

# Wellsford State Forest

## Gunyah Picnic Area

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Located just 15 km north east of Bendigo, the Wellsford State Forest is a great spot to relax, participate in a recreational pursuit or explore the history of the area. Bendigo is literally surrounded by forests and woodlands which boast a diverse array of plants and animals as well as Indigenous and European cultural heritage sites. Evidence of the region's rich history remains throughout the forest today.



Photo: Red Ironbark and Whirakee Wattle in the Wellsford State Forest

### About Gunyah Picnic Area

The Gunyah Picnic Area was once the site of a eucalyptus distillery and its foundations can still be seen here today. Imagine the hustle of the workers, bustle of the boilers and rustle of the leaves echoing throughout the forest. Explore the surrounding area and you may find evidence of gold mining and past and present timber use. The forests here today continue providing valuable resources to the local community.

### Getting here

From the centre of Bendigo, head north along the Midland Highway. Turn right at Taylor Street Epsom. Turn right again, go over the train tracks then turn left onto Epsom-Barnadown Road. Turn right into Harper Road and continue along for six kilometres. When the track splits, take the right track into the forest. Continue until you reach the end and turn right onto Plant Road. Follow this along for 100 m. Gunyah picnic area is on the left-hand side.

### Our golden past

This region is the traditional home of the Jarra Jarra people, who belonged to the Dja Dja Wurrung language group. *Gunyah* is a Dja Dja Wurrung term meaning shelter or hut. The local Indigenous people had intricate knowledge of the land and its needs, and the interconnectedness of all living creatures.

The discovery of gold in Victoria in the 1850s started a gold rush which had profound and lasting impacts on the local landscape. Between 1852–1861, almost 35 per cent of the world's gold came from Victoria. The original stands of Box-Ironbark forests were harvested in significant quantities to provide resources such as timber and fuel for the mining industry and associated settlements. Demand for timber continued after the gold rush for rapidly expanding railway and telegraph systems.

During the depression of 1889–1902, many miners returned to the gold fields to lucratively re-treat the quartz tailings, using the new process of cyaniding to extract gold. A slump in quartz mining then led to the emergence of another forest industry, the distilling of eucalyptus oil. The eucalyptus oil industry became an important source of work during the depression.

Eucalyptus oil has been distilled in Victoria's Box-Ironbark forests since the 1870s. It was one of Australia's first export products to England and proved a unique product in the world.

The distillery that once operated on this site was established in 1926 and managed by the Forests Commission for 25 years. The aim was "to investigate the conditions of the industry in general, the best timber and time to cut the leaves, the best yields at various seasons, and the most economical means of operating and marketing". The existence of the government-owned distillery caused much angst in the industry, which considered the government was cutting into their markets.



Above: The Wellsford eucalyptus distillery plant. On the right are the vats for steaming the leaves. On the left is the boiler for raising steam. The plant produced about one ton of oil per week.

## Distilling eucalyptus oil



The eucalyptus oil industry is an important and colourful part of Australia's history. In 1900, the eucalyptus industry was widespread throughout the country. Australia was exporting oil to many countries on a growing world market. In Bendigo, the first eucalyptus oil came from leaves harvested from Red Ironbark and Yellow Gum, which were also important sources of timber.

The nearby Whipstick forest was a popular eucalyptus distilling area due to its Blue and Green Mallee trees. The mallee trees of the Box-Ironbark region are renowned for their high quality eucalyptus oil. These trees can consistently produce oil with a high cineole content, meaning it is highly concentrated and pharmaceutical or hospital grade.

The earliest method of gathering leaves to distill eucalyptus oil involved men harvesting trees with axes and stripping the leaves and terminal branches. The timber was used for sawlogs, residual logs (for building), fencing timbers and firewood, while the leaves went to distilleries.



Photo: A hard day's work cutting the leaves for the Wellsford eucalyptus distillery.

The Wellsford distillery had two vats about three metres in diameter and four metres deep. These were dug into the ground and lined with bricks. There was also a boiler (rescued from a closed mine in the region), a dam, crane to lift heavy lids off vats and a cart to take ash away. Can you piece together the remnants from this former distillery? The site where the ash was deposited remains bare of vegetation. Can you find this?



Photo: Leaves are packed tightly and steamed to release the eucalyptus oil. The oil is cooled in the condenser.

### The distilling process:

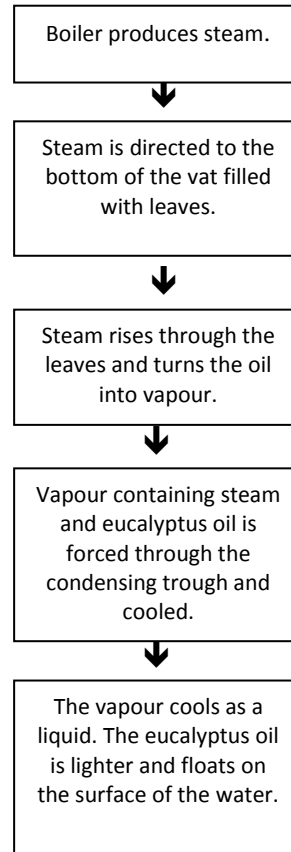


Photo: Eucalyptus Oil Bottles

A typical early eucalyptus oil operation involved a distiller, a bush boss and up to a dozen cutters and hands. Although it was a healthier job than working in the mines, cutting eucalyptus leaves by hand is hard work. Cutters have their backs bent all day, the tools were sharp, hand injuries were common and operating the distillery itself was hot, dirty and often dangerous. In the early years, cutters were mainly transients, most working for several distillers and sometimes in teams. Cutters got to know the bush intimately and named many individual trees, small rises and tiny gullies.

### Discover nature's treasures

The Wellsford State Forest is dominated by eucalypts, wattles and wildflowers. Stately Red Ironbarks with their corrugated bark stand tall on the ridge tops. Scattered amongst the stands are Yellow Gum, Grey Box and Red Box. The beautiful black trunks of the ironbarks are highlighted in spring by the acres of Cypress Daisy Bush and Whirakee Wattle. Glorious displays of Golden Wattle, Totem Poles, Leafless Current Bush, Spreading Wattle, Purple Mint Bush, and the lovely orange, yellow and red colour of the Showy Parrot Pea also decorate the forest in September and October.



Photos: Cypress Daisy Bush (Cincotta), Golden Wattle (DELWP)

A blanket of flowers carpets the ground here in summer. They include Golden Pennants, Golden Everlastings, Cranberry Heath, Cats Claw Grevillea, Gold Dust Wattle and Bluebells. If you look carefully on the forest floor you may find delicate native orchids such as the Waxlip Orchids, Blue Caladenia, Tall Greenhoods and maybe even a Leopard Orchid.

Understorey plants such as wattles, heaths, grevilleas, grasses, herbs, sedges and mosses are vital to the health of this ecosystem. They also protect the soil and other plants, and provide shelter, nest sites and food for animals. Apart from their intrinsic value, they provide magnificent flower shows in spring.

The Wellsford State Forest supports a unique, diverse range of animals that feed in its nectar-rich canopy. The Swift Parrot flies from Tasmania each winter to feed on the delicious year-round nectar supply the Box-Ironbark forests provide. Tree Creepers and Tree Martins, flocks of Diamond Firetails and Honeyeaters are found in abundance.

The Wellsford State Forest is also home to threatened species including the Brush-tailed Phascogales (or Tuans), Grey Crowned Babbler, Regent Honeyeater and the Speckled Warbler. There are many Eastern Grey Kangaroos and Swamp Wallabies along with Short-beaked Echidnas, Yellow Footed Antechinus, Common Brushtail and Ringtail Possums, Wedge Tail Eagles, Barn Owls, Rosellas and Sugar Gliders.

Photo: Brush Tailed Phascogale (Parks Victoria)



As many native animals are nocturnal, you must be quiet, patient and lucky to see them. Dusk and dawn are the best times.

## Forest use guidelines

### Let's look after our living museum!

Box-Ironbark forests are accessible all year round and provide the ideal setting for recreational pursuits such as:

- Get active! Walk along one of the many tracks, ride your horse or bike along the bush roads and appreciate the beauty of the forest. Be sure to stay on formed roads when riding
- All native plants, animals, historic sites and geographical features are protected by law.



- Explore and search the forest for clues that give us evidence from the past. Remember to leave everything as you find it.
- There is no rubbish collection service so please take your rubbish home.
- Dogs are allowed in State forest but must be under direct control at all times and are expected to be on a leash in picnic and camping areas or when near other visitors.
- Motor vehicles including motorcycles must not be driven off formed roads or on walking tracks. All vehicles must be registered and drivers licensed.
- Use toilets where provided. At some sites hand washing facilities and toilet paper may not be supplied. Come prepared.

## Campfire guidelines

Campfires are permitted, provided the following guidelines are observed:

- **Campfire safety** – Use fireplaces where provided. The fire must be attended at all times by a person with the capacity and means to extinguish it. For solid fuel fires, the ground and airspace within 3m of the outer perimeter of the fire must be clear of flammable material. Ensure the fire is extinguished with water before leaving. **If it's cool to touch it is safe to leave.**
- **Campfires are prohibited on days of Total Fire Ban.** This ban does not apply to a person preparing meals on a gas or electric appliance that has been designed and commercially manufactured exclusively for cooking provided:
  - the ground and airspace within 3m of the appliance is clear of flammable material
  - when in use and alight, the appliance is in a stable position and attended by an adult who has the capacity and means (minimum of 10 litres of water on hand) to extinguish the fire.

**It is your responsibility to know if a Total Fire Ban is declared. If in doubt, do not light a campfire.**

## Firearms

Normal firearm laws apply in State forests.

- A licence is required and firearms must be registered.
- It is prohibited to shoot on, from or across roads.
- Use of firearms in camping areas is prohibited.

All native birds and animals are protected by law. State forests are popular recreation areas. Take special care with firearms.

## Camping - Minimal impact

To protect the delicate environments of the forest, we need to 'tread lightly' in the bush to minimise our impact on the natural environment.

- Be careful of camping under trees. Trees can drop their limbs at any time (particularly during high winds).
- Do not dig trenches around tents. With modern tents, this is unnecessary, particularly if you choose a well-drained or raised site.
- Protect water quality – wash up at least 50 metres away from the river and avoid using soap (use gritty sand and a scourer instead).
- Leave campsites tidy – Take your rubbish home.

## Prospecting

- Try your luck fossicking or prospecting with a current Miner's Right. You can purchase a Miner's Right online from the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning website at [www.delwp.vic.gov.au](http://www.delwp.vic.gov.au). Remember to re-fill any holes you dig

## Safety information

- **On Code Red Fire Danger Rating days, parks and State Forest are closed to the public.** Do not enter parks or forests on Code Red Days. If you are already there when a Code Red day is announced, you should leave the night before or early in the morning. For more information contact DELWP (see below).
- Be responsible for your own safety. Be aware of extreme weather events, carry your own first aid kit and let someone know before you go.
- This area is dotted with many mine shafts. Exercise care while walking through the bush and keep dogs on a leash.
- Visitors are advised to avoid the forest in very wet or windy weather when hazards may be increased.

## More To Explore App



Download the More To Explore App for comprehensive information and interactive maps on what to see and do in Victoria's three million hectares of State forest.  
<http://www.ffm.vic.gov.au/more-to-explore>

## Acknowledgements

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## For more information

**The Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning (DELWP) is responsible for managing Victoria's State Forest. For further information contact DELWP's Customer Service Centre ☎ 136 186 (TTY: 1800 555 667) or visit DELWP's website at <http://www.delwp.vic.gov.au>**



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Forest Notes Map  
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