

24. Hidden Valley Rail Reserve



Hidden Valley Rail Reserve is at the top of the final climb on the old Heathcote railway across the Great Divide and is the site of the old Leslie Siding. The line was opened in 1890 and closed in 1968. Native vegetation survived the rail era and has now recovered to create a lovely bushland reserve with many different trees and shrubs and a rich diversity of grasses and wildflowers. The old rail easement is providing great opportunities for botanists, walkers and cyclists.

This reserve is on the boundary of the lands of the Taungurung and Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung 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 map on the last page shows the different ways to enter the Reserve.

via Hidden Valley: from the Northern Highway, travel up the hill from Wallan, turn right into Hidden Valley Boulevard. From here, travel 1.2 km then left into Valley Drive, then either:

- turn left after another 1.2km into Lucca Way. The centre of the Reserve is at the end of Lucca Way, about 0.9km up a sealed road and a rough track. This approach to the Reserve is about to become immersed in urban development.
- continue past Lucca Way and turn left into Knight Way and right into Birdwood Crescent. The Reserve may be reached through a laneway (impassable to vehicles). Continue straight ahead through the laneway and veer left behind the line of back fences to the eastern end of the Reserve.

Note: These access points are in development areas. Vehicle and pedestrian access may change.

via Arkells Lane: from William Street in Wallan (traffic lights at the bottom of the hill), travel 4.5km up the Northern Highway and over the Divide, then turn right into Arkells Lane. The old railway ran under the road 2.3 km from the Highway. There is a small space for parking.

Walking Tracks

The old rail line runs from Arkells Lane east to the current Lucca Way entry point (650m) then to the eastern end of the Reserve (980m).



The old rail cutting and banks are relatively flat but may be rough and ungraded. Access from Arkells Lane is steep and narrow and not accessible for all abilities. Entrance from Lucca Way is across some ungraded flat ground.



Driving through the Reserve is only allowed for maintenance vehicles. This is to protect the walking track and vegetation, and to control illegal dumping and firewood collection.



The Reserve has no toilets or other facilities.

Landform and Geology

The Reserve is on ancient *Humevale Siltstone* that formed in deep seas around 440 to 400 million years ago, uplifted and eroded down to rolling hills and valleys.

The Rail Reserve is on the southern slopes of the Great Divide running up to the top of the Divide at Arkells Lane. To the south, gullies in the Reserve run into Mittagong Creek that joins Merri Creek

in Wallan. To the north are waterways that flow into Dry Creek near Wandong and ultimately the Goulburn River near Seymour.

Vegetation



The vegetation is classed at [Herb-rich Foothill Forest](#), but it varies from [Grassy Dry Forest](#) on the drier hilltops above the cutting to wetter foothill forest in gullies and in the more sheltered timbered country towards Arkells Lane. Even the oldest trees probably came after the construction of the railway in 1890, but they are now creating a healthy forest. The understorey reflects the past practices of slow burning begun by Aboriginal people and later by railways staff. This type of burning has helped to maintain the diversity of ground-cover species in the Reserve.

Messmate and Broad-leaved and Narrow-leaved Peppermints are dominant, with some Swamp Gums in swales created beside rail embankments. At the eastern end, the drier hilltops have Long-leaved Box and a ground cover of Silver-topped Wallaby-grass with many different wildflowers. The more sheltered cutting is adorned with peas, notably the prostrate Mountain Flat-pea.

Plant lists are in preparation.

Wildlife



The Reserve is part of the corridor of native vegetation that runs along the old railway line south to Heathcote Junction and north to High Camp Flora Reserve and beyond. The corridor is a valuable natural refuge across the rural and increasingly urban environment of Mitchell Shire.

The railway corridor attracts a variety of wildlife and, as nest hollows start to develop in the older trees, more species will start to use the corridor. Nest boxes may help the transition.

A list of species for the wider area of Hidden Valley shows good diversity. More surveys are needed to get a clear picture of the species specifically using the Reserve now and in the future.

Species list is in preparation.

Aboriginal history

The boundary between the lands of the two Registered Aboriginal Parties, the Taungurung Land and Waters Council Aboriginal Corporation and the Wurrundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, runs through the Reserve.

History after colonisation

European colonisers moved rapidly through to Wallan with sheep and cattle in the late 1830s and the land was quickly divided into private holdings. The North-east Railway came to Wallan Wallan (Wallan East) in 1872. The line winding up from Heathcote Junction to Leslie Siding in the Reserve and over the divide to Heathcote was opened in 1888. Leslie Siding included a waiting room for passengers. Railways created opportunities for the transport of timber and firewood from many small sidings such as Leslie to Melbourne and the goldfields and would have speeded up the clearing of the surrounding country over the next few decades.

The siding at Leslie was closed in 1952 and the last train through to Heathcote was in 1968. Many sections of the rail easement were sold to adjoining landholders but some sections remain as Crown land managed by VicTrack including this Reserve.

Urban development is transforming the landscape around these small remnants of crown land. There are moves to recognise and protect the natural environment and to re-open this publicly-owned rail easement as part of the Heathcote to Wallan Rail Trail.

Management

The Rail Reserve is Crown land managed by VicTrack (despite the absence of any rail tracks). Friends of the Bendigo-Kilmore Rail Trail and Mitchell Bicycle Users Group have been lobbying for the Reserve to be part of the rail trail. Wallan Environment Group has obtained funding and organized working bees to manage the natural values of the Reserve.

The boundary between the lands of two Registered Aboriginal Parties, the Taungurung Land and Waters Council Aboriginal Corporation and the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, runs through the Reserve. The Taungurung land is included in the [Land Use Activity Agreement](#), a part of in the [Taungurung Recognition and Settlement Agreement](#).

Further information

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>

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation at <https://www.wurundjeri.com.au>

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>

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

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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 the rail reserves through Hidden Valley, please contact us at <https://www.beam.org.au/contact>



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