Gembrook Park
Flora and Fauna Reserve

Cardinia

Nature trail notes and information

Gembrook Park is a superb example of a damp forest vegetation community with spectacular mountain grey gums, mountain ash, and messmate stringy bark trees towering overhead.

The park is about 29 hectares but was originally part of a 259-hectare reserve founded by the former Zoological and Acclimatisation Society in 1873. In 1906, the land was temporarily reserved after numerous petitions from local residents and was gazetted as a permanent reserve two years later.

If you would like to learn more about the park or would like to get involved and help complete various conservation projects you can join the Friends of Gembrook Park.

For more information or details of how to join the 'friends' group, contact Cardinia Shire Council on 1300 787 624.

1. Animal haven

Gembrook Park is home to many mammals, birds, insects, reptiles and amphibians.

One of the most abundant is the common wombat *(Vombatus ursinus)*, particularly in the more exposed areas, which favour the growth of grasses and other food plants. A wombat can live in as many as four to five burrows, which can be as deep as 2–3 metres.

Keep a look out for wombat diggings, burrows, and scats (droppings) along both the Fern Gully and Hillside loop walking tracks.

2. Overseas trees

Look around – can you find the 'visitors' from overseas? These two redwood trees *(Sequoia sempervirens)* originated from North America and the species is known to be the tallest growing in the world. These particular redwoods are thought to have been planted by prominent local Harry Knight somewhere between the mid-1920s and mid-1930s.

Friends of Gembrook Park now encourages the planting of local indigenous plants to provide food and shelter for local native animals.

3. Invaders from out of town

Almost 100 species of indigenous plants live in Gembrook Park. One of the greatest threats to their survival is weeds which smother the indigenous plants and take away valuable nutrients, water, and sunlight. Weeds can sometimes come out of our own gardens, for example, the wandering creeper *(Tradescantia fluminensis)*, English holly *(Ilex aquifolium)*, forget-me-not *(Myosotis sylvatica)*, blackberry *(Rubus fruticosus)*, and panic veldt-grass *(Ehrharta erecta)*, all unfortunately have made a home for themselves in this location.

Wandering creeper *(Tradescantia fluminensis).*

Friends of Gembrook Park is working to reduce weeds and return this reserve to native forest. You can do your bit by removing these plants from your garden and replacing them with local indigenous plants.

4. Change of scenery

This area of the park is drier, with less fertile soils, which favours the large mountain grey gums *(Eucalyptus cypellocarpa)* and messmate stringy barks *(Eucalyptus obliqua).* These trees form the 'over-storey', or tree layer, of vegetation.

The next layer of plants is called the 'understorey', and comprises species including hazel pomaderris *(Pomaderris aspera)* and musk daisy-bush *(Olearia argophylla).*

Mountain grey gum *(Eucalyptus cypellocarpa).* Photo: Stuart Hall.

The lowest layer of plants is slightly more open and allows the light to reach the ground, favouring forest wire grass *(Tetrarrhena juncea)*, tall sword sedge *(Lepidosperma elatius),* and purple-sheath tussock grass *(Poa ensiformis)* underneath.

5. Spot the hollow

Hollows are usually found in trees more than 80 years old. About 60 of Victoria's 385 species of native birds and just under half of our mammal species depend on hollows for shelter and breeding. Hollows often need to be a certain size and shape to be suitable for breeding to occur. The park provides some of the last habitats in the area for animals that need hollows. Look high and low to find a hollow.

6. Bushland symphony

This is a good place to sit down, rest and enjoy the sounds of the bush. Listen and pay particular attention for the superb lyrebird *(Menura novaehollandiae).* These birds have their own unique call, but this is usually interwoven with mimicked calls of many other birds. Their own call varies between areas, but is generally a loud 'blick blick'. Males commonly sing during the breeding season (winter) while feeding and standing on logs or branches.

Superb Lyrebird *(Menura novaehollandiae).*
Photo: Simon Dunstan.

7. Spot the eucalypt

Gembrook Park has five species of eucalyptus; messmate stringy bark *(Eucalyptus obliqua)* is the easiest to identify by its 'stringy' bark. This bark was once used by the local Indigenous people for string bags and nets for fishing.

To identify the other four species requires some careful observation. Below are some clues.

- Mountain ash *(Eucalyptus regnans)* has pale coloured bark. The lowest 5–7 metres of the trunk is a rough dark brown colour.
- Mountain grey gums *(Eucalyptus cypellocarpa)* have cream-coloured bark with yellow or tan patches.
- Manna gums *(Eucalyptus viminalis)* have cream-coloured bark, but no yellow or tan patches.
- Narrow-leaved peppermint *(Eucalyptus radiata)* has grey-brown bark that may appear interlaced and finely flake, but not stringy. The leaves give it its name, as they smell strongly like peppermint.

8. Peace and tranquillity

The Fern Gully is a peaceful area to enjoy the magnificent tree ferns; the rough tree fern *(Cyathea australis)* and the soft tree fern *(Dicksonia antarctica).* The base of the fronds of the soft tree fern are covered with soft hairs, compared with the prickly base of the rough tree fern.

The surrounding hills of large mountain ash *(Eucalyptus regnans)* trees create the ideal shaded, moist environment in which tree ferns flourish.

Take a walk along the boardwalk and enjoy this cooler environment. Please help us to look after this gully by viewing only from the lookout bridge.

9. Fallen giant

This grand old tree is about 45 metres long, which is impressive when you keep in mind that the tree has decayed substantially over time, shortening its original length.

Over the years, the tree has provided a perfect place for mosses and lichens to grow. These act like a sponge, soaking up the water – which you can feel for yourself. The mosses and lichens, combined with hundreds of insects and fungi, help the tree to decompose. This natural process returns nutrients to the soil for ongoing forest growth.

10. A watery home

Scented paperbarks *(Melaleuca squarrosa)* are abundant through this damp section of the park. These shrubs have small, pointed leaves and creamy-white, papery bark. The sweet-scented flowers in spring and summer are attractive to insects.

Also growing in this moist vegetation community surrounding Cockatoo Creek, is an unusual plant called the forest sedge *(Carex alsophila)*. This sedge is a light green plant which has a dark brown seed head. This area is one of the few sites in Victoria where the sedges are still found and as a result Gembrook Park is of 'State Conservation Significance'.

Although these are not abundant, if you look carefully near the bridge you might be able to spot one or two.

Scented paperbarks *(Melaleuca squarrosa).*
Photo: Stuart Hall.

11. Life on the edge

The edge of the park here is a dangerous area for both animals and plants. Hazards for native wildlife include roaming pets, foxes and vehicles. Plants also face difficulties with polluted water and invasions of non-native plants. But we can all help those animals and plants that rely on the park for their survival, by keeping our pets inside at night, staying on the tracks, and not dumping rubbish.

12. Mini-beast safari

Invertebrates or 'mini-beasts' (animals without backbones) are a vital part of a healthy forest, and of any ecosystem.

The most common invertebrates in the forest are spiders, ants, beetles, bugs, cockroaches, millipedes, snails and slugs.

Of all the animal species in the world, only 5 per cent are vertebrates and the other 95 per cent are invertebrates! Look carefully as you walk along the track and see what types of insects you can see.

13. Yabbies

In damp areas, like this next to the creek, you may see evidence of freshwater crayfish activity. Commonly known as yabbies, these semi-aquatic, smooth-shelled creatures do not have a skeleton but have an exterior hard shell – an exoskeleton. As they grow, they moult and shed their old shells, growing a larger shell to fit inside.

Yabbies live in small burrows that can be seen throughout the park and range in depth from 50 centimetres to 2 metres underground.

Yabbies are omnivores but primarily eat vegetation like leaves and rotting plant material. However, they are opportunistic and will eat fish, manure, meat, and even turn to cannibalism when population overcrowding occurs. Yabbies also eat their old exoskeleton after moulting and use the calcium from this to aid in growing the new one.

14. Wattles make a comeback!

This area to the north and continuing along the track for 150 metres has been allowed to naturally regenerate.

Silver wattle *(Acacia dealbata)*
Photo: Upper Beaconsfield Indigenous Nursery.

This 1.5-hectare area was once a pine plantation, logged for the final time in 1985.

Many wattles have regenerated and are now the dominant species in this area. Silver wattle *(Acacia dealbata)* and black wattle *(Acacia mearnsii)* have greenish-grey coloured, fern-like, soft leaves.

15. Fruits of the forest

Looking southwards from this point, you will see some very dense tall sword-sedges *(Lepidosperma elatius).* These form a barrier preventing weeds from entering the reserve along this boundary. Their distinguishing feature is the prominent mid-rib along the stem.

You may also see prickly currant bush *(Coprosma quadrifida);* a large shrub with small, dark, sweet fruit from January to March. Local Indigenous people used native plants like this as a source of food.

Austral mulberry *(Hedycarya angustifolia)* was another shrub important to Indigenous people, for food, but also to light fires. The shoots that come up from these trees are long and straight and could be used as fire drills.

Tall sword-sedge *(Lepidosperma elatius)*
Photo: Stuart Hall

16. Bird's eye view

Here you can see a couple of trees that have died but are now providing a great home for birds, mammals, insects and reptiles. Dead trees like these are important, as they provide habitat for many different animals.

Living plant species in this area include hazel pomaderris *(Pomaderris aspera),* blanket leaf *(Bedfordia arborescens),* hop goodenia *(Goodenia ovata),* drooping cassinia *(Cassinia arcuata),* and large kangaroo-apple *(Solanum laciniatum).*

17. Blackwood forest

In front of you here, is a patch of beautiful blackwoods *(Acacia melanoxylon).* These trees can be quite large and bushy, ranging in height from 6 to 30 metres, with hard, dark bark and deep green foliage. They favour well-drained soil and produce round, creamy yellow flowers from August to October.

Blackwoods are known to be a food source for caterpillars and butterflies, and Indigenous people used the wood to make weapons and the bark to relieve rheumatism.

Gembrook Park

Flora and Fauna Reserve

- Fern Gully Walk (markers 1–12)
  1.5kms 30-minute walk
- Hillside Walk (markers 13–17)
  1.2kms 35-minute walk

Self-guided trail

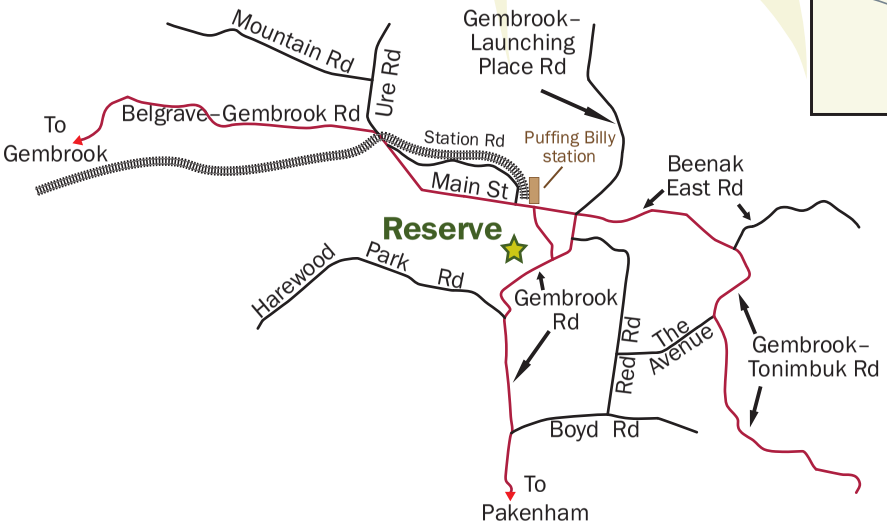
Sign post

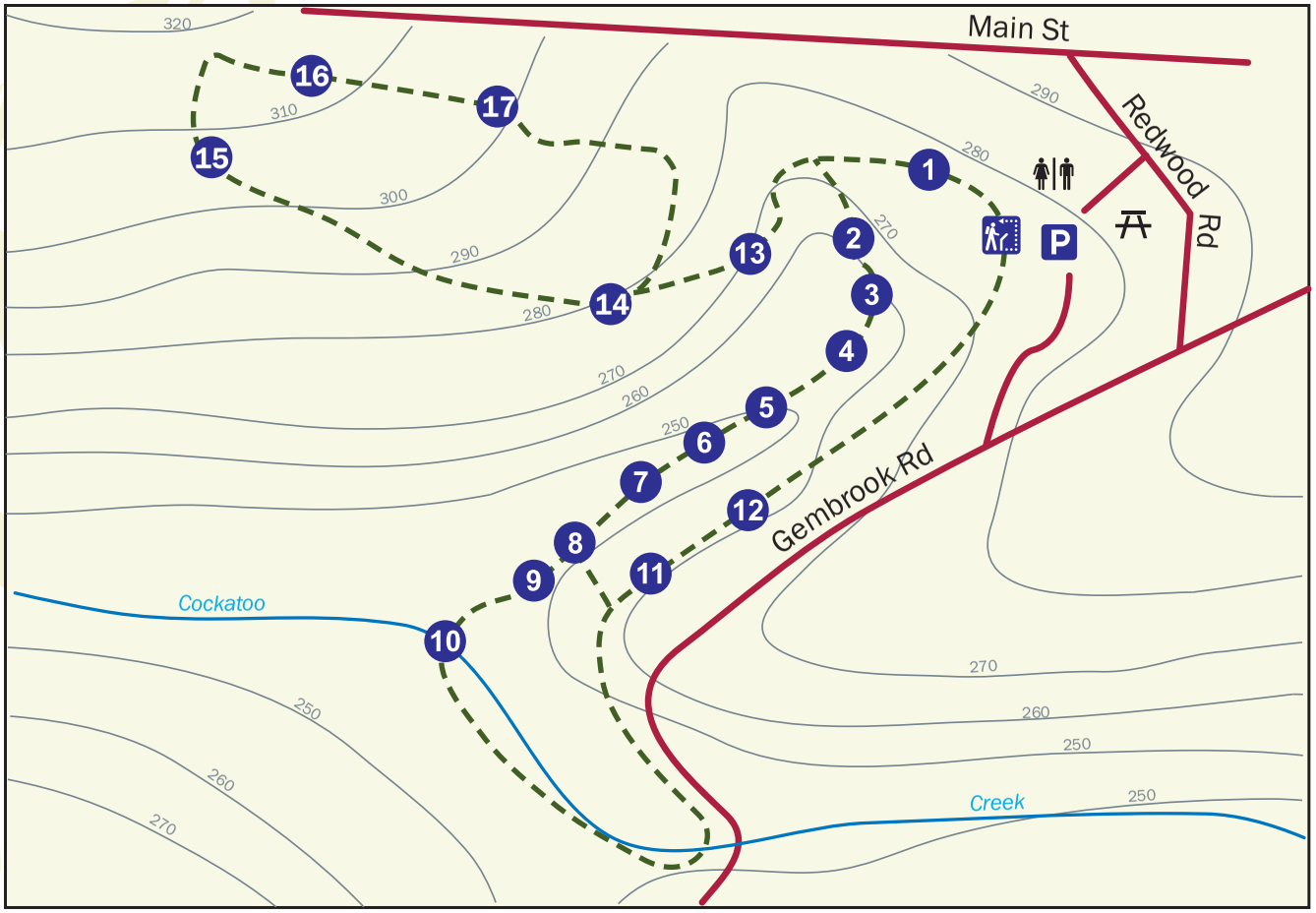
Parking
Lat 37° 57' 20" S
Long 145° 33' 02" E

Toilet

Picnic area

10m contour





How to get there

Gembrook Park is located on Gembrook Road, Gembrook (Melway ref: 312 K11).
It is a 5-minute walk from the town centre, and is only 350 metres from the Puffing Billy train station.

If you have been travelling on Puffing Billy why not get off at Gembrook, stretch your legs and take a walk around beautiful Gembrook Park? Also, if you are travelling through Gembrook, why not plan to relax and have a picnic stop in the park?

- Please leave everything as you find it along the way and enjoy your walk.
- These trails are of moderate difficulty, steep in some areas, and may become muddy after rain.
- Walking times are approximate.

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We hope you have enjoyed the walking trail. Feel free to take the notes home, or please return them to the box at the beginning of the walk.