

Gunbower Island State Forest

Koondrook Red Gum Forest Walk

ISSN 1440-2262 FS0122



The Koondrook Red Gum Forest Walk is an enjoyable and relaxing walk through the Gunbower State Forest. Along the walk you will find interpretive information boards telling you interesting stories of Gunbower Island's natural and cultural landscape that will inspire you to look at your surrounds through different eyes.

About Gunbower State Forest

Gunbower State Forest is an area with a unique ecosystem and a diverse history. The island contains many sites of European and Indigenous cultural significance, and is popular for recreational activities such as kayaking, fishing, camping and bushwalking.



Photo: Gunbower Island State Forest (DELWP)

Getting here

Gunbower Island is situated near Cohuna 240km North of Melbourne, on the Murray River. It is surrounded by River Red Gum forest and is home to many diverse species of flora and fauna.

The Koondrook Forest Walk is located south of the Koondrook Township, north of Cohuna. To get there from Melbourne you can either take the Calder Hwy (A79) into Bendigo and travel up the Loddon Valley Hwy (B260) to Kerang where you take the Kerang-Koondrook Rd (C264) into Koondrook; or travel up the Hume Freeway (M31) where you turn left onto the Northern Hwy (B75) to Echuca. From there you travel west along the Murray Valley Hwy (B400) into Cohuna, and then turn right onto the Cohuna-Koondrook Rd, which will take you to Koondrook.

A place of significance

Gunbower Island is a Ramsar listed Wetland of International Importance. It is a very important site for birds, mammals and amphibians. The island is home to over 210 plant species and 140 animal species. Gunbower Island - Perricoota is the second largest

River Red Gum forest in Northern Victoria (largest being Barmah-Millewa Forest) and one of the six Living Murray Icon sites.

Gunbower Island

Gunbower Island covers an area of 24,600ha. It consists of State Forest (10,500ha), National Park (9,330ha) and Murray River Reserve (4,770ha). Gunbower Island is a long shallow basin lying between the banks of the Murray River and the Gunbower Creek, and is only 80m above sea level. Gunbower Creek is an anabranch of the Murray River.

Gunbower Island consists of a variety of vegetation groups, including Black Box woodlands, tall Red Gum forests, semi-permanent wetlands and permanent wetlands. The forest is home to many endangered plants and animals, such as the Giant Banjo Frog and Intermediate Egret.



Photo: Intermediate Egret (NCCMA)

Things to do

Self-Guided Nature Walk

For those who enjoy a leisurely walk, the Koondrook Red Gum Forest Walk is ideal. Enjoy the tranquility and beauty of the forest and stop along the way for a picnic lunch in picturesque surrounds. Starting from Koondrook (87km North-West of Echuca, 82 km South-East of Swan Hill), both the Turtle loop or Eagle loop are a leisurely half-day walk, and link a number of historical, cultural and ecological sites of interest. The walks meander through Red Gum forests and wetlands.



Photo: Koondrook Forest Walk (DELWP, Groch)

Koondrook Red Gum Forest Walk (Turtle Loop)



Return 13.2 km | 3.5 hours
 Flat | Formed track
 Signposted | No steps
 Some bushwalking experience recommended

Koondrook Red Gum Forest Walk (Eagle Loop)



Return 9.1 km | 2.5 hours
 Flat | Formed track
 Signposted | No steps
 Some bushwalking experience recommended

NOTE: In wet weather or during flood times, access to the start of the trail may be limited. Contact DELWP Cohuna for further information regarding road conditions.

Trail Points of Interest

1. Start of the Walk (Condidorio's Bridge)

Be introduced to the walking track, the Gunbower Island, its ecology and history in the making and a welcome to country.

2. Gunbower Stockyards

Stock used to graze on Gunbower Island in the 1900s, with large grazing licenses owned by local families. The sign here explains more about the history of cattle in the Gunbower Forest.

3. Meet the locals ... the Pearce Family

John Robert Pearce (known as Jack) worked as a Forest Officer at Tarnagulla and Waanyarra before arriving at Gunbower Island with his wife Florence and three children in 1925. The sign here tells you more about the Pearce family.

4. Meet the locals ... family homes

There were a number of homes, and many stories to tell in the Gunbower Forest. Read the sign here to get more information on the different family homes.

5. Cultural significance

The Barapa Barapa Indigenous communities have spiritual connections to Gunbower State Forest. Get to know more about why that is, on the sign at this stop.

6. Shell midden

Shell middens are a common trace of Aboriginal occupation. Get to know more about the shell middens in Gunbower State Forest at this stop.

7. Selective logging ... 'less is more'

The Gunbower State Forest has been a working forest for more than 100 years. Read about selective logging and the benefits of this timber harvesting process.

8. Vegetation communities

Read about the different types of vegetation communities to be found in the Gunbower State Forest and learn about the differences in elevation for the various vegetation communities.



Photo: Flooded Redgum Forest (NCCMA)

9. Aboriginal mounds

The Gunbower Creek provided water, food and shelter for the local indigenous Barapa Barapa communities in years gone by. Aboriginal artefacts are plentiful in the Gunbower State Forest, and include mounds throughout the forest. Learn more about Aboriginal mounds at this stop.

10. Flooding

Flooding is an integral part of the ecology of Gunbower Island. The flora and fauna have adapted to, rely on, and flourish from flood seasons. Get to know more about this important aspect of the landscape by reading the sign.



Photo: Flooded Redgum Forest (NCCMA)

11. Fire and stone

Wildfires have always been a part of the Gunbower Forest history. Aboriginal artefacts are plentiful in the Gunbower State Forest and you may have walked over, or past a stone tool. Want to learn more? Read the sign.

12. Eagle Tree

The Eagle Tree was one of the most majestic Red Gums in the Gunbower Forest, stretching more than 40 metres into the sky. Learn about the age of the Eagle Tree here.

13. Sleeper cutter or skilled artist?

Sleeper cutting was very labour intensive and dangerous work, with the workers needing the strength of a weight lifter and the skills of

an artist, sculpting sleepers from the tree with an axe. Read more about the multi-staged process for producing the sleepers.

14. Wetlands

Wetlands of Gunbower Island are of international significance and are listed under the Ramsar convention to protect water bird habitat. Learn more about the functions and importance of wetlands on the sign.

15. A quirky sense of humour

Here you'll get to see how nature sometimes plays tricks on the vegetation, leaving us with a visual puzzle. Learn how a strange looking tree is actually two trees.

16. Market Garden

You are now halfway through the walk. Here you can explore the place that was once was a thriving market garden. Many different types of vegetables were grown on Gunbower Island, with agriculture being an important industry of the district.

17. Past and present, nature and art

Here you can read about the interesting history of the ShannKirst Farm on the sign. You can also learn about 'coppice' regrowth of trees, which is nature's way of providing interesting art throughout the forest.

18. Freshwater Turtles

Gunbower Island is home to the vulnerable Broad-shelled Turtle (*Chelodina expansa*). The turtle can grow up to 80cm in length and is found in slow moving or still freshwater habitats in South Eastern Australia. Read more about their diet and reproduction and the protection of turtles in the forest.

19. Waterbirds

Gunbower Island is home to over 200 species of birds and is one the largest breeding grounds for waterbirds in Victoria. It provides valuable habitat for colonial waterbirds to nest, feed and roost. For further information about waterbirds read the sign at this stop.



Photo: Pacific Black Duck, Grey Teal (NCCMA)

20. Scar Trees

At this stop you can see a scar tree and learn more about how these scars were created and for what purposes.

21. Chinamens' Bend

Chinamens' Bend is located on the west side of the Gunbower Creek, which is approximately 80 metres from the track at this spot. Chinamens' Bend is known by many of the older locals and it has an interesting story.

22. Charcoal Production

In 1941 the Forests Commission erected a number of charcoal burning kilns in this vicinity, in order to make charcoal to power vehicles. Learn more about this interesting historical aspect of the forest.

23. Rifle Range

Get to know more facts regarding the Rifle Range on Gunbower Island at this stop.

24. Amphibians and reptiles

Here you can learn more about the Gunbower frogs, snakes and their relatives and how programs in the forest help protect these and increase their breeding success.

25. Water, the start of life ...

Here the beautiful lagoon in front of you is the 'Three Corner Hole', providing a natural drainage point for flood water throughout the forest into the Gunbower Creek.



Photo: Scar tree (DELWP, Groch)

26. Home among the gum trees

Get to understand how large old trees, fallen timber, hollows, loose bark and leaf litter are important sources of habitat and food for many animals.

Caring for the wetlands

In recent years Gunbower Island has received environmental flows as part of a seasonal watering program to try to help restore regular flooding through the forest. This will help improve the health of the important wetland forest and its flood dependent plants and animals.

For more information on the seasonal watering program visit the North Central Catchment Management Authority's web site: http://www.nccma.vic.gov.au/Water/Environmental_Water/The_Living_Murray/the_North_Central_Catchment_Management_Authority

For your safety

River Red Gums drop their branches without warning so be careful when camping, and remember to leave your car parked in a safe spot.

Forest use guidelines

Let's look after our living museum!

- 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.

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.

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. Remember to re-fill any holes you dig

Seasonal road closures

Some roads within the forest are seasonally closed each year during environmental flooding. Throughout the watering the forest will remain open to visitors to use the forest, however some access tracks to recreational areas may be closed.

For the latest information regarding the delivery of environmental water visit North Central CMA's website; for tourist information, including recreational opportunities, visit Gannawarra Shire's Gateway to Gannawarra Visitor Information Centre in Cohuna or call (03) 5456 2047; for information regarding forest access and track closures, see the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning's Public Access Map.

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.ffmpeg.vic.gov.au/more-to-explore>

Acknowledgements

- [Gunbower Island] (DELWP, Groch)
- [Intermediate Egret] (NCCMA)
- [Koondrook Forest Walk] (DELWP, Groch)
- [Flooded Redgum Forest] (NCCMA)
- [Scar Tree] (DELWP, Groch)
- [Pacific Black Duck, Grey Teal] (NCCMA)

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>



© The State of Victoria Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning 2015. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International licence. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

This publication may be of assistance to you but the State of Victoria and its officers do not guarantee that the publication is without flaw of any kind or is wholly appropriate for your particular purposes and therefore disclaims all liability for any error, loss or other consequence which may arise from you relying on any information in this publication.