

Hattah-Kulkyne National Park



Hattah Lakes Nature Discovery Trail

Drive, cycle or walk this self-guided trail and enjoy some of the Mallee and Murray floodplain secrets of Hattah-Kulkyne National Park.



Slender Hopbush

Drive (30min), Cycle (1.5hrs), Walk (2.5hrs)

This 6.5km self-guided nature trail is an excellent introduction to the parks of the Mallee. It gives you an insight into some of the natural features of the area and reveals some of the challenges this landscape endures.

Although designed as a drive, the trail is also an easy and pleasant walk. If you have time, why not park your car and explore the trail on foot or by bicycle. Drive slowly and stay on the track at all times.

As you travel around you will visit the homes of many animals, even though you may not see them. Even the logs and dead branches scattered on the ground provide important habitat and a link in the food chain for a wide range of insects, invertebrates, reptiles, birds and small ground-dwelling mammals.

1. Restoring the landscape

Look around at the landscape. What appears natural is not always so. Before this area was declared a National Park in 1960, sheep, cattle and rabbits heavily grazed the native vegetation cover. Bushfires and timber cutting added to the impact and the vegetation cover in some areas was completely changed.

Restoration of native vegetation to its pre-1960s condition will take a lifetime, but work to restore its former values has begun.

2. Plant life returns

The tall bush found here is native Slender Hopbush. Hopbush gets its name from the papery wings of its seeds that are sometimes called 'hops'. The common names of many Australian plants often reflect their unique features.

Native plants like the Slender Hopbush have re-established on this sand dune as a result of the removal of stock, active campaigns to control rabbits and, more recently, kangaroo management.

3. Water and steam

A short walk from the track here brings you to the remnants of a Victorian Railway pump house. In the early part of the 1900s, the facility pumped water from the lake to the Hattah railway line to refill the boilers of steam locomotives. The original buildings were replaced by tin sheds in the 1940s when the pumps were used to supply water to the township of Hattah.

Today water is provided to Hattah and surrounding properties via pipeline from the Murray River.



4. Sand dunes to flood plains

Notice a change in the vegetation here. The track has left the sand dune and moved onto the flood plain where the clay soils are home to magnificent River Red Gums.

Further to the right there are River Red Gums growing in an unusual position. It is likely that the seed was deposited on the sand dune by a large flood, possibly more than a century ago. The seed germinated in the moist sand and the trees grew, fed by rainfall runoff captured by the dune.

River Red Gums, particularly the older trees around the lake edge, are important habitat as they often bear large hollows that are used by a variety of birds and tree dwelling mammals for shelter and nests.

5. Hardy inhabitants

On the shore of the lake grows dense stands of young River Red Gum saplings, they appear over extensive areas after floods and at times form impenetrable thickets like the ones you can see here. These saplings will gradually thin out as they grow and eventually the lake will become easier to see.

6. Claiming new territory

To the left of the track are a few mature Hooked Needlewood trees. They are probably the remnants of a once large stand of trees. Hooked Needlewood is a member of the Hakea family - a group of plants renowned for their curious, but effective methods of seed dispersal. Most Hakea have seed enclosed in impenetrable pods that open only after exposure to fire, heat or smoke. Once triggered the pod bursts open and the seed floats away through the air, eventually settling on new ground away from the parent tree.

7. Unexpected treasure

In late summer you may see Garland Lilies near the track. Garland Lilies are rare in Victoria, can be found to the left of the track. These lilies will be most noticeable in late summer when they produce yellow flowers and grape-like clusters of berries.



Garland Lily

8. Undoing the damage



The large, almost bare expanse on the right of the track probably developed in the following way:

- The original cover of native plants was overgrazed by sheep and rabbits in the early days of non-indigenous settlement. The disturbed vegetation loosened the sandy top soil and sand blown by the wind helped cut down the remaining vegetation
- The clay subsoil was eventually exposed and further eroded by rainwater run-off. Salt concentrated at the surface through upward seepage and evaporation and the area became a wasteland
- Restoration began in 1960 when Hattah-Kulkyne National Park was created. Grazing stock was removed and rabbits gradually brought under control. Salt-tolerant plants began to colonise the area
- In the 1990s bare areas were ploughed to trap moving soil and seeds, assisting in the revegetation process
- Regrowth is evident, but recovery is slow in such a harsh environment.

9. Ramsar wetlands

Hattah Lake, on the left, is one of twelve lakes located in Hattah-Kulkyne National Park listed under the Ramsar Convention. The convention is an international agreement, signed in Ramsar, Iran in 1971 and aims to conserve wetlands of international importance. See more information on the sign.



10. The Hattah Lakes System

Beyond the post you can see the channel connecting Lake Hattah with Lake Bulla. In 1956, a small weir was built at the northern end of Lake Hattah to prevent water from flowing back into the Murray River when flood waters receded.

The lakes in the Hattah-Kulkyne system fill via Chalka Creek when there is a major flood in the Murray River. This has only occurred a few times since the record flood levels of 1956 and include the years 1960, 1964, 1966 and on several occasions in the 1970s and late 1980s.

The Hattah Lakes system needs both wet and dry periods to be healthy, but river regulation and a changing climate have reduced the frequency and extent of natural floods and the environment has suffered as a result. With the completion of the new permanent pump station, regulators and environmental levees it is now possible to top up natural floods to increase water levels in the lakes system or, when river flows are not able to naturally reach the lakes, water can be pumped into the system to maintain watering regimes.



Messengers Pump Station

11. Flood

The grove of Black Box saplings along the track at this point was created by the record floods of 1956. Black Box trees grow higher up the slopes than River Red Gums and indicate the height of floodwaters in the past. Only one or two of these seedlings need to survive to maturity to ensure the continuation of the forest here.

Further along the track, on the right, are smaller Black Box. These trees germinated here after the 1973 flood.



Black Box flower

12. Tolerating salt

To the right of the track grow Glassworts and other low-lying succulents that store water in their fleshy leaves. Glassworts are salt-tolerant and play an important role in minimising soil erosion. Over time the Glassworts and other soil stabilising plants help to improve soil fertility by adding nutrients through decomposition. Eventually soil condition is improved allowing less salt-tolerant plants to establish.

Among the few plants that thrive here is the rounded Noonflower (Pigface), a staple food of the Shingleback Lizard. After summer rains this area is a sea of pink flowers.



Noonflower (Pigface)

For further information

Call Parks Victoria on **13 1963**
or visit www.parks.vic.gov.au

Mildura Visitor Information
(Alfred Deakin Centre)
180-190 Deakin Avenue
Mildura Vic 3500
Tel: (03) 5021 4424

Caring for the environment

Help us look after your park
by following these guidelines:

Please take rubbish with you for
recycling or disposal

Camp only in designated
campgrounds

All native plants, animals,
historical and archaeological sites
and geographic features are
protected by law

Dogs and other pets are not
permitted in the park

Firearms are prohibited

Light fires only in fireplaces
provided. Collect only dead wood
from the ground for campfires.
Please do not collect wood from
inside the campground or inside
the kangaroo proof fence

No fires are permitted on a day of
Total Fire Ban. Built in and
portable gas or electric barbecues
may be used provided:

- a 3 metre area is cleared of
anything flammable
- at least 10 litres of water is
available for immediate use
- an adult is in attendance at
all times

**It is your responsibility to know if
it is a day of Total Fire Ban.** If in
doubt call the **Victorian Bushfire
Information Line on 1800 240 667**

Vehicles, including motor bikes,
may only be used on formed open
roads. Drivers must be licensed
and vehicles registered and
roadworthy

Mobile phones – you may not be
in network range in some areas.
To connect to Police, Ambulance
or CFA key in 112 and press the
YES key

13. Black Box Waterhole

The track passes a stand of Moonah as it skirts around Black Box Waterhole. The waterhole is a shallow clay pan that fills quickly when it rains and retains water well. Herons, Cormorants, Ducks, Black-tailed Native-hens and other water birds, along with frogs and tortoises appear as if from nowhere when rain arrives.



Pied Cormorant

14. Canoe tree

Take a stroll down to the canoe tree on the bank of the lake. It is possibly a century or more since Aboriginal people cut away the living bark of the tree to make a canoe, leaving the characteristic canoe tree scar.

Smaller scars can also be seen on other trees along the river system. These were created from bark cut away to make dishes called coolamons to carry food and sometimes infants.



Canoe tree

Caring for Country

Indigenous Australians have been connected to this landscape for tens of thousands of years. The ancestors lived in harmony with the environment and nurtured a deep and abiding respect for Country. Caring for Country continues to be an integral part of present day Indigenous social, spiritual, economic and physical life. All Australians share a responsibility to create a community that shares and values this respect for our land.

If you have enjoyed this drive you might like to try the Hattah Nature Walk or one of the other walks in the park (see the Hattah-Kulkyne National Park – Murray Kulkyne Park visitor guide). There are other self-guided walks and drives in nearby parks including Wyperfeld and Little Desert National Parks.

Be fire ready and stay safe

On days of forecast Code Red Fire Danger this park will be closed for public safety.

If you are already in the park you should leave the night before or early in the morning for your safety.

Closure signs will be erected and rangers will patrol where possible, however you may not receive a personal warning that the park is closed so check the latest conditions by calling **13 1963** or visit www.parks.vic.gov.au.

For up to date information on fires in Victoria or general fire safety advice call the **Victorian Bushfire Information Line on 1800 240 667**.

Location and access

Hattah-Kulkyne National Park and Murray-Kulkyne Park are about 475km from Melbourne off the Calder Highway. The park office (off Robinvale Road) is 74km from Mildura.

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