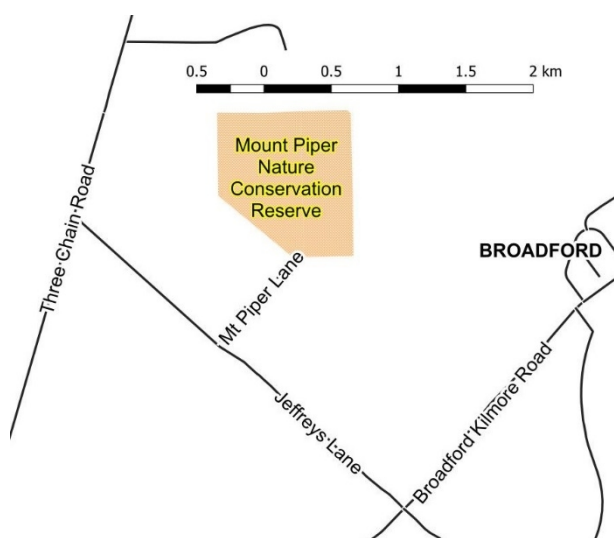


16. Mount Piper Nature Conservation Reserve



Mount Piper is an iconic feature of the landscape south-west of Broadford, with its high peak and steep sides fanning out into the surrounding farmlands. The Reserve has 94ha of forests and grasslands that are home to a wide diversity of plants and animals including many threatened species including Golden Sun-moths and rich butterfly communities. Walking tracks around the mountain are popular with walkers to the summit and tracks to the summit provide great views of the surrounding hills.

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

Mount Piper Nature Conservation Reserve is south-west of Broadford. The entrance to Mount Piper NCR is off Jeffreys Lane, 1.8km in from the Broadford Kilmore Road. Mount Piper Lane is 900m to the carpark. The lane is rough and occasionally wet and may be unsuitable for vehicles with low clearance.

Walking Tracks



Summit walk (1.0 km and return): From the carpark, walk up through the entrance gate (start) and past the information board, following the red arrows. At 90m, the walking track crosses a management vehicle track, and winds up the mountain with a series of switchbacks as the slope becomes steeper. The last section of the track is a steep scramble over rocks and boulders to the summit cairn. The summit is reached at 300m. Return the same way but take care of loose rocks.

Alternative route (800m one way): From entrance gate, follow Summit Track to the management vehicle track, then turn right and follow this steep gravel track to the east knoll at 550m (a good place to rest and see the quartz veins). Continue up to the end of the vehicle track. From there, scramble up a steep and roughly-marked route to the summit. Loose gravel on the management vehicle track is slippery and a return down the walking track is recommended.

Circuit walk (3.9 km): From the entrance gate, turn left and follow an old management vehicle track around the southern slopes of the mountain. This track branches 160m from the start, with one track turning right up the hill. Continue straight ahead along the less obvious vehicle track around the mountain. This section of track has a rich diversity of understorey. The track crosses the grain of the country across six deep gullies and dry ridges, then swings east, gradually climbing a long dry ridge with sparser vegetation along the dry northern slopes. After two more gullies and ridges, the track reaches the gate into Caplehorn's Paddock (2.6 km from the start). The track con-

tinues along the upper slopes of grassland with patches of dry forest before coming into a slope and swale of rich native grassland at around 3.0 km. Golden Sun-moths can be seen quartering over the grasslands in late Spring. The track then crosses a forested ridge, down a grassy swale then west up past a small dam to the gate into the carpark.



Vehicles are not permitted beyond the carpark (management vehicles excepted).



Tracks are rough with some short steep sections, loose rocks and sections that are slippery when wet. Summit walk has rocks and boulders near the summit and is graded 4 in a scale of 1-5 in the [User Guide to the Australian Walking Track Grading System](#).



No tracks are suitable for all abilities.



Picnic tables near the carpark.



No toilets. The nearest are in High Street, Broadford.

Landform and Geology



Mount Piper is a conical hill standing above the lower eroded hills and lava flows in the centre of Mitchell Shire and visible from the surrounding hills. The core of Mount Piper is made up of a vertical dyke of igneous rock broken up and welded together by veins of quartz. The quartz formed when super-heated water from deep beneath the mountain dissolved silica and forced its way into the broken rock around 380 million years ago. As the water cooled, the silica crystallised into quartz. The result is a type of breccia (see photo on left).

The igneous rock and breccia are resistant to erosion compared with the surrounding Silurian sandstones and siltstones (*Broadford Formation*). Over the following 380 million years, erosion has exposed the rocks we now see on the summit. Small quartz crystals can be found near the summit. Gravels, sands and clays (colluvium) carried by water and gravity form the gentler lower slopes and gullies of the mountain.

The surrounding land is mostly eroded hills and gullies of ancient sedimentary rocks, running down to Dry Creek to the east and Camerons Creek to the west. The low plateau north-east of the

Reserve has a cap of basalt lava from Round Hill (with towers). Mount Prospect is another higher volcanic cone south of the Jeffreys Lane.

Vegetation



The summit and steep upper slopes of Mount Piper are dry forest, sparse [Heathy Dry Forest](#) on the north and west slopes and [Grassy Dry Forest](#) on the more sheltered south and east slopes. The trees around the summit are mostly low growing Long-Leafed Box, with Red Box, Red Stringybark and Broad-Leafed Peppermint on the slopes.

This forest gradually merges into [Box Ironbark Forest](#) on the mid-slopes. Mugga Ironbarks become more common, and Grey Box gradually

appears as the lower slopes merge into [Grassy Woodlands](#) (status: endangered). The south and east slopes have a rich understorey of Golden Wattles and many different species of low shrubs, herbs and wildflowers among the tussock grasses. Again, the vegetation on the drier west and north slopes is sparse and less diverse.



Cleared areas in Caplehorn's Paddock have a rich diversity of native grasses, lilies, orchids, small grass-trees and many other ground cover species among the regrowth of Golden Wattles. The regrowth is regularly slashed to maintain the open grasslands for Golden Sun-moths.

The gentle outwash slopes around Mount Piper are *Grassy Woodlands* with many remaining large Grey Box along Jeffreys Lane and the track to the carpark but is extensively cleared towards Broadford.

Wildlife

Mount Piper is known for its moth and butterfly communities, and for its many threatened species.

[Butterfly Community No. 1](#) (a Threatened Community) includes at least 50 species of butterflies and day-flying moths that live around Mount Piper. Most of these species use the hilltop of Mount Piper to claim mating territories and find mates. Butterflies are a feature of any visit to the summit in the warmer months.

This community includes the threatened Large Ant-blue and Small Ant-blue Butterflies (both Endangered species). The larvae of these species live in close symbiosis with specific ant species including the Coconut Ant. Both the butterflies and ants are tricky to find and identify, but recent searches have found this ant in several patches of bushland in Mitchell Shire.

Golden Sun Moths (Conservation Status: Vulnerable) are a feature of the grassy areas in and around Mount Piper. Male butterflies can be seen quartering above the grasslands in search of females in November/December. The larvae live beneath grass tussocks particularly Wallaby Grass for at least a year. Studies on the moths began around 1995 and the populations continue to be monitored by local volunteers.

Note: moths and butterflies, like all native animals, are protected and should not be collected.



Mount Piper is also home to a diversity of birds and mammals. Birds of the Threatened Woodland Bird Community include Mount Piper among the places they visit during the year depending on the flowering of plants such as the Mugga Ironbark.

Mammals living in the Reserve include the charming Sugar Glider and Tuan or Brush-tailed Phascogale (Vulnerable). Eight species of bats live around Mount Piper and may be seen around dusk. A few Eastern Bent-wing Bats over-

winter in the mines at Mount Piper. These bats are classed as Critically Endangered and the metal gate on one of the mines is there to protect them.



Mount Piper is a large island of bushland surrounded by private bushland and farmlands. Many of the private bushlands are covenanted with Trust for Nature, adding a buffer of protected land around the Reserve. The whole of this protected landscape provides essential habitat for many species and communities, making it an important site for conservation of biodiversity. Nearby roadsides (particularly Three Chain Road) and the Piper Biolink (see photo on left) to the Dry Creek corridor in Broadford allow for the movement of wildlife to and from the Reserve to other large patches of native bushland.

Aboriginal history

The Reserve is on the land of the Taungurung People and is Crown land included in the [Taungurung Recognition and Settlement Agreement](#). Although there are no listed sites of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Sensitivity in the Reserve, Mount Piper would have been a place for regular visits by the local groups.

History after colonisation

The first pastoralists took up runs in the district from 1837. Mount Piper was also known as Mount Sugarloaf but the pastoral holding was named Mount Piper. The 54 ha area around Mount Piper became a public-purposes reserve from 1883. It was logged and mined leaving relatively few large old trees. Three mines were driven into the mountain in search of gold and antimony but only small amounts were found. The mines are listed on the Heritage Register. The Land Conservation Council recommended the area be reserved for the natural environment in 1978. It was classed as an Education Area until the early 2000s.

Caplehorn's Paddock (39ha) on the eastern side of the mountain was cleared, fenced and farmed until about 1996 when it was added to the Reserve to protect the grasslands on the lower slopes for Golden Sun-moths. This area was recognised as habitat for Golden Sun-moths. The lower open grasslands were fenced to manage the habitat for the moths.

The Piper Biolink from the eastern side of the Reserve to Dry Creek in Broadford was created by Landcare and local landholders in 2007/8.

Friends of Mount Piper, a community group, has been working with Parks Victoria for many years to remove fencing, control weeds and monitor the Golden Sun-moths.

Management

Mount Piper Nature Conservation Reserve is Crown land managed by Parks Victoria. Friends of Mount Piper is an informal community group that assists Parks Victoria with management of the Reserve and organizes natural history events.

The Reserve is on the land of the Taungurung People and is Crown land included in the [Land Use Activity Agreement](#), a part of the [Taungurung Recognition and Settlement Agreement](#). Teams from the Taungurung Land and Water Council are working with Parks Victoria on the ecological management of the Reserve.

Further information

Parks Victoria can be contacted on 13 1963 or go to <https://www.parks.vic.gov.au/contact-us>.

Website for the Mount Piper NCR is at <https://www.parks.vic.gov.au/places-to-see/parks/mount-piper-nature-conservation-reserve>. The website contains only general information on visiting reserves (at 30/6/2023).

Mitchell Shire Council: <https://www.mitchellshire.vic.gov.au/points-of-interest/mount-piper-nature-conservation-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>

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>

Acknowledgements

This Reserve Note was prepared by BEAM Mitchell Environment Group. Thanks to Mitchell Shire Council and Parks Victoria for their assistance and support.

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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 Mount Piper NCR, please contact us at

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



Mount Piper Nature Conservation Reserve

