

Dandenong Ranges National Park

Fern Tree Gully

Fern Tree Gully covers the south western area of Dandenong Ranges National Park from Upper Ferntree Gully in the south to The Basin in the north. It occupies nearly 600 hectares of the park's total 3,215 hectares. The Doongalla, Sherbrooke, Olinda and Mt Evelyn sections make up the remainder of the park.

The oldest area of the National Park, Fern Tree Gully offers a diverse range of activities including walking, bike riding, picnicking, nature observation and car touring. It even boasts a playground for the children.

Popular for 100 years

Fern Tree Gully has long been popular as a place to escape city life for a picnic or stroll through the forest. In the 1800's tens of thousands of people were visiting each year.

The natural beauty and popularity of the gully prompted a group of local residents in 1881 to ask the Minister of Agriculture to reserve the area as a public park. The following year, 168 ha, including the main gully, were reserved as a site for public recreation. However, it wasn't until December 1927 that an enlarged area of 227 ha was permanently reserved as Fern Tree Gully National Park, Victoria's second National Park. With the addition of Sherbrooke Forest and Doongalla in 1987, Fern Tree Gully was renamed Dandenong Ranges National Park.

Things to see and do

A network of walking tracks gives access to most parts of the park. With the guidance of this Park Note you can spend an hour or a day discovering the forest.

Some suggested walks:

1. Living Bush Nature Walk

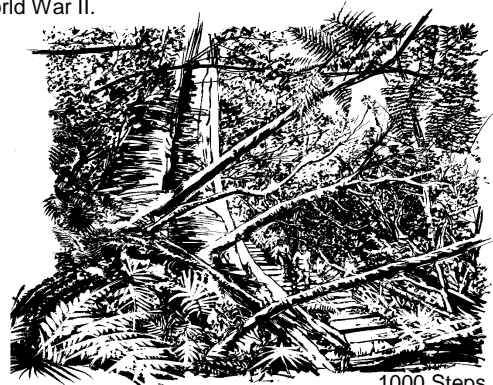
3km, 1.5 hour loop. Grade: Moderate to steep.

Starting at the footbridge next to the playground at Fern Tree Gully Picnic Ground, this pleasant walk introduces you to the wonders of the bush that you may not have been aware of before. A self-guided Park Note describing features of interest along the track is available at the start of the walk.

2. 1000 Steps and Kokoda Trail

5km, 2 hours return. Grade: Steep.

This track leads from the Fern Tree Gully Picnic Ground to One Tree Hill. Fine examples of Tree Ferns, Manna Gum and Blackwood can be seen towards the top of the hill. The track is very steep and consists of the famous 1000 Steps. Along the way there are plaques depicting the lives of the men who fought and died on the Kokoda Trail in Papua New Guinea during World War II.



1000 Steps

3. Lyrebird Track

1.5km, 45 minutes one way. Grade: Steep

Situated on the hill, west of Fern Tree Gully Creek, this track offers an alternative route to One Tree Hill. Few eucalypt trees exist on the upper half of this track as most were killed in successive bushfires and little regeneration has since occurred. In their place are understorey species such as Dogwood, Hazel Pomaderris and Musk Daisy-bush. The track is very steep and slippery when wet.



Further information

Phone the Parks Victoria Information Line on **13 1963** or visit our website at www.parkweb.vic.gov.au

Caring for the environment

Help us look after the park by remembering these guidelines:

Rubbish bins are not provided, please take your rubbish home.

No fires may be lit on days of Total Fire Ban.

Firearms are prohibited.

Dogs and other pets are not permitted in the park.

4. Circumnavigate One Tree Hill

3.7km, 1.5 hour loop. Grade: Moderate.

This round trip takes you through attractive peppermint and stringybark forest and in springtime, flowering pea shrubs add to the beauty of the area. The route starts at One Tree Hill and follows Ramu Avenue to the five-way intersection, then north along Macedon Track, before weaving around to Tysons Track on the north side of One Tree Hill, and back to the picnic ground.

Wildlife

Fern Tree Gully is home to a variety of native birds and animals. If you are lucky you may spot an echidna or an antechinus, a small native mouse, scurrying across the forest floor.



Echidna

The area also has a diverse mammal population, most of which are only active at night. They include possums, Yellow-bellied, Sugar and Greater Gliders.

The Fan-tailed Cuckoo with its call sounding like a lazy postman's whistle, can be heard by the keen observer. Goulds Wattle Bat, Chocolate Wattle Bat and Lesser Longeared Bat may also be spotted feeding on insects at dusk.

History of the Dandenong Ranges

"Corhanwarrabul" was the Aboriginal name for the Dandenong Ranges. It appears from historical accounts that the Bunurong (Western Port) and the Woiworong (Yarra Yarra) Aboriginal people used the Dandenongs as hunting grounds during the summer months.

European Settlement

The first recorded expedition into the Dandenong Ranges was made by botanist Daniel Bunce during the 1840s.

By the early 1850s, wholesale clearing began as settlers foraged further into the forests for agricultural land and timber resources. Timber splitters invaded the forest, felling giant eucalypts to be used for railways, piers, bridges and sailing ship masts.

To protect the area from indiscriminate clearing a timber reserve, the Dandenong Woori Yallock State forest, was established in 1867.

By the end of the 19th century, only one fifth of the original timber reserve remained in public ownership.

The push by settlers for land near Melbourne pressured the government into releasing 4,400 hectares in 1878. A further 4,900 hectares were released in the 1890s. From the later 1860s, Melbourne residents began to visit the area for recreation. At first the retreat of the wealthy, the area became a popular destination for the general population with the advent of the railway in the 1890s and later the motor car.

In 1882, land was reserved as a site for public recreation and extended to 227 hectares in 1927. This area was later declared the Fern Tree Gully National Park.

Early 20th Century

The area became a focal point for the arts and attracted painters, writers, poets and naturalists including Tom Roberts, Arthur Streeton, Anneas Gunn and C.J. Dennis. Between the early 1900s to the mid 1920s, the beauty of the hills attracted a large number of holiday makers and weekenders. Land was cheap and roads were pushed through unreserved forested areas where quarter acre blocks were developed for weekend shacks. During this time, many well known guest houses were built, most of which were destroyed in the bushfires of 1923 and 1926.

Visitors to the ranges in the early 1920s often returned home laden with ferns and flowers for their gardens and vases, indicating the conservation ethic of the time.

Post World War 2

Since the late 1940s, residential development has expanded steadily, altering the character of the ranges and making them almost a suburb of Melbourne. During the 1940s and 1950s, public debate was intense concerning development in the hills. Some residents, concerned about the rate and nature of land subdivision formed the "Save the Dandenongs League" in 1944. A Buy Back program was initiated, creating a corridor linking the Fern Tree gully and Sherbrooke sections of the Dandenong Ranges National Park. The government's purchase of Doongalla Estate in 1950 was the first example of this acquisition program.

Major bushfires in 1962 and 1968 further accelerated the acquisition program in order to develop a fire protection buffer zone.

Today

The Dandenong Ranges National park was proclaimed in December 1987. It consists of the amalgamation of Fern Tree Gully National Park, Sherbrooke Forest and Doongalla Estate along with the Upwey and Sassafras land corridors. In 1997, the Olinda State forest was formally added to the National Park along with the Montrose Reserve.

