

1. Introduction to Dandenong Ranges National Park

The Dandenong Ranges form a border on the eastern plains of metropolitan Melbourne, running from Mt Evelyn in the north to Fern Tree Gully in the south. The highest peak is Mt Dandenong at 622 metres. These forested hills provide Melbourne with a prime conservation and recreational resource. Within these ranges lies the Dandenong Ranges National Park.

The Dandenong Ranges National Park provides visitors with opportunities to explore forest environments right on the doorstep of Melbourne. Waterfalls, fern gullies, towering Mountain Ash and a diverse range of fauna make this area a popular destination for local, interstate and international visitors. In addition, in the surrounding areas bordering the park, there are world-renowned nurseries and gardens, quaint villages with art galleries and markets, a variety of restaurants and the ever popular historic steam train 'Puffing Billy'.

The Dandenong Ranges National Park forms a significant part of the network of public open space, linking parks and linear reserves throughout Melbourne. The suburbs of Melbourne extend to the foothills of the ranges and the park is fringed by urban development, making it an "island in a sea of suburbia".

Walking, nature observation, picnicking, sightseeing, horse riding and mountain biking are the major outdoor activities in the park.

The Dandenong Ranges National Park is an important part of our natural heritage - through careful management it can continue to be used and enjoyed by present and future generations.

The park is an ideal classroom for those studying the natural environment.

Significant features of the park include:

Natural values

- Outstanding examples of Mountain Ash forest. Mountain Ash are the world's tallest flowering plant and can grow to 100 metres.
- More than 70 Superb Lyrebirds that live in the park.
- Six different kinds of vegetation types and over 400 species of indigenous plants, along with 200 wildlife species.
- Twenty-nine rare or threatened species.

Cultural values

- Includes the oldest of Victoria's national parks.
- Contains the 1000 steps and Kokoda Memorial Track with plaques depicting the lives of the men who fought and died on the Kokoda Trail in Papua New Guinea in World War II.

The popularity of Dandenong Ranges National Park has caused some problems. Weed invasion, water pollution, wildlife predation by dogs, cats and foxes and the other effects of urbanisation need to be carefully monitored and relevant management strategies developed. The protection and conservation of the Dandenong Ranges National Park depends on the active support of surrounding property owners as well as visitors to the park.

Because so many people live in the Dandenong Ranges – a recognised wildfire prone area, the park has to be more actively managed to protect life and property from wildfire. Many of the wildfires in the Ranges were deliberately lit by vandals or accidentally started by people burning off on their properties.

1a. Overview of Dandenong Ranges National Park

The Dandenong Ranges National Park, declared in 1987, is located 35 km south east of Melbourne. It is among the more unusual and beautiful of Victoria's national parks. Right on Melbourne's doorstep, the park is easily accessible and provides many opportunities to explore its varied natural features, especially the magnificent scenery of the Mountain Ash forests.

Access to the park through the outer suburbs of Melbourne to the foothills of the ranges is via the Burwood Highway, Wellington Road or Canterbury Road.

The roads through the Dandenong Ranges follow the contours of the hills and provide visitors with spectacular displays of scenic beauty. More than two million people visit the park each year to appreciate its picturesque scenery and as a place for picnicking, walking, nature observation and car touring.



Superb Lyrebird ©MT

Sections of the park

The 3,215 hectare Dandenong Ranges National Park contains the five largest areas of forest remaining in the ranges.

Ferntree Gully unit

The Ferntree Gully unit covers the south-western area of the Dandenong Ranges National Park, from Upper Ferntree Gully in the south to The Basin in the north. It occupies nearly 600 hectares.

This area has been popular with Melbournians since the 1800s and was reserved for the public in 1882.

Ferntree Gully is home to a variety of native birds and animals, from the escapades of the echidna to the active scurrying of the Dusky Antechinus, a small native mouse. Animals active at night include Sugar Gliders, Yellow-bellied Gliders and Greater Glider, and bats such as Goulds Wattle Bat and the Lesser Long-eared Bat.

Sherbrooke unit

At 800 hectares, this is the largest section of the park. It is located in the southern area from Selby in the south to Sherbrooke in the north. This popular area contains a variety of walking tracks and picnic grounds.

The area's high rainfall, deep soils and sheltered southerly slopes provide ideal conditions for the world's tallest growing flowering plant, Mountain Ash. Small remnant pockets of cool temperate rainforest with tree ferns and filmy ferns occur in the gullies.

Sherbrooke forest is an ideal habitat for one of the world's greatest mimics - the Superb Lyrebird. Other birdlife includes kookaburra, rosellas, pilotbird and wrens.

Olinda unit

The name Olinda is Spanish for “Oh most beautiful” and contains relatively undisturbed natural habitat. This unit of the park covers 790 hectares between Olinda, Kalorama and the catchment of Silvan Reservoir. Olinda Falls picnic ground is a popular destination with tourists and many walk to view the delightful Olinda Falls.

This dry sclerophyll forest of Messmate and Narrow-leaved Peppermint provides homes for many shy animals.

Birdlife often seen include Gang Gang Cockatoo, Superb Parrot and Superb Lyrebird. Wedge-tailed Eagles are sometimes seen swooping overhead.

Daytime animals such as Swamp Wallaby and the rare Broad-toothed Rat may be seen disappearing into the bush. Night animals include possums and bats.

In the past the area was used extensively for logging. Bushfires in 1962 burnt out large areas of this unit and consequently regrowth Mountain Ash dominates in some areas.

Doongalla unit

The Doongalla unit takes in the steep western slopes of the Dandenong Ranges, covering some 700 hectares from Sassafrass to Montrose. It forms the centrepiece of Melbourne’s view of the Dandenongs.

Doongalla takes its name from a family that settled the area. In the 1920s a 279 hectare property was purchased by Miss Helen Simson who named the area Doongalla station meaning 'place of peace'. A bush fire in 1932 destroyed most the buildings on the estate.

The drier, more exposed western slopes support Long-leaved Box and Red Stringybark, a rare community in the area. During spring and early summer the reds and yellows of the Rough Bush Pea colour the area.

Tall Mountain Ash forest thrives in the valley of Dandenong Creek. Calls of the Australian Raven and Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo can be frequently heard overhead, while small birds such as pardalotes and Mistletoe Bird twitter as they move swiftly in the treetops.

Mt Evelyn unit

The Mt Evelyn unit, the smallest and newest of the five units, is 180 hectares. This forest is situated on the northern slopes of the ranges and is bordered by Mt Evelyn, Olinda and Silvan.

This area has a mixture of dry and wet forest types. Gullies contain ferns, Mountain Grey Gum and Manna Gum. The Small Grass Tree and a local form of Alpine Grevillea are two of the rarer plants found here.

Platypus occur in Olinda Creek. Echidna sniff for termites and ants, while native rats and goanna rustle in the bushes. The area is also home to Powerful, Barking and Boobook Owls.



Echidna © MT

1b. Visitor facilities at Dandenong Ranges National Park

The Dandenong Ranges National Park is one of Melbourne's most popular venues for day trips, weekend and holiday outings. People come to the park for picnicking, car touring, walking and nature observation. Other recreational pursuits include jogging, bike riding, horse riding and scenic driving in designated areas of the park.

There are no entry fees for the park however a few picnic grounds or sections are closed at night to help protect the park and it's nocturnal wildlife:

- Ferntree Gully picnic area.
- One Tree Hill picnic area.
- Olinda Falls picnic area.
- Doongalla unit of DRNP.

Check with the Park before you visit these sites to confirm opening and closing times.

Ferntree Gully unit

The Ferntree Gully section of the park includes the Ferntree Gully picnic area and One Tree Hill picnic area.

Facilities at both sites include free gas barbeques, picnic tables, shelters, water, toilets including facilities for the physically challenged, and information boards.

The park's Education Centre is located in the historic Kiosk building in the Ferntree Gully picnic area.

Walks from the Ferntree Gully picnic area include the famous 1000 Steps and Kakoda Memorial Track, and the self-guided Living Bush nature walk.



In the 1800s, tens of thousands of people visited the Ferntree Gully reserve, the closest park to Melbourne. A diverse range of activities previously occurred here, prior to it becoming part of Dandenong Ranges National Park. In 1906 a dance pavilion was built and from 1936 to 1956 a zoo with native and exotic animals existed.

Walks from the One Tree Hill picnic area include a circumnavigation of the hill.

Sherbrooke unit

There are no restrictions on opening and closing times in this section of the park.

Facilities at Sherbrooke, O'Donohue and Grants picnic grounds include information boards, free gas barbeques, picnic tables, water and toilets including facilities for the physically challenged.

Grants picnic ground also has a bird viewing area and the Sherbrooke Tea Rooms which provide refreshments, souvenirs and an extensive range of information on the Dandenong Ranges.

Walks from these picnic grounds include a loop walk to Sherbrooke Falls and longer walks through stunning Mountain Ash forest with lush green ferns.

Shorter walks from Grants picnic ground include Hardy Gully Nature Walk and the hard surfaced Margaret Lester Forest Walk which is suitable for wheelchairs. A longer loop goes through the eastern section of the forest and shows the changing vegetation of Mountain Ash, Messmate, Stringybark, wattles and fern gullies.

Olinda unit

The popular Olinda Falls picnic ground has picnic tables and toilets. A short walk to the falls takes visitors along Olinda Creek as it cascades over rocks. Viewing platforms at both the top and bottom area of the creek ensure visitor safety and enjoyment.

The Olinda area is criss-crossed with an extensive network of walking tracks.

Doongalla unit

Both the Homestead and Stables picnic grounds provide picnic tables and toilets including access for the physically challenged. Wood barbecues are provided but visitors must bring their own wood.

An information board is provided.

A number of well signposted, short, relaxing walks can be taken around the Homestead site. Longer walks through stunning forest can be taken from the Stables Track.

Both areas can be booked for functions and weddings, with the Homestead site able to provide up to 100 car parking spaces. Marques can be erected. Booking for functions are essential and fees are charged.

Mt Evelyn unit

There are no restrictions on opening and closing times in this section of the park.

There are currently no specific picnic facilities in this section.

A number of challenging walks take visitors through eucalypt forest, providing a mix of dry and wet forest types, fern gullies and pockets of rare plants.

For further information

Please contact the rangers at the Ferntree Gully unit, Mt Dandenong Tourist Road, Upper Ferntree Gully, 3156. Phone: 9758 1342

Services for schools

The park's Education Officer is available to assist school groups with materials, lessons, guided activities and advice about suitable activities in the park. Classes are conducted in the park's Education Centre located in the Ferntree Gully picnic area. Activities may also be conducted at suitable outdoor sites in the park.

Schools wishing to visit the Dandenong Ranges National Park should contact the Education Officer well in advance to make a booking.

Bookings can be made via Parks Victoria's education website
www.parkweb.vic.gov.au/education

Additional information and educational activities relating to this park are available on Parks Victoria's education website.
www.parkweb.vic.gov.au/education
Click on Dandenong Ranges National Park.

