Red White and Blue Recreation Site – Muckleford State Forest

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Muckleford State Forest – Red White and Blue

The Red, White and Blue Recreation site is located in the Muckleford State Forest at the site of the historic Red White and Blue mine (also known as the ‘Golden Age’ mine or ‘Moloney’s Reef’).

Remnants from the mining days remain at the picnic area, as well as throughout the surrounding forest. Go exploring in the forest to find evidence of these uses and discover the rich diversity of plants and animals found here.

Our Box Ironbark forests tell a fascinating story of change and survival. How you use the forest today will shape our forest’s future. How will you help shape the next chapter?

History

The Red White and Blue Mine is a site of historical, archaeological and scientific importance to Victoria – it is listed on the Victorian Heritage Register of significant heritage places. Explore the range of intact relics from the past, which illustrate 20th century mining operations in the heart of Victoria’s box-ironbark country.

Muckleford State Forest, south of Maldon, covers approximately 3152 hectares. The forest is an ancient landscape which bears the imprint of many cultures. For tens of thousands of years Dja Wurrung Aboriginal people occupied and roamed the area. Today, this heritage is still evident in the form of scar trees, rock wells, artefacts and ancient meeting places.

Surveyor-General, Major Mitchell, passed through this area on his third expedition in 1836. Pastoralists followed soon after to squat and establish sheep runs on the grasslands. Gold was found at the foot of Mount Tarrengower in December 1853. Following this, miners spread out through the forest in the pursuit of gold and the town of Maldon quickly grew - the scars of early mining can still be seen throughout the forest. Sources of gold included: sandstone outcrops, quartz reefs and shallow alluvial (stream) deposits.

“Thousands upon thousands of tents extending through the gullies for about ten miles in every direction...”, (Edward Snell)

“To some the diggings had the appearance of a graveyard - it was a sight! Mounds of earth lying beside holes presented the dismal appearance of a graveyard, men washing dirt in tubs, carrying its colour on their skin, hair, hats, trousers and boots, miserable-looking low tents their places of refuge. Where water was to be seen it was puddle. The whole scene to a new chum was one of unspeakable squalor ...” (James Robertson, in Records of Castlemaine Pioneers, p. 47, Forest Creek, late 1852).

Getting here

The Muckleford State Forest is approximately 130 km north west of Melbourne via the Calder Highway and 50 km south of Bendigo. Located just 15 km south west of Castlemaine, the Muckleford State Forest is a great spot to relax, participate in a recreational pursuit or explore the history of the area.

From Castlemaine, take the Maldon Road. Turn south onto Muckleford Road, then right onto the Muckleford School Road. Follow into Muckleford State Forest – the walk starts at the Bells Lane Track.
Early miners initially carried out shallow digging for alluvial gold deposits. As gold became harder to find, miners used other methods such as sluicing, steam diversions and puddling machines to separate the gold. Later methods included quartz reef mining, open cut and shafts. Mining for gold below the ground water table required the use of machinery such as steam-powered pumping and winding machinery – as at Red, White and Blue.

From Maldon quartz mining extended south along Sandy Creek, eastward and even to the top of Mt Tarrangower. Shallow alluvial mining was also carried out extensively along Back Creek. Gold was found at Dunn’s Reef to the south during the late 1850s – the remains of a timber loading ramp can still be seen today. The first shaft was sunk here into the Red White and Blue quartz reef in 1871. A number of shafts were sunk in the area along the reef, and mining continued on and off for many years. Between 1909 and 1915 a total of 2369 ounces of gold was mined from here. Red White and Blue was last mined in 1960 to a depth of 52 meters – at the time the site consisted of a poppet head and shaft, a steam boiler, winding engine and battery, change rooms, an office and storage rooms. The poppet head was originally from the Bendigo Deborah United Mine.

The forest surrounding Red, White and Blue is unique, and supports a diverse range of flora and fauna species. Despite previous disturbances, numerous threatened plants and animals live in these forests. Visit during Spring and enjoy the spectacular wildflower displays. A large number of rare and threatened species plant species are recorded here, including Whirrrakee Wattle, Goldfield Boronia, Buloke, Arching Flax-lily, Trailing Hop-bush, Small-flower Grevillea. Muckleford’s threatened orchids include the Castlemaine Spider-orchid, Fringed Midge-orchid Fringed Midge-orchid, Green-comb Spider Orchid and Musk Hood-Orchid. There are also a large number of more common but beautiful wildflowers found here.

These forests are also home to a large number of native animals, including mammals, birds, reptiles and frogs. By day, enjoy the sights and sounds of wallabies and kangaroos bounding through the forest and numerous bird species twittering in the trees overhead, as well as the odd Koala. Visit the forest at night when the owls, gliders, possums and bats come out to play.

The area provides critical habitat for numerous threatened fauna species such as the Powerful Owl, Swift Parrot, Brown Treecreeper, Diamond Firetail, Brush-tailed Phascogale, Eastern Pygmy Possum, Grey Goshawk, Grey-crowned Babbler and Square-tailed Kite.
What can I see here?

**Historic Mine site**

1. Intact, standing poppet head: tubular steel legs, winding wheels, remains of timberwork.
   - 3-compartment shaft with its intact concrete baling pond

2. To the south of the poppet head:
   - machinery site: remains of square concrete winder bed
   - a concrete winding engine bed
   - several concrete air-receiver pads
   - a boiler setting depression, an iron damper plate is visible on the south east corner of the engine site. The boiler setting has a short flue depression running from its rear end to the remains of a square brick chimney stack base.

3. Further South:
   - a partially buried small narrow open cut associated with two filled (subsided) shafts. Both shafts still have sections of their wooden collars exposed.

4. East of the shaft:
   - small intact mullock heap
   - six short dumping lines from an earlier mining phase.

5. North of the poppet head:
   - two large dams
   - a drain leading from the shaft’s baling tank to the closest dam.
   - extensive dumps of treated tailings.
   - a band of of shallow alluvial sinkings runs south down the gully below the dams and continue as far as the Dunns Reef Track.

6. West of the poppet head:
   - several sections of concrete flooring and some post stumps
   - small exposed section of a stone footing (possibly a battery site).

The poppet head/concrete engine beds etc belonged to the Golden Age Gold NL (1957 to c. 1960), while the tailings were generated by Maloney’s Red White and Blue (1909 to 1915).

DEPI carried out Safety Works on the poppet and shaft during 2010.
Muckleford Forest Walk

Distance: Return 5 km  
Time: 2 hours  
Gradient: Flat terrain  
Quality of Path: Formed track  
Quality of Markings: Signposted  
Experience required: Some bushwalking experience recommended

The red white and blue walking track is an easy five kilometre walk through the Box-Ironbark forest to Dunn’s Reef. It starts at the Historic Red White and Blue Mine Site.

Along the walk you will find interpretive information boards telling you interesting stories of Muckleford State Forest’s natural and cultural landscape that will inspire you to look at your surrounds through different eyes.
Activities to enjoy in the State forest

There are many activities you can enjoy in the forest, some of which include:

- Get active! Walk along one of the many tracks around the forest, ride your horse or bike along the bush roads and appreciate the beauty of the forest. Be sure to stay on formed roads when riding.
- Find a nice spot to relax, camp or have a picnic, remember to look after the forest by taking your rubbish home with you.
- Take your dog for a walk. Making sure your dog is under control at all times and does not disturb other visitors or harm wildlife.
- Try your luck fossicking or prospecting. All prospectors require a Miner’s Right. This lasts two years and costs around $30. You can purchase a Miner’s Right online from the Department of Primary Industries website at [www.depi.vic.gov.au](http://www.depi.vic.gov.au). Remember to re-fill any holes you dig.
- Enjoy a car or motorbike tour of the forest, exploring the extensive road network. Make sure you are licensed and registered and always stay on formed roads.
- Test your hunting skills with licensed firearms and protect the forest from pest animals such as foxes and rabbits.
- Explore and search the forest for clues that give us evidence from the past – remember to leave everything as you found it.

FOR YOUR OWN SAFETY

Look out for old mine shafts and snakes when walking through the forest.

Looking After our Forests

Let’s look after our living museum!

- All native plants, animals, historic sites and geographical features are protected by law.
- Campfires are part of the outdoor experience. However sparks can easily start the bush burning. You can take care with fire by observing all fire regulations and Total Fire Ban days. Always use existing fireplaces where possible or 30 cm deep trenches, collect only dead wood from the ground for campfires, ensure your fires is less than 1 metre square and at least 3 metres clear of burnable material, never leave fires unattended, and ensure fires are safe and that they are completely extinguished when you leave.

For more information

The Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI) is responsible for managing Victoria’s State Forest. For further information contact the Department of Environment and Primary Industries office at Bendigo (5430 4444) or DEPI’s Customer Service Centre on 136 186.

Visit DEPI’s website

The Muckleford State Forest is managed for a wide range of uses including catchment protection, timber production, recreation and conservation. If you are interested in how State Forests are managed visit the Department’s website on the Internet.

Acknowledgements

- [Red White and Blue Recreation Site] (DEPI, Camilleri)
- [Travelling to the Diggings ]: Courtesy of the Castlemaine Art Gallery and Historical Museum
- [Red, White and Blue Gold Mine, Muckleford Victoria] (Noel Lee)
- [Flax-lily] (DEPI, McCann)
- [Spreading Wattle] (DEPI, Stimpson)
- [Purple Beard-orchid] (DEPI, Stimpson)
- [Pink-Bells] (DEPI, Stimpson)
- [Chocolate Lily] (DEPI, Camilleri)
- [Eastern Rosella] (DEPI, MCCann)
- [Brown Trecreeper] (DEPI, MCCann)
- [Lesser Long-eared Bat] (DEPI, MCCann)
- [Yellow-footed Antechinus] (DEPI, MCCann)
- [Yellow-tufted Honeyeater] (DEPI, MCCann)
- [Mt Alexander Goldfields] (S T Gill)
- [Historical Castlemaine Images] Courtesy of the Castlemaine Art Gallery and Historical Museum
- [Historic Mining Sites in the Maldon Mining Division, Dept of Conserrvation and Natural Resources, David Bannear, May 1993.]

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