

## 2. Hughes Creek Reserves



Hughes Creek Road runs through a magnificent gorge of metamorphic rock on the edge of granite country. On the narrow floodplain, floods sweep rock and sand slugs through the gorge, and only the toughest vegetation survives. The cliffs and dry hills are also a tough place for plants. This means a great diversity of eucalypts, wattles and other plants. Hughes Creek Gorge is part of a beautiful drive from Seymour along Highlands Road and Hughes Creek Road into the Strathbogie Ranges to Ruffy.

*These reserves are on the land of the Taungurung People and the gorge along Hughes Creek is an area of [Aboriginal cultural heritage sensitivity](#). 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

From Seymour, travel east along Highlands Road to Hughes Creek Road junction. From here, the road travels north to meet Hughes creek 2.4 km from Highlands Road, then winds through the gorge. The gravel road has few stopping places: off-road parking is only available at 4.9 and 5.7 km. The road continues through the gorge into open granite country, crossing Hughes Creek (at 11.8km) then climbing past Tarcombe to Ruffy (at 29.2km).

The gorge continues downstream through the Hughes Creek Flora Reserve. This Reserve is not accessible to the public as the only access routes are through private land.

## Walking Tracks

The Waterfront Reserve has no walking tracks but the road is generally quiet and a pleasant stroll (with care for traffic particularly on weekends). Access to the creek is over rough ground with scrub, rocks or deep sand. The Hughes Creek Water Frontage on the opposite bank to the road is managed by the adjoining landholder and this should be respected.

Hughes Creek Flora Reserve is not accessible to the public as it requires crossing (trespass) on private land.



The Reserves is not accessible for all abilities



The Reserve has no toilets

## Landform and Geology



Hughes Creek has created the gorge by cutting through the metamorphic aureole surrounding the *Strathbogie Granite*. The aureole was created around 366 million years ago when molten granite intruded into the sedimentary rocks more than one kilometre below the surface at that time and baked the sedimentary rocks into hornfels (or “hard rocks”). Hornfels is slow to break down and the hills are steep with relatively shallow soils and deep gorges. Waggs Range on the right driving up Hughes Creek Road is part of the

aureole. The road climbs through the gorge and emerges into the open granite country where the transitions between the rock types can be seen on surrounding hills.

The flood plain along Hughes Creek is made up of sands from the granite country upstream and sharp dark rocks from the surrounding aureole. The current creek and previous water courses have many waterholes but these are interrupted by slugs of sand that fill the waterholes and form sand bars and beaches. After each flood, the valley is covered with sand and the sand slugs move downstream and across the floodplain. These sand slugs have become more of an issue since the clearing of the catchment increased runoff. The filling of the waterholes reduces the amount and continuity of habitat for aquatic species, from platypus and water rats through to all the small crustacea and insect larvae that rely on the pools and provide essential parts of the food chain for all the other animals.

## Vegetation



This is a tough environment for plants. The flood plains are [Riparian Shrubland](#) (an Endangered vegetation community) with open woodland of Red Gums, Manna Gums and Swamp Gums and layers of shrubs and tussocks (notably Spiny-headed Mat-rush) that can withstand fast-flowing floods. The shrubs and tussocks help to hold and bind the sand that is deposited on the flood plain.

The rocky ridges covering most of the higher ground around the gorge are [Grassy Dry Forest](#) (Depleted) with more stunted trees such as Red Box, Long-Leaf Box and Red Stringybark and an understorey of grass tussocks and a diversity of wildflowers.

On the steepest, rockiest and driest slopes above the creek carry *Riverine Escarpment Shrublands*.

The gentler outwash slopes are [Valley Grassy Forest](#) (Vulnerable) with a variety of trees, including Grey Box, Yellow Box, Red Stringybark, several wattles, and shrubs including hop bush, and grasses, daisies and other smaller plants.

Over 140 plant species have been recorded in the gorge (and the downstream Flora Reserve), including 11 mosses and 6 ferns that are not usually listed. Oddly, no orchid species are listed. Plant lists are in preparation.

## Wildlife

Hughes Creek is one of several creeks of conservation interest as it links the Goulburn River with the higher creeks of Strathbogie Ranges. Ten species have been recorded in the gorge including the endangered Trout Cod and Macquarie Perch and the vulnerable Southern Pygmy Perch. Introduced Redfin and Brown Trout are not so welcome.

Over 100 birds have been recorded with water birds following the creek and bush birds using the extensive areas of dry forest around the gorge. The Speckled Warbler is threatened species that might be seen.

The lists of other animals are small. Few of the expected nocturnal mammals (or birds) and no kangaroos are listed. The endangered Lace Monitor is one interesting and significant species that might be seen in the gorge. A night walk would certainly add other species to the lists. Fauna lists are in preparation.

## Aboriginal history

The Reserve is on the land of the Taungurung people. The gorge along Hughes Creek is an area of [Aboriginal cultural heritage sensitivity](#). We currently have no direct information on how the Aboriginal people lived here, but we can try to imagine people living along the shaded gorge for thousands of years, swimming in the pools, and gathering food from the lomandras and wattles and other plants and collecting fish and molluscs from the creek.

## History after colonisation

The surrounding lands are divided up into large grazing properties but the steep, dry and rocky hills along the gorge are largely uncleared, and some are protected with Trust for Nature covenants. The sand slugs are a symptom land clearing and grazing in the Strathbogie Ranges since the late 1830s.

## Management

Hughes Creek is the boundary between Mitchell and Strathbogie Shires. The road is managed by Mitchell Shire Council and the Crown Water Frontage between the road and the creek is managed for public use by the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA). Most of the opposite side of the creek is managed by the adjoining landholder with support from the Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority (GBCMA). The Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority is also responsible for works in the stream channel (bed and banks). Hughes Creek Flora Reserve is managed by Parks Victoria.

The Crown land is included in the [Land Use Activity Agreement](#), a part of the [Taungurung Recognition and Settlement Agreement](#). The creeklines are areas of [Aboriginal cultural heritage sensitivity](#)

## Further information

Parks Victoria: Parks Victoria can be contacted on 13 1963 or go to <https://www.parks.vic.gov.au/contact-us>. Website for the Hughes Creek Flora Reserve is at <https://www.parks.vic.gov.au/places-to-see/parks/hughes-creek-flora-reserve>. The website contains only general information on visiting reserves (at 30/6/2023). Dogs are not allowed in this Reserve.

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>.

Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA). Information on Croan Land management at <https://www.forestsandreserves.vic.gov.au/land-management/managing-crown-land>.

Goulburn Broken CMA Revegetation Guide: information on different ecological vegetation communities, plant communities and plants in the Strathbogie Ranges (Tallarook/Highlands to Creightons Creek/Merton Gap - Mid Catchment) at <https://www.gbcma.vic.gov.au/revegetation/zones/strathbogie>

## Acknowledgements

This Reserve Note was prepared by BEAM Mitchell Environment Group. Thanks to Mitchell Shire Council for their assistance and support. Thanks to Parks Victoria and Goulburn Broken CMA for information on these Reserves.

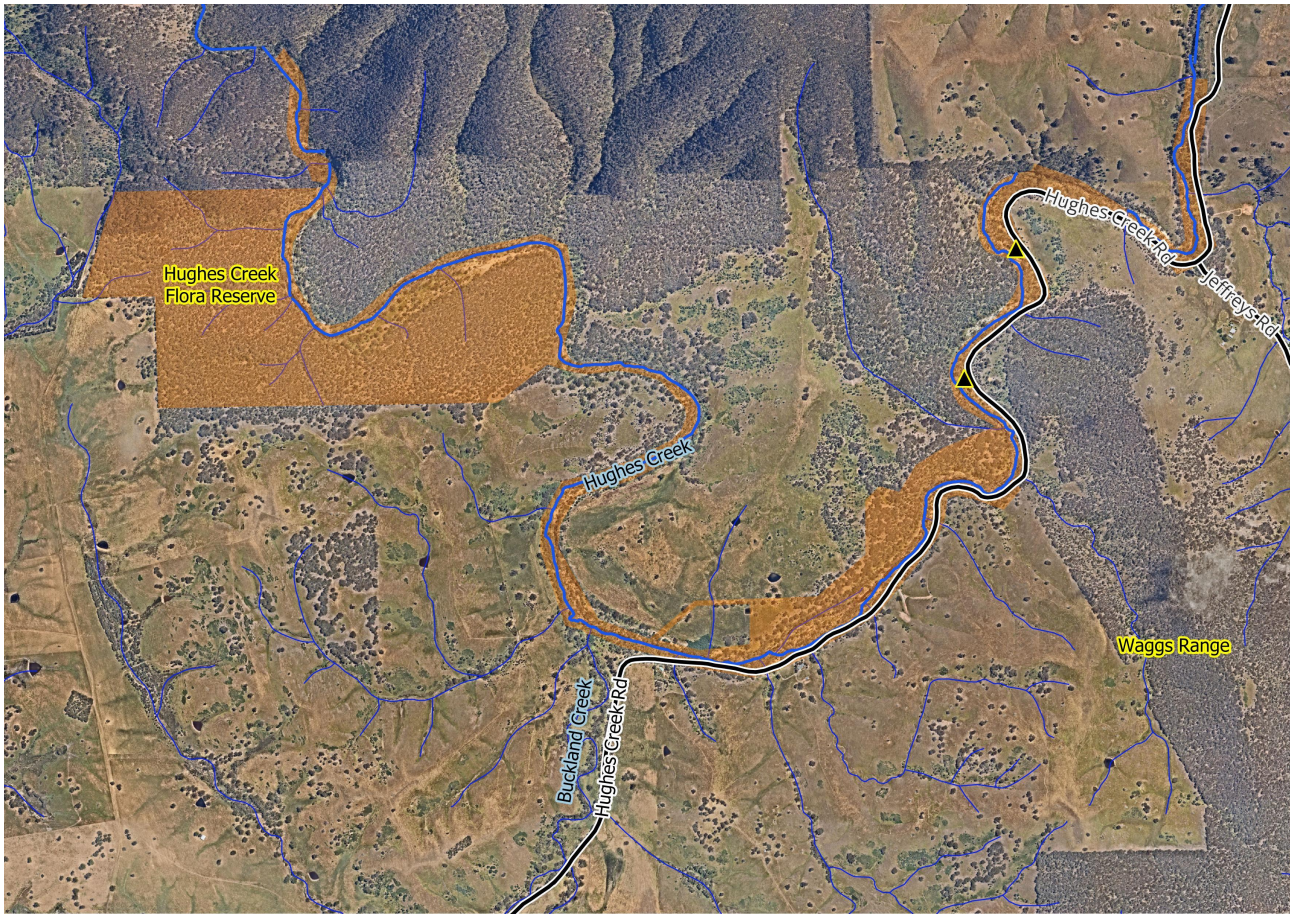
Author: Peter Mitchell

Version: 1 19 May 2024

These notes are a work in progress. If you have any comments or additional information on the nature and ecological history of the Hughes Creek Reserves, please contact us at <https://www.beam.org.au/contact>.



## Hughes Creek Water Frontage and Flora Reserves



Hughes Creek Flora and Streamside Reserves	All roads
Waterways	Off-road Parking

**Notes on map:** The corridor through the gorge includes Hughes Creek Water Frontage and Hughes Creek Road Reserve but it is difficult to match the title maps with either the current stream or the road. The land on the opposite side of the creek is under private management.