

The Murrungowar Forest Drive meanders through the great forests of East Gippsland showcasing a range of forest types and scenery. The drive provides an insight into how the forests of East Gippsland are managed for both conservation and timber harvesting. The drive also takes you through the old Murrungowar Township site, allowing you to step back in time and imagine the hardships experienced by the early settlers.

### Murrungowar Forest Drive Circuit

**Grade: Moderate 34km, 2 hours driving time return**

The Murrungowar Forest Drive begins at the Murrungowar Picnic Ground on the Princes Highway, approximately 17km east of Orbost. It finishes back on the Princes Hwy, 14km east of the picnic ground. The route includes the opportunity to stop for picnics or short walks to Little Cabbage Tree Creek and the Falls Creek waterfalls.

The drive covers 34km and will take about 2 hours (allow longer if you wish to picnic or complete the short walks). The route is on gravel roads and during wet weather the middle section (as indicated on the map) is not recommended for two-wheel drive vehicles. Logging trucks may use some of these roads throughout the year and there is a four tonne load limit on the Towser Creek bridge.

#### Stop 1: Old Growth Banksia Woodland 4.3km

Banksia Woodland generally grows on a sandy rise. One of the main species is Saw Banksia, which is easily identified by a gnarled knobby trunk and serrated leaves. At this stop the banksia trees are old and have been relatively undisturbed. A 948 hectare Special Protection Zone, which is managed for conservation, excludes this example of old growth forest from timber harvesting.

#### Stop 2: Seedtree Harvesting 5.3km

This stop (located on the right hand side of the road) is a logging coupe that was harvested in 1999 using the "seedtree" system, which leaves some mature trees within the coupe to provide seed for regeneration.

A controlled burn followed harvesting to provide a seedbed of nutrient rich 'ash' that eucalypts rely on for germination of the fallen seed. Soon after burning, a thick carpet of eucalypts, wattles and shrubs will colonise the coupe. The eucalypts will eventually outgrow the shrub and understorey plants and dominate within just a few years.

Continue along the Murrungowar Road for 3km and turn right onto Jirrah Track. Stop 3 is a further 300 metres from the intersection.

#### Stop 3: Murrungowar Settlement 8.5km

This site marks the edge of the old Murrungowar Township, which was once a thriving settlement with a hotel, store, post office and school. In the 1890s pioneers were attracted to the area by the promise of a railway from Orbost, so the land was cleared and farmed for dairy, beef and vegetables. When the promised railway did not eventuate, most of the farms were abandoned, resulting in many of the cleared areas reverting back to forest. Most of the old farms are now privately owned eucalypt plantations while the rest continue to be grazed for beef.

Continue along Jirrah Track. After 600 metres, turn left onto Tarlton Track and continue towards Stop 4.

#### Stop 4: Blue Gum Plantation 10.5km

This area, originally part of the Murrungowar settlement, was cleared and farmed up until the 1940s, when it was abandoned. In the 1970s it reverted to Crown land (to be managed by the government) and planted with Southern Blue Gum (from north-eastern Victoria). This is one of very few plantations of this age on public land in East Gippsland.

Travel a further 800 metres to the Little Cabbage Tree Falls Picnic Area where an information board, picnic and toilet facilities are provided. Complete the short walk to the Little Cabbage Tree Creek waterfall (Skill Level: Moderate, Fitness Level: Average, 0.8km return (30 minutes)). Please take your rubbish with you.



Continue along Tarlton Track for a further 2.9km, turning left onto Dyer Creek Road at the T-intersection. Stop 5 is 700 metres from the intersection

**Stop 5: Thinning Harvesting 14.9km**

At this stop, the smaller Silvertop Ash and Yellow Stringybark trees were removed or 'thinned' in 1999. Thinning increases the growth of remaining trees, which in turn increases the wood production. This area will be ready to harvest for sawlogs 20 to 30 years after thinning. Dense stands of regrowth forest originating from wildfire and logging in the 1960s and 70s in East Gippsland are most suited to thinning treatments. Thinned forest will form an important future timber resource as harvesting shifts from older forest into regrowth forest stands.

**Stop 6: Warm Temperate Rainforest 15.8km**

Warm Temperate Rainforest thrives in the moist protected gully of Dyer Creek. Unlike eucalypt forest, rainforest occurs due to the absence of fire. Millions of years ago rainforest was the dominant vegetation across most of Australia, but presently in Victoria rainforest is located mostly in sheltered areas along gullies and streams. Warm Temperate Rainforest is made up of climbers, ferns and broad leaved plants.

**Stop 7: Extensive Regrowth Stand 17.2km**

This forest was harvested in 1974. In the 1980s, the seed trees left after logging were killed with herbicide to reduce the competition for soil nutrients and water with the young trees. The result of this treatment has left many dead standing trees or "stags" scattered throughout the regrowth forest. Current practice is generally to leave living seedtrees rather than treat them with herbicide. Over the next ten years, selected regrowth trees in this stand will be thinned to help the remaining trees produce sawlogs for the future.

*Dyer Creek Road joins Towser Creek Road 1.2km from stop 7. Turn right and head towards the next stop.*

**Stop 8: Mature Silvertop Ash Forest 19.4km**

This tall, majestic forest is over 250 years old and is an example of what much of this forest would have looked like in the 1890s. This stop is part of a 715 hectare Special Management Zone, created to protect habitat for the rare Sooty and Powerful Owls. These owls need large tree hollows for nesting and also for habitat for the species that they prey upon, such as possums and gliders.

*At the intersection of Towser Link Track, there is a signpost to the Close Family Allotment, which was farmed between 1891 and 1915. The land has reverted back to forest, but remnants of the settlement are still present. Continue along Towser Creek Road to stop 9.*

**Stop 9: Cabbage Tree Creek Linear Reserve 23.8km**

Cabbage Tree Creek forms part of a network of linear reserves that aim to maintain populations species sensitive to timber harvesting. These animals, such as possums, gliders and owls, nest or den in hollows in the big old trees and are able to recolonise areas that have been harvested or burnt by wildfire. The linear reserves are on average 200 metres wide and generally comprise older forest containing high quality habitat. Linear reserves such as

this one have been created around streams to complement existing river corridors and stream buffers.

*1.1km further along from stop 9, turn right onto Falls Creek Road No.1. Keep left at an intersection 600 metres after this point. Turn right into Four Lane Hwy and travel a further 500 metres to stop 10.*

**Stop 10: Silvicultural Systems Project 27.1km**

Established in 1988, the Silvicultural Systems Project aims to determine the feasibility of alternatives to clearfelling in native forests of Victoria. The project monitors the long-term environmental and economic effects of a range of different harvesting and regeneration treatments in native forest, including regeneration, species composition and forest health. The area covers 580 hectares with almost 100 research sites.

*The drive continues through the Silvicultural Systems Project. Turn left 500 metres after stop 10 onto Centre Road. Turn left onto Anarchy Avenue (1.2km further), then left again after 2.1km at the Winter Road t-intersection. Continue towards Stop 11.*

**Stop 11: Falls Creek Memorial Trail 31.4km**

This memorial trail is dedicated to Peter Geary, a young forester who tragically lost his life but his commitment to forestry lives on through the Silvicultural Systems Project. Peter was the driving force in the planning and operations of the project. Enjoy the short walk through stringybark forest and fern gullies to the waterfalls on Falls Creek.

*Follow Winter Road, turning left after 900 metres onto Emphield Track to return to the Princes Highway. Turn left here to Cann River (44km) or right to Orbost (31km).*

*We hope you enjoyed your visit.*

**For more information**

The Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) is responsible for managing Victoria's State Forest. For further information contact the DSE office at Orbost (☎ 5161 1222) or DSE's Customer Service Centre on ☎ 136 186.

Alternatively you may like to view the Department's website on the Internet at:

<http://www.dse.vic.gov.au>

The East Gippsland Forest Management Plan can be viewed on the website by selecting "Forestry" and then "Publications".

**Other sites of interest in the area**

The Mount Raymond lookout, McKenzie River Rainforest walk and the Cabbage Tree Palms Picnic Area are other interesting sites to visit in the area. For more information on these sites contact the Parks Victoria Information Centre on 131963.

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