

29. High Camp Flora Reserve



High Camp was a settlement with railway station south of Pyalong. It is now a bushland reserve rich with wildflowers and birds and a few remnants of its railway history. Parking is at the old station off Crawfords Road near the corner with the Northern Highway. Walkers can continue north or south along the old railway or explore some of the old entry roads in the conservation area.

This reserve is on the land of the Taungurung People. We acknowledge their Elders past and present and emerging, and their care of Country over many millennia. We ask that all people respect this ancient heritage and care for the land we now share.

Directions

The Reserve is on the old Heathcote railway line adjacent to the Northern Highway between Kilmore and Pyalong. The Reserve can be entered about 100m up Crawfords Road (opposite Whitegate Road) with parking beside the old station.

Walking Tracks



A gentle track runs south through the first gate from the station area and along the old rail line to an old brick culvert and private gate. The old entry roads running off the rail line are overgrown but visible for explorers.

The old rail line runs north of Crawfords Road into a second smaller section of the Reserve with more remnants of the railway infrastructure and a large railway embankment.



The track south along the railway line is slightly rough but passable for all abilities. The north track is not accessible.



Driving through the Reserve is discouraged. The track south runs to a private residence.



The Reserve has no toilets.

Landform and Geology

This Reserve is on the lower slopes and foothills of the steep Black Range, a ridge of hard rock (hornfels) part of the metamorphic aureole around the Pyalong Granite. The hornfels runs across the north of the Reserve but most of the Reserve is on “incised colluvium” – loose rocks and sands and silts that have spread down from the Black Range. Across the Northern Highway, the High Camp plains have heavier clay soils from finer outwash sediments, with extensive basalt plains further out along Whitegate Road.

A second lower ridgeline between the railway and Back Creek Road is cut by gullies running east through the southern and northern ends of the Reserve. The railway station is on the higher ground between the gullies.

Drains divert water from the station area and a long pondage above the station area may have captured water for trains.

Vegetation



The dry forests above the Reserve merge into [Valley Heathy Forest](#) (Status: Vulnerable) on the lower slopes. The dominance of Thatch Saw-sedge marks the areas of Valley Heathy Forest. This Reserve contains one of the few relatively intact remnants of this EVCs on either private or public land with many large old Yellow Box and other trees.

The gully in the northern section of the Reserve is very deleted [Valley Grassy Forest](#) (also Vulnerable).

More than 200 plant species have been identified in the Reserve. The forest has a mix of eucalypts: Yellow Box, River Red Gum, Grey Box, Long-leaved Box, Red Stringybark and Broad-leaved Peppermint, with Messmate and Red Gums in the north. Most trees have regrown or regenerated following the clearing around the railway station. A few older and larger Yellow Box are below the station and fast-growing Sugar Gums and Pines planted round the station are now large trees.

The understorey is a variety of Golden Wattles, Sifton Bush and other species. The ground flora is dominated by grasses and low shrubs, and by the sword sedge in lower areas. There is a wide diversity of orchids, lilies and other wildflowers through the reserve.

The Reserve also has a challenging 70 introduced species reflecting both ground disturbance and garden plantings at the station. No threatened species have been recorded to date, but a few threatening species need attention.

Plant lists are in preparation.

Wildlife

High Camp Flora Reserve is a substantial refuge for indigenous flora and fauna absent from extensively cleared land to the east or cleared land undergoing natural regeneration to the west. The Reserve has many older trees with a few good hollows. However, firewood collection has reduced the numbers of logs on the ground.

The Reserve has good connectivity with the timbered country along Black Range and on to the Tantaraboo Hills and Goldie Flora Reserve. Biolinks are being planned across towards Mount Piper that would enhance the largely cleared country east of the Northern Highway.

Despite the habitat values, relatively small numbers of animals have been recorded in High Camp Reserve. This may reflect the lack of surveys or reporting. Most of 40 bird species listed so far are

common species that you would hope to see in any good habitat. Similarly, mammals include Sugar Gliders, Echidnas, Wombats and Eastern Grey Kangaroos. Only one frog and no reptiles have been reported.

Species lists are in preparation.

Aboriginal history

The Reserve is on the land of the Taungurung People. The Reserve not identified as a Site of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Sensitivity

History after colonisation

From 1837, squatters took the land and brought in cattle and sheep.

The Reserve dates back to the construction of the High Camp Station and sidings on the Heathcote Junction to Bendigo Railway that opened from Kilmore to Tooborac on 22nd August 1890. The Station was originally known as Glenaroua, then High Camp Plains, then High Camp. In addition to the station and other buildings, the Reserve had several drainage systems that are still redirecting water away from the station area.



All the stations and sidings along the Heathcote line were important for the transport of timber and firewood to Bendigo and Melbourne. The rate of land clearing would have increased with the stimulus of a market for timber and firewood created by the railway. As late as 1959, 10,000 tons of firewood were loaded at High Camp, but this dwindled to almost nothing by the mid-1960s.

The Railway stopped operating on 7th November 1968 after a final steam-powered nostalgic journey. The area is now overgrown but mounds for the platform and goods shed and other structures can still be identified. High Camp Railway Station is now listed on the [Victorian Heritage Inventory](#).

The High Camp Flora Reserve was established with the former Pyalong Shire as Committee of Management before the amalgamation of Shires in 1994. Willowmavin Landcare Group has obtained grants to help with fencing and the removal of Bridal Creeper, pines and rubbish. Local groups are planning to clean up the Reserve, enhance the environment and provide information for visitors.

Management

The Reserve is Crown land with Mitchell Shire Council as Committee of Management for the area south of Crawfords Road. The northern area managed by Parks Victoria. Mitchell Shire Council has been supported by Willowmavin Landcare Group.

Friends of Bendigo-Kilmore Rail Trail and Mitchell Bicycle Users Group have been lobbying for the reserve to be part of the Heathcote to Wallan Rail Trail.

The Reserve is Crown land included in the [Land Use Activity Agreement](#), a part of the [Taungurung Recognition and Settlement Agreement](#).

Further information

Mitchell Shire Council:

<https://www.mitchellshire.vic.gov.au/our-region/parks-and-playgrounds/highcamp-flora-reserve-highcamp>

Wallan to Heathcote Rail Trail Feasibility Study at <https://engagingmitchellshire.com/wallan-to-heathcote-rail-trail>

Keith W Turton (1968). Farewell to the Timber Line: The History of the Heathcote Junction to Bendigo and Associated Railways. Victorian Division, Australian Railway Historical Society.

Australian Railway Historical Society. 1970. Bulletin Volume 21 No. 390. Not found online.

Taungurung Land and Water Council at <https://taungurung.com.au>. Taungurung Recognition and Settlement Agreement at <https://www.justice.vic.gov.au/your-rights/native-title/taungurung-recognition-and-settlement-agreement>

Goulburn Broken CMA Revegetation Guide: information on different ecological vegetation communities, plant communities and plants in the Sugarloaf zone at <https://www.gbcma.vic.gov.au/revegetation/zones/sugarloaf>

Mitchell Bicycle Users Group: <https://mbug.org.au>

Friends of Bendigo-Kilmore Rail Trail: proposed Heathcote to Wallan Rail Trail: <https://bendigokilmorerailtrail.com/possible-extension>

Acknowledgements

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These notes are a work in progress. If you have any comments or additional information on the nature and ecological history of High Camp Flora Reserve, please contact us at

<https://www.beam.org.au/contact>



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