Victoria, its parks and its walks, the following will be of some assistance:

Federation of Victorian Walking Clubs (☎ 9455 1876; <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~vicwalk>) Peak body for more than 70 walking clubs in Victoria.

Parks Victoria (☎ 13 19 63; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au) Manages Victoria's parks; the website has details of all parks in the state, with links to printable park notes. Phone queries about any park in the state should be directed here first.

Tourism Victoria (☎ 13 28 42; www.tourism.vic.gov.au) Information on general travel around the state.

Victorian National Parks Association (☎ 9347 5188; www.vnpa.org.au) A leading conservation organisation with a very active walks program.

Park Fees & Regulations

Entry fees apply only to three national parks featured in this chapter – Mornington

Peninsula, Wilsons Promontory and Mt Buffalo – which makes the National Park Pass (\$67.60) useful only if you are planning to visit these particular parks a few times. Annual passes are also available for each of these three parks.

See the Planning sections of individual walks for details of fire restrictions; for information of Total Fire Bans, see the boxed text p24.

Guided Walks

Anaconda Adventures (☎ 03-8720 4013; www.anacondaadventures.com.au) Walks at Wilsons Promontory, the Victorian Alps and the Great Ocean Walk.

Auswalk (☎ 03-5356 4971; www.auswalk.com.au) A selection of walks along the Great Ocean Road, Grampians, Mornington Peninsula, Croajingolong and the Victorian Alps.

Bothfeet (☎ 1300 767 416; www.bothfeet.com.au) Walking tours along the Great Ocean Walk and around Daylesford.

Epicurious (☎ 0407 261 510; www.epicurioustavel.com.au) Sections of the Great Ocean Walk and Great South West Walk.

Parktrek (☎ 03-9486 7070; www.parktrek.com) Walks in Croajingolong, Wilsons Promontory, the Victorian Alps, Great Ocean Road and Grampians.

Walk 91 (☎ 03-5237 1189; info@walk91.com.au) Two-and three-day guided and self-guided walks on the Great Ocean Walk.

GATEWAY Melbourne

☎ 03 / pop 3.6 million

Australia's second-largest city prides itself, among other things, as being the nation's sporting capital, which usually means sitting and watching somebody else compete. It helps keep the numbers down on walking tracks, at least. Food is the city's other passion, making it an oasis if you have been out on the track eating dried stodge for a few days.

INFORMATION

Information Victoria (☎ 1300 366 356; 356 Collins St) State government bookshop with a good section of bushwalking titles and topographic maps of Victoria and Australia (with laminator). Upstairs, there is a computer for printing out park notes on national parks around the state.

Map Land (☎ 9670 4383; www.mapland.com.au; 372 Little Bourke St) Set among the outdoor stores, with maps of all Victorian walking areas.

Melbourne Visitor Centre (☎ 9658 9658; www.visitmelbourne.com; Federation Sq) Good source of information

about the city and has a 'Greeter Service', matching visitors to volunteer guides for a half-day walking tour of the city. There is also an information booth (Bourke St Mall) in the city centre.

SUPPLIES & EQUIPMENT

Most of Melbourne's outdoor equipment stores are clustered on Little Bourke St, between Elizabeth and Queen Sts, where boots briefly replace briefcases. In this small stretch you will find **Paddy Pallin** (☎ 9670 4845), **Mountain Designs** (☎ 9670 3354), **Snowgum** (☎ 9600 0099), **Bogong Equipment** (☎ 9600 0599), **Platypus Outdoors** (☎ 9602 3933) and **Pinnacle Outdoors** (☎ 9642 2955). **Kathmandu** (☎ 9642 1942; cnr Bourke & Elizabeth St) is nearby. If you are in a thrifty mood there are clearance stores for **Kathmandu** (421A Smith St) and **Mountain Designs** (412 Smith St) in the inner suburb of Collingwood. Mountain Designs also has a clearance centre upstairs from its Little Bourke St store.

Coles (Melbourne Central, 203-245 La Trobe St) and **Safeway** (cnr Lansdale & Swanston Sts) supermarkets are both central, while it is almost compulsory to rummage through the produce section at the **Queen Victoria Market** (513 Elizabeth St; ☎ 6am-2pm Tue & Thu, to 6pm Fri, to 3pm Sat, 9am-4pm Sun).

SLEEPING & EATING

Ashley Gardens Big 4 Holiday Village (☎ 1800 061 444; www.big4ashleygardens.com.au; 129 Ashley St, Braybrook; camp site \$31-37, cabins \$70-146; ☎) has a spacious area 9km northwest of the city. It is reached by bus No 220 from Queen St in the city; get off at stop 33.

Friendly Backpacker (☎ 9670 1111; www.friendlygroup.com.au; 197 King St; dm \$28, d & tw \$78; ☎) is large but far from institutional, and is a good place for a hungry walker – there is free breakfast, free pancakes on Sunday morning and free dinner on Tuesday night. Each bed has a locker and individual reading light.

Greenhouse Backpacker (☎ 9639 6400; www.friendlygroup.com.au; 228 Flinders Lane; dm/s/d \$29/65/78; ☎) is nearer to the city centre with similar offerings. It has a large, open rooftop area; there are no views but there are sun lounges.

If you want something without any frills or pretensions (and prices to match), try **Kingsgate Hotel** (☎ 9629 4171; www.kingsgatehotel.com.au; 131 King St; economy/standard d \$99/129). You'll find discounted rates on the website.

Victoria Hotel (☎ 9653 0441; www.victoriahotel.com.au; 215 Little Collins St; s \$50-95, d \$70-120; ☎ ☎) is a Melbourne institution and remarkably good value for the location, just off Swanston St. Rooms have shared or private bathroom.

Hotel Y (☎ 8327 2777; www.hotely.com.au; 489 Elizabeth St; d from \$119; ☎ ☎) could redefine your image of the YWCA. Newly renovated, each floor has a different (very bright) colour. It is comfortable and chic and one of the best midrange options in the city. Guests get free use of the gym and pool at the Melbourne City Baths.

Atlantis Hotel (☎ 9600 2900; www.atlantishotel.com.au; 300 Spencer St; d from \$140; ☎) has smart rooms on the west side of the city. There is a coffee bar at reception, and deluxe rooms (\$160) have great views over Docklands.

Melbourne's ethnic diversity is reflected in the exhaustive variety of its cuisines. Food is a local obsession and there are people who believe that Melbourne is one of world's great eating cities. Because Melbourne revolves around its CBD less than most other cities, some of the best options are away from the centre, but there are also some excellent choices inside the city.

Hardware Lane, near the outdoor stores, is full of good little eateries: **Invita** (32 Hardware Lane; mains \$9-12) specialises in organic vegetarian, and is the spot for nibbling on brown rice balls and vegetarian lasagne; while **aloina!** (59 Hardware Lane; mains \$10-21; ☎ lunch Mon-Fri, dinner Mon-Sat) ostensibly serves rich Thai food but dabbles in other Asian favourites such as tandoori and nasi goreng.

To sample Melbourne's Middle East you should conversely head west, to the new Docklands precinct and **mecca bah** (55a Newquay Promenade; mains \$16-20; ☎ lunch & dinner) for warming tagines and the house speciality of Turkish pizzas. If you want to glam up a little, head for the sister restaurant **mecca** (☎ 9682 2999; mid-level, Southgate; mains \$28-40; ☎ lunch & dinner).

Chocolate Buddha (Federation Sq; mains \$15-20; ☎ lunch & dinner) specialises in noodles not chocolate (alas) and appeals for its communal Japanese-style dining room.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air
Melbourne airport (☎ 9297 1600; www.melair.com.au) is 22km northwest of the city, with some

Jetstar interstate flights also arriving at **Avalon airport** (☎ 5227 9100; www.avalonairport.com.au), about 55km from Melbourne. **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13; www.qantas.com.au), **Virgin Blue** (☎ 13 67 89; www.virginblue.com.au) and **Jetstar** (☎ 13 15 38; www.jetstar.com.au) operate flights between Melbourne and cities across the country.

Skybus (☎ 9335 2811; www.skybus.com.au) operates a 24-hour shuttle service between the city and Melbourne airport (\$15, 20 minutes). **Sunbus** (☎ 9689 6888; www.sunbusaustralia.com.au) runs between the city and Avalon airport (\$16, one hour).

Bus

Greyhound Australia (☎ 13 14 99; www.greyhound.com.au) buses leave from the **Melbourne Transit Centre** (58 Franklin St) for Adelaide (\$55, nine hours), Sydney (\$70, 12 hours) and Brisbane (\$180, 22 hours). **Firefly Express** (☎ 1300 730 740; www.fireflyexpress.com.au; 261 Spencer St) buses depart from its offices and travel to/from Sydney (\$65, 12 hours) and Adelaide (\$55, 10 hours). Buses leave from the Firefly Express office. **V/Line** (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) is the main operator for destinations within Victoria. V/line buses depart from **Southern Cross Station** (Spencer St).

Car

Airport Rent-A-Car (☎ 1800 331 033; www.airportrentacar.com.au) is based at Melbourne airport. The following companies, except Apex and Rent-a-Bomb, also have offices at the airport.

Apex (☎ 1800 777 779; www.apexrentacar.com.au; 11 Mareno Rd, Tullamarine) Five kilometres from the airport.

Avis (☎ 9663 6366; www.avis.com.au; 2/8 Franklin St)

Budget (☎ 9203 4844; www.budget.com.au; 398 Elizabeth St)

Europcar (☎ 8633 0000; www.deltaeuropcar.com.au; 89 Franklin St)

Hertz (☎ 9663 6244; www.hertz.com.au; 97 Franklin St)

Rent-a-Bomb (☎ 9335 6777; www.rentabomb.com.au; cnr Mickleham & Freight Rd, Tullamarine) Near the airport.

Thrifty (☎ 8661 6000; www.thrifty.com.au; 390 Elizabeth St)

Train

Long-distance trains operate out of **Southern Cross Station** (Spencer St). **Great Southern Railway** (☎ 13 21 47; www.gsr.com.au) runs the *Overland* to/from Adelaide (seat/sleeper \$65/149, 10½ hours) three times a week. **CountryLink** (☎ 13 22 32; www.countrylink.info) connects Melbourne

to Sydney (economy/first class \$75/105, 11½ hours, two daily). Victoria's rail network is operated by **VLine** (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au). Services are of limited use to walkers, but they can get you near some walks.

MELBOURNE REGION

The High Country, Grampians and Wilsons Promontory may be Victoria's walking diamonds, but you don't need to go far from Melbourne to find a few fantastic walking options. Within 100km of the city you will find a beach that can only be accessed by walkers, a deep, rugged gorge and a knife-point range more akin to something in the Victorian Alps. Public transport links to walking destinations around the city are not great so you had best plan on driving.

WERRIBEE GORGE

| | |
|---------------------|------------------|
| Duration | 2½–3 hours |
| Distance | 8km |
| Difficulty | easy–moderate |
| Start/Finish | Quarry car park |
| Nearest Town | Melbourne (p128) |
| Transport | private |

Summary Dip into one of the most rugged bits of country near to Melbourne, following a dry ridge down to swimming holes and some easy scrambling along the river.

If you are driving west from Melbourne towards the Grampians, you will notice a gash of rock to the left of the highway just beyond Bacchus Marsh. Hidden beneath is Werribee Gorge, which is up to 200m deep and is one of the most dramatic land features near to the city. The major walk in 575-hectare Werribee Gorge State Park crosses a dry ridge to then meander back through the gorge. The route through the gorge involves some rock hopping and rudimentary scrambling, though a recently installed hand cable has made it a more simple passage. The name 'Werribee' is believed to be derived from an Aboriginal word meaning 'swimming place' and it is a fitting title, with a number of swimming holes to be found along the walk's river stretch. You will find it welcome in a place where the heat can seem greatly magnified.

ENVIRONMENT

The oldest rocks exposed in the gorge are sediments deposited in a sea bed about 450 million years ago. These were folded and bent by upheavals in the earth's crust, evident in the anticlines (arch-shaped fold in rock in which rock layers are upwardly convex) and synclines (basin-shaped fold in rock in which rock layers are downwardly convex) you will see along the route. About three to four million years ago, lava from nearby volcanoes spread across the surrounding lands, creating basalt plains. Unrest along a fault in the earth's crust opened the way for the Werribee River to slice through.

Stringybarks and box gums are the dominant trees of the 250 native species found in the park. Along the river you will find manna gums, with smooth grey-white bark – look out for koalas. The cliffs provide ideal nesting sites for wedge-tailed eagles and peregrine falcons, most likely to be seen during the August to November breeding season. Platypuses also inhabit quiet pools in the river.

PLANNING When to Walk

The spring display of wildflowers, especially wattles, makes this the best season for this park. Throughout summer, the pools in the gorge are just right for refreshing swims. Camping is not allowed within the park.

Maps & Books

Meridian Productions' 1:35,000 topographic map *Lerderberg & Werribee Gorges* also has a selection of background information.

NEAREST TOWN

See Melbourne (p128).

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

Werribee Gorge is around 60km west of Melbourne. Leave the Western Fwy at the Pentland Hills Rd exit, 5km west of Bacchus Marsh, and S turn right at a T-junction along the Pentland Hills Rd, which goes under the freeway. Turn left immediately beyond the overpass. Follow this road for about 2km to another underpass (Werribee Gorge is visible to your left), turning left along sealed Myers Rd and continuing steeply downhill past the park entrance to the Quarry car park (6km from the freeway).

THE WALK

Begin north (past the toilet) from the information shelter, climbing through an old quarry to a disused vehicle track. Turn right here and walk up to the car park at the park entrance.

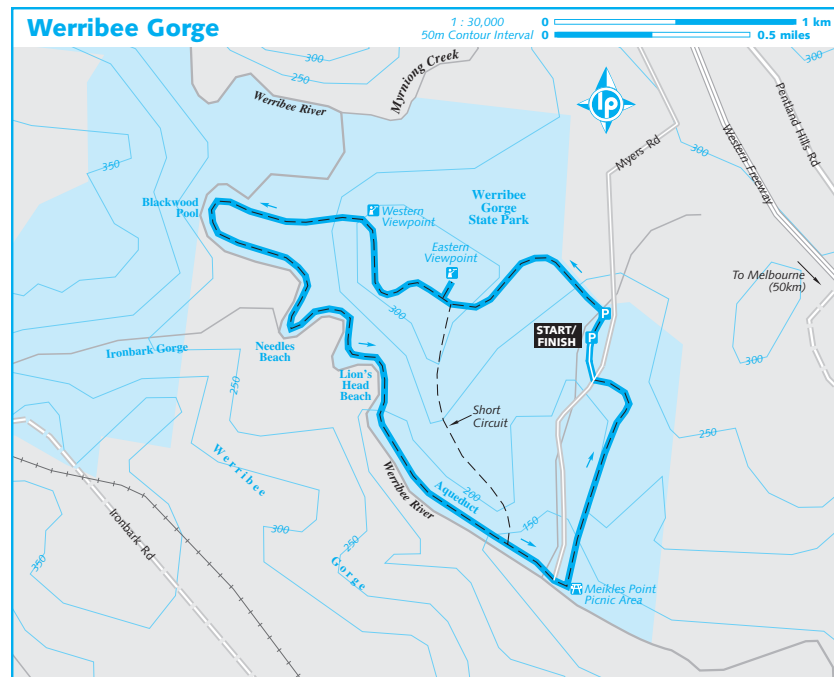
Go along the sealed road for about 25m and then turn left through a small gate. Follow the clearly defined track through open woodland, climbing onto a ridge and passing the turn-off to the Short Circuit walk. About 100m on, there is a turning to the right to **Eastern Viewpoint**. This lookout gives expansive views across the brown hills to the north, and east towards distant Melbourne. Back on the main track, continue through open forest before swinging left into ridge-top grassland (the You Yangs are visible to the east). From here the ridge begins to fall away to the west; follow it down to the turn-off to **Western Viewpoint** for a peep into the gorge entrance.

Return to the main track and turn right, descending along a narrow spur. Veer left around a rocky point and continue descending. Nearing the river, the track U-turns

left, continuing above the **Werribee River** for about 10 minutes before descending to its bank (one hour from the start). High on the right you will see the Falcons Lookout cliffs, a popular climbing wall.

Follow the bank, first through rock fall and then along narrow rock ledges, to the second river bend. Rounding this, you come to sandy **Needles Beach**, the best swimming hole along the river. At the next bend there is a low bluff to negotiate before the river meanders past **Lion's Head Beach**, where there is the prospect of another swim if the one 15 minutes ago hasn't satisfied you.

Past the beach you come to a trickier scramble around a bluff, though a hand cable has eliminated much of its challenge. After this it is a stroll beside (and in) a water channel that was built in 1926–29 to supply water to Bacchus Marsh. After about 15 minutes, pass the Short Circuit walk turn-off to the left and bear right down some steps to **Meikles Point picnic area** (45 minutes from Needles Beach). Go through to the far end of the picnic ground, then left up some steps, walking to the right of the toilets to



MELBOURNE MEANDERS

Melbourne is blessed with good walking almost all the way along its edges. Werribee Gorge, Bushrangers Bay and the Cathedral Range are the pick of the walks, but they are in no way the only options. If you wish to do a bit more walking near to the city, consider the following areas.

Dandenong Ranges

Only 35km from the city, the Dandenong Ranges are one of Melbourne's most popular escapes, cherished for their magnificent forests of towering eucalypts and luxuriant fern gullies. Five areas make up the 3215-hectare Dandenong Ranges National Park – Sherbrooke Forest, on the southern slopes, is the best of them, with its mountain ash forest, fern gullies and plenty of lyrebirds; it can be accessed on foot from Belgrave train station, on the suburban train network.

Macedon Ranges

Block-like Mt Macedon is one of the more striking mountain vistas from Melbourne, and also a good walking drawcard. For one of the longest day outings near the city you can stride out on the Macedon Ranges Walking Trail, which begins in the town of Macedon and makes a 30km loop over Mt Macedon, the Camels Hump and Mt Towrong, easing off in the middle to make a gentle loop around Sanatorium Lake. Macedon can be reached from Melbourne by train.

Woodlands Historic Park

Plane spotters and bushwalkers unite in this area of eponymous woodland and grassland at Melbourne airport's edge. Walks here can take in Woodlands Homestead, city views from Gelibrand Hill and mobs of grazing eastern grey kangaroos. A full circuit of the main features will take about half a day, and you will need your own transport.

Brisbane Ranges

One of the few opportunities close to the city to set out for a few days of walking, the Burchell Walk extends for 39km through the dry bushland of the Brisbane Ranges. The walk begins in the former gold-rush township of Steiglitz and meanders north for three days to Boar Gully. Koalas are prolific in the ranges. A shorter option is to walk into Anakie Gorge on the ranges' eastern side. There is no public transport to the ranges. Fires in February 2006 burned 7000ha around the national park. You'll see much evidence of this as you walk.

You Yangs

An iconic landmark on the city's western horizon, the granite humps of the You Yangs top out at Flinders Peak (348m). The best walk circuits this peak, starting at Turntable car park and swinging around a saddle before looping back. Conclude your walk by taking the track up to the summit of Flinders Peak. The circuit route is 4.5km in length, with the summit climb adding another 3km.

Cape Woolamai

At the southeastern tip of Phillip Island, Cape Woolamai is noteworthy for two things: the pink granite that forms the rugged point, and the migratory mutton birds (short-tailed shearwaters) that arrive here in September each year. To see the best of the cape you can walk a 10km circuit, beginning on Woolamai Surf Beach, and passing the Pinnacles sea cliffs to the cape. The return route crosses inland through the mutton-bird rookeries to Safety Beach. Allow three or four hours.

Coastal Art Trail

The walk you can have without leaving Melbourne, following the shore of the city's exclusive bayside suburbs. The Coastal Art Trail extends for 17km between Brighton and Beaumaris, and is showcased by signboards highlighting the coast's influence on Heidelberg School painters such as Arthur Streeton, Tom Roberts and Frederick McCubbin. The trail can be reached on the suburban train network; stations near the trail are Middle Brighton, Brighton Beach, Hampton and Sandringham.

join a marked track that angles steeply up a spur. Bear left on the crest, then left again to cross a gully and continue on to a sharp road bend. Follow the road for 100m into Quarry car park (30 minutes from the river).

BUSHRANGERS BAY

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Duration | 3½–4 hours |
| Distance | 13.7km |
| Difficulty | easy |
| Start | Baldry Crossing |
| Finish | Cape Schanck (right) |
| Nearest Town | Melbourne (p128) |
| Transport | private |
| Summary | Combines much that is great about Mornington Peninsula: a secluded beach, Cape Schanck lighthouse and remnants of native bush. |

The Mornington Peninsula National Park covers a narrow strip of coast between Point Nepean and the town of Flinders. Along Main Creek it also arrows inland to incorporate Greens Bush, one of the few remaining sections of native vegetation on the peninsula. The walk described here combines these two features of the park – bush and beach – into a great day trip.

For most of the walk's length you follow the Two Bays Walking Track. This coast-to-coast route stretches 26km from Dromana to Cape Schanck, crossing Arthur's Seat en route. Its best section is described here.

If you can't organise a vehicle shuttle at each end of the track, an alternative to the route described here is to begin at Boneo Rd and walk into, and back out from, Cape Schanck. Compensation for the out-and-back nature of this walk is that you get to see its best feature – Bushrangers Bay – twice.

Dieback (see p47) is a problem in Greens Bush, so keep to the defined walking tracks.

PLANNING

When to Walk

Just about any time of the year is suitable for this walk; if you strike a hot summer day you can always cool your feet at Bushrangers Bay (while heeding the swimming warnings). Camping is not permitted in the national park. There are no reliable sources of fresh water along the walk, so carry all you will need for the day.

Maps

Vicmap's 1:25,000 topographic map, *Cape Schanck*, covers the area of the walk and shows most walking tracks. The *Melway* street directory also shows most of the route, barring the final wander into Cape Schanck, and is sufficient for such a well-marked track.

Permits & Regulations

Though there is a \$4.10 vehicle entry fee to Mornington Peninsula National Park it is not payable if you park at Baldry Crossing or Boneo Rd. If you leave a vehicle at Cape Schanck you will need to pay the fee (disguised as a parking fee).

NEAREST TOWN & FACILITIES

See Melbourne (p128).

Cape Schanck

For some moody pre- or post-walk accommodation you can stay in former lighthouse-keeper cottages at **Cape Schanck lighthouse** (☎ 03-5988 6251; www.austpacinns.com.au; d/cottage \$120/165), with the lighthouse as your bed lamp and Bass Strait as your backyard pond. The motel-style Inspector's Room is the most modern option, while the oldest cottage, built in 1859, has an open fireplace.

To reach Cape Schanck, turn left at the end of the Mornington Peninsula Fwy and follow Boneo Rd for 12km to Cape Schanck Rd. The car park is 4km along this road.

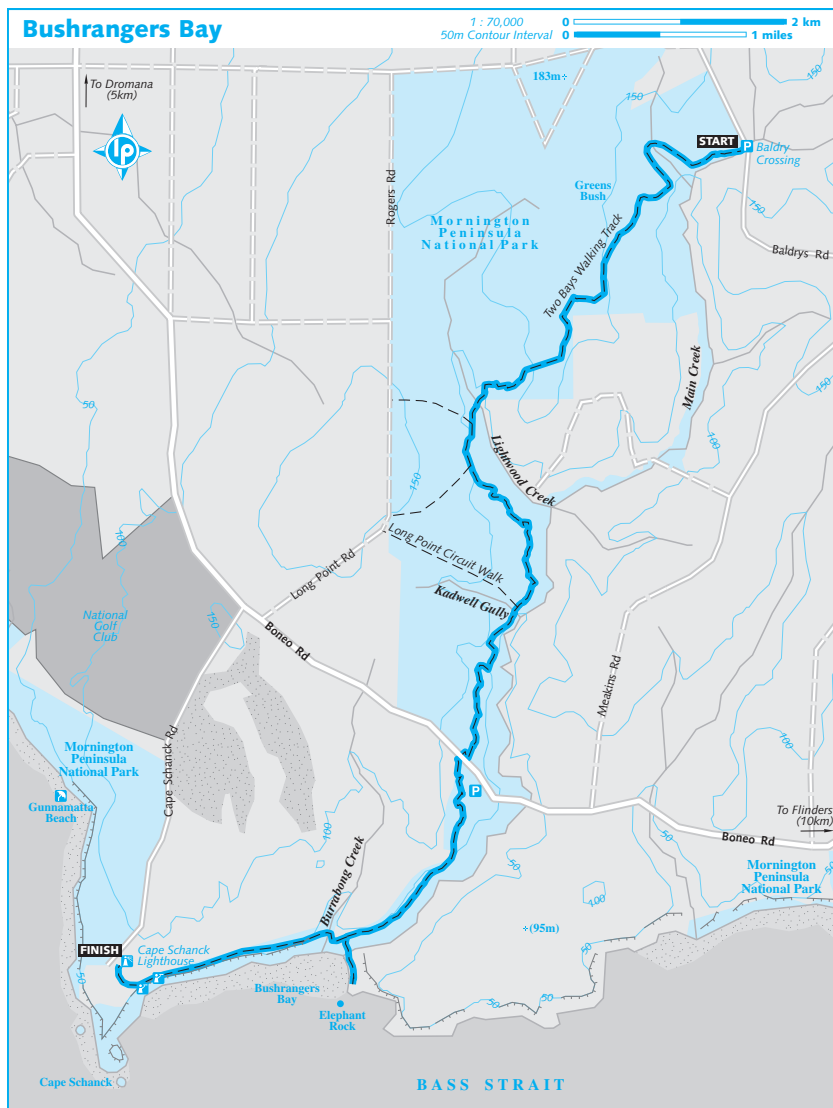
GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

The most direct approach from Melbourne to Baldry Crossing is along Mornington Peninsula Fwy. Near its end, take the Jetty Rd exit and continue south to Browns Rd, then Baldry Rd. Baldry Crossing is about 2km along Baldry Rd, 9km from the freeway.

If driving from Cape Schanck to Baldry Crossing, turn right at Boneo Rd, then left onto Meakins Rd shortly after passing the car park for the walk into Bushrangers Bay. Turn left at the road's end, then quickly left again into Baldry Rd. The car park is about 2km ahead.

THE WALK

Cross Baldry Rd from the car park and follow the walking track into the open eucalyptus bushland of **Greens Bush**. Walk beside Main Creek for five minutes, then begin



climbing above it. Pass a track junction to the right, cross a bracken-filled side creek on a boardwalk and continue the climb away from Main Creek. Nearing the ridge top, turn left onto Two Bays Walking Track.

Beyond a ridge-top swathe of bracken the track heads back into woodland and some dense clusters of grass trees. Follow the ridge

down to ferny **Lightwood Creek** (one hour from the start). Pass a track junction (out to Rogers Rd) on the right, then round a gully and amble above Lightwood Creek and the deeper Main Creek valley once again. Cross the two ends of the Long Point Circuit Walk and pass through a stand of banksias to **Kadwell Gully**. About 1km beyond the gully,

with the track crisscrossed by kangaroo superhighways, you emerge onto an open, grassed ridge. You will almost certainly see kangaroos. Boneo Rd is 800m ahead.

Cross Boneo Rd and continue south on a wide, sandy track, passing through banksia thickets and clumps of wattle. After 1km there are glimpses along Main Creek to the ocean; another 1km and you are starting down onto Bushrangers Bay, which is dominated by Elephant Rock. Thirty to 45 minutes from Boneo Rd you come to a track junction. Turn left and descend to the beach at **Bushrangers Bay**. Although the surf may look inviting, bear in mind that cross rips (undertows or currents) can make swimming hazardous. To see the best of the bay, cross Main Creek and head to the beach's eastern end, where you can poke about beneath **Elephant Rock**. From here there are also views across the bay to the Cape Schanck lighthouse.

Back on the main track, cross Burrabong Creek and climb beneath a canopy of tea-tree to the top of the 80m-high cliffs. Set back from the cliffs, the track follows their general line towards Cape Schanck. Nearing the lighthouse there are a couple of good **viewpoints** onto the tip of Cape Schanck and back to Bushrangers Bay. The track emerges at a car park; to the left is a **lookout platform** with clearer views of the previous vantage points. Follow the road down to the main car park (45 minutes from Bushrangers Bay), where there is a basic kiosk. Tours of **Cape Schanck Lighthouse** (adult/child \$12/10), which has been operating since 1859, leave on the half-hour.

CATHEDRAL RANGE

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Duration | 2 days |
| Distance | 18.6km |
| Difficulty | demanding |
| Start/Finish | Cooks Mill camp site (p136) |
| Nearest Town | Marysville (p136) |
| Transport | private |
| Summary | Discover an isolated walking wonder as you pick along the narrow and rocky ridge of the Cathedral Range, where there is always a view and a few superb lyrebirds. |

The Cathedral Range State Park offers the most rugged and rewarding walking near

Melbourne, although it doesn't come without some effort. To walk the circuit that is described here, you must be confident about scrambling on rock while carrying a backpack. If you are in any doubt about your ability, consider abbreviating the walk to a circuit of the range's northern end, following the Jawbone Creek Track west from Cooks Mill to the Farmyard, and then following the Day 2 description here. Jawbone Creek Track is steep but it's in no way technical.

The walk described here can be tackled in either direction, though walking clockwise is recommended since the descent from Sugarloaf Peak is more problematic than the ascent.

PLANNING

When to Walk

Avoid midsummer as you will be in the full glare of sun all the way across the ridge. Because of this, you will invariably need to drink more water than you expect, and there may be no resupply at Jawbone Creek, so ensure you have adequate supplies. Spring and autumn are both excellent times to walk, while the Cathedrals can also be a good place on which to break the chill of winter – avoid the ridge, however, if there is the likelihood of rain or mist.

Maps & Books

Vicmap's 1:25,000 topographic map *Cathedral Range* contains some basic walk notes and is a good resource, though the trail from Cooks Mill to Jawbones car park is incorrectly marked. Pick up also the park notes from the Marysville visitor information centre (p136); these show the new trail.

Federation Day Walks, produced by Maroonah Bushwalking Club, may be difficult to find but it contains more than 20 walks in the area, including a couple in the Cathedrals.

Permits & Regulations

Access to the ridge is not allowed on days of Total Fire Ban. Fires are not permitted at the Farmyard (or anywhere along the range), so carry a fuel stove. If you are camping at either Cooks Mill or Neds Gully, firewood collection is banned, so bring any firewood with you.

NEAREST TOWN & FACILITIES

Buxton and Taggerty are marginally nearer the trailhead, but Marysville offers a far better range of services.

Marysville

☎ 03 / pop 625

If you have been to the Cathedrals isn't the obvious next stop Victoria's one-time honeymoon capital? Marysville is still very much a place people come to swing hands with a loved one. If not that, then for the abundance of king parrots.

The **visitor information centre** (☎ 5963 4567; www.marysvilletourism.com; Murchison St) can supply you with maps and park notes. You will find basic camping supplies at **Marysville Hardware & Auto** (Murchison St).

SLEEPING & EATING

Marysville Caravan & Holiday Park (☎ 5963 3443; 1130 Buxton Rd; unpowered sites for 2 \$27-31, powered sites for 2 \$29-33, cabins \$60-105) is in the centre of town, with the Stevenson River running right through it.

Blackwood Cottages (☎ 5963 3333; www.blackwoodcottages.com.au; 38 Falls Rd; cottages \$125-145, spa cottages \$160-180) come complete with washing machine, dishwasher and park notes on all the walking options around the area. Ask the helpful and knowledgeable owners for a look at the house copy of *Federation Day Walks*. There are tennis courts also, if you still have some puff left.

Maryton Park B&B Country Cottages (☎ 5963 3242; maryton@bigpond.com; 36 Maryton Lane; d \$135) are 5km out of town (towards the Cathedral Range) and overlook a berry garden, nut grove and a lake from which you can pluck your own trout for dinner. There is complimentary port and home-made chocolates in each cottage. The attached **Cumquat Tree Tearooms** (mains \$18-30; ☎ lunch Sat & Sun, dinner Fri, Sat, Mon & Tue) draws on the best of local produce, including rib-eye steaks as high as a Cathedral Range escarpment.

Foodworks (Murchison St) has sufficient supplies for a night out on the track, while **Marysville Country Bakery Cafe** (cnr Murchison St & Pack Rd; ☎ 7am-5.30pm) is parrot central and an institution worth walking up an appetite for.

Fraga's café (19 Murchison St; mains \$17-25; ☎ lunch Thu-Tue, dinner Fri-Sun) has no parrots and no olde-worlde gimmickry, just a modern menu to be enjoyed in the art-filled dining

room or at the outside tables (where you probably will be among the parrots).

Crossways Country Inn (4 Woods Point Rd; mains \$18-25; ☎ lunch Sat & Sun, dinner Fri-Sun) picks up the yesteryear slack with fine-china displays, framed Hollywood starlets and candle lighting; a chintzy way to enjoy a chicken parma or roast-of-the-day.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Marysville is 95km from Melbourne along the Maroondah Hwy (across the magnificent Black Spur). **McKenzie's Tourist Services** (☎ 9853 6264; www.mckenzie.com.au) has a daily bus to/from Melbourne's Southern Cross station (\$14, 2½ hours).

Cooks Mill Camp Site

Set among manna gums (keep an eye out for koalas) on the banks of Little River, **Cooks Mill camp site** (per vehicle \$11.50) is a large, well-spaced area central to everything in the park. There are two approaches – the shortest is to take Buxton Rd 8km from Marysville (or 3km from Buxton), turning right into Mt Margaret Rd, then forking left onto Cerberus Rd (Cooks Mill is 10km on). This road might not be suitable to 2WD at all times. Otherwise, head north from Buxton on Maroondah Hwy, turning right into Cathedral Lane. Turn right again after 3km into Little River Rd and follow this south to Cooks Mill.

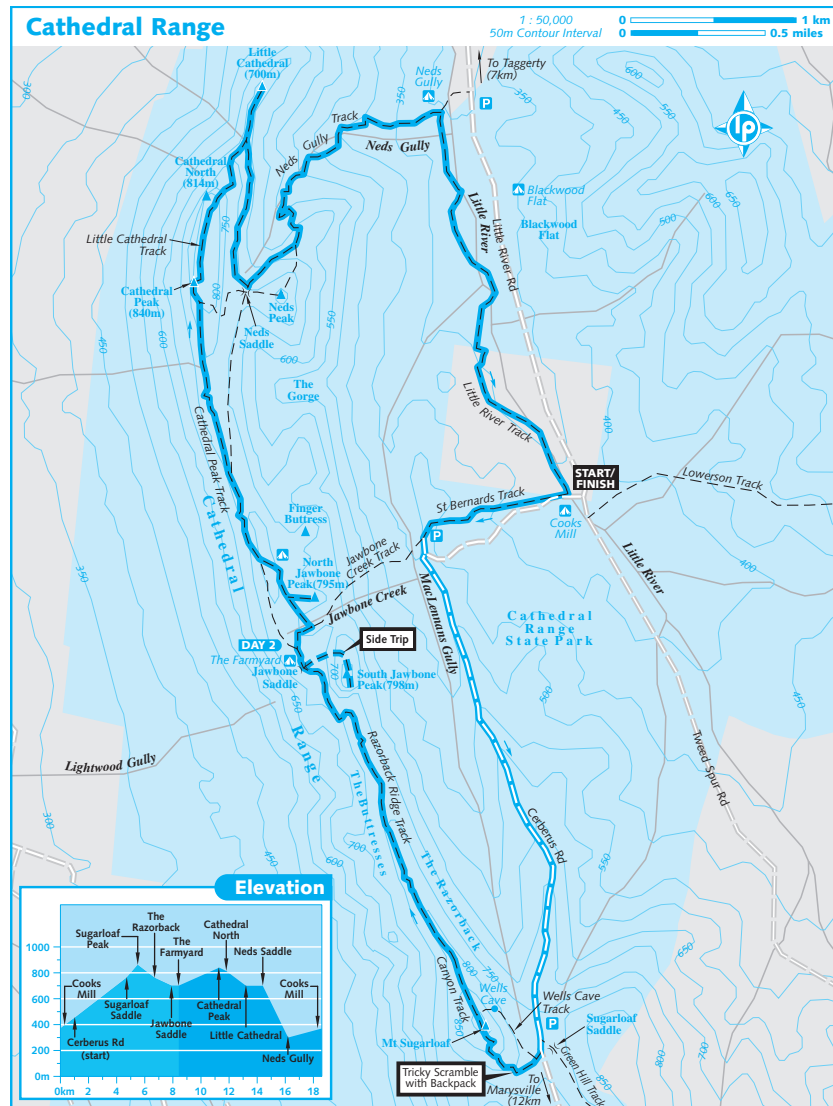
THE WALK

Day 1: Cooks Mill Camp Site to Farmyard

3–4 hours, 8.3km, 520m ascent, 170m descent
Head off from the walking track at the western end of the camp site, winding up St Bernards Track until it enters Jawbones car park (about 30 minutes from Cooks Mill). Turn left and begin the road slog, and a climb of 300m, towards Sugarloaf Saddle (45 minutes to one hour from the car park).

WARNING

The spring below the camp site at the Farmyard is unreliable, especially in late summer and autumn. You should carry enough water for the full two days. If this makes your pack uncomfortably heavy, avoid the section of the walk from Sugarloaf Peak across the Razorback to the Farmyard.



There are good views of the Jawbone peaks early on.

At **Sugarloaf Saddle** turn right onto the walking track, forking almost immediately left onto the Canyon Track. (The right trail ascends through Wells Cave, a more technical route than the Canyon Track, making the final climb along a flake of rock. Wells

Cave itself becomes extremely narrow and you won't fit through wearing a backpack.) Skirt a rock outcrop and ascend along the spur, which steepens as you climb. Scramble up through the next fractured line of rock, then continue to the left of the main line of rock. Cut across this below the point at which the rock becomes cliff, and funnel

up a narrow break in the rock. This is the most exposed section of the walk, though if you hold your balance it is not particularly difficult. Stay with the weak line in the rock until it angles to the left of the main outcrop. Here, you drop down to a track behind the rock.

About 100m on, an orange arrow on a gum tree points you back up onto the rock. Follow the reliable arrows as the track angles up to the summit of **Sugarloaf Peak**. There are some spectacular and airy views north along the spiky line of the ridge – what you see is what you will have to walk.

Follow the ridge north – it's as knife-sharp as the name **Razorback** suggests. The route goes across the top of, and just in behind, the rocky ridge top, making for a slow, scrambly and enjoyable rock hop. Much of the way there are good views into the agricultural Acheron Valley and, ahead, to the two Jawbones peaks in the middle of the ridge.

After about 30 minutes, as the trail dips away slightly to the west, the going becomes a little easier and the rock disappears from the ridge top. Don't panic; it returns intermittently in about 400m, although you now walk below it through stringybark forest on the ridge's western slopes. Soon afterwards, the track contours around South Jawbone Peak, before dropping into the open saddle of the **Farmyard** (one to 1½ hours from Sugarloaf), where you will find good camp sites, either shaded or open. There is a spring below the camp site, at the head of Jawbone Creek, though it is not reliable (see p136).

LIAR, LYRE *Andrew Bain*

The Farmyard takes its name for the resident superb lyrebirds that have taken to imitating the calls of livestock from the surrounding farmlands. Around this camp site, especially beside Jawbone Creek and on the slopes of North and South Jawbone Peak, the lyrebirds are as visible as they are showy. In five or six walking trips to the Cathedral Range, I have never failed to see one of these gregarious birds. Occasionally, such as one morning on the trail to North Jawbone Peak, there has even been the treat of the ultimate mating display.

This day I heard the lyrebird well before I saw it, mistaking it at first for a whipbird – it was, after all, making the unmistakable cracking call of a whipbird. By the time I spotted it, the male lyrebird was mimicking a kookaburra, strutting about with its gorgeous tail up over its back and head like the fan of a society lady. A few metres away a seemingly uninterested female wandered about the bush. Slowly the male employed every noise it knew – cicadas, cattle, currawongs, other birds. When I left it, the lyrebird had become the ultimate conservationists' nightmare – a bird that knew the sound of a chainsaw. Hardly the thing to impress the ladies, you would think.

SIDE TRIP: SOUTH JAWBONE PEAK

20 minutes, 800m, 70m ascent

From the centre of Farmyard a simple track eases up the hill to the rocky summit of **South Jawbone Peak** (798m). From here, all of the principal features of the ridge – Sugarloaf Peak, North Jawbone Peak and Cathedral Peak – look close. You can also look down on the road you trudged up first thing this morning; it looks much better from afar.

Day 2: Farmyard to Cooks Mill Camp Site

3½–4½ hours, 10.3km, 270m ascent, 620m descent

You can continue north along the ridge (follow the sign for Cathedral Peak), but the more interesting route is to begin along Jawbone Creek Track (signposted to Jawbones car park). After about 100m turn left, crossing the creek and heading up a small gully. In roughly five minutes you'll come to a T-junction (and another small camp site). Dump your pack here and take the right-hand track, crossing through a small clearing and then climbing 50m (steeply at the end) to the summit of **North Jawbone Peak** (795m), about 15 minutes from Farmyard. Drop down to the obvious ledge below the summit for the best views you will get of South Jawbone and Sugarloaf Peaks.

Return to your pack and continue straight ahead, climbing back to the ridge top, where you turn right. About 100m on, a trail drops away to the right towards Neds Saddle – stay on the ridge. At this end of the range the ridge is more gentle than near

Sugarloaf but it still makes for an interesting rock hop.

After crossing a run of high knolls, pass by a second turning to Neds Saddle (about 45 minutes from North Jawbone Peak). Climb on for five minutes to the summit of **Cathedral Peak** (840m). Here, the track drops away on the eastern side of the ridge, although it continues to follow its general line down and to the north. Just before a saddle you come to a third track junction (roughly 30 minutes from Cathedral Peak). Drop your pack again and make the short climb onto **Little Cathedral** (700m), the end of the line so far as tracks go in the Cathedral Range. The view north along the ridge will confirm the knowledge that you have been walking in rugged terrain.

Return to your pack and take the left fork, which contours across the ridge and into Neds Saddle. Take a hard left, onto the track that is signposted 'Neds Gully' (the track to Neds Peak leads to a viewless summit), and descend across the slopes of Neds Peak. After about five minutes the track begins a switchbacking descent. About one hour from Little Cathedral, the track crosses Neds Gully, recrossing its various streams several more times until you reach a T-junction. Turn right – the left turn heads a short distance into **Neds Gully camp site** (per vehicle \$11.50) – following the track along the bank of Little River. The valley will seem positively lush (except for the short section of pines) after your hours on the ridge. Around thirty minutes away from the junction, you will arrive back at Cooks Mill.

GREAT OCEAN ROAD

The aptly named Great Ocean Road, stretching between Torquay and Warrnambool, is the popular choice as Australia's most scenic drive. With two very different stretches of coast divided by the death throes of the Otway Ranges, it attracts motorists in herds, but there are a number of walking trails delightfully removed from the heavy tread of this holiday migration.

We have chosen the two prime coastal walks in the region – the Surf Coast Walk and the Great Ocean Walk. For a taste of the damp and lush hinterland there's good

walking among the waterfalls behind Lorne (see p186).

HISTORY

The idea for the Great Ocean Road was suggested in 1917 as a way to employ soldiers returning from WWI. A trust was established the following year and the first surveys completed. Construction began near Lorne in September 1919, though it would take 13 years to complete the road and require the labour of around 3000 workers. The road was officially opened on 26 November 1932.

ENVIRONMENT

The Great Ocean Road is a tale of two coasts. Along the Otway Range, at its eastern end, the hillsides are blanketed in thick forest and drained by waterfalls. At its western end, the road concludes in grassy agricultural land and limestone cliffs and stacks such as the Twelve Apostles. The difference is evidenced by rainfall figures – Lorne receives around 200mm more rain per year than Port Campbell. The two walks in this section are on the different sides of the divide.

In December 2005, the former Otway National Park and the Angahook-Lorne, Carlisle and Melba Gully State Parks, as well as some areas of state forest, were incorporated into the new 103,000-hectare Great Otway National Park, increasing the national park area by around 60,000 hectares, and making it the largest coastal national park in the state.

PLANNING Information Sources

The **Great Ocean Road visitor information centre** (☎ 5237 6529; www.greatoceanrd.org.au; Great Ocean Road, Apollo Bay) is a good starting point. If you are driving along the road from Melbourne to the Great Ocean Walk you will pass right by it. The website has a heap of basic, downloadable maps, including 15 walking maps (the Surf Coast Walk among them).

Guided Walks

Each of the companies listed on p128 offers walking tours along the Great Ocean Road: Auswalk on the Surf Coast Walk and all others on the Great Ocean Walk.

SURF COAST WALK

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Duration | 2 days |
| Distance | 32km |
| Difficulty | easy |
| Start | Torquay |
| Finish | Fairhaven |
| Nearest Towns | Torquay (below), Aireys Inlet (right) |
| Transport | bus |
| Summary | Discover the cliffs, beaches and lighthouse at the end of Australia's most famous scenic drive – it's even better on foot. |

At the Great Ocean Road's eastern end, the Surf Coast Walk is unlike most other Australian walks because it can be done in comparative comfort. Skipping between holiday towns, it is a great chance to walk without the need to hump your home on your back. Passing over and across some of Australia's most attractive cliffs and beaches, and taking in bushland the Great Ocean Road largely ignores, there is much to recommend the walk over the drive.

The route described here varies slightly from the Surf Coast Walk proper, but is more scenic and more practical to public transport. Gone is the largely uninspiring climb from Fairhaven into Moggs Creek at its end; added as a taster of the coast to come is the section between Torquay and Jan Juc.

PLANNING

When to Walk

This route can be walked at any time. Summer is most popular, with the mixed blessings of warm weather and cooling crowds.

Maps

Though the trail isn't marked, the 1:50,000 Royal Australian Survey Corps' topographic maps titled *Anglesea* and *Torquay* cover the length of the walk. The free *Surf Coast Official Touring Map*, available at the Torquay visitors centre (below), is a necessary complement. It shows a basic outline of the walk and has inset maps of Torquay, Anglesea and Aireys Inlet.

NEAREST TOWNS

Torquay

☎ 03 / pop 8000

The Surf Coast's major town is, shall we say, a little obsessive about its surfing. Here, you

will find what is billed as the world's largest surf museum and an entire plaza filled with surf shops. Set into the Surfworld Australia Surfing Museum is the **Torquay visitors centre** (☎ 5261 4219; Beach Rd).

Of the three caravan parks, **Torquay Public Reserve** (☎ 5261 2496; Bell St; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$10/25, cabins \$65-120) is nearest to the start of the walk.

Bells Beach Lodge (☎ 5261 7070; www.bellsbeachlodge.com.au; 51-53 Surfcoast Hwy; dm \$20-25, d \$50-65; ☑), with its *faux* bathing boxes, hires surfboards if you fancy strutting the waves as well as the coast.

Norfolk Cottage B&B (☎ 5264 8182; 22 Island Dr; d \$90-150; ☑) has stepped from the pages of *B&B Weekly*, with its English country garden, home-made biscuits and plump quilts. The attic is all yours, including the large spa.

Growlers (23 The Esplanade; mains \$15-26; ☑) breakfast, lunch & dinner has an inventive menu and proximity to the beach. Near the Torquay Surf Beach, **Café Splash** (2/15 Bell St; burgers \$9) does all-day breakfasts and a variety of burgers, sandwiches and cakes.

V/Line (☎ 13 99 36; www.vline.com.au) has five daily buses – two on weekends – from Geelong's Transport Mall to Torquay (\$5.40, 40 minutes). Return buses run four times a day (twice on weekends).

Aireys Inlet

☎ 03 / pop 1000

Fairhaven, at walk's end, is a residential extension of Aireys Inlet, a town as earthy – at least by Great Ocean Road standards – as its unsealed roads. Pinned to the ground by the Split Point Lighthouse, it is not a place to come on a budget. The cheapest accommodation is at **Aireys Inlet Holiday Park** (☎ 5389 6230; www.aicp.com.au; 19-25 Great Ocean Road; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 from \$20/22, cabins \$65-165; ☑, ☒, ☓).

In Fairhaven itself there is quirky **Ocean Inlet at Fairhaven** (☎ 5289 7313; oceaninlet@bigpond.com; 34 Wybellenna Dr; d \$200-250) with a gazebo-style bed-sit with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking native gardens. A tiny cabin next door contains your kitchenette and bathroom.

On the walk, you will pass two B&Bs: **Cimarron** (☎ 5289 7044; www.cimarron.com.au; 105 Gilbert St; d \$125-175, garden flat \$150-200; ☑, ☒, ☓), 1km east of Boundary Rd, with a free library

of 1000 movies and 3000 books; and **Aireys by the Light** (☎ 5289 6134; 2 Federal St; d \$165-265; ☑), located – surprise, surprise – by the lighthouse. All rooms have ocean view and there's a central spa.

Aireys Inlet Hotel (☎ 5289 6279; 45 Great Ocean Road; mains \$15-22) has a beer garden and bistro meals, while **A La Grecque** (☎ 5289 6922; 17 Beach Rd; mains around \$25; ☑) breakfast, lunch & dinner (Wed-Sun) is the creation of famed Lorne restaurateur Kosta Talihmanidis, offering fine but informal dining to celebrate the end of a fine walk.

The V/Line buses that serve Torquay (see opposite) continue to Aireys Inlet (\$10.40, 1¼ hours from Geelong), also stopping at the Fairhaven Surf Club.

THE WALK

Day 1: Torquay to Anglesea

4–5 hours, 18km

Begin by walking southwest along **Torquay Surf Beach**, at the town's southern end. Past the surf club, turn upstream on the true left (north) bank of Spring Creek to the footbridge, crossing it and following the wide path to the tip of **Rocky Point**, where a set of wooden steps leads down onto **Jan Juc beach**.

Head west along the beach for about 15 minutes, leaving it at the third set of steps, marked 77W. (Avoid the temptation to continue to the steps at the beach's end; these have been partly destroyed by land slips.) Despite the lack of signage, the head of these steps marks the official start of the Surf Coast Walk.

TIME & TIDE

Given perpetual low tide it would be possible to walk almost the full length of the Surf Coast Walk along the beaches. Though this isn't feasible, it is worth coordinating your walk so that at least a part of each day corresponds with low tide. The best places to aim for low tide are Bells Beach/Southside (Day 1), making it possible to walk below the cliffs from Bells to Point Addis; and Split Point (Day 2), granting you close-up views of Table Rock and its spread of rock pools. Tide times can be checked at www.bom.gov.au/oceanography/tides – Anglesea tides are 30 minutes earlier than at Port Phillip Heads.

From the steps, an obvious trail heads southwest along the cliff tops, climbing slowly with the cliffs and offering views ahead of sloping sandstone headlands. After 20 minutes the trail leaves Jan Juc, swinging inland through heath to meet Bells Blvd at a white, wave-shaped marker denoting the entrance to the Bells Beach Surfing Recreation Reserve.

The path now stays beside the road into the car park, reached about 45 minutes from Rocky Point. Take the first set of steps to **Bells Beach**, which surfers know as a nirvana, and others might know for its starring role in the movie *Point Break*, though for a beach with enormous raps it is surprisingly small.

At low tide you can walk to the beach's end and simply round the headland on its rocky platform. Away from low tide, this route should not be attempted – you could get more than wet, as this section of coast has a wrath that has claimed at least 19 ships. Instead, take the path (not the road) at the obvious gully, crossing the footbridge and climbing back on to the cliffs.

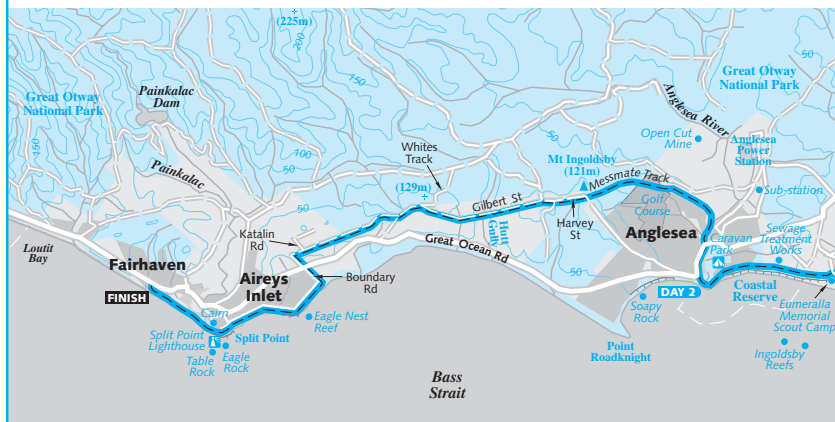
At the Southside car park, five minutes from Bells, you will strike two paths. The sealed path heads down to Southside Beach. Follow instead the gravel track, which eventually meets Jarosite Rd near the crest. Walk on the road verge for about 200m, until just past a sign for Ironbark Basin, and turn left at the narrow path into the heath.

Soon you will come to a vehicle track and a confusing web of paths. Go virtually straight on, beside the sign for the Jarosite Track, and drop to an unexpected **dam**, its waters as brown and viscous as liquid chocolate. This is followed by another mess of signs; stay with the Jarosite Track as it heads uphill and inland.

Near the top of the hill, through grass trees as prolific as lawn, you reach a T-junction. Turn left, following the 'Car Park' sign. Here, the vegetation thins, opening up views across the top of the Ironbark Basin to pencil-sharp Point Addis.

Twenty minutes from the dam, and 100m before the Ironbark Basin car park, turn left on to Ironbark Track, descending back to the cliff tops through the eponymous ironbarks with their furrowed bark. At the cliff edge (a tiger snake breeding ground) turn right, staying on Ironbark

Surf Coast Walk



Track and coming almost immediately to a lookout across unstable cliffs that resemble melted wax.

The track ascends behind these cliffs, veering right at the Koori Cultural Walk, then left again after about 200m. This path ends at Point Addis Rd; turn left and follow the road to the point (45 minutes from the start of the Ironbark Track).

Point Addis offers views the virtual length of the walk, back to Jan Juc and west to Split Point Lighthouse. Take the track at the car park's western edge, winding down to the beach, which is cleaved by a rocky spit. At the spit, turn up the creek to a set of steps, walking up and away from the coast and into a stand of she-oaks. Follow the cliff tops past the Eumeralla Scout Camp to the Anglesea River in **Anglesea** (1¼ hours from Point Addis).

ANGLESEA

☎ 03 / pop 2200

The first point at which the Great Ocean Road actually touches the coast, Anglesea stakes much of its celebrity on the kangaroos that famously graze its golf course.

The **Anglesea Beachfront Family Holiday Park** (☎ 5263 1583; www.angleseafcp.com.au; Cameron Rd; sites \$26-35, cabins \$76-152; 🏠) offers the most practical camping – it is the first thing (after the sewage works) you come to in town. **Anglesea Backpackers** (☎ 5263 2664; angleseabackpackers@primus.com.au; 40 Noble St; dm \$20-23, d \$60-70; 🏠) is run by a surfer but welcomes walkers.

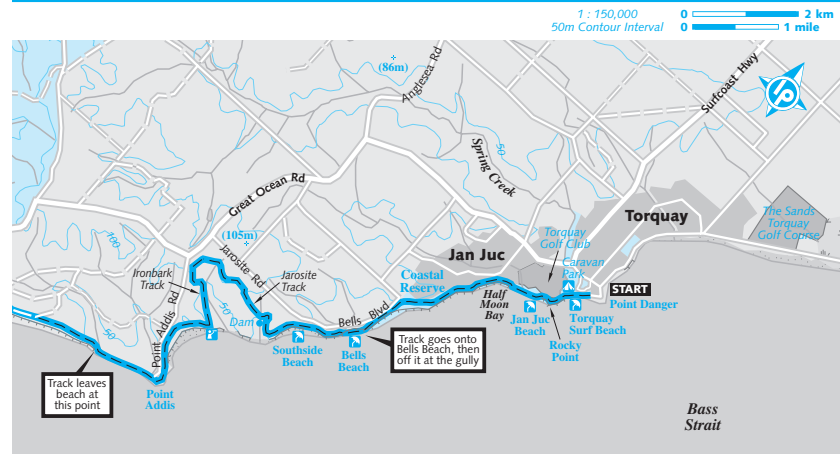
The **Anglesea Motor Inn** (☎ 5263 3888; www.angleseaoz.com; 109 Great Ocean Road; d \$110-240; 🏠 🚽), overlooking the river, is only a few metres off the trail, while you need only cross the river to find **Anglesea Rivergums B&B** (☎ 5263 3066; anglesearivergums@bigpond.com; 10 Bingley Pde; d \$100-140; 🏠 🚽), with river views and a cloud-soft bed to prepare you for another day of walking.

Angahook Cafe & Stores (119 Great Ocean Road) is a combination restaurant/gourmet deli/grocer that will fit most catering needs. The salmon steaks at the **Surfing Albatross** (89 Great Ocean Road; mains \$16-21; 🍳 breakfast, lunch & dinner) will make you forget you are supposed to be doing it rough, while the menu at **Rose Chinese Restaurant** (65 Great Ocean Road; mains \$17-25) resembles an electoral roll.

Day 2: Anglesea to Aireys Inlet

3½–4 hours, 14km

Finding the path out of Anglesea is about the Surf Coast Walk's greatest difficulty. Head upstream on the Anglesea River's true right (west) bank, crossing the Great Ocean Road and continuing into Coogoorah Park. When you draw level with the playground's wrecked ship, go left up the embankment (it won't feel right, but it is) to meet an unsealed road. Take the sandy foot track straight ahead, following the power lines. A wire fence will gradually separate you from the lines, but at the break in the fence, head through and back to the rubbly road under the lines.



After about 500m, the lines kink to the right. Take the smaller track to the left, then turn immediately right to join a narrow path contouring above Anglesea. This is one of the walk's best stretches: ahead, you will see the road to Mt Ingoldsby – your guiding line – and below, you might snatch glimpses of the golf course's kangaroos.

After 10 minutes you ascend to the Messmate Track, turning left amid less inspiring views of an open-cut coal mine. The Messmate Track climbs in ever-steep steps to **Mt Ingoldsby** (121m), one hour from Anglesea, from where you will have a view of Anglesea that is blotted by the mine and the belching substation.

Turn right at the summit onto unmarked Harvey St, veering left after 10 minutes onto (also unmarked) Gilbert St, rejoining the power lines – grow to like them, they are with you until Aireys Inlet.

Gilbert St drops steeply into and out of reedy **Hutt Gully**, then meanders towards Aireys. At Boundary Rd, 1¼ hours from Mt Ingoldsby, turn left, crossing the Great Ocean Road and continuing to the car park at Boundary Rd's end.

From the car park, you have a choice between spectaculars. At low tide, you can descend to the beach and round Split Point from below, threading between the headland and fez-shaped **Table Rock**. Otherwise, follow the cliff path, with its frequent views, to reach **Split Point Lighthouse** in about 30 minutes. Built in 1891, the 'White Queen',

as the lighthouse became known, is open to visitors just one day a year.

Round the lighthouse and follow the path signed 'Inlet & Beach', passing a **cairn** that marks the graves of two settlers. Joining the beach where it blocks Painkalac Creek, the final sandy stroll to the surf club at Fairhaven takes about 15 minutes.

GREAT OCEAN WALK HIGHLIGHT

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Duration | 3 days |
| Distance | 43km |
| Difficulty | moderate |
| Start | Johanna Beach car park |
| Finish | Glenample Homestead |
| Nearest Towns | Lavers Hill (p144), Princetown (p145) |
| Transport | shuttle service |
| Summary | Sample the country's newest long-distance trail, seeing some of the Great Ocean Road's little-known beauties and ending beside its showstopper, the Twelve Apostles. |

By its very name, the Great Ocean Walk makes clear its intention to become one of the most famous names among Australian walking tracks, coupling itself to the fame of the Great Ocean Road.

Completed in January 2006, the full trail extends from Apollo Bay to Glenample Homestead, adjacent to the Twelve Apostles, a distance of 91km. The section described here covers the most remote and

dramatic piece of the track, along beaches and cliffs that most people don't know exist since they can't be seen from the Great Ocean Road. It is a section that the track's creators have dubbed the 'wild side', in comparison to the eastern end of the walk, known as the 'mild side'.

The walk begins on roads that loop inland, but the coastal sections thereafter more than compensate. You will wander gorgeous Milanesia Beach and climb almost continuously across coastal ridges for the first two days (on Day 1 alone your ascents total more than 800m) each with a subtle variation on the view. As an alternative, you can begin on Milanesia Track, parking by the large gate near its end. While this does cut out the first section of road, you will also miss some good early views of Johanna Beach.

PLANNING

When to Walk

It is quite feasible to walk this track at any time of year. Winters can be fierce – it is not called the Shipwreck Coast for nothing – but also show this rugged coast at its most dramatic, if you can put up with the extra discomfort. This is also the season when you might spot southern rights whales on their annual migration.

Maps

Vicmap's 1:50,000 topographic map *The Otways & Shipwreck Coast* covers the area of the described route (and of the entire Great Ocean Walk), though it doesn't show the track. Use it with Parks Victoria's *Great Ocean Walk Information and Map Guide* brochure for the most complete resource.

Information Sources

Being the newest walking trail in the country, it is not surprising that the Great Ocean Walk has its own website – www.greatoceanwalk.com.au. You will find most details you might need on the site, or check with Parks Victoria (p127). The Great Ocean Road visitor information centre (p139) is also well schooled in details about the new walk.

Permits & Regulations

Parks Victoria requests that all walkers go east to west along the track – Johanna Beach

to Glenample Homestead in this case. You must register your walking and camping intentions – registration forms are available on the Great Ocean Walk website (www.greatoceanwalk.com.au). Great interest in the walk is anticipated and you should try to register around six weeks ahead.

Fires are banned along the track, so carry a fuel stove.

NEAREST TOWNS & FACILITIES

A number of accommodation providers along the Great Ocean Walk will transport you to and from the trail each day. For a selection of recommended places, log on to www.greatoceanwalk.com.au/search_accomm.asp.

Lavers Hill

📍 03

Lavers Hill is the high point of the Great Ocean Road, at least geographically. Despite the general feeling of abandonment, there are a couple of good sleeping and eating options.

Lavers Hill Roadhouse (📞 5237 3251; Great Ocean Road; unpowered/power sites for 2 \$12/17, d without bath \$48) is as basic as Lavers Hill itself. Hope for the unlikely – a log-truck-free night – as it is right by the road.

The decor in the tiny rooms at **Otway Junction Motor Inn** (📞 5237 3295; Great Ocean Road; \$89-140) fancies that it is in Italy but the views are all Otways. The attached **Otway Junction Bistro** (mains \$18-30; 🍴 breakfast, lunch & dinner) does pub-style meals in a Tuscan setting. As a bonus, there is a great selection of biscuits.

Southern Heights B&B (📞 5237 3131; Great Ocean Road; www.southernheights.com.au; d \$115-149) is 4km west of town and by far the pick of the litter. Perched on an open hilltop, there are two modern rooms – the better one has a view along the coast to Point Flinders, near Cape Otway. Adults only.

Foggy Hill Bistro (lunch \$11.50, mains \$15-23; 🍴 lunch & dinner) is attached to the roadhouse and worth seeking out for a traditional bistro menu and an inventive specials list.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Lavers Hill is around 240km from Melbourne along the Great Ocean Road, or along Hwy 1 to Colac, then across the range through Gellibrand River. **VLine** (📞 13 61 96;

www.vline.com.au) runs a Friday service between Melbourne and Warrnambool that stops at Lavers Hill (\$45, 5¼ hours).

Johanna

📍 03

Set behind the dunes of one of the state's fiercest surf beaches, and right next to the trailhead, Johanna camping ground has grassy areas and toilets. At the time of writing it was free to camp here, but this is likely to change. There are a few self-contained cottages tucked along the Red and Blue Johanna Rds. Of these, the **Boomerangs** (📞 5237 4213; www.theboomerangs.com; 3815 Great Ocean Road; d \$200) wins on novelty value for its shape (boomerang), design (jarrah floors and vaulted ceilings) and views (the Southern Ocean). Closer to the beach are **Johanna Seaside Cottages** (📞 5237 4242; www.johannaseaside.com.au; 395 Red Johanna Rd; d \$185-200; 📺), each with spa and wood fires, though there's a minimum two-night stay.

Princetown

📍 03

Bypassed by the Great Ocean Road, tiny Princetown is princely only in name. With the air of a roadhouse stop, it can be a nice antidote to the frills and frenzy of other Great Ocean Road towns.

Apostles Camping Park (📞 5598 8119; www.apostlescampingpark.com; unpowered/power sites for 2 \$18/22, cabins \$50; 📺) is grass disguised as a camping ground but has great views over the lower Gellibrand River. The office is the general store, as is **Do Duck in Café** (mains \$5-7), serving sandwiches, baked potatoes, nachos and the like.

There's also camping at the Princetown camping reserve (p148).

Talk of the Town (📞 5598 8288; talkofthetown.tavern@bigpond.com; motel r & cabins \$100) wears more hats than a milliner, being a **tavern** (mains \$14-21; 🍴 lunch & dinner), motel, greasy spoon and **pizzeria** (pizzas \$7-17; 🍴 dinner). There are two tiny motel rooms and a dorm-style cabin overlooking the river wetlands.

Clifton Lodge (📞 5598 8128; cliftonlodge@bigpond.com; 1450 Great Ocean Road; d \$60-100) is 3km west of town – just 2km from Glenample Homestead – with spacious and quiet, two-bedroom pine cottages.

Glenample Farmstay (📞 5598 8237; www.glenample.com.au; 2621 Great Ocean Road; d \$100-120) is a 2000-

acre property surrounding the Glenample Homestead. It has a self-contained cottage sleeping up to eight people. Access is from Simpson Rd, east of the homestead.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Princetown is 30km west of Lavers Hill, just off the Great Ocean Road. The Friday **VLine** (📞 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) service from Melbourne to Warrnambool stops at the Princetown turnoff on the Great Ocean Road (\$50, 6¼ hours). The general-store owners can also arrange transport to Melbourne (\$20).

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

Johanna Beach car park is reached along either sealed Red Johanna Rd (10km east of Lavers Hill) or unsealed Blue Johanna Rd (4km east of Lavers Hill) – the car park is at the end of the roads. Glenample Homestead is on the Great Ocean Road, 5km west of Princetown.

Timboon Taxi Service (📞 0438 407 777) will transport you from Glenample Homestead to Johanna Beach (or vice-versa) for around \$50. **Walk 91** (📞 03-5237 1189) also offers a shuttle for around \$65. Both can transport you between all accessible points along the Great Ocean Walk.

THE WALK

Day 1: Johanna Beach Car Park to Ryans Den Camp Site

4–5 hours, 14.4km, 850m ascent, 750m descent

At the northern end of the car park begin west, through two farm gates. The farm track climbs high onto the coastal hills, with surprisingly good views of the farmland below. In about 10 minutes you round the first hill, coming to a small **saddle** with views back along Johanna Beach, invariably being assaulted by surf. If you turn back left and walk for 200m you will find the Johanna Beach walkers' camp site.

Stay high on the hillsides, ignoring gates to the left signposted 'Management Vehicles & Walkers Only' – there is a good view west along the coast from the first gate. Coming to a fence-line the track turns inland, crossing through a final gate and joining Old Coach Rd. Climb on through intermittent bush to a junction with Milanesia Track (1¼ to 1½ hours from the start). Turn left, skirting a pine forest.

After about 45 minutes – as the road swings south again – cross through a large gate into a private property. The track here descends through some beautiful eucalypt woodland before making a final, steep drop onto **Milanesia Beach**. The impressive white headland to the east is Lion Headland.

Walk west along the beach for 300m to a prominent spur. If it is high tide or large seas you will need to take the track below the spur, climbing steeply away from the beach onto the cliffs (this track rejoins the main walk at the next creek). Look for the ‘decision point’ signs on the beach.

Outside of high tide and large seas, continue along the beach, below cliffs so pitted with rounded rocks they resemble an indoor climbing wall. At the beach’s end, beside a deeply cut creek, take the set of steps inland. Fork left after 30 metres (the right turn is the end of the high-tide track above Milanesia Beach) and cross the creek, climbing through vegetation for 800m to an old vehicle track. Turn left and after 100m branch right (the left track leads down to sea-edge rock platforms and is overgrown

with blackberries), heading up the hill to ascend across the high ridge of Bowker Point – there are fantastic views east to Cape Otway lighthouse as you climb.

After crossing through a small saddle, the track parallels the coast, swinging in and out of small gullies and climbing across another ridge to reach the junction with the Ryans Den Track (the Side Trip, below, turns left here).

Contour above Ryans Den (the small cove to your left) for 500m and begin a steep climb on steps to round a ridge. Ryans Den camp site is visible among the trees on the adjacent ridge. In about 10 minutes turn left at a junction and walk 150m into the camp site (1¼ to 1½ hours from Milanesia Beach). There are eight tent sites clinging to the narrow ridge.

SIDE TRIP: RYANS DEN

15–30 minutes, 800m

At Ryans Den Track turn left and descend along the wide track, which is steep and sometimes slippery. At its end it narrows to a foot track, burrowing through paper-

barks to emerge at **Ryans Den**. Cross carefully over the creek’s slippery rock to reach the shore with its rocks smoothly rounded by time and the ocean. There are also some fantastically eroded, knobby boulders at the mouth of the creek. Return along the same path.

Day 2: Ryans Den Camp Site to Devils Kitchen Camp Site

5–6 hours, 15.2km, 500m ascent, 500m descent

Return to the main track, turn left (west) and descend to a seasonal creek before switchbacking up the slope of the next ridge. The climb ends steeply, following a line of fence poles, but it does offer among the best views of the walk, down onto Cape Volney and back beyond Johanna Beach.

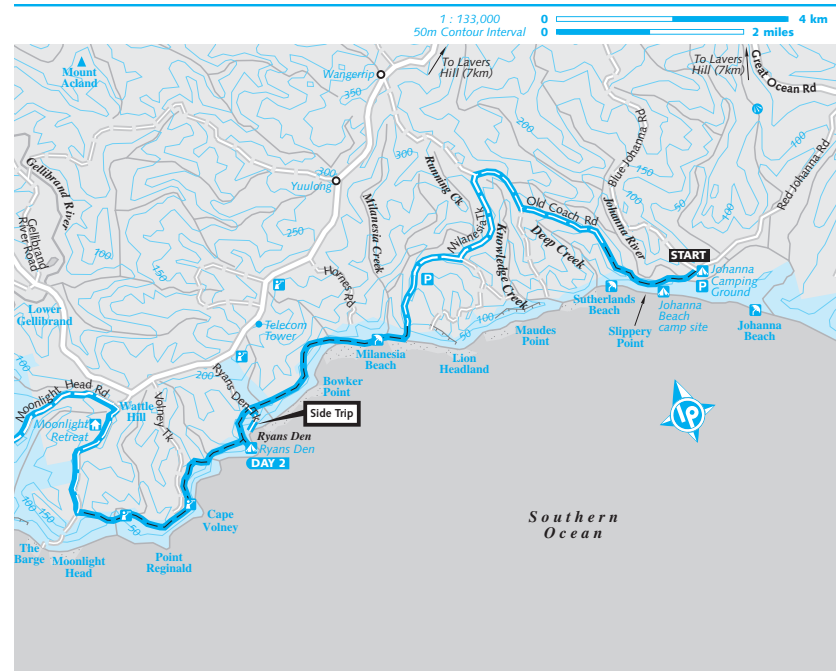
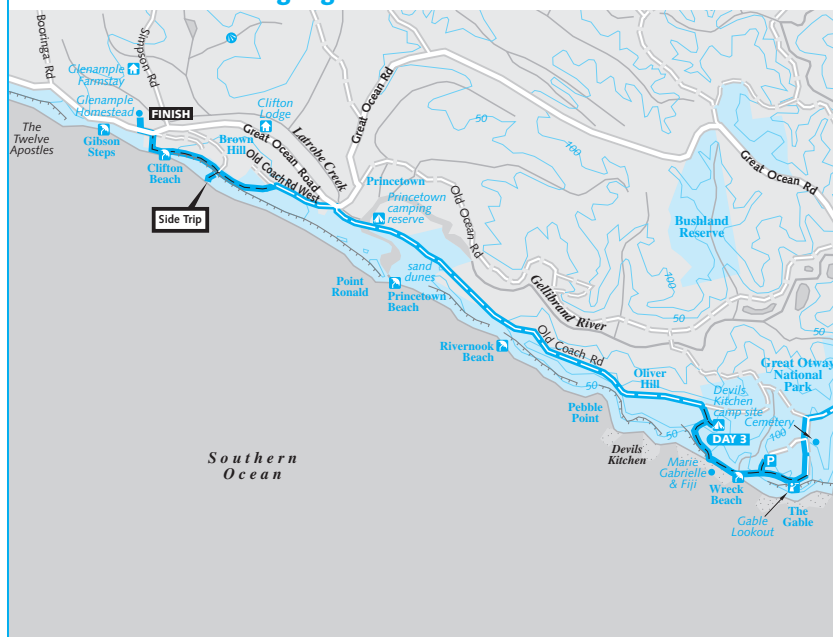
The track follows the fence poles around the coast for 400m, leaving them to head across to an old vehicle track (30 to 45 minutes from camp). Descend and climb steeply as the track rounds **Cape Volney** – nearing the point of the cape there is a great **viewpoint** just off the track, looking east along the coast.

The vehicle track follows ridge lines past Point Reginald – a nice stretch of walking without being spectacular. After 20 to 30 minutes the road rounds the top of a point for a good **view** across to Moonlight Head. At a track junction soon after, veer right, descending into a gully and then climbing onto a low spur, which you follow inland. Look out for a narrow pillar of remnant rock to the left of the track; just beyond here, the track steepens considerably, turning back on itself above Moonlight Head to join a road (1½ to two hours from camp).

Follow the road inland, passing **Moonlight Retreat** (☎ 03-5237 5277; www.moonlightretreat.com; d \$155-295), where the B&B rooms look out to the distant Twelve Apostles – bring binoculars if you really want to see them. Dinner service is available. A few minutes beyond, you come to a junction with Moonlight Head Rd. Turn left, returning towards the coast.

Veer left at the next two intersections (if you are heading towards a high tide on Wreck Beach, turn right at the first intersection to follow the high-water alternative)

Great Ocean Walk Highlight



GREAT OCEAN WALK

The idea for a Great Ocean Walk was born over a bottle of port in the early 1990s among accommodation providers in the region, though it would be more than a decade before the dream became reality in 2006.

The 91km walk begins in Apollo Bay and ends beside the famed Twelve Apostles, running mostly through the newly created Great Otway National Park. Unlike the Great Ocean Road, it adheres to the coast for most of its length, and offers tremendous variety: beaches, cliffs, rainforest, lighthouse and farmland, with the Twelve Apostles as a finishing post.

It can be walked in five days, though it's promoted as an eight-day walk, which allows you to settle into the slow rhythm of the coast. Seven walker camp sites have been created along the trail's length (as well as four drive-in sites), each positioned at points of great beauty. Each camp site has a composting toilet, and all but Blanket Bay have a shelter and table. There are also water tanks at each site – be sure to treat the water before drinking. Tent sites are spaced throughout the bush to create a sense of removal.

The trailhead in Apollo Bay can be accessed by a **V/Line** (☎ 13 99 36; www.vline.com.au) bus service from Melbourne, and there are dedicated shuttle services (see p145) to return you to Apollo Bay or in between.

and pass an old **cemetery** on your left. After 45 minutes you come to the Gable Lookout car park. Find the signposted walking track at its southern end and wander out to the **Gable Lookout**, passing a turn-off to Wreck Beach. The lookout is atop 130m-high cliffs, among the highest in mainland Australia. Return to the Wreck Beach junction and turn left (west), descending through she-oaks, grass trees and heath into a gully.

Beyond the gully, the track parallels the coast to a T-junction. Turn left and descend a seemingly endless set of steps to **Wreck Beach**. Walk west (right) along the beach for about 500m and you will come to the **rusted anchors** of the *Marie Gabrielle* resting in a series of rock pools – at high tide they may be underwater. About 300m further west is the upturned (and less evocative) anchor of the *Fiji*, embedded in cement.

Pick around the rust-coloured boulders at the next point and, five minutes on (midway to the next point), turn up a flight of stone steps, leaving the beach. Climb through paperbarks, continuing west along a ledge to begin with, then doubling back to climb to a track junction. Turn right; the Devils Kitchen camp site is five minutes' walk east.

Day 3: Devils Kitchen Camp Site to Glenample Homestead

3¼–4½ hours, 13.4km, 200m ascent, 250m descent
Return to the track junction and continue straight on (west), turning left along a 4WD

track in about 50m. The tracks hairpins almost immediately (this road can have some very boggy sections), heading inland. In five minutes you come to Old Coach Rd (and the high-tide track above Wreck Beach). Turn left (west), walking through heath and scrubland – keep an eye out for echidnas, which are common along this section. As you follow the sandy road west, along the park fence-line much of the way, there are occasional views into the agricultural Gellibrand Valley.

After about one hour, as you bottom out beside the Gellibrand Valley, merge with another 4WD track and continue west along the fence-line. Fifteen minutes on, the road swings inland, dropping again toward the Gellibrand River and then climbing through the vegetated dunes behind Princetown beach. Circuit a roundabout (a trail to the left heads down to Princetown Beach) and follow the road out, past **Princetown camping reserve** (unpowered/powerd sites \$14/18) and across Gellibrand River (1¼ to 2½ hours from camp). Princetown (p145) is on the hill to the right – a boardwalk across the wetlands into town begins just beyond the bridge.

Follow the road on for another 500m to the Great Ocean Road, but take the sharper left turn into Old Coach Rd West. Stay with the road as it bends right (ignoring a foot track that goes straight on) and, 15 minutes from the Great Ocean Road, break away left onto a foot track (signposted to Clifton Beach). Continue through dense tea-tree

scrub, climbing to views ahead that culminate in the Twelve Apostles. The track now winds along the cliff top, crossing a wire fence and a rough road. Walk straight on (the Side Trip, below, goes left), joining a boardwalk across the sandy cliff tops.

The track stays atop the cliffs until just before the beach at Gibson Steps, and the first of the Apostles. Here, the track veers inland, descending to the Great Ocean Road. Turn left along the road, then right after about 100m, following the entrance road up to **Glenample Homestead** (☎ 10am–5.30pm). The entrance gate on the Great Ocean Road will be closed outside of the homestead opening hours.

SIDE TRIP: CLIFTON BEACH

20–30 minutes, 1km

For an eye-level look at the most famous section of the Great Ocean Road, turn left at the Clifton Beach road and then right at the grassed parking area at its end. Follow a narrow track through a break in the cliffs and down to **Clifton Beach**. The stacks of the Twelve Apostles look very close from here.

GRAMPIANS NATIONAL PARK

The Grampians are a series of mountain ranges clustered together to form one of Victoria's most outstanding natural features, with sandstone escarpments that rise above the Wimmera Plain like petrified waves. Cradled inside is a host of wildlife, rock art, waterfalls, fantastic rock formations, wildflowers and myriad bushwalking opportunities along more than 150km of tracks.

In January 2006 a lightning strike on Mt Lubra, 15km south of Halls Gap, started a bushfire that burned around 130,000 hectares, including almost half of the national park. The two areas covered in this section were not burned, though it could be years before other popular walking areas such as the Wonderland Range and Major Mitchell Plateau (p187) make a full recovery.

ENVIRONMENT

The Grampians extend for about 100km north–south and 50km east–west at the

western extremity of the Great Dividing Range. They comprise a long central, almost continuous spine of peaks through the Mt Difficult, Serra, Victoria and Mt William Ranges. Mt William (1167m) is the highest summit in the Grampians.

The greater part of the ranges is made up of hard, quartz-rich, western-leaning sandstone beds, or 'cuesta' landforms – rocky ridges with one side steeper than the other, which are the result of differing rates of erosion of hard and softer rock. Outcrops of granite in the Grampians are most obvious as narrow bands in the Wonderland area, where vegetation is taller and relatively luxuriant.

The Grampians is renowned for its flora, especially wildflowers. More than 85 flowering plant species exist in the Grampians, and there are 18 endemic plant species. The diversity of the vegetation means a great array of habitats, ranging from wet heathlands to woodlands on rocky outcrops, and a corresponding range of animal communities. Mammals are particularly easy to spot in the Grampians, though it will be some time before the full effect of the January 2006 bushfires is known. The most easily seen animals are the eastern grey kangaroo, which is abundant, and the swamp wallaby. Echidnas are often seen in healthy woodlands throughout the park.

PLANNING When to Walk

The Grampians' season is almost year-round, influenced by two factors: hot summers and prolific spring wildflowers. You'll probably want to avoid too much walking in the former but will welcome it during the latter. Rainfall is not excessive at any time of year – nearby Stawell averages around 580mm annually – though most falls between May and October.

Maps & Books

The Grampians are covered by two Vicmap 1:50,000 topographic maps in the Outdoor Leisure series: *Northern Grampians* and *Southern Grampians*. Both walks in this section are covered by *Northern Grampians*, though it's a little outdated – it doesn't show all of the Mt Stapyllton track or Stapyllton camping ground, but is accurate for the Mt Difficult walk.

Parks Victoria has produced a series of three walking brochures: *Northern Walks*, *Southern Walks* and *Wonderland Walks*. Tyrone Thomas' *80 Walks in the Grampians* covers exactly what the title promises, while *Discovering Grampians Gariwerd* by Alistair and Bruce Paton is an all-round resource, featuring colour plates of wild-flowers and details of 48 walks.

The Grampians in Flower by IR McCann will help you pick one petal from another. The last two books can be ordered from the **Victorian National Parks Association** (www.vnpa.org.au).

Information Sources

For the most detailed information about the Grampians pay a visit to Brambuk (right). **Friends of Grampians Gariwerd** (http://home.vicnet.net.au/~gariwerd; annual membership \$5) works to conserve the park, and runs regular bushwalks.

Grampians Marketing (www.visitgrampians.com.au) Regional tourism body. The site is most useful as a link to accommodation around the area.

Permits & Regulations

There are no entry fees to the park, and sites at the 13 campgrounds dotted around the park cost \$11 for two people. Bush camping is permitted anywhere except in the

Wonderland Range, around Lake Wartook and in parts of the Serra, Mt William and Victoria Ranges.

Guided Walks

Grampians Personalised Tours & Adventures (☎ 03-5356 4653; www.grampiantours.com.au) operates a selection of bushwalks in the Grampians, ranging from half-day to four days.

ACCESS TOWN Halls Gap

☎ 03 / population 300

The small town of Halls Gap is pinched between the Wonderland Range and the northern tail of the Mt William Range. A singular tourist town, it is unobtrusive and likeable and a good base for all walks in the national park.

The **visitor information centre** (☎ 1800 065 599; Centenary Hall, Grampians Tourist Rd) has a free accommodation booking service and can also book tours and activities. **Brambuk the National Park and Cultural Centre** (☎ 5356 4452; www.brambuk.com.au; Dunkeld Rd) is 2.5km south of town and has park displays, Aboriginal cultural displays and activities, and rangers are available for walking information. There's also a good bookshop with some bushwalking titles.

GARIWERD

The Grampians' original inhabitants were two Koori (Aboriginal) peoples, the Djab wurrung and Jandwardjali, for whom the mountains were known as Gariwerd. In 1991 the national park was even renamed Gariwerd, but was changed back to Grampians National Park the next year when a new state government came to power.

The importance of the mountains as a Koori cultural site is evident in the number of art sites among the escarpments. There are more than 100 rock-art sites in the Grampians – or about 80% of all rock-art sites in Victoria. Five of these are promoted as tourist sites, two of which are located near Mt Stapylton. The small rock overhang of Ngamadjidj is reached along a 300m loop walk out of Stapylton camping ground and features a line of white human figures (Ngamadjidj means 'white person'). It is thought to be a place where people camped and repaired tools. A short drive away, reached on a 700m walk from the Hollow Mountain car park, is Gulgurn Manja, which features hand prints of Koori children around eight to 12 years old.

The most evident sign of Koori cultural influence is the presence of Brambuk the National Park and Cultural Centre (above). The building is designed to reflect the contours of the Grampians' mountains and a cockatoo – the totemic symbol of both the Djab wurrung and Jandwardjali people – in flight.

Brambuk means 'belonging to the Bram brothers', key figures in the legendary creation of the mountains. For the Kooris, Brambuk symbolises their renewal after nearly two centuries under European domination. Here, Kooris teach visitors about their cultural practices, stories, beliefs and management of the land. You can also sample some bush food at the Brambuk Bush Tucker Cafe (opposite).

SLEEPING & EATING

Halls Gap Caravan Park (☎ 5356 4251; www.hallsgapcaravanpark.com.au; Grampians Tourist Rd; unpowered sites for 2 \$19-23, powered sites for 2 \$22-26, on-site caravans \$47-68, cabins \$71-130) is as central as a GPO but a little spartan. **Parkgate Resort** (☎ 1800 810 781; www.parkgateresort.com.au; Grampians Rd; unpowered sites for 2 \$25-31, powered sites for 2 \$27-36, cabins \$80-175; ☎ ☎) has more razzle-dazzle with tennis courts, games room and nine different types of cabin. There's also a large grassy area to camp among the kangaroos.

Of the hostels in town, **Grampians YHA Eco-Hostel** (☎ 5356 4544; www.yha.com.au; cnr Grampians Tourist Rd & Buckler St; dm/s/d \$24/54/60; ☎) leaves the smallest footprint, with solar water heating, grey-water toilets and scrap bins for the chooks and worms. There are fresh herbs and eggs in the kitchen each morning and pot-belly stoves in the two lounges.

The self-contained cottages at **D'Altons Resort** (☎ 5356 4666; www.daltonresort.com.au; 48 Glen St; standard/deluxe/2br \$100/120/140; ☎ ☎) are ringed around a grassed area popular with kangaroos. Deluxe rooms have spa, stereo and dishwasher.

Pinnacle Holiday Lodge (☎ 5356 4249; www.pinnacleholiday.com.au; Heath St; s & d from \$89; as) has the wonderful knack of being both central and well hidden, tucked away behind Stony Creek Stores. The rooms are arranged to maximise views of the Wonderland Range.

Mountain View Motor Inn (☎ 5356 4364; www.mountainviewmotorinn.com.au; Ararat Rd; d \$90-105, cottages \$135-180; ☎) has a standard wing of motel rooms but well-spaced cottages for a camp-like sense of isolation.

The **general store** (Grampians Tourist Rd) has a good range of groceries and some camping gear; don't rely on it for anything useful.

Halls Gap Hotel (Grampians Rd; mains \$14-23; ☎ lunch & dinner) has a fairly unimaginative menu (barring the half-dozen things it can do with a chicken schnitzel) but is about the best value in town. Fall into step with the 'Trekkers T-bone'.

Quarry (☎ 5356 4858; Stony Creek Stores, Grampians Tourist Rd; mains \$22-30; ☎ lunch & dinner) overlooks Stony Creek and the tips of the Wonderland Range, and has a menu that ranges across the globe. Try the Razor Back Stack for the visual equivalent of a sandstone pinnacle. Bookings advised.

Brambuk Bush Tucker Cafe (Brambuk the National Park and Cultural Centre, Dunkeld Rd; mains \$8-16;

☎ breakfast & lunch) is the place for kangaroo steak sandwiches, emu kebabs and other bush treats.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Halls Gap is about 260km from Melbourne via the Western Hwy to Ararat and then via Moyston or Stawell. **V/Line** (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) operates a daily train and coach service from Melbourne to Halls Gap (\$48, four hours) via Ararat and Stawell.

MT STAPYLTON

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Duration | 4–4½ hours |
| Distance | 12.2km |
| Difficulty | moderate–demanding |
| Start/Finish | Stapylton camping ground (below) |
| Nearest Town | Halls Gap (opposite) |
| Transport | private |
| Summary | An exciting and scenic walk, with plenty of rock hopping, to a fine mountain summit in the northern Grampians. |

There are many higher peaks than Mt Stapylton in the Grampians, but few offer such exhilarating and rewarding climbs. Between sections of well-made walking track, there's plenty of rock hopping, some moderate scrambling and a close-up look at one of the most imposing and colourful cliffs in the country. If you've ever dreamed that you'd like to be a rock climber, this place might just inspire you to give it a go.

NEAREST TOWN & FACILITIES

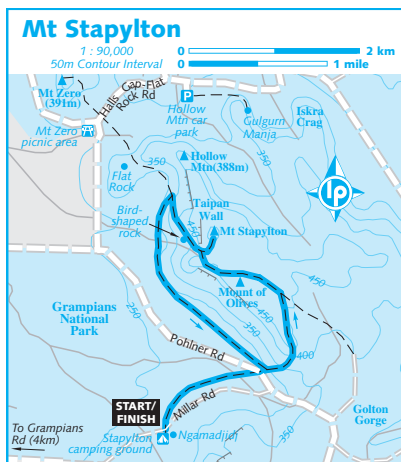
See Halls Gap (opposite).

Stapylton Camping Ground

In view of the Mount of Olives, **Stapylton camping ground** (\$11) has toilets, an untreated water source and a great location. There's room for caravans. To reach the camp from Halls Gap, turn west onto Grampians Rd, travelling 43km to Plantation Rd. Turn right; Stapylton camping ground is 5km along this road (the final 2km is unsealed). If travelling from the Western Hwy, Plantation Rd is 25km along Grampians Rd.

THE WALK

The walk starts at the western end of the camping ground and immediately crosses



over narrow, unsealed Millar Rd. Follow the track west through open bush – popular with eastern grey kangaroos – to Pohlner Rd. Cross straight over and follow a clear path through bushland for about 100m to a junction. Bear right towards a break in the ridge, climbing through it on a series of short flights of sandstone steps. The track reaches a broad ridge and swings north, climbing more gently through stringybark woodland.

Merge with a track coming in from the southeast, veering left and continuing along the ridge. Soon you emerge onto a rib of rock (one hour from the start) with good views of the rugged Mt Difficult Range to the south. Edge along the west side of the rock rib and descend back into woodland.

For the next 15 minutes or so, the route switches between the sandy track and seams of rock. At the edge of a deep cleft, descend steeply to a gully. The path soon heads back out onto rocks; about 50m on, look up to the right to spot a red triangle, indicating the line upwards for a short but steep scramble. Turn left along a wide rock ramp, dropping away left again after about 50m. At the base of the rock turn left. Quickly the track swings back right, generally skirting the cliffs. Ascend to a track junction and turn right.

Climb back to the now-narrow ridge top, dropping off the eastern side to the base of the summit cliffs. The track turns up into a gorge-like break in the cliffs. Cross the gully above a rock fall and double back

left along a wide sandstone ramp, rounding the beautifully fretted sandstone cliffs. Then comes a slightly awkward scramble up a 2m chimney, an airy traverse and a final scramble up to the rocky summit of **Mt Stapylton**. The view takes in Mt Zero and Hollow Mountain nearby, the Victoria and Mt Difficult Ranges and, to the west, Mt Arapiles, looking like Uluru in miniature.

Return to the last track junction and bear right towards Mt Zero picnic area. In a couple of minutes you begin a great descent down a broad band of rock hundreds of metres long, with the colourful **Taipan Wall** soaring above. This striped wall is among the most challenging climbing walls in the country. For those not into harnesses and karabiners it's also one of the most attractive bits of rock architecture in the land. Soon you'll pass a large remnant of sandstone shaped like a bird.

Keep right of a deep ravine and re-enter woodland. A few minutes on (30 to 45 minutes from the summit), turn left. (If you have the time, it's worth wandering straight on for about 400m to **Flat Rock**, which offers the best views of Mt Stapylton and Taipan Wall). The main track heads through woodland below Mt Stapylton and the **Mount of Olives**, with good views of their classic Grampians cliffs. About 40 minutes along this track you arrive back at the track junction above Pohlner Rd. Turn right and retrace your steps to the camping ground.

MT DIFFICULT

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Duration | 2 days |
| Distance | 22.6km |
| Difficulty | moderate–demanding |
| Start/Finish | Beehive Falls car park |
| Nearest Town | Halls Gap (p150) |
| Transport | private |
| Summary | Climb through sandstone cliffs to the highest peak in the northern Grampians and arguably the ranges' best viewpoint; a sunset stunner. |

True to its name, Mt Difficult doesn't yield easily but it's arguably the best long walk in the Grampians. Though its summit is just 806m above sea level, it's an indication of the terrain that you will climb more than 1000m on the first day to reach it.

The route described here can be varied in a couple of ways. For a long day outing you can beeline straight for the peak by following the Day 2 description in reverse. An equally popular approach is to climb Mt Difficult from Troopers Creek camping ground at its foot, spending the night in one of the camp sites near Deep Creek. Both these options can mean sacrificing sunset on Mt Difficult, which is the reward you want for a day of walking effort.

Mt Difficult was untouched by the bushfires of January 2006 but was burnt back in January 1999, when a bushfire burned more than 5000 hectares of the national park (as well as surrounding areas). There's little sign of fire damage now.

Navigation is fairly simple along this route with all track junctions marked by silver plaques showing tracks and distances.

PLANNING

What to Bring

There are no reliable water sources along the route of this walk so you will need to carry your entire supply; allow at least 6L.

Permits & Regulations

All walkers on this route are required to fill out a trip intention form at Brambuk (p150). You will be required to contact Brambuk when you finish walking or a search will be initiated. The walk is also through a fuel-stove-only area (despite all the heavy camp-fire scars you'll see), so no fires are allowed.

NEAREST TOWN

See Halls Gap (p150).

THE WALK

Day 1: Beehive Falls Car Park to Mt Difficult Saddle

4½–5½ hours, 14.9km, 1050m ascent, 500m descent
Begin south from the car park on a wide trail through open eucalypt woodland. The track soon comes to often-dry Mud Hut Creek, following it to a wooden bridge at the base of the escarpment. Cross the bridge and ascend on stone steps to the foot of **Beehive Falls** (20 to 30 minutes from the car park). You will need to be here in winter or spring to see the falls at anything more than a dribble, though it's a beautiful and cool spot at any time.

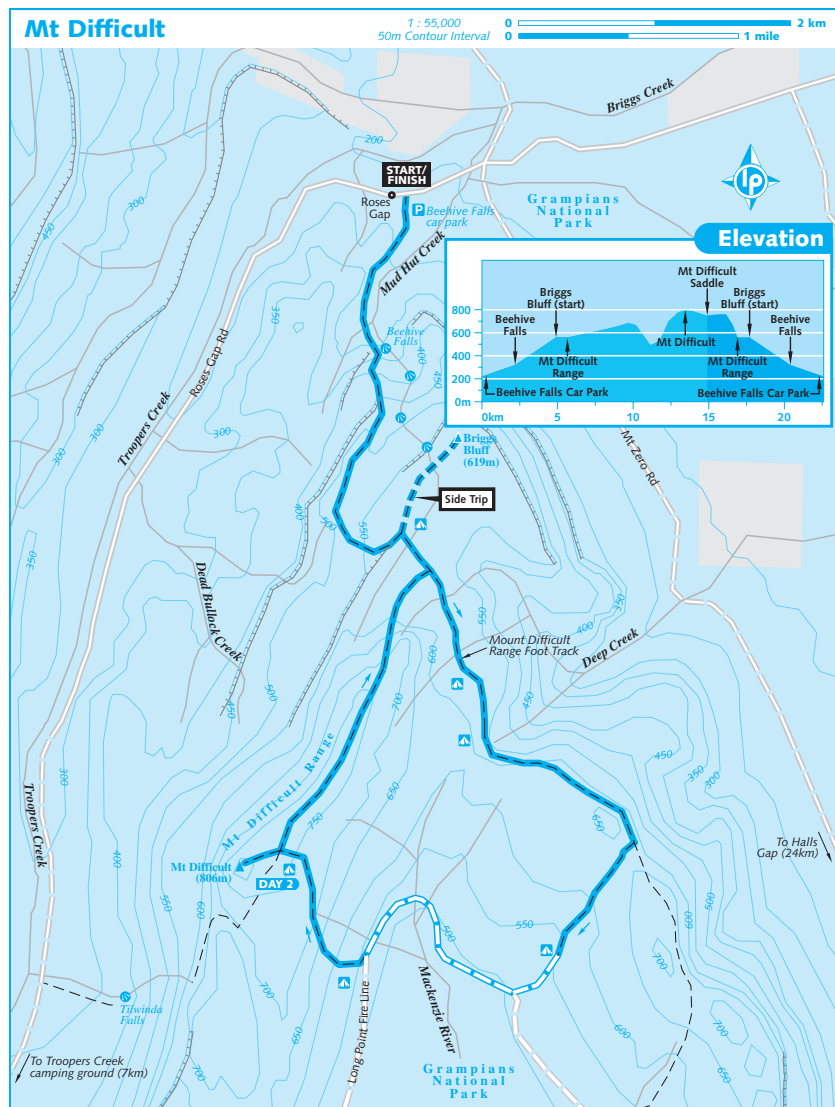
Cross back over the creek and begin a steep, winding climb through the lower escarpment. Cut back across a small creek to a second line of rock, mottled here like the hide of an elephant. Briggs Bluff is the tall, pointed peak ahead. Begin ascending this next section on the rock before funneling into a small, stony gully.

At the head of the gully the track swings south, climbing again to a wide ledge overlooking the cleft of **Mud Hut Creek**. Here, the track flattens, heading south atop the ledge (the trig point on Mt Difficult is visible ahead). Follow the obvious track across rock and sand for about 15 minutes before swinging east to cross a small gully and climb towards the cave-riddled cliffs. Passing between a pair of giant boulders the track veers north, following the foot of the cliffs to a track junction (one hour from Beehive Falls).

Turn right (the left turn goes to Briggs Bluff; see p155), walking east through eucalypt woodland. In about 200m you pass through a number of camp sites. Scramble through one line of rock and then edge around the base of the next to reach a track junction. Turn left, descending past some camp sites to cross one arm of **Deep Creek** (which will almost certainly be anything but deep) and then climbing steeply to the foot of the cliffs ahead. Swing first east and then west at their base, gradually climbing through the cliffs. At the last line of cliffs, the track breaks left through a narrow gap in the wall, and you are rewarded with a view south along the Mt Difficult Range and across the plains to Mt Langi Ghiran.

Cross two more inlets of Deep Creek (there is a good camp site at the first crossing) and continue on south through stringybark, banksias and grass trees. Soon, as you begin rounding Deep Creek Gorge, there are fleeting views of Lake Wartook, cradled in the centre of the Mt Difficult Range. Pass through another camp site, veering right at the large, worn boulder in the camp.

Soon after, you begin a gradual climb through bush all but air-brushed orange with lichen. Thirty minutes from the last camp site, turn right and descend through stringybark woodland to join a disused 4WD track. Veer left along the track (there is a decent camp site to the right) and, in



another 300m, turn right onto the Long Point Fire Line, a management vehicle track. Heading back north the track crosses two arms of the **Mackenzie River** (look for beautiful coral ferns at both crossings). These tiny streams flow on to become one of the Grampians' most impressive attractions: Mackenzie Falls.

A few minutes past the second crossing the track hairpins south, crossing three streams to a junction with a foot track. There's a camp site here that can be a good option as the stream beside it is the most likely of any along the walk to contain water.

Turn right and begin climbing beside the fern-lined creek. The switchbacking climb

is relentless for about 20 to 30 minutes, but then flattens out, contouring north. Turning west the track squeezes between two boulders and climbs – more gently now – up to a small saddle just below the summit of Mt Difficult (about 45 minutes from the Long Point Fire Line). There are a few good camp sites here; set up your tent and then take the track north out of camp for about 100m. Turn left onto a path that turns in behind the first line of rock and then winds easily up to the summit of **Mt Difficult** (806m). The view from here is a what's-what of the Grampians: Mt Stapyllon and Mt Zero to the north; and Mt Rosea, Mt William and its tower, and the trailing line of the Serra Range to the south. It's well worth getting here for sundown; on a good night it's one of the best sunset vantage points in the state.

SIDE TRIP: BRIGGS BLUFF

45 minutes–1 hour, 2.4km return, 80m ascent

At the Briggs Bluff junction turn left and head north. The route is marked by small cairns and the polished line of years of walking use. Generally descend for about 800m, until you cross a wooded gully. From here, ascend on bare rock to the summit of **Briggs Bluff** (619m). From the top, you'll see lumpy Mt Stapyllon to the northwest, the distant bubble of Mt Arapiles to the west and the ramped summit of Mt Difficult to the south. Return to the junction along the same path.

Day 2: Mt Difficult Saddle to Beehive Falls Car Park

2–3 hours, 7.7km, 550m descent

Take the track north out of camp again, passing the turn-off to Mt Difficult, and heading out across sandstone slabs and into woodland. Passing through a camp site, after 600m the track climbs to the edge of a large seam of rock. Walk along its base, and then edge away to continue north across nicely smoothed slabs. After about 40 minutes you enter a beautifully sculpted section of rock, which is more reminiscent of the Wonderland Range than Mt Difficult. A few minutes on you come to a junction, turning left to rejoin your outward route. Swing left at the Briggs Bluff turning and descend back past Beehive Falls to the car park.

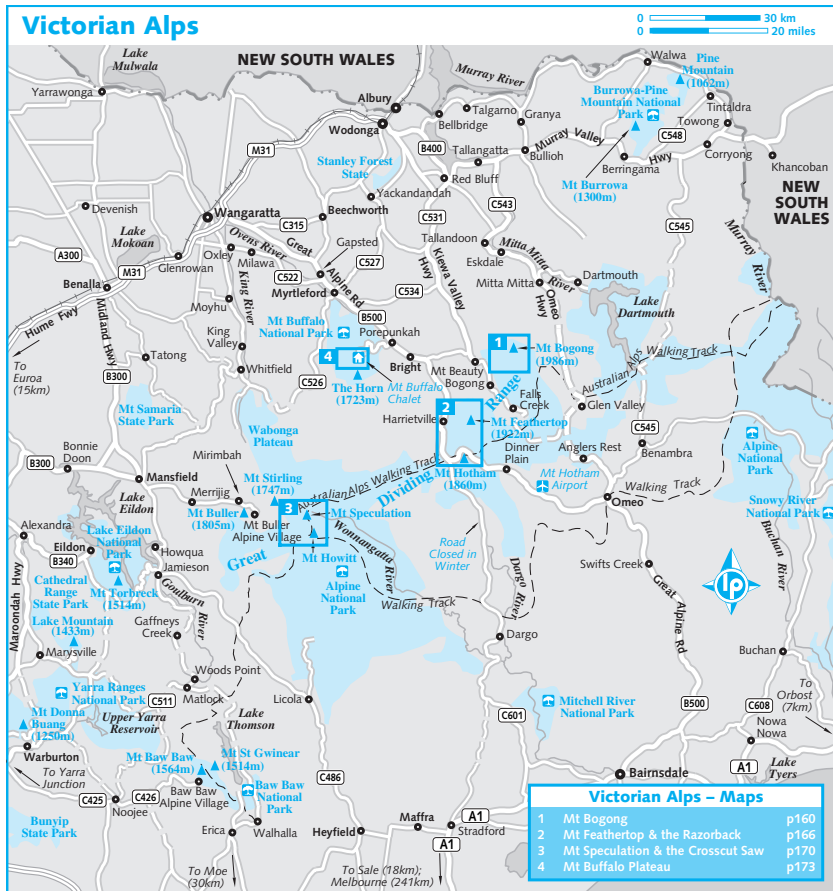
VICTORIAN ALPS

Rising about 100km northeast of Melbourne and stretching for 250km right to the New South Wales (NSW) border is a mountainous region of high ridges, plateaus and deep valleys collectively known as the Victorian Alps. The Alps are home to the highest mountains in the state; from the tallest peaks, the views are almost limitless as range after range fades towards the horizon. The Great Dividing Range, which parallels the east coast of Australia from western Victoria right up to Cape York in Queensland, forms the backbone of the Alps, rising to a height of 1986m at Mt Bogong.

Much of the region is contained within a number of national parks, the largest of which, at 646,000 hectares, is the Alpine National Park. (Other smaller but equally important High Country parks are Baw Baw National Park and Mt Buffalo National Park.) The Alpine National Park abuts Kosciuszko National Park, creating a massive zone protecting most of the country's alpine regions. Unfortunately, the boundaries of the Alpine National Park have been creatively routed so that pockets of alpine ash and other mountain hardwoods still see the frequent activity of timber getters. Another oddity is that cattle grazing has continued in some sectors of the park for many years, though this practice seems likely to cease beyond 2006 due to recent Victorian Government legislation.

The Victorian Alps are a tourist attraction year-round. Pretty towns can be found in the valleys around the area, each catering for the traveller and offering a good base from which to explore the mountains. In winter, downhill skiers flock in large numbers to the major ski resorts of Falls Creek, Mt Buller and Mt Hotham, and to smaller areas at Mt Baw Baw and Mt Buffalo. Rolling plains and rounded summits make cross-country skiing popular, while bush camping, 4WD driving and fishing are popular in the summer months.

But by far the best way to see the most attractive, captivating and isolated parts of the Victorian Alps is on foot. This huge area is well covered by a network of walking tracks and old 4WD roads, giving relatively easy access to most of the scenic country.



HISTORY

Evidence suggests that this region was first visited by Aboriginal people at least 5000 years ago, and even earlier in the surrounding lowlands. They gathered on the mountain plains during the summer months to feed on the protein-rich Bogong moths, which they found in cracks and fissures in rocks. But it was not until the mid-1800s when European Australians first reached the Alps. One of the first visits to the highest areas was made by two graziers, Jim Brown and Jack Wells, who traversed the Bogong High Plains in 1851. They named many of today's well-known features, including Mt Feathertop, Mt Fainter and Pretty Valley, and cut the area's first stock routes.

In the 1880s and 1890s, there was an influx of graziers and miners (after the discovery of gold deposits). Prospectors pushed far up the valleys, and some even high onto the mountains. While most sources of gold eventually ran dry, the Red Robin mine (near Mt Hotham), founded in 1941, remains a viable, small-time operation.

Locals, appreciating the scenic beauty of the mountains, began promoting the area with brochures and guided walks. Residents from the town of Bright formed the Bright Alpine Club in 1887 and members led excursions to the mountains in both summer and winter; Mts Buffalo (p171) and Feathertop (p164) being two of their most visited areas. Roads were gradually cut to

the heads of the valleys, then over the Alps at Mt Hotham, so that a large section of the mountains became readily accessible to travellers. Bushwalking boomed in the 1920s – and was given further impetus by the Great Depression of the 1930s – and is still a most popular pastime today, while tourism has become one of the region's most prosperous industries.

ENVIRONMENT

The flora and fauna of the Victorian Alps varies little from what you can expect with Kosciuszko National Park; you're less likely to see emus and feral pigs on any of the walks in the Victorian High Country, though deer (feral in Australia) are common, particularly in the Mt Howitt area. More detailed information can be garnered from the Kosciuszko National Park's Environment section (p83).

CLIMATE

The Victorian Alps are part of the same mountain range that forms the heart of the

Kosciuszko National Park in NSW, and experience a similar climate (see p85).

PLANNING

It's essential to be well prepared for a walk in the mountains, as weather conditions can be severe at times, even in summer. The Gearing up for the Mountains boxed text (p39) has further information.

When to Walk

Winter is unsuitable for walking, not only because of the deep snow that covers many parts of the walking areas described here, but also because seasonal road closures affect access to some places. For the most part, you can walk any time between October and April, though the most popular months are January to March when the days are usually warm, the weather is generally stable and wildflowers put on their best displays.

Maps & Books

There are many good general maps covering the Australian and Victorian Alps. One

AUSTRALIAN ALPS WALKING TRACK

This challenging, and at times spectacular, long-distance walk traverses about 680km of alpine country and summits Australia's highest peaks. Starting from the tiny historic village of Walhalla in Victoria, it ends at the Namadgi Visitor Centre on the southern outskirts of Canberra in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT).

When the original plan for a Victorian 'Alpine Walking Track' was mooted in the 1940s it was met with much disdain by walkers who wanted to keep the mountains free of marked trails. However, in the 1950s and 60s, with logging and tourist roads pushing further into the Victorian mountains and slowly eroding the wilderness value of popular walking destinations, the idea of an Alpine Walking Track became increasingly popular.

The 400km Alpine Walking Track was completed in 1976 and stretched from Walhalla to the Victorian border at Tom Groggin (near Thredbo), but it was not until the early 1990s that the track was extended through the high country of NSW and the ACT as well, creating the Australian Alps Walking Track.

The track, most of which is clearly marked, takes about eight weeks to walk in total, but most walkers tend to complete sections of the track as shorter, less demanding tours. If you are interested in walking the entire track remember that no major towns are passed (only a few ski villages), so it is necessary to store food caches at designated points beforehand.

The best source of information on the track is John Siseman's *Australian Alps Walking Track*. This excellent guide includes detailed track notes, as well as background information on history, environment, climate, flora and fauna, camping, and maps.



of the better maps is *High Country Victoria*, published by Hema Maps. It provides a good overview of the area at a scale of 1:300,000.

A few handy guidebooks with extensive walking notes include *Bushwalks in the Victorian Alps* by Glenn van der Knijff, a full-colour guide, and *Victoria's Alpine National Park* by John Siseman. Both guides include track notes to a number of walks and plenty of photographs, as well as ample background and planning information.

Australian Alps – Kosciuszko, Alpine & Namadgi National Parks by Deirdre Slattery has some track notes, but also contains loads of other information on the environment, history and development of the Victorian Alps and Snowy Mountains region.

Information Sources

The best places for information on the region, including accommodation, transport, maps and books, are visitor centres in Bright, Mt Beauty and Mansfield.

The **Australian Alps National Parks** (www.australialps.deh.gov.au) website is a useful source of background information on the Alps region.

Permits & Regulations

There are no camping fees for bush camping in the Alpine National Park, although there is a charge for using a camp site at the established camping ground in Mt Buffalo National Park (p172). Mt Buffalo National Park also charges a vehicular entrance fee (p172).

One major restriction to be aware of is that no campfires are permitted in the areas surrounding the summits of Mts Bogong and Feathertop, as these are declared as fuel-stove-only areas.

ACCESS TOWN

Bright

☎ 03 / pop 1900

Within the upper reaches of the Ovens Valley, Bright is a pretty town that thrives on tourism and is increasingly a centre for adventure pursuits, including cycling, walking, skiing, rockclimbing and hang gliding. It has a wide range of facilities and services, and is an excellent springboard for bushwalking in the surrounding mountains.

INFORMATION

The **Bright Visitor Centre** (☎ 5755 2275; www.brightscapes.com.au; 119 Gavan St; ☹ 9am–5pm) has plenty of information for travellers and has a helpful **accommodation booking service** (☎ 1300 551 117). There's also a **Parks Victoria office** (☎ 5755 0000; 46 Bakers Gully Rd), which can offer advice on the condition of roads in the surrounding mountains.

SUPPLIES & EQUIPMENT

The shopping strip is on Ireland St, where there are various shops, takeaway outlets, cafés, supermarkets and **Bright Disposals & Outdoor Centre** (☎ 5755 1818; 9 Ireland St) selling a variety of outdoor and camping equipment. There are a few banks and a post office on Gavan St, just uphill of the visitor centre.

SLEEPING & EATING

There is a plethora of caravan parks in and around Bright. The largest is **Bright Caravan Park** (☎ 5755 1141; www.brightcaravanpark.com.au; 1 Cherry Lane; unpowered/powered sites for 2 from \$20/24, cabins from \$55), occupying a shady location beside Morses Creek and only a short walk from the town centre.

Bright Hikers Backpackers' Hostel (☎ 5750 1244; www.brighthikers.com.au; 4 Ireland St; dm/s/d \$21/30/44; ☹) has a cosy atmosphere and a great veranda overlooking the main shopping street.

Elm Lodge Holiday Motel (☎ 5755 1144; www.elmlodge.com.au; 2 Wood St; s/d from \$55/70; ☹) sits amid pleasant gardens and is a popular place for backpackers. Nearby, the comfortable **John Bright Motor Inn** (☎ 5755 1400; www.albury.net.au/~jbmotel/; 10 Wood St; s/d from \$85/90) has motel-style accommodation and is only a few minutes' walk from the shops.

Jackie's (☎ 5750 1303; 6 Ireland St; breakfasts \$6–11, mains \$5–12; ☹ breakfast & lunch) offers a multitude of good pre-walk breakfasts, as well as a lunch menu including sandwiches, shepherd's pie and nachos.

Close to the tourist office is **Tin Dog Café & Pizzeria** (☎ 5755 1526; cnr Gavan & Barnard Sts; pizzas \$14–20, mains \$18–21; ☹ breakfast, lunch & dinner), popular with outdoor enthusiasts at any time of year, but particularly in summer.

Opposite the clock tower is the **Liquid Am-Bar** (☎ 5755 2318; 8 Anderson St; mains \$14–25; ☹ dinner Thu–Tue), a restaurant-cum-bar that exudes a relaxed ambience and offers a wide variety of meals.

There's no shortage of takeaway food outlets in town, including two bakeries, one in Gavan St and one at the top end of Ireland St. For self-caterers, there are two supermarkets, both in Ireland St.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Bright is 306km northeast of Melbourne by road, first along the Hume Fwy (M31), then along the Great Alpine Rd (B500).

V/Line (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) operates a daily train/bus combination between Melbourne and Bright (adult/child \$49.20/24.60, 4½ hours).

MT BOGONG

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Duration | 2 days |
| Distance | 26.5km |
| Standard | moderate–demanding |
| Start/Finish | Mountain Creek Camping Area (p161) |
| Nearest Town | Mt Beauty & Tawonga South (right) |
| Transport | private |
| Summary | A long ascent to Victoria's highest summit along good tracks, then a panoramic ridge walk to Camp Valley. As well as great views, the route passes an old stone hut and an isolated mountain waterfall. |

A big brute of a mountain, accessible only by long, demanding climbs, Mt Bogong was for many years familiar only to local cattlemen. They drove their cattle to the mountain tops each summer to graze on the sweet herbs and grasses that grow in profusion. Over the years the cattlemen cut paths on which they drove their cattle. By the early 1900s Mt Bogong had been discovered by bushwalkers and cross-country skiers, and a series of huts slowly appeared on the mountain. Summit Hut (now destroyed) and Michell Hut were built as refuges on the two most popular access routes to the mountain, and the popular Cleve Cole Hut was built in memory of a pioneer skier of the region who died on the mountain (p161).

It's the views, though, not the huts that provide the highlights; from the sweeping upper slopes of Mt Bogong you can see to the horizon in some directions, while the nearby hills fill the scene in others. Admittedly, the climb is long, gaining 1400m in

altitude, but it's gratifying nonetheless, and the scenery more than compensates for any effort. The two side trips, to West Peak and the cascading Howmans Falls, could easily be completed from a base camp at Cleve Cole Hut, extending the trip to three days.

PLANNING

It should be noted that this is a very exposed walk in sections and you must have a strong weatherproof tent, wet-weather gear, good sleeping bag, warm clothes and a fuel stove. Cleve Cole Hut does have a number of bunk beds, but it's often full and shouldn't be relied upon. As well, there's often no water available on the climb to Mt Bogong until you reach the camp site, so make sure you carry plenty of water (1.5L to 2L should suffice).

Maps

Vicmap's 1:50,000 topographic map *Bogong Alpine Area*, part of the Outdoor Leisure Map series, is the best choice. It shows a good level of track detail with a 20m contour interval.

Permits & Regulations

The walk falls within a fuel-stove-only area. No campfires are permitted, so you must carry a fuel stove for cooking.

NEAREST TOWN & FACILITIES

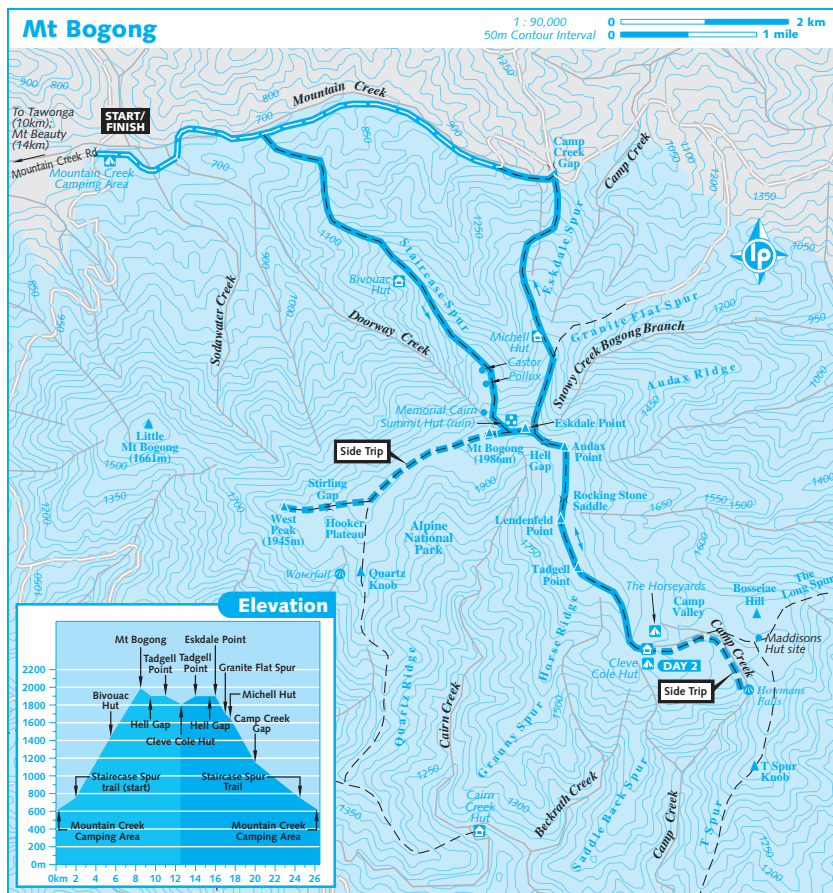
Mt Beauty & Tawonga South

☎ 03 / pop 1650

At the head of the Kiewa Valley, Mt Beauty (and its adjoining town of Tawonga South) is an excellent base for walks on Mt Bogong and the Bogong High Plains. Confusingly, Mt Beauty is not a mountain, but a small country town that survives on tourism and the nearby Kiewa Hydroelectric Scheme.

INFORMATION

On the left as you approach Mt Beauty from Tawonga South is the **Alpine Discovery Centre** (☎ 5754 1962; www.alpinediscoverycentre.com.au; 31 Bogong High Plains Rd; ☹ 9am–5pm). It is open daily and has an **accommodation booking line** (☎ 1800 033 079). Also on the highway, but a little further back in Tawonga South, is a **Parks Victoria office** (☎ 5754 4693). There are two banks in the shopping centre in Hollonds St, while the post office is located back down the highway in Tawonga South.



SLEEPING & EATING

Carver's Log Cabins (☎ 5754 4863; www.netstar.com.au/carvers; Buckland St; cabins from \$100; 🚻) enjoys good views of Mt Bogong from the pleasant gardens and offers self-contained cabins sleeping up to six people.

The award-winning **Braeview** (☎ 5754 4756; www.braeview.com.au; 4 Stewarts Rd; B&B s & d from \$120, studio apt s/d \$205/225, cottage s/d \$270; 🚻) has well-equipped rooms containing TVs and bar fridges, and desirable views of the nearby mountains (for free!). The cottage, and some of the B&B rooms, have spa tubs, and guests are provided with a complimentary food platter on arrival.

Popular with locals and tourists alike, the **Mt Beauty Bakery & Café** (☎ 5754 4870; Hollonds &

Kiewa Sts; meals \$4-8; 🍷 6.30am-6.30pm) serves the usual pastry fare – such as pies, sausage rolls and pasties – but also a selection of sandwiches, cakes and antipasti.

For a more upmarket meal try **Roi's Diner** (☎ 5754 4495; 177 Kiewa Valley Hwy; mains \$18-25; 🍷 dinner Thu-Sun), on the uphill side of the road in Tawonga South, which serves a variety of excellent modern Italian dishes.

Good for a feed after the completion of the walk is the **Bogong Hotel** (☎ 5754 4482; 169 Kiewa Valley Hwy; mains \$14-17; 🍷 lunch Sun, dinner Thu-Mon), in the small town of Tawonga, 4km north of Tawonga South. Here you can sit and admire the peak you've just climbed while enjoying a traditional counter meal. Just off the main road in Mt

Beauty is the shopping centre on Hollonds St, where you'll find a supermarket and a few cafés and takeaway outlets.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Mt Beauty is 365km from Melbourne via Myrtleford, and just 25km from Bright (p158). From Albury, 95km away, drive through Wodonga then head along the Kiewa Valley Hwy.

V/Line (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) operates a train/bus combination between Melbourne and Mt Beauty (adult/child \$55.70/27.80, 5½ hours), also via Bright, on Monday and Friday. You could also take a train to Albury (on the Victoria-NSW border), from where you can catch a bus; **Pyles Coaches** (☎ 5754 4024; www.pyles.com.au) runs a service between Albury and Mt Beauty (adult/child \$25/18, 1½ hours) Monday to Friday.

Tawonga Caravan Park

Closer to the trailhead is **Tawonga Caravan Park** (☎ 5754 4428; www.mtbeauty.com/tawonga-caravan-park; Mountain Creek Rd; unpowered/power sites for 2 from \$16/22, cabins from \$46), 1km east of the small town of Tawonga (not to be confused with Tawonga South, 4km away). The park provides shady sites and fronts the Kiewa River, a frequent destination for anglers.

Mountain Creek Camping Area

The closest camping option to the walk is at the Mountain Creek Camping Area, right at the trailhead. There are plenty of flat camp sites, a toilet and picnic tables, all beside a fresh mountain stream.

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

Mountain Creek Camping Area is 15km from Mt Beauty. Drive north for 4km from Mt Beauty to the small town of Tawonga. Turn east, opposite the Bogong Hotel, onto Mountain Creek Rd, which leads to the camping area.

If you require a ride from Mt Beauty, contact the **Mt Beauty Taxi Service** (☎ 5754 4739, 0409 573 909).

THE WALK Day 1: Mountain Creek Camping Area to Cleve Cole Hut via Mt Bogong

5-7 hours, 12.5km, 1400m ascent, 200m descent
The route follows a 4WD track east into the forest from the camping area. Within 15 minutes you'll come to a grassy area and gate; it is possible to drive 2WDs to this point, so you could start the walk here. Continue along the track, negotiating five creek crossings, until you reach the sixth crossing. Fill your water bottles here as

THE DEATH OF CLEVE COLE

In 1937 Cleve Cole Hut was constructed on Mt Bogong at the head of Camp Valley in memory of Cleve Cole, who died after being stranded on the mountain during a blizzard in August 1936.

Cleveland 'Cleve' Cole and his companions Percy 'Mick' Hull and Howard Michell were nearing the end of a ski tour from Mt Hotham, some 50km away. While ascending Mt Bogong, they were greeted by driving snow and thick fog. Unable to find the summit, the route to Camp Valley, or even the spur they'd just ascended, they dug a snow cave. For the next two days they were held captive by the blizzard. On the fourth day, with little food remaining and with their general condition worsening – and having written farewell letters to their loved ones – they made a final attempt to reach the top. Astonishingly, they found the summit cairn and thought they could find their way to the Staircase Spur and, therefore, a relatively easy route off the mountain.

Unknowingly, they followed a course onto the southern side of the mountain instead of the north. They battled for hours, finally reaching Big River below the snow line, but civilization was miles away. They followed the Big River downstream for two days, unable to light a fire and sleeping inside hollow logs for shelter. A week after reaching Mt Bogong, Howard, the fittest member of the group, struggled on in search of help. Mick set up a rough camp and nursed Cleve, who could no longer walk and was suffering from hypothermia. Howard eventually stumbled into the small gold-mining town of Glen Valley, and a rescue party was soon on its way.

Mick and Cleve were rescued ten days after their ordeal began and were carried to the village of Glen Valley. Cleve's condition had deteriorated to such an extent that he later died from severe hypothermia and frostbite.

The solid hut, built in his honour, still stands today.

BOGONG HIGH PLAINS SHORT WALKS

The Bogong High Plains, 32km from Mt Beauty up the Bogong High Plains Rd, is a region of high rounded peaks, broad snow plains and shallow valleys, sporadically clothed in snow gum forest; and they're a walker's paradise. Below are a few short walks that will give you a taste of what the area has to offer.

The best take-off point for walks is Falls Creek, 30km from Mt Beauty and right on the edge of the plains. A thriving ski resort in winter, Falls Creek is quiet outside this time. Most of the village shuts down after the snow melts, although a handful of lodges, cafés and bars remain open.

All walks are covered by the Vicmap 1:50,000 topographic map *Bogong Alpine Area*, available from the Snowland Centre in Falls Creek.

Ropers Lookout

A short walk (4km) offering a good introduction to the region, the lookout provides expansive views of Falls Creek and the surrounding terrain.

Starting from the eastern end of the Rocky Valley Storage dam wall, follow a track alongside the Rocky Valley Aqueduct north for 25 minutes to where the aqueduct ends. A track climbs straight up the hill, then loops to the south to end at the interesting basalt outcrop of Ropers Lookout (1700m). Allow 1½ hours.

Mt Nelse

As one of the tallest peaks on the Bogong High Plains, Mt Nelse stands well above the tree line and offers unlimited views in all directions.

While not particularly 'short' (three hours, 11km), this walk is nonetheless quite easy with good tracks for most of the route. Big River Fire Track leaves the Bogong High Plains Rd 5km east of Falls Creek.

Follow the track northeast to the Park (a large snow plain), then generally north to where it levels off west of Mt Nelse. Leave the track here and walk across the grassy plain to the summit of Mt Nelse (1882m).

Wallaces & Cope Huts

These two huts are among the oldest and most interesting on the Bogong High Plains, and are the legacy of some of the region's pioneers. Wallaces Hut, originally used by cattlemen, is classified by the National Trust, while Cope Hut is the only hut on the plains built specifically for ski tourists.

This two-hour, 8km walk starts where a 4WD track heads east away from the Bogong High Plains Rd about 10km from Falls Creek. Follow this track east for 15 minutes to Wallaces Hut, the oldest hut on the Bogong High Plains. Continue down the main track (east) as it descends gently to meet Langford West Aqueduct. Turn right and you'll soon reach Rover Lodge, a large building used by the Rover Scouts, 25 minutes from Wallaces Hut.

Beyond Rover Lodge, the route follows the aqueduct, then veers briefly onto a foot track before joining a 4WD track that leads west to Cope Hut. Past the hut, the track soon rejoins the Bogong High Plains Rd, which you follow north for 800m. Take the snow pole line (and accompanying track) northeast, which soon brings you back to Wallaces Hut. Retrace your steps back to your vehicle.

Mt Cope

The prominent rocky summit of Mt Cope provides a great vantage point from which to admire the surrounding plains and, particularly, Pretty Valley.

The start of this 3km track is at a signpost ('Mt Cope') on the Bogong High Plains Rd, 13km beyond Falls Creek. This faint track heads southwest over the plains before climbing to the boulder-covered summit of Mt Cope (1837m).

this is the last reliable water supply until you reach Cleve Cole Hut.

Ten minutes later, the signposted track up the Staircase Spur leaves the main track on your right. The track climbs steeply over the series of flat sections that give the spur its name, until you reach **Bivouac Hut** at 1440m and about two hours (5.5km) from the start. It is possible to camp by Bivouac Hut, but you will have to rely on a rainwater tank for drinking water. The hut itself offers shelter and has a small potbelly stove, but there are no bunks.

Continuing, the track soon climbs steeply again. About an hour from the hut, the track unexpectedly climbs out of the forest and onto the windswept grassy moors of the upper mountain, where you get your first good distant views. Snow poles now accompany the route. At times, with a gentle breeze, these poles emit an eerie sound; in a misty storm, the noise can be quite unnerving. Further up you will pass a **memorial cairn** marking the place where three skiers died in a 1943 blizzard.

A while later you may notice the scattered ruins of Summit Hut. (There is a small semi-permanent spring a few metres above the ruins.) Another 300m brings you to a T-junction at the top of the high, treeless ridge that forms the summit plateau of Mt Bogong. At this point, marked by a snow pole and signpost, turn west and follow the track for five minutes to the huge cairn at the summit of **Mt Bogong** (1986m). It will take you about four to five hours to cover the 8.5km from the start of the walk.

Bogong, an Aboriginal name that loosely translates as 'big fella', befits the title of Victoria's highest peak; after the climb up, you'll understand why. Soak in the 360-degree panorama, including the Snowy Mountains (Australia's highest mountain range) on the northeast horizon, while enjoying a well-earned rest. West Peak, the obvious dome seen at the western end of the summit ridge, can be visited with an easy side trip (right).

Return to the T-junction mentioned above and follow the track east to **Hell Gap**. The route swings slowly round to the south then gradually east again as it passes over Rocking Stone Saddle, Lendenfeld Point and Tadgell Point; there are exceptional

views all along this high ridge. The track then descends into the forest before reaching the grassy camping area beside **Cleve Cole Hut**, 4km and one hour from the summit. With eight beds, a sink, running water and stove, the hut is luxurious compared with most mountain huts but is often full with walkers.

If the camping area is crowded, consider camping about 300m north of the hut at the Horseyards, visible across the shallow valley. The pleasant grassy camp sites, near some old yards, can be seen from the hut, and water can be obtained from a small creek 100m before reaching the camp site.

SIDE TRIP: WEST PEAK

1½ hours, 6km return, 40m descent

From Mt Bogong, a faint track leads west down the broad ridge and into a shallow saddle. Here the track is poorly defined, but walk slightly south of west to the top of Hooker Plateau. A few old snow poles are scattered along the route. From the western edge of Hooker Plateau, descend west into a saddle and locate a foot pad which will bring you to **West Peak** (1945m). The Kiewa River valley and ranges to the west look particularly impressive from here.

Return to the summit along the same route. Note that this trip is not advisable in foggy conditions, because it is easy to become disoriented on the featureless Hooker Plateau.

Day 2: Cleve Cole Hut to Mountain Creek Camping Area

4–5 hours, 14km, 200m ascent, 1400m descent

From the hut, return along the track towards Mt Bogong. At Hell Gap, a track bears north and skirts the east side of Eskdale Point to join the Eskdale Spur, 500m away. The path heads down the spine of the narrow spur to a track junction where the spur flattens out. At the edge of the tree line, this is your last opportunity to savour the outstanding vista. The main track heads left (northwest) and soon arrives at **Michell Hut** – rebuilt in 2004 after being destroyed in 2003 by bushfire – which relies on a small tank for water.

Beyond the hut the route descends deeper into the forest, crossing a small stream that is reliable in all but the driest of times, and eventually leads to the prominent Camp

Creek Gap about 45 minutes from Michell Hut. Here there is a track junction; take the route heading west into a gully. After only 15 minutes you reach a scrub-free 4WD track. Providing pleasant walking through pretty forest, this track in turn leads in 6km to the end of the walk at the Mountain Creek Camping Area.

SIDE TRIP: HOWMANS FALLS

1 hour, 4km return, 150m descent

The short trip to Howmans Falls, cascading 50m over a series of three smaller falls, is highly recommended. From Cleve Cole Hut follow the walking track, and snow poles, east into the snow gum woodland. The track descends to the treeless Camp Valley, then heads alongside Camp Creek, crossing it twice before swinging round to the south. The path ends at the top of the **waterfall**. Of course, exercise caution when viewing the falls from the nearby (unprotected) cliffs.

If you have allocated a third day for your walk, this side trip can easily be made from the overnight camp near Cleve Cole Hut, combining it with the West Peak side trip for a long day walk.

MT FEATHERTOP & THE RAZORBACK

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Duration | 2 days |
| Distance | 36km |
| Standard | demanding |
| Start/Finish | Harrietville (right) |
| Nearest Town | Harrietville (right) |
| Transport | private |
| Summary | Mt Feathertop, Victoria's second-highest peak, rewards walkers with a superb all-round panorama. An unusual hut, excellent views along the impressive Razorback ridge and diverse eucalyptus forest are among the highlights. |

Named for the appearance of lingering snowdrifts in spring and often dubbed the 'Queen of the Victorian Alps', Mt Feathertop has attracted walkers for decades. And for good reason: it's one of Victoria's most attractive and impressive mountains; it's cut off from the High Country to the east by the deep valley of the Kiewa River; it boasts commanding views; and it stands

aloof at the head of the Ovens Valley, dominating the skyline. Snaking away from Mt Feathertop to the south is the Razorback, a high bare ridgeline that's been a mecca for walkers and skiers since the 1930s and is one of Australia's most scenic ridge walks.

In winter, cross-country skiers and budding mountaineers are drawn to Feathertop's snowy slopes, ridges and crags. Built as a base for these activities, the peculiar MUMC Hut (p167) can easily be visited on a short side trip. While winter sees the region at its most dramatic, the slopes are prone to ice and Mt Feathertop has claimed several lives, but in summer the mountain is generally benign and makes for a perfect walking destination.

PLANNING

This is a very exposed walk in sections and you must have a strong weatherproof tent, wet-weather gear, good sleeping bag, warm clothes and a fuel stove. Be aware that there are few places to collect water, apart from the sources indicated, and the water tank at Federation Hut cannot be relied upon; so make sure you carry plenty on each day (2L should be enough). Federation Hut also has a number of sleeping benches, but it's popular and often full so you must be prepared to camp. For more details on clothing and equipment, see the boxed text p39.

Maps

The most useful map for this walk, with an excellent level of topographic and track detail, is the Vicmap 1:50,000 topographic map *Bogong Alpine Area*.

Permits & Regulations

Mt Feathertop and its immediate surroundings, including the Razorback, have been declared a fuel-stove-only area. This means no campfires are permitted, and you must carry a fuel stove for cooking.

NEAREST TOWN Harrietville

☎ 03 / population 140

At the foot of Mt Feathertop is the village of Harrietville. There's not much to do, but it's a pretty spot and makes a good base for walks to Mt Feathertop. Some maps can be bought at the small general store, but you will need to buy groceries in Bright (p158).

You can gather further information from the **Harrietville Tourism Association** website (www.harrietville.com).

SLEEPING & EATING

The **Harrietville Cabins & Caravan Park** (☎ 5759 2523; hville_cpark@netc.net.au; Camping Park Rd; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$16/20, cabins from \$80), backs onto the West Branch of the Ovens River south of the Snowline Hotel.

Shady Brook Cottages (☎ 5759 2741, 0438 050 475; www.shadybrook.com.au; 2 Mountain View Walk; d from \$110; 🚰) occupies a bush setting at the foot of Mt Feathertop. There's a choice of B&B rooms or fully equipped cottages with spas and verandas.

CasBak on the Ovens Holiday Units (☎ 5759 2531; www.casbakalpineunits.com.au; 206 Great Alpine Rd; cabins from \$95; 🚰) is in a pretty park-like setting dominated by European trees. The salt-water pool is ideal for easing post-walk pains and strains.

Motel-style accommodation can be found at the **Snowline Hotel** (☎ 5759 2524; www.snowlinehotel.com.au; Great Alpine Rd; s/d from \$65/75) where you can also arrange for a cooked breakfast and, ahhh, a cold beer!

There's not much for foodies in Harrietville. However, the **Snowline Hotel** (mains \$14-18, pizzas \$7-15; 🍷 lunch & dinner), which has a sunny balcony where you can enjoy a refreshing drink and meal, is a popular place after a hard walk. The general store has a limited range of takeaway food.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Harrietville is 24km south of Bright (p159) along the Great Alpine Rd (B500). Although there is no public transport, the **Bright Taxi Service** (☎ 0408 589 370) can take passengers to/from Harrietville.

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

From Harrietville, turn east onto Mt Feathertop Rd just north of the School Bridge (near the small general store and riverside park). Follow this road for 1km to where the bitumen ends at a small information board and car park.

THE WALK

Day 1: Harrietville to Federation Hut

5-6 hours, 13km, 1360m ascent, 210m descent

A broad track heads into the forest and crosses a small stream. Fill your drinking

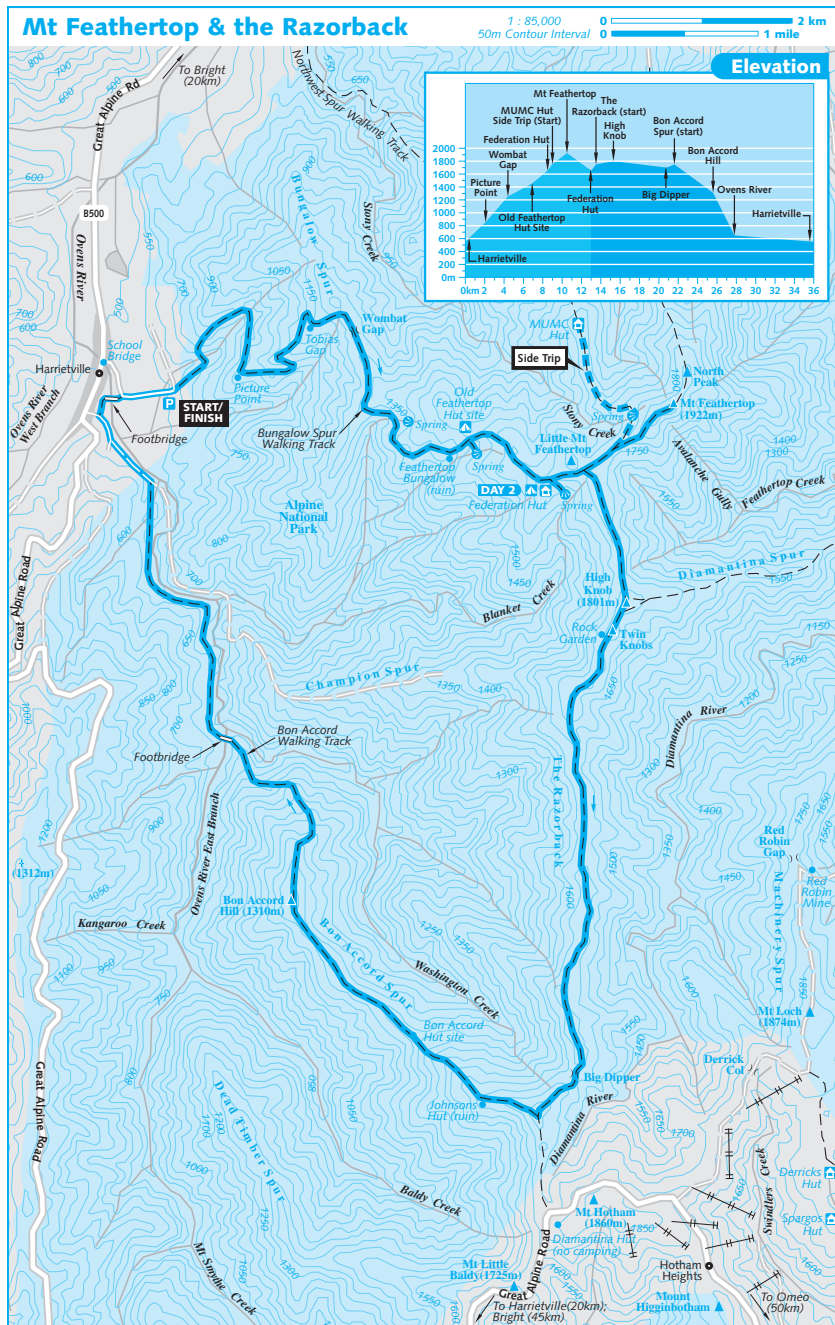
bottles here as there may be no water at the trackside springs further up the mountain. The trail narrows and begins its steady ascent. After 2km you cross a major gully that, during spring, carries a good supply of water. Continue past the signposted Picture Point (although there is nothing to see here) and Tobias Gap, eventually reaching the top of the spur at Wombat Gap (two hours and 6km from the start).

Soon after entering alpine ash forest, you pass a small spring (which is generally reliable for most of the year). Thirty minutes further on you pass the ruins of the **Feathertop Bungalow** – a large structure built in the 1920s for use by skiers, but destroyed by wildfire in January 1939 – on your left; then within 200m you pass a side-track to a small creek a few hundred metres away to the east. This is the last reliable water point along the main track. There are some flat, grassy camp sites at the water-point turn-off.

About 10km from the start, the track breaks out from the forest to arrive at **Federation Hut**, where you get your first good views since starting out. There are sheltered camp sites among the trees near the hut.

The summit cannot be seen from the hut, but a short stroll of a few minutes to a small knoll south of the hut provides a fine view. There is a rainwater tank by the hut (although during dry periods this may be empty) and a spring 30 minutes to the east, though this is not as reliable as the one near the Feathertop Bungalow ruins. Another generally dependable water source is on the west side of Mt Feathertop; see the side trip to the MUMC Hut (p167).

It is worth making the two-hour return trip to the summit on the first day to shorten the walk on Day 2. The track leads northeast from the hut to a track junction in a saddle just to the east of Little Mt Feathertop. Take the left-hand track then, shortly afterwards where the track forks, the right-hand track (the track to the left leads to the MUMC Hut, an interesting side trip). A steep climb up the narrow ridge ends on reaching the summit of **Mt Feathertop** (1922m) where a sweeping panorama of the surrounding peaks and valleys is stunning. With steep slopes dropping away in most directions, you'll feel as though you're on top of the world.



MT FEATHERTOP UFO

The first geodesic structure of its kind built in Australia, the Melbourne University Mountaineering Club (MUMC) Hut was constructed in the 1960s by a group of active climbers keen to create a base from which they could practise their mountaineering skills in winter. Mt Feathertop was their ideal choice; its steep, snowy slopes are prone to ice (especially on the mountain's steep southeast face) and there is plenty of terrain to hone telemarking, snow camping, cramponing and self-arrest techniques.

Tragically, a car accident on the way to the mountain during construction claimed the lives of three club members, and memorial plaques can be seen in the hut. So prominent was the hut's shiny reflection that Ovens Valley residents, convinced it was distracting to drivers at certain times of day, insisted that the club paint it; every few years the dark green paint job is stripped away by the harsh alpine weather and must be renewed.

SIDE TRIP: MUMC HUT

2 hours, 6km return

A visit to MUMC Hut (see the boxed text above) makes for a pleasant return journey from the camp site. Walk along the track from Federation Hut towards Mt Feathertop, but then take the left-hand track where the trail forks 200m northeast of the saddle near Little Mt Feathertop.

The path initially cuts across the steep western face of Mt Feathertop (crossing a reliable spring) before joining the Northwest Spur for the final section to the hut, which stands beacon-like where the spur begins its headlong descent to the Ovens River valley below.

Day 2: Federation Hut to Harrietville

8–9 hours, 23km, 340m ascent, 1490m descent

Return to the first track junction above Federation Hut and follow the southeast track as it sidles round the west side of a hill to join the Razorback, a high ridge separating the Ovens and Diamantina River valleys. You will come to yet another junction, where a track heading east leads to Diamantina Spur and a very steep descent to the Kiewa River West Branch. Take the right-hand track, skirting around the western side of High Knob, and bypassing the summit, to arrive at a magnificent **rock garden** that's wedged into the side of the Twin Knobs. During summer, this area is likely to be absolutely carpeted with wildflowers.

Beyond Twin Knobs, the track gains the ridge again and generally follows the spine of the Razorback, at times passing through forested glades, for another 7km to eventually pass into a deep saddle known as

the **Big Dipper**. A short but steep climb to the head of the Bon Accord Spur follows, where you'll be rewarded with extensive views and the comforting knowledge that the remainder of the walk is mostly downhill.

Bear west from the top of the hill and follow the Bon Accord Walking Track. It descends gently at first but then becomes more steep as it moves into tall alpine ash forest to reach the former site of Bon Accord Hut (torched in 2003 by bushfire) on a large flat area 40 minutes from the head of the spur.

The first 2km beyond the hut site is an easy ramble. Soon another descent begins, but the track is not unduly steep, and before long you reach the depths of the valley at the junction of the Ovens River East Branch and Washington Creek, about 7km from the Razorback. The river is crossed on a footbridge, and then a track heads downstream on the western side of the river, providing relaxed walking for a while. Not far from the river crossing, the track improves and follows a course just above an **old aqueduct** for a while. While it's not always obvious, the aqueduct was constructed by gold miners around the turn of the 20th century.

About 4km from the river crossing the track joins a dirt road and this is followed west for a short distance to join a minor sealed road on the fringe of Harrietville. Turn right, then right again after another 100m and follow a foot pad beside the river for 500m to a footbridge over the Ovens River. On the far side is Mt Feathertop Rd, which will lead you back east to the beginning of the walk.

MT SPECULATION & THE CROSSCUT SAW

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Duration | 2 days |
| Distance | 31.5km |
| Standard | moderate–demanding |
| Start/Finish | Upper Howqua Camping Area (opposite) |
| Nearest Town | Mansfield (right) |
| Public Transport | private |

Summary Climb up to the Crosscut Saw, a narrow ridge providing stupendous views, and spend the night at one of the best camp sites in the mountains. An ascent of Mt Howitt, and views of impressive cliffs and crags, completes a great weekend walk.

Since the 1920s the Wonnangatta Wilderness, which includes the peaks of the Mt Howitt area near the headwaters of the Wonnangatta River, has been one of the most sought-after walking areas in the Victorian Alps: the spectacular summits, ridges and spurs in the area have drawn walkers like moths to a flame. With such evocative names given to the geographical features of the area – Mts Buggery and Speculation, the Crosscut Saw and the Terrible Hollow, to name just a few – you can only wonder as to their origins. In 1982 the area was given the protection of national park status, but logging of the superb mountain forests in the lower areas hasn't helped the aesthetics of the once pristine river valleys. Fortunately, many of the old logging tracks are now being reclaimed by nature and are becoming increasingly overgrown, although paradoxically a few major tracks remain, giving relatively easy access for bushwalkers. In the 1980s many of the peaks in this area, including Mt Howitt, were used for horse-riding sequences in the popular Australian films, *The Man From Snowy River* and *The Man From Snowy River 2*.

This really is a beautiful region in which to spend a few days – or longer. As you walk, you'll be wondering what's over the next hill, or round the next bend, and unless fatigue gets the better of you, you may find it hard to stop walking. It's perhaps the most scenic region in the Victorian Alps.

PLANNING

It is essential that you carry enough drinking water for each day as few water points are

passed. There is, however, a reliable water source near the camp on Mt Speculation.

In addition, there are numerous seasonal road closures between the wetter months of June and October, and the access road to the trailhead is closed to traffic at Telephone Box Junction (near Mt Stirling). To check road conditions before you set forth, contact **Parks Victoria Information Centre** (☎ 13 19 63; www.parkweb.vic.gov.au).

Maps

Vicmap's 1:50,000 topographic map *Howitt-Selwyn* covers the entire walk and is the best choice for geographic and contour information. The Victorian Mountain Tramping Club (VMTC) 1:50,000 topographic map *Watersheds of the King, Howqua & Jamieson Rivers*, specially produced for bushwalkers, makes a useful additional reference.

NEAREST TOWN & FACILITIES

Mansfield

☎ 03 / pop 2500

A popular stopping-off point for campers, walkers and 4WD enthusiasts, Mansfield is a major gateway to the Alpine National Park. On weekends, Mansfield could well be regarded as the 4WD capital of Victoria, and you might feel feeble without one!

The **Mansfield visitor information centre** (☎ 5775 1464; www.mansfield-mtbuller.com.au; Maroondah Hwy; ☎ 9am–5pm) offers an **accommodation booking service** (☎ 1800 039 049).

SUPPLIES & EQUIPMENT

The Maroondah Hwy, named High St in town, is the main road on which you will find an array of shops including banks, a chemist, a post office, food and retail shops, and **Outdoor Pleasure** (☎ 5755 2826; www.outdoorpleasure.com.au; 63 High St), a gear shop selling a wide range of camping, fishing and other outdoor equipment.

SLEEPING & EATING

The **High Country Holiday Park** (☎ 5775 2705; www.highcountryholidaypark.com.au; 1 Ultimo St; bunkhouse \$12, unpowered/powerd sites for 2 from \$20/23, cabins from \$63; 🏠) has a wide range of facilities including a children's pool, games room and tennis courts, and occupies a shady location a short walk from the centre of town.

The **Mansfield Travellers Lodge** (☎ 5775 1800; www.mansfieldtravellodge.com; 116 High St; motel rooms

s/d from \$75/80; 🏠) is in a handy location in the main street and can provide a continental breakfast. Part of the same complex is the **Mansfield Backpackers' Inn** (dm \$25). There's a fully equipped kitchen, barbecue, laundry and drying room available for use by motel and inn guests.

In a beautifully restored bank building dating from 1866 is **Tavistock House** (☎ 5775 1024; www.tavistockhouse.com.au; cnr High & Highett St; d from \$120) where all rooms have been charmingly decked out with Victorian-style furniture and decor. It's smack-bang in the middle of Mansfield, and the owners welcome you with a bottle of vino or bubbly.

The **Mansfield Hotel** (☎ 5775 2101; www.mansfieldhotel.com.au; 86 High St; mains \$15–20; ☎ lunch & dinner) dates from 1862, although the fully renovated interior is definitely 21st century. The large courtyard is a pleasant place to enjoy a meal while finalising your walk plans.

The **Mansfield Regional Produce Store** (☎ 5779 1404; 68 High St; mains \$7–15; ☎ breakfast & lunch daily, dinner Fri) sells delicious home-made foods for self-caterers, including breads, condiments, ice cream and crepes. If you want to eat in, or just relax with a coffee, grab a seat at the communal table.

The trendy **Sweet Potato** (☎ 5775 1955; 50 High St; mains \$10–18; ☎ lunch & dinner Thu–Mon) is a licensed café offering good food with a relaxed ambience.

High St has numerous cafés, takeaway outlets and a supermarket. There's also a supermarket on Highett St.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Mansfield is 192km northeast of Melbourne along the Melba Hwy (B300) to Yea, Goulburn Valley Hwy and Maroondah Hwy. If coming from the north, leave the Hume Fwy (M31) at the Midland Hwy exit near Benalla and travel south to Mansfield.

V/Line (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) operates a daily bus between Melbourne and Mansfield (adult/child \$34/17, three hours).

Upper Howqua Camping Area

A number of bush camp sites exist at the trailhead in the upper Howqua River valley. Water is handy, and this location is convenient if you want an early start in the morning.

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

There is no public transport from Mansfield to the trailhead, so your best option is to use a private vehicle.

From Mansfield, follow the Mt Buller Rd east for 40km (past the villages of Merrigig and Sawmill Settlement) to a road junction at Mirimbah. Turn left onto the Stirling Rd and this leads, in 8km, to Telephone Box Junction. Follow the right-hand road (Circuit Rd) from the junction for 19km (over Howqua Gap) to an intersection where Bindaree Rd leaves Circuit Rd on the south side.

Bindaree Rd zigzags its way down to meet the Howqua River, about 10km from the turn-off; avoid any minor side tracks that branch from the main road. In the valley, the road is blocked at the Upper Howqua Camping Area and vehicular access terminates here.

THE WALK

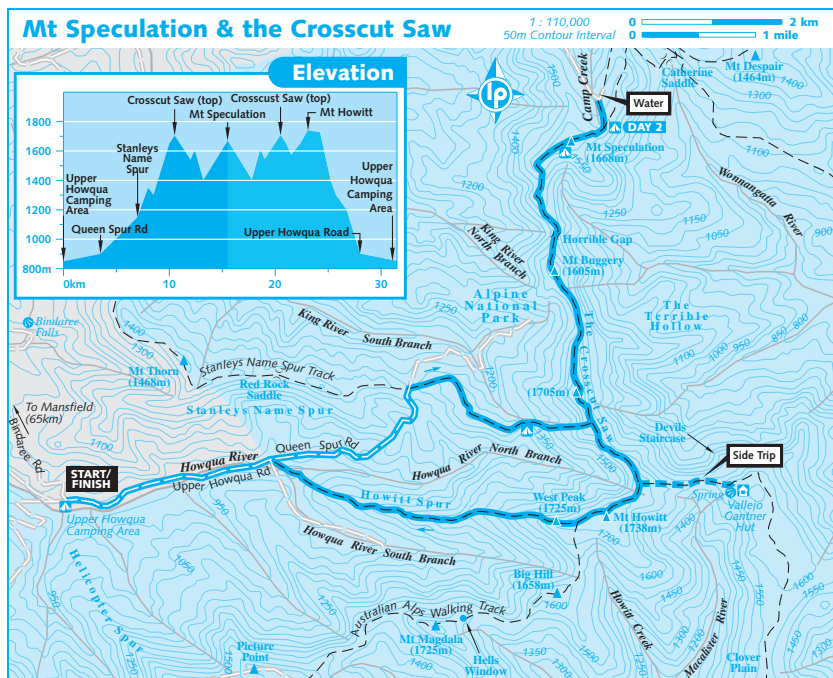
Day 1: Upper Howqua Camping Area to Mt Speculation via the Crosscut Saw

5–6 hours, 15.5km, 1310m ascent, 490m descent

Follow the closed road upstream for 3.5km, crossing the river a few times, to a track junction at the foot of Howitt Spur where the valley really starts to feel enclosed. There is a small camping area here.

Cross to the north side of the Howqua River and follow the continuation of Upper Howqua Rd, here called Queen Spur Rd, up the southern slopes of **Stanleys Name Spur**. The track provides easy walking as it climbs steadily for 3.5km (one hour) to a saddle on the crest of the spur. Turn right (east) at the saddle and follow an old, indistinct, 4WD track for 200m to where a yellow marker on a tree indicates the faint walking track on your right climbing to the crest of Stanleys Name Spur. The track undulates until it reaches a pleasant camp site in a **saddle** at the foot of the Crosscut Saw. There is usually water in a creek 100m to the north, except in the driest times. Ahead of you through the trees soars the jagged form of the Crosscut Saw, a narrow ridge lined on its upper slopes with layers of rock, buckled and folded over the ages to create the impressive outline we see today.

Continue east very steeply up the spur; there are a few rocky bluffs to negotiate that require a bit of scrambling and are not



for the faint-hearted. After about 1km, the track cuts to the left, sidling across the steep slope, and eventually tops out in a saddle at the southern end of the Crosscut Saw. Turn north here and follow the obvious path, the Australian Alps Walking Track, for about 15 minutes as it climbs to the highest summit of the **Crosscut Saw** (1705m). Spread around you are a number of stunning peaks, although your eyes will likely be drawn to the rugged outlines of the Razor and the Viking to the northeast. As you continue, slopes drop away steeply on both sides of the Crosscut Saw, into the tall forests of the Terrible Hollow on one side, and into craggy slopes on the other.

The track undulates generally northwards over many of the knolls that make up the teeth of the Crosscut Saw, then descends through a saddle before a short climb brings you to **Mt Buggery** (1605m). There are some pretty trees on the summit, although only restricted views. The route certainly falls away quickly from the top to Horrible Gap, although it's not nearly as bad as the names 'Buggery' or 'Horrible' would suggest.

Beyond Horrible Gap the track ascends through thick forest to more open country near Mt Speculation. Higher up the route climbs a few rocky bluffs before arriving at the summit of **Mt Speculation** (1668m) and one of Victoria's most spectacular camp sites. In a region where a surplus of striking peaks rise above the forests, Mt Speculation is one of the best. The view south from the summit, particularly in autumn when fog often fills the upper Wonnangatta Valley early in the morning, is wonderful. On the horizon, beyond the craggy summits of the Razor and Viking, you can even make out Mts Bogong and Feathertop and other peaks of the Bogong High Plains.

There are lots of flat, grassy camp sites on the summit ridge; if the weather is fine it's best to overnight here. Further to the east, and about 100m below the summit, there are more excellent camp sites (still with stunning views), which offer more shelter in adverse conditions. Water can be found at the head of **Camp Creek**, about 1km northeast of the summit, along a well-defined track. It's about a 45-minute return trip.

Day 2: Mt Speculation to the Upper Howqua Camping Area via Mt Howitt

5–6 hours, 16km, 580m ascent, 1400m descent

Return along yesterday's route to the saddle where Stanleys Name Spur track joins the southern end of the Crosscut Saw. From the saddle (2½ hours from Mt Speculation), continue walking along the Australian Alps Walking Track. It passes through another saddle, then climbs onto the exposed plateau northeast of Mt Howitt. Here you'll find a track junction, the left (east) track heading to Macalister Springs and Vallejo Gantner Hut, which can be visited on a side trip (below). Continue southwest over the plains for 1km to **Mt Howitt** (1738m). Here you're greeted by an outstanding panorama and one of the finest viewpoints in the Victorian Alps.

The route now heads west and is less obvious across the summit plateau. At a T-junction, the Australian Alps Walking Track heads south, but keep right and follow the minor track west as it descends to a slight saddle before climbing to the head of Howitt Spur at **West Peak** (1725m). This prominent knoll provides an excellent lookout from which to view the curious geology of the nearby peaks. Differential weathering and folding of sediments has produced dramatic bands of rock, and these tilted sedimentary layers can be seen to good effect on the escarpment running west from near West Peak all the way to the Bluff.

Howitt Spur plummets from West Peak; the track negotiates the very steep upper section by way of a series of short scrambles and zigzags. Once down in the forest, the route eases off considerably and becomes a pleasant ramble all the way to the Howqua River (about 1½ hours from West Peak). Continue along the outward route of Day 1 to the end of the walk.

SIDE TRIP: MACALISTER SPRINGS

1 hour, 3km return, 50m ascent, 140m descent

The short trip to Macalister Springs provides a different, and intriguing, perspective of the depths of Terrible Hollow and the Crosscut Saw. From the track junction 1km northeast of Mt Howitt, a well-defined foot track heads east along a narrow ridge, providing fine views to the north. Leaving the ridge the track contours round to a spring – the headwater of the Macalister

River – and to the slanted A-frame **Vallejo Gantner Hut**, with space for four on a sleeping platform.

There are three camping options in the vicinity of Macalister Springs. The most scenic (but also most exposed) sites are on the ridge a few hundred metres northeast of the spring, while more protected camp sites are just above the spring and near the hut.

MT BUFFALO PLATEAU

| | |
|-------------------------|---------------|
| Duration | 5–6 hours |
| Distance | 16km |
| Standard | easy–moderate |
| Start/Finish | Camp Plain |
| Nearest Towns | Bright (p158) |
| Public Transport | private |

Summary This is a wonderful day walk, with short climbs to three prominent lookouts, giving an excellent overview of Buffalo Plateau. Highlights include attractive snow plains, snow gum and alpine ash forests, and some shapely granite tors.

Mt Buffalo National Park, one of Australia's first national parks, celebrated its centenary in 1998. Named by early explorers Hume and Hovell in 1824 (see the boxed text p105) because of its distinctive shape when viewed from the west, Mt Buffalo has arguably some of the most varied and attractive scenery found anywhere in Australia.

Formed by a geological uplift of molten rock many millions of years ago, the plateau has since been eroded heavily along a series of weaknesses, or faults, leaving today's high plateau; and some of the most bizarre granite rock outcrops you're ever likely to see.

Historically, Mt Buffalo has been popular with nature lovers and bushwalkers since it was first climbed by local miners and farmers in the 1850s. So popular did the area become that in 1910 the Victorian government built the large, rambling, Chalet (p172), which has provided accommodation for thousands of visitors over the years. Australia's first ski lift was constructed on the plateau in 1936, creating an all-season resort.

Mt Buffalo's subalpine environment has a diverse range of flora and fauna, and some plants are endemic to the park, including

the Buffalo sallee, Buffalo wattle and fern-leaf baeckea. Many creeks drain the plateau along a series of faults, before plummeting off the plateau's rim in a spectacular series of cascades and waterfalls. Best viewed from the lookouts and tracks near the Chalet (see the boxed text, p174), Crystal Brook and Eurobin Creek are two of these major watercourses.

The described walk – an easy day's outing for most people – encompasses many of the plateau's diverse variety of scenic highlights.

PLANNING

Mt Buffalo soils are extremely fragile and prone to erosion, so please be careful not to stray off the defined tracks. Remember, too, that many of the lookouts on the plateau are simply large boulders often perched precariously above formidable drops, and you'll need to exercise extreme caution in some instances.

Maps & Books

The Vicmap 1:25,000 topographic map *Eurobin* covers the entire walk. However, if you are interested in walking more of the park, you will need to get the 1:25,000 map *Buckland* and possibly the *Dandongadale* and *Nug Nug* maps as well.

Permits & Regulations

Walking permits are not required, but it is a good idea to book a camp site if you wish to camp on the plateau at the Lake Catani Camp Ground (below), which is usually full during holiday periods. There is also a park entry fee of \$9.70 for a day, or \$15.30 for two days, per car, payable at the Entrance Station.

NEAREST TOWNS & FACILITIES

Although the small town of Porepunkah is close to the base of Mt Buffalo National Park, Bright (p158), only 6km further away, has a wider variety of accommodation choices and loads of eateries.

Lake Catani Camping Ground

The most convenient place to stay near the trailhead for campers is on the plateau at the **Lake Catani Camping Ground** (sites for 2 \$16.50). Bookings are essential during holiday times; contact the **Entrance Station** (☎ 03-5756 2328; Mt

Buffalo Rd). The camping area is 2km from the start of the walk near the shore of Lake Catani.

Mt Buffalo Chalet

Dating from 1910 is the historic and rustic **Chalet** (☎ 03-5755 1500, 1800 037 038; www.mtbuffalo.chalet.com.au; en suite s/d from \$70/125, guestroom per person incl shared bathroom \$35) where there is an array of outstandingly scenic short walks at your doorstep. Inside the large complex you'll find a cosy bar, a games room with a full-sized billiard table and lounges with open fires, still adorned with early 20th-century fittings. There's a variety of deals on offer; prices increase according to the standard of accommodation and some packages include breakfast, or both breakfast and dinner, in the charming old ballroom. The price also includes your park entrance fee.

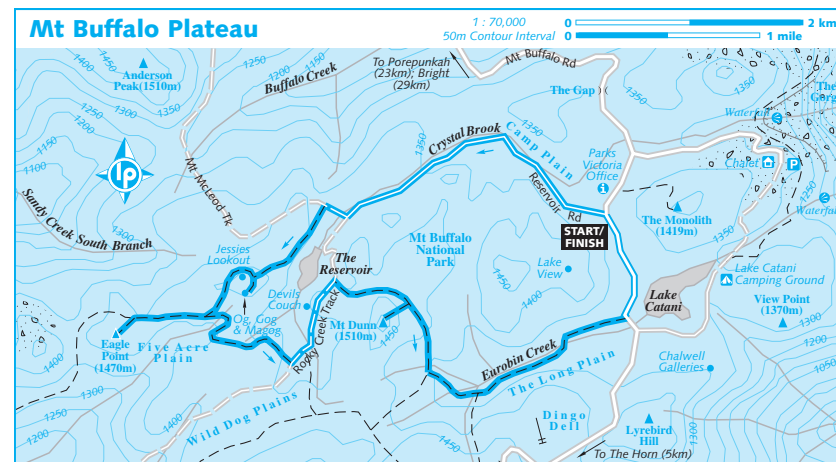
GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

There is no public transport from Bright to Mt Buffalo, except during the winter ski season. If you don't have private transport, you could take a taxi to the plateau; contact the **Bright Taxi Service** (☎ 0408 589 370).

From Bright, drive to Porepunkah along the Great Alpine Rd, then follow the Mt Buffalo Rd into Mt Buffalo National Park. Once on the plateau, 25km from Porepunkah, keep right at an intersection (the left-hand road leads to the Chalet) and continue for about 500m to Reservoir Rd and the start of the walk adjacent to a snow clearing depot.

THE WALK

Reservoir Rd leaves the Mt Buffalo Rd and crosses Camp Plain before following the pretty valley of Crystal Brook upstream. The walking is effortless, and the track almost flat, for a little over 3km (45 minutes) to an intersection. Turn right (west) and follow Mt McLeod Track up the slope for a few hundred metres to a signposted walking track on the left, which heads toward Og, Gog & Magog. The walking track leads above a small reservoir before climbing to a T-junction; turn left and walk 300m to the triple rock formations of **Og, Gog & Magog** (1490m) for fine views of the surrounding terrain and many of the high peaks of the Victorian Alps.



Return to the T-junction and proceed around the flanks of **Jessies Lookout**. Keen observers may notice wombats, or even the elusive lyrebird, in the forested sections of this walk. The track soon descends to the south and arrives at another T-junction. The described walk will return to this point later, but now follow the right-hand track as it skirts around the northern extremity of Five Acre Plain – attractively littered with boulders – which you can see sporadically through the trees. Twenty minutes' walking will bring you to an intersection and a signpost indicating the way 500m southwest to Eagle Point (two hours, 7.5km from the start). Like many other rocky lookouts in the park, **Eagle Point** (1470m) can only be ascended by climbing a series of ladders. The view south from the top includes Mts Cobbler, Howitt, Stirling and Buller. This is also a fine place to enjoy lunch.

Return to the T-junction south of Og, Gog & Magog and head along the walking track pointing to Rocky Creek Track. Initially you feel as if you're heading back towards Eagle Point but soon the track veers southeast past the grassy head of Five Acre Plain before looping around the north side of a hill to meet up with Rocky Creek Track on Wild Dog Plains. Turn left and follow the track north to cross the headwaters of **Crystal Brook**. Here, the tiny rivulet spits and coughs its way around boulders as it flows down the plain. Remarkably, just 4km down the valley, this stream reaches the plateau's

edge at the Gorge, where it dives in a fit of windblown spray over the lip creating a fine feathery waterfall; the tallest in the park.

Press on up the track, soon passing the side track to **Devils Couch**, which can be easily climbed if desired. A little further on, around 10 minutes from the Crystal Brook crossing, is the signposted turn-off (right) to Mt Dunn.

After strolling 1km southeast along this well-trodden path – passing drifts of alpine everlastings and pink trigger plants – you'll reach a T-junction just below Mt Dunn, barely visible through the alpine ash forest. The track climbs to **Mt Dunn** (1510m); again, ladders are required for the ascent. The return journey will take about 30 minutes, but is well worth the effort, particularly as Mt Dunn's central location on the plateau ensures extensive views in all directions. Allow plenty of time to savour the captivating scene from this rocky roost.

Backtrack to the T-junction east of Mt Dunn, turn right and follow the main route south towards Eurobin Creek and the Long Plain, keeping left when passing two signposted side tracks along the way. Once on the Long Plain the track swings to the northeast and stays close to Eurobin Creek, paralleling its south bank for a little over 1km before crossing to the north bank for the final section of track to the Mt Buffalo Rd. With the end in sight, though not visually, a 15-minute stroll north along the road brings you back to Camp Plain.

MT BUFFALO SHORT WALKS

There is so much to see in Mt Buffalo National Park that you should try and allow a little extra time – you don't need much – for some of its finest sights; here are a few suggestions. You'll need the Vicmap 1:25,000 topographic maps *Buckland* and *Eurobin*.

Eurobin Falls

These two attractive falls are best seen in winter or spring – or after heavy rain – when there's a good flow of water.

Framed by trees, Ladies Bath Falls, just a short walk from the road, is particularly attractive, while Eurobin Falls are more visually spectacular as torrents of water pour over huge rock slabs in a frothy race down the mountainside. The 2km foot track starts about five minutes' drive from the Entrance Station and takes about 45 minutes return.

Rollasons Falls

Buffalo Creek, draining the northern portion of the plateau, rushes through a narrow gorge and has carved the twin Rollasons Falls, two separate falls just a short distance apart. On a hot day, the pool at the base of the lower falls makes a great swimming hole.

The 4km (return) foot track to Rollasons Falls starts about halfway to the plateau from the Entrance Station. As the trail approaches falls, the route divides: left to the upper fall and right to the lower fall, and it's worth visiting both. Allow 1¼ hours.

The Gorge

Immediately in front of the Chalet stupendous cliffs fall away towards the Ovens Valley far below. From the western edge of the car park a 3km (return) track leads to the point where Crystal Brook plummets over the rim of the Gorge. Nearby are numerous excellent lookouts that will keep you awestruck; the views of the falls and distant ranges are exceptional. All tracks are well marked and easy to follow. Allow one hour.

The Monolith

Opposite the Parks Victoria office on Mt Buffalo Rd, near the start of the Mt Buffalo Plateau walk (p171), is a 2km (return) track that ascends east to the balancing tor named the Monolith (1419m), from where a brilliant all-round panorama unfolds.

The trail itself is not difficult and takes about 45 minutes there and back. Although the final climb to the top is up a steep stairway, the perilous-looking tor is quite easily climbed.

The Hump

As the second-highest peak in the Park, the Hump provides a grandstand outlook over the peaks and plains of the plateau, and also affords a close-up view of the Cathedral, probably the plateau's most prominent granite outcrop.

At a high saddle about 1km north of the Cresta ski field, a track heads west away from Mt Buffalo Rd and climbs to another saddle between the Hump and the Cathedral. Follow this track south from the saddle to the Hump (1695m). Allow around 45 minutes for this 1.5km (return) walk.

The Horn

As you'd expect, the views from the Horn (1723m) – the highest point of Mt Buffalo – are not just impressive but also the most extensive of any seen from the plateau.

The 1.5km (return) track begins at the very end of the road across the plateau, about 3km south of the Cresta ski area, where there is a fine lookout. The prominent trail (45 minutes return) climbs round the western and northern edges of the Horn, getting steeper near the top, where the path is protected by wire fences.

WILSONS PROMONTORY NATIONAL PARK

Known affectionately as 'the Prom', 50,300-hectare Wilsons Promontory National Park is almost a byword for bushwalking in Victoria. Hanging from the coast like an afterthought, its granite mountains slope away into secluded, sandy bays. Once the start of a land bridge to Tasmania – you see the same lichen-smear granite through the Furneaux Islands and the east coast of Tasmania – the Prom now forms the southern-most point of mainland Australia.

Wilsons Promontory is arguably the national park most cherished by Victorians, and certainly among the most used, receiving around 400,000 visitors a year. Great numbers of bushwalkers have had their introduction to overnight walking here, and the Prom's universal appeal means that it continues to attract an eclectic mix of walkers – the person in the tent beside you is just as likely to be carrying a guitar as they are gaiters.

Visitors to the park will find an extensive network of well-maintained walking trails. Walks vary from short nature trails out of Tidal River to overnight rambles to more remote areas. Sections of the Prom Southern Circuit described here are among the park's most popular walking areas, but a carefully managed permit system manages to control any sense of crowding. In 2005 a fire swept through the park, but the flora and fauna are on the road to recovery; see the boxed text p177.

HISTORY

The original inhabitants of the Prom area were the Aboriginal Brataualung people, who called it Yiruk or Woomom. It was a place to retreat to from attackers, though they also spent part of each year here.

The first European to sight the Prom was George Bass in 1798. Returning later with Matthew Flinders, Wilsons Promontory was named after a friend of Flinders. Sealers and whalers were the first to exploit its natural resources; loggers, pastoralists and tin miners followed. A timber mill was built at Sealers Cove (of which you will only notice the remnants of a pier).

In 1898, 36,800 hectares were set aside as a temporary national park. This was made permanent in 1905, though logging, grazing and tin mining all continued at various times.

ENVIRONMENT

Around 18,000 years ago, when ocean levels were far lower, the Prom was the beginning of a granite land bridge that connected Tasmania to the mainland. The Prom has more than 700 native plant species and 33 mammal species, while 230 bird species – about half Victoria's total – breed in or visit the area. If you come in spring, one of the great sights is from the lighthouse, with thousands of short-tailed shearwaters (mutton birds) skimming across Bass Strait. Commonly seen mammals include eastern grey kangaroos, swamp wallabies, echidnas and wombats, which are about as common as campers at Tidal River. Almost decimated by the 19th-century sealing trade, Australian fur seals are occasionally seen on the coast and around the cliffs below the lighthouse.

PLANNING When to Walk

It is feasible to walk at the Prom year-round, though autumn (March to May) brings the most stable weather, and summer (December to February) the most hours of sunshine. In January the average maximum daily temperature is 20.7°C, but can reach into the high 30°Cs; by July it is a less appealing 11.8°C. The greatest concentration of rain is from May to August. Jutting into Bass Strait, the Prom can experience wild bursts of weather, with the prevailing westerlies dragging in storms – it's worth coming here just to see nature's fury.

The summer school holidays (from just before Christmas until about the end of January) can make the place very crowded, as can Easter.

Maps & Books

The Vicmap 1:50,000 topographic map *Wilsons Promontory National Park* covers all walking tracks in the park with accuracy. *Wilsons Promontory: Marine and National Park Victoria* by Geoff Westcott has detailed notes on the history, geology, and flora and fauna of the park. *Discovering the*

Prom by the Victorian National Parks Association is a very useful, pocket-sized guide to the many walks around the promontory. *A Field Guide to Wilsons Promontory* by David Meagher and Michele Kohout will get you up to speed on the flora and fauna you will be wandering past.

Information Sources

The park **visitor centre** (☎ 1800 350 552; Tidal River) is 30km south of the park entrance along the access road. Walking-permit applications and accommodation bookings for the lighthouse should be made here.

Park Fees & Regulations

Entry to the Prom costs \$9.50 per vehicle, though it is free if you have booked your permit. Overnight walks, such as that described here, require a permit. This can be obtained from the park visitor centre (p175); it is recommended that you book by phone as camp sites on the Prom Southern Circuit – and especially the cottage at the lighthouse – can fill well ahead of time, particularly during summer and Easter.

Fires are banned throughout the park, so carry a fuel stove.

PROM SOUTHERN CIRCUIT

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| Duration | 3 days |
| Distance | 57.6km |
| Difficulty | moderate |
| Start | Telegraph Saddle |
| Finish | Tidal River (p177) |
| Nearest Town | Foster (p176) |
| Transport | shuttle service |
| Summary | Spend a night in a lighthouse cottage and wander the beaches and regenerating forests of one of Victoria's most popular walking tracks. |

This wide-reaching circuit highlights the best of the Prom's east and west coasts, and throws in a bit of the rugged south as a bonus. You will head out through protected coves on the east coast, and wander back along wild and windswept beaches. In between you will see forests that have begun their rebirth from a major fire (see the boxed text (opposite).

This walk offers the opportunity for a bit of bush luxury. Accommodation on the

second night is available in cottages at the lighthouse, and each one has a kitchen, heated lounge and – joy of joys – a hot shower. Bookings are essential.

Before setting out, check tide times at the Tidal River visitor centre; they are posted on a noticeboard outside. While never impassable, the Sealers Creek crossing can rise to a chilling waist height at high tide. Tide tables can be checked in advance at www.bom.gov.au/oceanography/tides – Port Welshpool is the closest listing.

If you want to visit South Point (p180), or just fancy a more leisurely return from the lighthouse, consider extending the walk to four days, with a night camped at Oberon Bay.

All camp sites have toilets and drinking water channelled from creeks.

NEAREST TOWN & FACILITIES

Foster

☎ 03 / pop 1000

The former gold-mining town of Foster, on the South Gippsland Hwy, is a convenient place to break the journey to the Prom and buy supplies. It is the kind of town dependent on its nearby national park – after the April 2005 bushfires, supermarkets recorded a 20% downturn in sales. **Parks Victoria** (☎ 13 19 63; 3a Main St) has an office in town.

Prom Central Caravan Park (☎ 5682 2440; 38 Nelson St; unpowered sites \$18-26, powered sites \$20-30; cabins \$60-85) has free barbecues, a camp kitchen and laundry facilities.

Prom Coast Backpackers Hostel (☎ 5682 2171; 40 Station St; dm/d \$25/60; ☎) is in a converted and homely berry-coloured cottage with free use of bikes and the washing machine. Next door, comfortable **Warralee Holiday Apartments** (r \$90-110) are owned by the same family. Transport to Tidal River can also be arranged (see p177).

Foodworks (Main St) and **IGA** (Main St) supermarkets are about 50m apart.

Dining choices are limited. The **Exchange Hotel** (43 Main St; mains \$15-27; ☎) lunch & dinner) is open every day – come Tuesday for a cheap chicken schnitzel – while the **Foster Golf Club** (Reserve St; ☎) dinner) has bistro-style meals and doubles as the local Chinese takeaway.

V/Line (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) has a weekday bus service departing Melbourne's Southern Cross station at 4.30pm, arriv-

BLACK BEAUTY

In late March 2005, Wilsons Promontory park rangers conducted planned burns around Tidal River. Ten days later, on 1 April, a fire reignited, burning south to within metres of the lighthouse. Around 6200 hectares, or 13% of the national park, was burned, most of it in the area of the walk described here.

It was a publicity disaster, prompting a media rant against planned burns, but when the bulk of the walking tracks reopened six months later, spring had well and truly sprung from the ashes. Grass trees were thriving and wildflowers were making their return. Eucalypts were sprouting new growth and fresh wombat scat littered the paths.

The contrast that already existed between the Prom's east and west coasts had become a gulf. The east coast between Sealers Cove and North Waterloo Bay was untouched by fire, while the west coast – particularly behind Little Oberon Bay – burned so intensely it looked like a preview of the apocalypse. Other contrasts had been created anew, with slopes of burned forest ending in gullies still thick with rainforest.

It is these contrasts that are the new attraction of walking at the Prom. It is worth re-visiting this walking wonderland even if you have been here many times before.

ing in Foster at 7.15pm (the Saturday bus departs Melbourne at 6.50pm, and the Sunday bus leaves from Dandenong train station at 6.40pm). The return service leaves Foster at 7.49am daily except Sunday; the Sunday bus departs Foster at 3.25pm. An extra service departs Melbourne on Friday at 6.10pm. Tickets cost \$27.

Tidal River

The popularity of **Tidal River camping ground** (☎ 1800 350 552; camp sites for 3 peak/off-peak \$20/16.50, 4-bed hut peak/off-peak \$56/54, 6-bed hut peak/off-peak \$85/81, unit peak/off-peak from \$106/93, cabin peak/off-peak from \$147/134) has made it a virtual metropolis of Victorian camping. Such is the demand that a ballot system is used to allocate sites over the summer school holidays (from about Christmas until the end of January). Applications for huts and cabins during this period are accepted during May, with the draw taking place on 1 June. Applications for camp sites are accepted through June, with a 1 July draw. A minimum stay of one week is required at this time. There is a small shop with a limited range of groceries, camping supplies and takeaway food.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

To drive to Tidal River from Melbourne, join the South Gippsland Hwy in Dandenong and continue until the signed turn-off for Wilsons Promontory at Meenyan (148km). Tidal River is 73km from Meenyan via Fish Creek. Allow about three hours.

There is no public transport to Tidal River, but Prom Coast Backpackers Hostel (p176) will drop you off and pick you up from the Prom (\$15 per passenger) with advance arrangement.

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

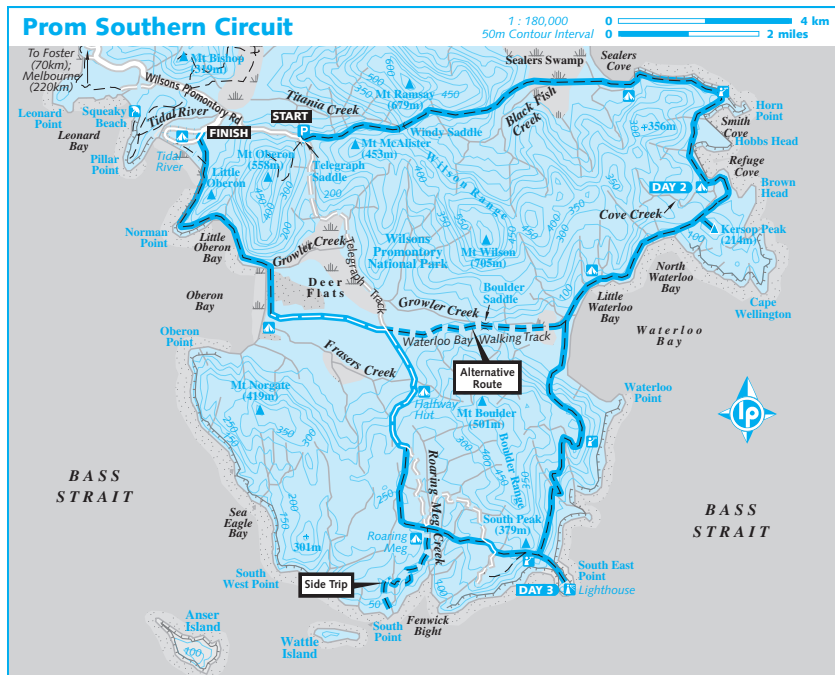
In the main walking season – November to Easter – the road to Telegraph Saddle is closed and a free shuttle bus operates between the Tidal River visitors' car park and Telegraph Saddle. If walking outside this season, the road is open, and you will either have to slog up it, a walk of around an hour, or leave a car at Telegraph Saddle and Tidal River.

THE WALK

Day 1: Telegraph Saddle Car Park to Refuge Cove

4–5½ hours, 16.5km, 280m ascent, 480m descent
From the car park's eastern end, follow the 'Sealers Cove' sign pointing east. The sandy track heads out through eucalyptus forest, contouring gently round Mt McAllister and up the southern slope of Titania Creek valley. As you near Windy Saddle (45 minutes from the car park) you leave the burned area and won't see it again until Waterloo Bay. A grassy circle in thick bush, Windy Saddle once had views but they are now blocked by trees.

From here the track continues roughly east for the next 7km, descending 300m through sassafras, myrtle and beech to Sealers Cove. The last 2km of the walk is



through the primordial-looking Sealers Swamp, much of it along a boardwalk. The water in **Black Fish Creek** (and the drinking water at each of the camp sites) is rust-coloured from the tannin leached from the surrounding tea-trees.

Once you hit the beach at **Sealers Cove**, turn right and walk 500m to the Sealers Creek outlet for your first (and deepest) wade. The Sealers Cove camp site is just beyond, 1½ to two hours from Windy Saddle.

Walk directly through the camp site and onto the signposted track to Refuge Cove. Climb for 45 minutes up and around the headland to a lookout near **Horn Point** with uninterrupted views of Five Mile Beach (one of the destinations for the Prom Northern Circuit, p188) to the north and the Seal Islands to the east. As you round Horn Point there is a view ahead to Refuge Cove and, immediately behind it, Kersop Peak.

Turning southwest, the path angles around Smith Cove, cuts across the 'neck' of Hobbs Head and descends to North Refuge Beach. Turn right and plough along the

beach for 50m, turning back onto the track, which continues above the foreshore rocks to the next sandy bay at **Refuge Cove**. The immediate camp site is reserved for boat campers, so walk down onto the beach and along to its opposite end. Take the track back into the bush to reach the walkers' camp site on the true left bank of Cove Creek. This is arguably the best-set camp site at the Prom.

Day 2: Refuge Cove to Wilsons Promontory Lighthouse

5–6½ hours, 17.9km, 580m ascent, 530m descent
This day begins with a good heart-starter. Climb around the scrubby headland over slabs of exposed granite with good views back to Refuge Cove, turning south for a winding ascent to the side-track (on the left) to **Kersop Peak** (214m), 30 to 45 minutes from Refuge Cove. The summit (10 minutes return) is one of the best vantage points along the walk, with fantastic views south to Waterloo Bay, the lighthouse and sharp-tipped Rodondo Island, which is actually a part of Tasmania.

Back on the main path, descend to **North Waterloo Bay** through shady stringybark woodland. Walk southwest along the beach and, at its end, follow the track back above the rocks. This section of track has been rebuilt after the April 2005 bushfires; it now climbs up onto the hillside and soon through areas burned in the fires.

Descend onto the beach at **Little Waterloo Bay** and cross the tannin-stained creek. Turn up into the bush to the camp site (1¼ to 1¾ hours from Kersop Peak). From here the track continues behind the beach (there's no access to the track from the beach's southern end). Continue south round the headland, fording Freshwater Creek as you come out onto **Waterloo Bay beach**.

Almost immediately the alternative route (p180) turns west, but the main route continues south along the beach for 1.7km. Nearing the end of the beach, about 40 minutes from Little Waterloo Bay, the track turns up through the dunes and begins the steep 300m climb onto the slopes of Mt Boulder.

At the top of the climb you rise onto a ridge of secondary summits, following the ridgeline south for a short time until you come to a **lookout** on a large granite boulder. The lighthouse now looks near and North Waterloo Bay pleasantly far behind. From here the track swings west, cutting across the ridge and descending in indirect fashion into the adjacent valley. Cross the rainforested creek, then ascend the adjoining spur.

WILSONS PROMONTORY DAY WALKS

As one of Victoria's prime weekend getaways, Wilsons Promontory has rightly acquired a network of short tracks that could extend your stay here beyond the three days it takes you to walk the Southern Circuit. The following trails are all easily accessed from Tidal River. Little Oberon Bay and Sealers Cove can also both be reached on day walks.

Mt Oberon

From Telegraph Saddle, climb west to the summit of Mt Oberon (558m), ascending about 350m. Though it is far from the Prom's highest peak it is regarded as the best viewpoint. Allow two hours for this 6.8km return walk.

Vereker Outlook

For a view of Corner Inlet – the bite in the Prom's northern edge – drive to the Five Mile car park, on Five Mile Rd, and climb past a rocky outcrop to this lookout at the northern end of the Vereker Range. It will take an hour to complete this one-hour, 3km return walk.

Tongue Point

From Darby Saddle (on the main park road) a 5.6km trail heads through eucalypt woodland and she-oaks, and past two minor summits with good views, to near the tip of narrow Tongue Point. Allow about 1½ hours. If you have two vehicles, you can leave one at the Darby River car park and walk to it from Tongue Point to vary the route.

Mt Bishop

Begin this 5.3km, two-hour route by climbing along the easy Lilly Pilly Gully walk (which can be accessed from the Tidal River camping ground), then ascend to the summit of Mt Bishop (319m) for a good look across Tidal River. Return part way along the ascent trail before turning off southwest for a shorter and steeper descent.

Picnic Bay & Whisky Bay

The small beaches of Picnic Bay and Whisky Bay, north of Tidal River, can be reached on short tracks from nearby car parks, but a more interesting approach is to begin from Squeaky Beach, crossing Leonard Point to Picnic Bay. Continue to this beach's northern end and cross Picnic Point to Whisky Bay. Return along the same route; the 4km return walk will take about 1½ hours.

Follow it south, with a few westerly veers, until finally contouring around South Peak to a track junction (two to three hours from Waterloo Bay). Turn left, and it's a 15-minute walk, past some wind-sculpted tors, to the **lighthouse cottages** (Sun-Fri \$43-69, Sat \$71-95). The concrete path to the lighthouse is the steepest climb of the day.

The managers offer **lighthouse tours** (☎ 2-4pm) but only to guests.

ALTERNATIVE ROUTE: WATERLOO BAY WALKING TRACK

1¼–1½ hours, 4.8km

If you are short on time or energy you can slice off the southern half of this walk by turning inland at Waterloo Bay beach. Fifty metres past Freshwater Creek, turn west (right), making your way up through wetlands and hakea-studded heathland to the large boulders on Boulder Saddle. Mt Wilson (705m) rises to the north.

Beyond the saddle is a series of giant granite tors. The path contours beneath them and descends through banksias, tea-trees and gnarled she-oaks to the junction with Telegraph Track, rejoining the main route as it returns from the lighthouse.

Day 3: Wilsons Promontory Lighthouse to Tidal River

6¼–8 hours, 23.2km, 550m ascent, 600m descent

Return to the track junction 1km from the lighthouse, turning left and beginning the climb west. Within five minutes, a side track of just a few metres leads to a **lookout** back to the lighthouse. Continue climbing to reach Telegraph Track, a management-vehicle road, turning right. Follow this zigzagging road for 600m, watching for an unmarked foot track to the left. Take this track, which heads directly west to **Roaring Meg camp site**, cutting out the meanders of the road, though adding in a few steep pinches as you climb in and out of three creeks. Roaring Meg is reached 1½ to two hours from the lighthouse.

The side trip to South Point (p180) leaves from the southern end of the camp site, while the main track heads off west (left) about 20m before you reach the road. Quickly it veers north, through a sea of grass trees, before rejoining Telegraph Track.

Telegraph Track rounds Martins Hill and descends past **Halfway Hut camp site**, with

glimpses west to Oberon Bay, to reach the junction with Waterloo Bay Walking Track (about two hours from Roaring Meg). Continue straight on for 100m, turning left onto the marked track to Oberon Bay.

Pass by the camp site, with its warren of sites, and out onto the beach at **Oberon Bay** (45 minutes to one hour from the track junction). Turn right onto the beach, which is 2km long and bordered by an extensive system of sand dunes. Cross Growler Creek and turn upstream for 100m to the heavily eroded track entrance. Contour around to **Little Oberon Bay**.

Round the headland to Norman Point lookout (its views will be pretty much obliterated once the bush regenerates) before descending the final 1km to **Norman Beach**. You can reach Tidal River on the path through the stand of tea-trees behind, or you can give your feet a final flogging on the concrete-hard beach to arrive at the camping ground two to three hours from Oberon Bay.

SIDE TRIP: SOUTH POINT

2 hours, 7.4km

The walk to South Point is one for the lookbo: this is the southernmost point of mainland Australia. Take the track heading south from Roaring Meg camp site and contour round the hills before descending to the rocky point. Ahead is only Bass Strait – if you squint you still won't be able to see Tasmania.

CROAJINGOLONG NATIONAL PARK

Croajingolong... a difficult place to spell but a great place to walk. This national park is one of 12 biosphere reserves in Australia, and protects a magnificent stretch of rugged Victorian coastline, extending from Bemm River in the west to Cape Howe in the east, on the NSW state border. It is a wild, 87,500-hectare tangle of swamps, forests and heathlands, fringed by remote, windswept beaches and tidal estuaries, and is one of the last remaining untouched bits of coast in southeast Australia.

Despite being coated in magnificent bush, it is the coast that is Croajingolong's

great attraction, and on the walk described here you will see the greater part of it. It is also something of a treasure chest of wildlife. On one visit here we encountered fur seals, snakes, sea-eagles, wedge-tailed eagles, bats, crabs, a ring-tailed possum, dolphin, lace monitor, wallaby and scorpions...all in one day.

HISTORY

Aboriginal occupation at Croajingolong dates back more than 40,000 years, and this area was a favoured residence of the Krautungulung people – the name Croajingolong is a corruption of their name. Evidence of their long occupation is visible in the many shell middens that occur at various points along the sandy coast – more than 60 are known to exist.

Point Hicks, about 2km west of Thurra River, was the first section of eastern Australian spotted by James Cook's *Endeavour* crew in 1770, and George Bass also sheltered in Wingan Inlet for 10 days in 1797. Sealers had arrived by 1820, and went on to all but wipe out the local Australian fur seal population (happily seals have since returned).

During WWII, the area that is now Mallacoota aerodrome was a strategic defence base from which Hudson bombers patrolled the waters of Bass Strait looking for Japanese submarines. The threat was taken so seriously that all shipping was generally routed away from the strait and round the coast of Tasmania. Japanese sub crews are known to have come ashore on the remote beaches to take on water supplies. The current Old Coast Rd, now used as part of the coast walking track, was once a military supply and telegraph line, connecting an observation post on Little Rame Head with the operations headquarters at Mallacoota.

ENVIRONMENT

The vegetation in Croajingolong is extremely diverse, ranging from subtropical vines, ferns, mosses, native orchids and stands of warm temperate forest, to banksia forest and heathland on the coastal fringe. Inland there are pockets of rainforest, as well as woodlands, plains and low-lying swamps.

The bird life is the park's most evident and prolific natural feature. More than one-third (or 306) of Australian bird species

have been recorded here – more even than in Kakadu. Pelicans, lyrebirds, satin bowerbirds, parrots, cockatoos, oystercatchers, sea-eagles, hawks and migrating seabirds are all present. There are also 52 mammal and 26 reptile species, including the giant lace monitor, a regular sight along the walk, even on the beaches. The Skerries, a set of rock islands just off the coast at Wingan Inlet, support a colony of Australian fur seals. They can often be seen in the inlet or even on the beach beside the inlet – do not approach them. If you are lucky you may see migrating whales heading up and down the coast.

INFORMATION When to Walk

Croajingolong is enjoyable at any time of the year, though severe storms and strong winds are common, so be prepared for all events, even in summer. Winter can be cold and wet (in June the average maximum at nearby Gabo Island is 14°, with more than 100mm of rain). That said, the number of clear sunny days on this coast varies little between summer and winter.

What to Bring

Carry a good stock of garbage bags as your pack may become immersed during a river crossing, or you may even need to float it across at Wingan Inlet. Weather conditions leading to flooded rivers and heavy seas can mean waiting at the source of the problem until conditions improve, so take an extra day or two of food for emergencies.

Maps & Books

Vicmap's 1:50,000 topographic maps *Cann-Point Hicks* and *Mallacoota* adequately cover the route. *Walking the Wilderness Coast* by Peter Cook and Chris Dowd is an excellent book, covering the coast from Lakes Entrance to Pambula (NSW) – about an 18-day walk if you are keen.

Permits & Regulations

A strict permit system applies to overnight walkers in Croajingolong National Park. Between Thurra River and Wingan Inlet, and again between Wingan Inlet and Shipwreck Creek, only 25 walkers are permitted to camp each night. You are allowed to camp a maximum of two nights in one spot, and

the number of walkers in a group is limited to eight.

In busy times, especially over the Christmas holidays and Easter, the demand for permits exceeds the allotted number, so it is wise to book well ahead. Bookings for Easter open on 1 January, and for Christmas on 1 August. At other times of the year you can book permits up to three months ahead. Permits cost \$5 per person per night.

Permit forms can be obtained from **Parks Victoria** (☎ 13 19 63) and should be sent to the **Mallacoota Parks Victoria office** (fax ☎ 03-5161 9540; PO Box 179, Mallacoota 3892).

CROAJINGOLONG COAST WALK

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Duration | 5 days |
| Distance | 59km |
| Difficulty | moderate |
| Start | Thurra River camping ground (p183) |
| Finish | Mallacoota aerodrome |
| Nearest Towns | Mallacoota (opposite), Cann River (p183) |
| Transport | shuttle service |
| Summary | Wander the wild, rugged coast of far-eastern Victoria, across some of the most unspoilt beaches in the state. Sweeping deserted stretches of sand, rocky headlands, coastal dunes and tidal inlets are all features. |

The coast around and in Croajingolong National Park often goes under the stage name of the 'Wilderness Coast', and it is by far the wildest, most removed bit of coast in the state. This walk follows the coast almost unstintingly, wandering inland only when the coast becomes impassable, and features a variety of scenery ranging from wide, open beaches to small coves with rocky headlands, river estuaries and coastal headlands.

Water can be an issue on this walk, particularly at the height of summer. High tides can inundate the river estuaries and make their water brackish and undrinkable for many kilometres upstream. In summer, water sources can dry up, so the nightly stops may need to be varied from those given here, depending on water supplies. Alternative water sources are detailed in the walk description, and you should always check with park authorities in Mallacoota

or Cann River as to the current water situation. Be certain to treat all drinking water.

Almost one-third of Croajingolong is designated as 'wilderness' area, meaning that it is being left to return to its natural state. This walk passes through some of that wilderness area, particularly across Sandpatch Point, and by its nature it is more wild and tangly than most tracks you will encounter. Already there are some grumbles among walkers that the signage on this route is not sufficient, making route-finding difficult. In light of this, walkers should be proficient in bush navigation.

While it is possible for a fit and gung-ho walking party to traverse this route in good weather in as little as three long days, it is worth taking the time to absorb and explore the region at a leisurely pace.

NEAREST TOWNS & FACILITIES

Mallacoota

☎ 03 / pop 1040

Abutting the NSW border, and completely surrounded by Croajingolong, Mallacoota is a one-road-in, one-road-out town with great access to remote ocean beaches, an extensive estuarine waterway system, an abundance of bird life, surf and, of course, the national park. **Mallacoota Information Shed** (☎ 5158 0800; Main Wharf, cnr Allan & Buckland Drs) is operated by friendly volunteers, while **Parks Victoria** (☎ 5161 9500; cnr Allan & Buckland Drs) has excellent outdoor displays and information on Croajingolong. **Mallacoota Bait & Tackle** (☎ 5158 0050; 14 Allan Dr) has some very basic camping gear.

SLEEPING & EATING

All prices here are off-peak; work some overtime if you are coming in Christmas holidays, because prices shoot up.

Mallacoota Foreshore Camp Park (☎ 5158 0300; camppark@bigpond.com; unpowered/powerd sites for 2 \$14/17.50, on-site caravans \$35) has hundreds of grassy sites extending along the foreshore, with sublime views of the lake and its resident black swans and pelicans.

At **Mallacoota Hotel Motel & Backpackers** (☎ 5158 0455; inncoota@speedlink.com.au; 51-55 Maurice Ave; dm \$22, motel s/d from \$55/66; 🍷 🍷) the backpacker rooms are a bit shabby but there is a good shared kitchen and it is conveniently located next to the pub (and you get use of the motel pool). Simple motel rooms overlook the lawn and pool.

The eco-friendly, creative and comfortable **Adobe Mudbrick Holiday Flats** (☎ 5159 0329; www.adobeholidayflats.com.au; 17-19 Karbeethong Ave; cabins \$55-135) are about 5km from town, with plentiful wildlife and gorgeous inlet views. Linen costs extra and kayaks are available for hire.

The early-1900s timber **Karbeethong Lodge** (☎ 5158 0411; www.karbeethonglodge.com.au; d \$75-180) has small bedrooms but wonderful serenity on the broad verandas overlooking the inlet. Rates include continental breakfast.

There are two supermarkets on Maurice Ave in the centre of town for any last-minute supplies. **Croajingolong Cafe** (Allan Dr; mains \$6.50-11; ☺ breakfast & lunch Tue-Sun) overlooks the inlet and is a perfect place to linger and settle into walking speed. Great smoothies; no credit cards.

Tide Restaurant (☎ 5158 0100; 70 Maurice Ave; mains \$15-25; ☺ dinner) has a prime lakeside location, and serves quality food and wine. The sunny outdoor deck is deservedly popular.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Mallacoota is 23km off the Princes Hwy. **V/Line** (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) services travel to/from Melbourne (\$68, eight hours) on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday. Be sure to inform V/Line that you are going to Mallacoota, as a shuttle bus meets passengers at Genoa, on the highway, for the transfer into town.

Cann River

☎ 03 / pop 250

A highway crossroads, small Cann River is 40km from the walk start at Thurra River. You will find basic food supplies but you should pick up your walking provisions elsewhere. The **Parks Victoria** (☎ 5158 6351; Princes Hwy) office is the main visitor information centre for Croajingolong – collect your permits here.

Toss a three-sided coin to choose between Cann River's motels. If you are weary you can plump for one of the two spa rooms at **Cann Valley Motel** (☎ 5158 6300; cannvalleymotel@bigpond.com.au; Princes Hwy; s/d \$80-120).

The courtyard at **Pelican Point Coffee Lounge** (Princes Hwy) is great on a sunny day.

Thurra River Camping Ground

At the trailhead, **Thurra River camping ground** (sites off-peak/peak \$13.50/15) has running water

and pit toilets. Advance bookings are required over summer and Easter school holidays.

If you want something a little more seductive, you can stay in former lighthouse-keeper cottages at nearby **Point Hicks Lighthouse** (☎ 03-5158 4268; www.pointhicks.com.au; up to 6 people \$230-300), mainland Australia's tallest lighthouse. During the summer and Easter school holidays, there is a minimum seven-night stay; on long weekends it is a minimum of three nights. Bookings for the camping ground can be made through the lighthouse or Parks Victoria.

GETTING TO/FROM THE WALK

To drive to Thurra River camp site, take Tamboon Rd south from Cann River for 15km, turning left onto Point Hicks Rd and following it for 25km. Point Hicks Rd may be closed after heavy rain.

A car shuttle from Mallacoota to Thurra River can be arranged through **Tony Gray** (☎ 0408 516 482, 03-5158 0472). He charges \$200 for up to six people. Your car is left at the Mallacoota aerodrome.

THE WALK

Day 1: Thurra River Camping Ground to Gale Hill Camp Site

4 hours, 10km

Follow the dirt road from the camping ground east, take a right turn at the fork and head out to the beach via several other camp sites. Head east along the beach and you will soon come to the outflow of the Thurra River. This crossing is usually a fairly straightforward wade, though heavy rains can increase the flow considerably. Occasionally, the flow will be blocked altogether by a sandbar.

Continue east along the beach for 1.5km to the mouth of the Mueller River – if you have waded the Thurra it is almost certain you will be getting wet again. Water can be found behind the dunes on the eastern side of the inlet, 300m up from the crossing.

Continue along the beach, which provides great swimming in summer but can be exposed to strong southerly winds in winter. Head for the visible rocky section of beach, cross this and a rocky prominence soon becomes visible on the beach: here lies the entrance between the dunes to Gale Hill. Follow this track over the dunes,

across a small wooden bridge and into the tea-tree for five minutes to the camp site. Water is available from a small soak here, though it may dry up in hot weather.

Day 2: Gale Hill Camp Site to Wingan Inlet

4 hours, 12km

Return to the coast and continue east along the beach, heading towards rocky **Petrel Point**. Continue over the rocks around the point, keeping slightly inland towards the grassy patches in bad weather. If the wind is really strong and the sea is raging, there is a rough track through vegetation higher up the hill.

Drop down onto the second small beach when the end of the rocks is reached and head east, passing many small rocky outcrops for about 3km. A high dune here comes close to the sea, and can be an obstacle at high tide or in rough seas. Cross the rock bar and a signpost appears marked with red arrows, heading left up into the sand hills. This section of track cuts overland through melaleuca scrub to avoid the

cliffs of **Rame Head**. Rock hopping round Rame Head is not recommended as large waves and tides may prevent access, and rocks may be slippery or unstable.

In about one hour, a track junction to Ram Head (a peak not the point) is marked. A brief but quite steep walk gets you to a **lookout** here, and is worth visiting. Back on the track, which is marked by red arrows as it continues northeast, the forest becomes more dense and is very pretty. The track then drops into attractive **Fly Cove**, just before Wingan Inlet.

Head northeast along the sand and pick up the vague track visible on the lower section of sand dunes. This leads to the camp site, along a wooden boardwalk around the inlet lagoon. This camp site is accessible to car campers, but there is a designated camping area for wakers, along with a supply of water.

Day 3: Wingan Inlet to Benedore River

5–6 hours, 15km

Wingan Inlet is one of the larger estuaries on the coast and has a fast outflow. Only

attempt this crossing at low tide (see the boxed text p186); the current is strong, so be careful. If the inlet is deep in summer, ask around and you may be able to arrange a lift across in a boat with anglers camped here. In winter, however, the place is a little deserted, especially mid-week. If, as a last resort, you are forced to swim or wade across deep water, bag up your goods inside a garbage bag (don't bother with the pack itself), pop it inside your pack and watch out for deep holes.

A small track – the Easby Track – continues on the other side (another camp site is located here) and heads up the hill. After 15 minutes it drops back down to the beach. Head towards Easby Creek with a lot of rock hopping, passing a small soak on the way that is a good source of water. Water in Easby Creek is not suitable for drinking; there is a camp site here, however.

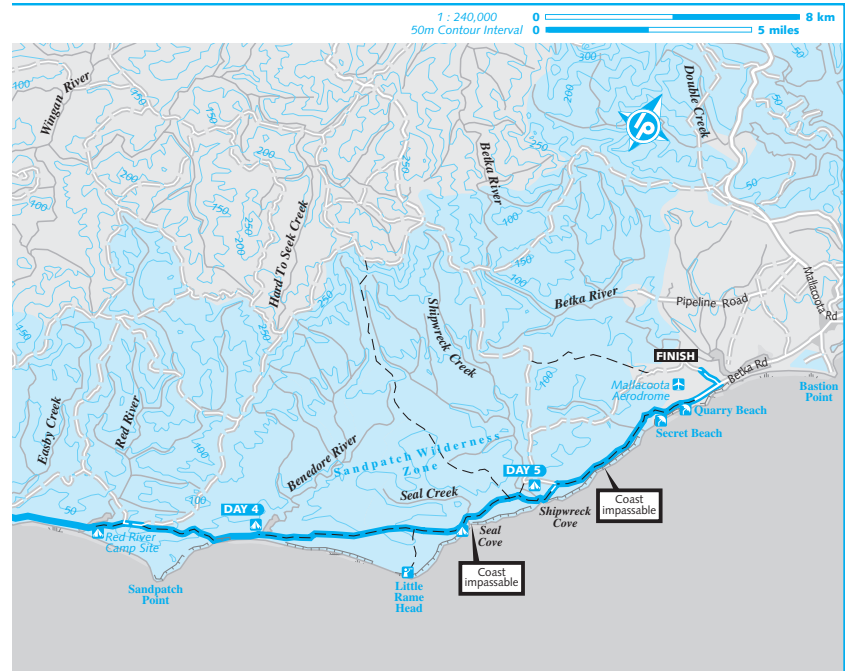
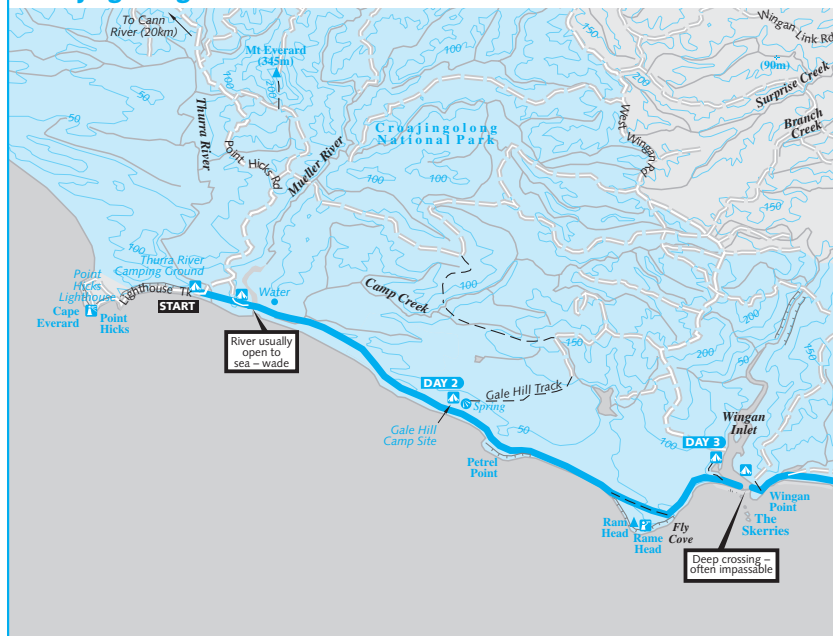
Continue rock hopping along the coast for about 4km, after which **Red River** is reached. The estuary here is wide and deep, but the crossing point near the sea is usually an easy wade across. Walk along the mouth

of Red River across the beach. About 100m past the river entrance, follow the Red River Walking Track left into the dunes.

Climb steeply up and over the first and second dunes, descending wooden steps to the Red River camp site, perched above the beautiful estuary and nestled among tea-trees and banksias. The water here is brackish. An alternative water supply is about 30 minutes away along the overgrown 4WD track (turning left at a junction). If the weather is windy you may prefer to camp here than at Benedore River.

Follow the overgrown 4WD track, heading right at the junction and walking northeast up a hill through progressively thicker forest and sword grass to a second track junction. Take the right fork (signposted 'Sand Patch Track') and follow it through thick forest to where the track narrows and drops to the beach. Water can be found near where the track exits – fill up here if possible. Continue for 15 minutes along the beach to **Benedore River**. There are camp sites on both sides of the inlet, but the higher, less swampy west side is better.

Croajingolong Coast Walk



WARNINGS

High seas, high tides and stormy, southerly weather can make walking over rocky points unsafe, and crossing the many inlets difficult. Fast-flowing water can sweep you off your feet, pack and all, and push you into the breakers. As a general rule, if you are in any doubt about the safety of a crossing, wait. Wangan Inlet can be particularly deep and difficult, and should only be tackled as close to low tide as possible. Check tide times at www.bom.gov.au/oceanography/tides before you set out – tides are listed for Eden (NSW), though Point Hicks tides are only eight minutes later. Check also with Parks Victoria for information on the status of crossings.

Snakes are very common throughout the park, so care is required (particularly near scrubby areas around water courses where they may be foraging for food). Wearing gaiters can provide a small measure of protection.

Paralysis ticks are extremely common in this area, and it is wise to check yourself and your companions each night for these tiny, unwelcome passengers – see p384 for information on removing ticks.

Day 4: Benedore River to Shipwreck Creek

3½ hours, 10km

Cross the inlet. It can be a little deep, but is generally easy to wade across. Pick up the track beside the lagoon that heads north for 150m to the camp site on this side. An old 4WD track continues inland from here and over the dunes behind Little Rame Head to Seal Cove (about two hours from Benedore River). Take the side track to the small **Little Ram Head** peak for an interesting diversion, though the junction can be hard to see.

Seal Cove has a pretty camp site right near the beach, and the swirling patterns in the pyramid-shaped rock at the beach's eastern end are worth a look. On the west side of Seal Creek, a track heads off into the scrub, continuing uphill through forest towards the west, then swinging east to cross Seal Creek. Head along an old 4WD track until a gate marked 'Walkers Only' is reached; pass through the gate and continue on the track through heathland bordered by forest. The trail crosses a section of boggy ground for about 30 minutes before descending through the trees to pretty **Shipwreck Cove**. Walk up the steps and continue 500m to the camp site in the forest, just to the south of the numbered car-camping spots. Water is available upstream in Shipwreck Creek.

Day 5: Shipwreck Creek to Mallacoota Aerodrome

4 hours, 12km

Pick up the track marked 'To Heath Track 200m' and follow it to the Old Coast Rd (it's been closed to vehicles for some time).

You leave the forest quickly and continue through heathland, skirting the cliffs of the rocky coastline, with glimpses of small coves emerging through the heath. Head along the track until you reach an intersection with Centre Track, which leads to **Secret Beach**; you are now outside the national park. Turn right and follow the road north as it turns to bitumen. Skirt Mallacoota aerodrome to pick up your car if it was left here during the car shuttle. If you came to Mallacoota by bus, just keep walking along the road; the town is about 5km ahead.

MORE WALKS**LERDERDERG GORGE**

Across the highway from Werribee Gorge (p130), Lerderderg is deeper and longer and offers a more committing gorge walk. Beginning at O'Briens Crossing camping ground, the way is obvious (follow the bed of the Lerderderg River) even if the going is not; at times over the three days you will be bush-bashing through the vegetated river bed. There are no designated camp sites but there are some beautiful small beaches on which to roll out your mat. Ending at Mackenzies Flat picnic ground, you will need to organise a car shuttle. Meridian Maps' 1:35,000 topographic map *Lerderderg & Werribee Gorges* 1:35,000 covers the gorge.

GREAT OCEAN ROAD Lorne Waterfalls

Above the tourist town of Lorne a series of waterfalls tumbles out of the Otway Range.

From Cumberland River in the west to Cora Lynn or Erskine Falls in the east, it is a simple task to piece together a walk that incorporates up to 13 waterfalls. Two days is a comfortable time to see all the waterfalls, and you can base yourself in Lorne or camp the night at a small site beside Sharps Rd. Plan your route by scanning Vicmap's 1:50,000 topographic map *The Otways & Shipwreck Coast*. Lorne is serviced by the daily **V/Line** (☎ 13 61 96; www.vline.com.au) bus between Melbourne and Apollo Bay.

GRAMPIANS NATIONAL PARK Wonderland

The extraordinary Wonderland Range is deservedly the most popular walking area in the Grampians. The best (and longest) approach to the range winds its way past the Elephants Hide, through Grand Canyon and Silent Street and up to the protruding summit of the Pinnacle. Heading back, about 50m below the Pinnacle a track signposted to Halls Gap leads to the right along the cliff top for several hundred metres, then down the eastern flank of the Wonderland Range. Allow about four hours for this 9.6km walk. Vicmap's *Northern Grampians* map has a 1:25,000 inset of the Wonderland Range that shows the tracks. Beginning in Halls Gap itself, this is one of the few Grampians walks you can access without a vehicle.

Mt Rosea

Mt Rosea (1009m) is the most rewarding of the Grampians' high peaks. Mt William and the D'Alton Peaks are slightly higher, but the first is reached by walking along a sealed road, and the second is all but inaccessible. Mt Rosea, though, is reached along marked tracks after a climb of around 400m. The track begins at Rosea camping ground on Silverband Rd and ascends towards a stand of Grampians gums found nowhere else in the world. The view from the summit extends from the rock-climbing icon of Mt Arapiles in the west to the Langi Ghiran Range near Ararat in the east. Allow about three hours for the 7km return walk. Vicmap's 1:50,000 topographic map *Northern Grampians* covers the area.

Major Mitchell Plateau

Along with the Mt Difficult walk (p152), a traverse of the Major Mitchell Plateau

to Mt William, the highest peak in the Grampians, is the classic overnight outing in the Grampians. Major Mitchell Plateau sits below, and south of, Mt William. Ascending along Fyans Creek, you summit Mt William before descending to the plateau, where camp is made beside First Wannan Creek (usually a reliable water source) on the plateau. The next day, you descend to Jimmy Creek picnic area – a vehicle shuttle will be needed to get you back to Fyans Creek. The route is almost entirely covered by Vicmap's 1:50,000 topographic map *Southern Grampians*, though the first couple of kilometres along Fyans Creek are on the *Northern Grampians* map.

GREAT SOUTH WEST WALK

The Great South West Walk (GSWW), in the southwest of the state, is one of the finest long-distance walking tracks in Australia, featuring lovely eucalyptus forests, pockets of cool temperate rainforest, the limestone gorge along the Glenelg River and the nearly unbroken 60km-long beach of Discovery Bay. Although long, it is a fairly easy walk, and can be completed in 12 to 14 days. Beginning in Portland, the trail distance is 225km along the Discovery Bay beach route, or 247km by a more-popular inland route through Mt Richmond National Park. There are 16 camp sites, spaced 10km to 20km apart; you also pass through the small town of Nelson. *The Great South West Walk*, a booklet of 1:100,000 maps, provides practical information and a basic description of each stage. **Friends of the Great South West Walk** (www.greatsouthwestwalk.com) is a good first contact for walkers. Portland has air and bus connections to Melbourne.

VICTORIAN ALPS**Bogong High Plains Circuit**

This six-day, 85km walk covers the best of the Bogong High Plains, including pretty plains surrounded by snow gum glades and easily accessible peaks. Mt Beauty (p159) is a handy base from where the walk, starting at Bogong Village, can be accessed. The route climbs to Mt Fainter and beyond to the Niggerheads, before looping over the plains to Mt Nelse and onto Mt Bogong (p159) via T-Spur. Crossing the mountain to the west side, the route passes Bogong Creek Saddle returning to Bogong Village.

The Vicmap 1:50,000 topographic map *Bogong Alpine Area* is an excellent reference. Regarded as moderate standard, this is an ideal 'longer' walk in the Bogong High Plains area.

The Bluff

This short (13km) but spectacular day walk traverses a panoramic craggy ridge high above the Howqua River. You will need a good map (see p168) to guide you to the start at the northern base of the Bluff, 60km southeast of Mansfield (p168), the nearest town. Drive towards Mt Buller, turn onto Howqua Track, then follow Brocks Rd and Bluff Link Rd to reach the Bluff car park. For the walk you need the Vicmap 1:50,000 topographic map *Howitt-Selwyn* and 1:25,000 topographic map *Buller South*. The route is steep for 1km, climbing up through broken crags which require a bit of scrambling. Once on the Bluff, the path is easily followed over Mt Eadley Stoney before reaching Bluff Hut. You can either retrace your steps, or circuit back to the starting point along Sixteen Mile and Bluff Link Rds.

Lake Tali Karng

Formed by a massive landslide a few thousand years ago, Lake Tali Karng has the appeal of a mountain oasis hidden deep within a narrow valley; it is an inviting and special place. Starting on the plains at McFarlane Saddle, 61km northeast of Licola, this moderate-grade two-day walk traverses the open Wellington Plains, passing Mt Wellington itself, before descending Riggalls Spur. Camp is made by the lake. Climb up the steep Gillios Track, and across the rocky Spion Kopje, to return to the car park. The walk is accessed through Traral-

gon, Heyfield and Licola (260km from Melbourne). The Vicmap 1:25,000 topographic map *Tali Karng* and 1:50,000 topographic map *Tamboritha-Moroka* show the route.

WILSONS PROMONTORY Prom Northern Circuit

Infinitely less crowded than the Prom Southern Circuit, the circular, 57km walking track near the promontory's north-eastern tip crosses swampland to remote Five Mile, Three Mile and Chinaman Long Beaches. There are five camp sites en route, though the most likely itinerary is a three-day walk, camping at Five Mile Beach (or Johnny Souey Cove) and Tin Mine Cove. The track from Tin Mine Cove back to the trailhead at Five Mile Rd car park is overgrown with prickly heath, poorly defined and with potentially deep creek crossings, making this a route for experienced walkers only. A self-assessment form confirming your proficiency in such skills as compass use and navigation must be completed before you walk. Vicmap's 1:50,000 topographic map *Wilsons Promontory National Park* shows the route.

MITCHELL RIVER NATIONAL PARK

The Mitchell River is well known among white-water paddlers but less so among bushwalkers, which means you will see few people as you wander the 18km stretch of its banks through this national park north of Bairnsdale. Beginning at Angusvale, the trail heads through the spectacular cliffs of the Amphitheatre to the Den of Nargun and Deadcock Den, gorges rich in scenery and Aboriginal legend. There is camping at Angusvale, or other accommodation in Bairnsdale. Carry Vicmap's 1:50,000 topographic map *Cobbannah-Tabberrabbera*.