Forests Notes

Briagolong State Forest

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Briagolong State Forest

Two and a half hours drive from Melbourne, north of the town of Briagolong on the southern fall of the Great Dividing Range, lies the Briagolong State Forest. These forests have a rich history. The original inhabitants of the area were the Briakoloong people who utilised the vast forest resources for canoes, shelter, food, clothing and tool making. The early European explorers relied heavily on Koori guides during the exploration that was responsible for the opening up of the region. In the late 1800's, these forests teemed with prospectors searching for that ever-elusive gold to bring them instant wealth. These days, the forests provides for a variety of activities including picnicking, camping, walking, swimming, sightseeing, and car touring.

Note: The Freestone Creek Road is a narrow 2WD gravel road and is not suitable for caravans; other tracks are best attempted with 4WD vehicles.

Getting There

From Melbourne
Drive along the Princes Highway turning left, after Rosedale, at the Maffra exit.

From Maffra

Take the Maffra Briagolong Road out of Maffra to Briagolong. Continue through Briagolong along Freestone Creek Road.

History

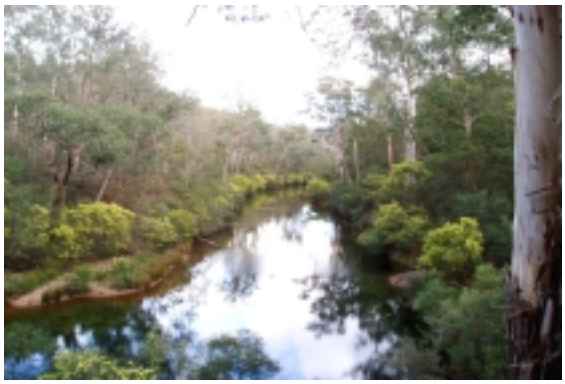
For thousands of years the Briakoloong people utilised these forests, until conflict and disease which accompanied early Europeans decimated the Koori population. Evidence of Aboriginal occupation can still be found today throughout the area with the recording of many archaeological sites including scarred tress, grinding grooves and artefact scatters.

The Freestone Creek, Lees creek and Granite Creek areas were the location of a number of alluvial gold mines. These were first discovered in the mid-1860's and though not highly profitable, continued to be worked into the twentieth century. During the late 1800s and early 1900s, a track existed to service the needs of the miners, connecting Briagolong and Gladstone Creek to the goldfields at Lees Creek and Granite Creek. This track was marked on a Government map dated 1909 as "Track 96".

The Gladstone township was located near the Gladstone Bridge, upstream from the Gladstone-Freestone Creeks junction. It was burnt down on Christmas Eve 1868 and never re-established, Briagolong becoming the alternative settlement.

Attractions

Picnic and Camping Spots
Picnic spots are located throughout the forest with the Blue Pool as the centrepiece. Located on Freestone Creek this site provides interpretative facilities, barbeques, shelters,



Freestone Creek

toilets and walking tracks. The pool itself has formed at the bottom of narrow basalt gorge and provides a wonderful deep swimming hole during the warmer months. The creek can be accessed via a walking track starting from the car park.

Other sites with basic facilities include the Froam, Lee Creek and Pretty Boy Hill Picnic Areas. McKinnons Point, Shady's Place, Johnstons Flat, Lloyd Knob & Alistair Fieldings provide excellent camping areas with water available nearby. Blue Pool is the only site within the forest with a toilet. In areas without toilets, bury toilet waste in a 15 cm deep hole at least 100 metres away from campsites and watercourses.

Walks
The Freestone Creek area offers a variety of walks, ranging from 5 minutes to three days in duration are an excellent way to discover the many wonders of the forest. Walks are all marked and easy to follow.

1.Blue Pool Walking Tracks
The Bluff
Skill Level: Basic Fitness Level: Low
0.2 km return (5 minutes)
A short 5 minute walk to a lookout point that provides excellent views of the Blue Pool below.

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Peregrine walking track
Skill Level: Basic Fitness Level: Average
3 km return (2 hours)
As the name suggests Peregrine falcons may be seen from the lookout during the September to December breeding season. The track winds its way through dry open forest made up of predominantly Red Box, Stringybark and Ironbark. A mine and chimney ruin along the way are reminders of its past. You may continue all the way to McKinnons point and return via Gladstone Creek and the Froam Picnic area via Track 96.

Fern Gully
Skill Level: Basic Fitness Level: Average
1 km return (30 mins)
A small gully provides just enough moisture to provide a much different range of plant species to that of the surrounding dry ridge.

2. Track 96
Skill Level: Intermediate Fitness Level: High
60 km one way (3 days)
The walking track, as well as being interesting historically, traverses some very scenic forest with camp and picnic sites along the way. The total network of tracks that make up Track 96 total 60kms of walking, providing various degrees of difficulty for the casual or experienced walker. The first section may be commenced just north of the Blue Pools walking tracks. Track 96 was retraced and cleared during the 1990s thanks mainly to the efforts of the Ben Cruachan Walking Club who have helped retain a vital link with our past..

On leaving the town of Gladstone, Track 96 crossed what is now private property known as Paddy Melon Gully. To pick up Track 96 you will have to walk around the Boundary Track or take the shorter route via the Freestone Creek Road. The track takes you through the Lees Creek mining area, up into the main range, to finally finish at the southern end of the Granite Creek goldfield.

3. Lees Creek Walking Track (Alistair Fielding Memorial Track)
Skill Level: Basic Fitness Level: Average
3 km return (2 hours)

Alistair Fielding was a park ranger from Briagolong who saw the potential of opening this area up to the public but died tragically however before his vision was completed. This walk takes you back to the Lees Creek alluvial gold mining era of the 1890s where you will be able to view old house sites, alluvial diggings and a water race used to bring water from a dam to the diggings. Nature also abounds with lyrebirds, giant Mountain Grey Gums (Eucalyptus cypellocarpa), tree ferns and maybe the Fringed Helmeted Orchid (Corybas diemenicus) with its bright red flower along the way.

4. Granite Creek Walking Track
Skill Level: Basic Fitness Level: Average
Comprises 1,2 & 3 Circuits
Circuit 1–45 mins, Circuit 2–1.5 hrs, Circuit 3–3 hrs
Complete circuit - 8 km return (4-5 hours)
An information board at the picnic area provides further details on the circuits. The walks mainly follow old water races that lead to Granite Creek. After completing each circuit there is the opportunity to continue or turn back. Along the way you will encounter old house sites, dams, a battery site, and diggings which include the Evening Star Mine.

Flora and Fauna

The Briagolong State Forest comprises of mostly dry forest types with the most common overstorey species being Mountain Grey Gum, White Stringybark, Red Stringybark, Yellow Stringybark, Red Box and Sivertop Ash. Common lower storey species of trees and shrubs include Common and Shiny Cassinia, Hop Bitter Pea, Common Heath, Snow Daisy Bush and Burgan.

Briagolong State Forest supports a range of native animals, many of which are best viewed at night. An after dark spotlight walk scanning the tree tops may reveal a variety of species. Night time is also a good time to listen for the distinctive calls of the variety of frogs that inhabit the area. Snakes are relatively common during warmer periods and if you come across one, keep your distance and respect and admire. Over 100 bird species have been recorded throughout the forest and native freshwater fish inhabit the waterways.

For more information

The Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) is responsible for managing Victoria's State Forest. For further information contact the Department of Sustainability and Environment office at Heyfield (☎ 5139 7777) or DSE's Customer Service Centre on ☎ 136 186.

Visit DSE's website

http://www.dse.vic.gov.au
then select "Forestry".

The Briagolong 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, the current Gippsland Forest Management Plan can be viewed on the Department's website on the Internet at

http://www.dse.vic.gov.au
then select "Forestry", then select "Publications".

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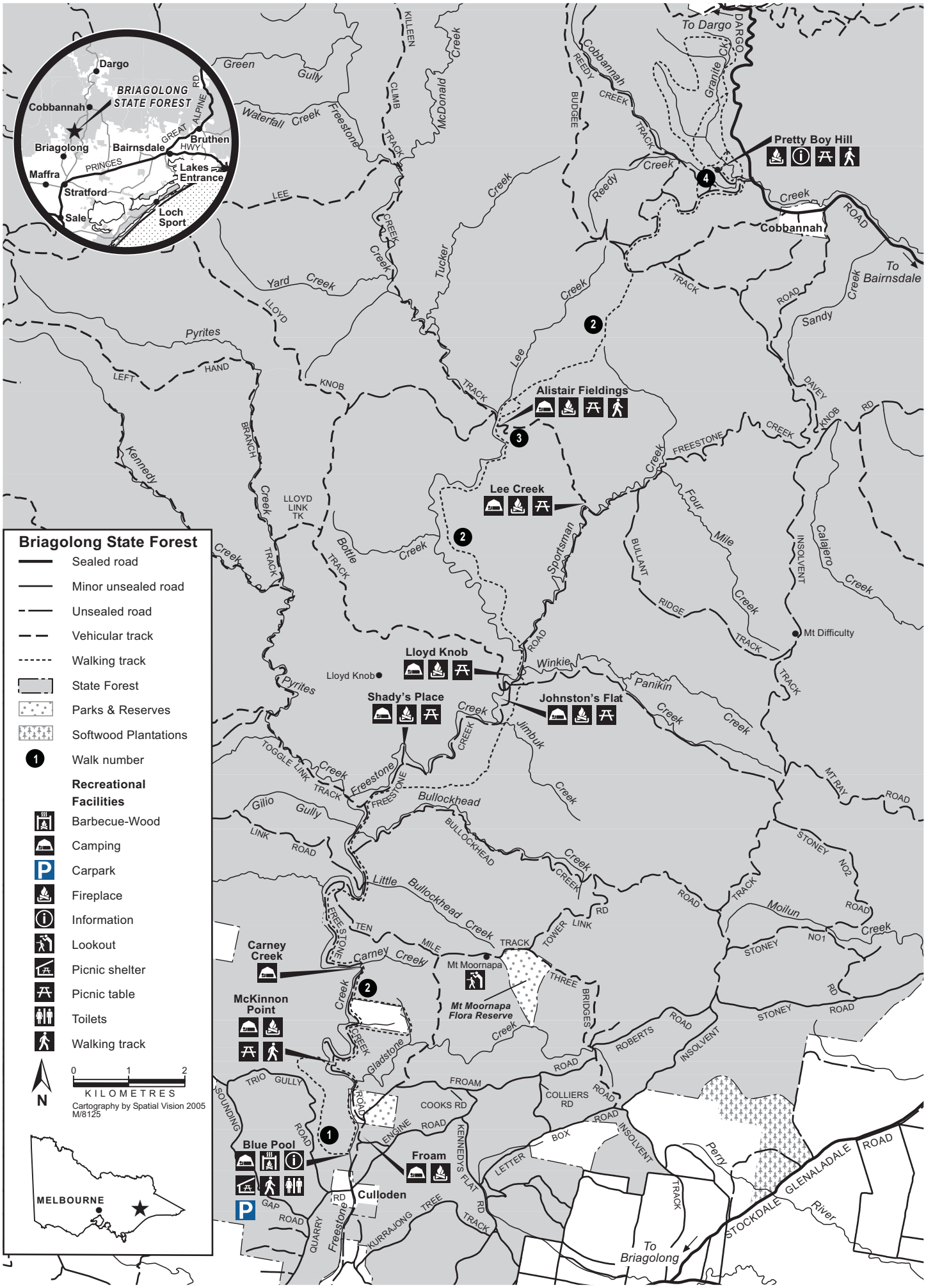

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