

# Valley of the Giants

## BROWN MOUNTAIN

This stand of ancient forest is a magnificent example of forests of the Errinundra plateau that are under threat from clearfell logging. Come for an easy walk through these giants and gaze in awe at their size and antiquity.

### How to get there

Drive along Bonang Rd/Hwy until just before the intersection turnoff to Bonang or Bendoc. Before the large sign, Legge Road takes off on the right. Drive for 2.1 km along here and the walking track starts just before the large tall messmate tree on the left side of the road.

### Tree species

This forest is extremely rich in arboreal (tree dwelling) mammals, mostly due to the extraordinarily diverse tree species. It contains a rare stand of mixed eucalypts all of similar ages - including the Mt Grey Gum (*Eucalyptus cypelocarpa*), Errinundra Shining Gum (*e.denticulata*), Messmate (*e.oblique*), Cut-tail (*e.fastigata*) and the East

### Gippsland Peppermint

(*e.croajingalensis*). To have such a mix of trees growing so closely is rare. This provides an abundant source of food throughout the year.

### Age of the forests

As you walk through these forests, take note of the age of the trees. The term old growth doesn't mean all trees are decrepit and about to fall down. It means there is a mix of ages - with a large number being the 'great grandmas' with their canopy having dead branches and many hollows. Younger generations are still growing throughout and underneath.

The age of Australia's larger eucalypts was unknown until 2009 when EEG

sampled a stump in an adjoining stand of old growth that was cut down.



A piece of wood from a 10 metre circumference tree stump was radio carbon dated at between 550 and 600 years old. The tree was almost solid to the core, so would have lived for centuries more had it not been cut down. As many of these bigger trees in this forest are over 12mts around, we believe they are likely to be over 800 years old. Studies done on understory species in the Central Highlands nearer Melbourne also show that the tree ferns and geebungs can be much older than the overstorey of eucalypts.



### Native animals

Over 90 of Victoria's native animals need hollows. Our birds and mammals have evolved to den and nest in tree hollows - which eucalypts are particularly good at providing.

In these tall forests there is the large but mute Greater Glider, the Yellow-bellied Glider with its raucous nocturnal chatter and the small sugar

### Some plants along the walk

The mid-storey forest plants include: Musk daisy bush, Frosted Wattle, Hazel Pomaderris, Blanket leaf, Geebung, Silver Wattle, Bootlace bush, varieties of Dogwood or Cassinia, Christmas Bush, Austral Mulberry, Correa and Black Olive-berry, Gippsland Waratah, Elderberry, Panax, Dusty Daisy Bush, Snowy Daisy Bush, Blackwood, Lomatia and Soft Tree Ferns, to name a small sample.



There are also many vines in the understorey. Two of the more obvious

vines are the Smilax or 'wait-a-while' (if you get caught on one you'll know why it has that name) and the Clematis or 'old man's beard'. When it finishes flowering, its seed heads are fluffy and white.

Tiny green things you will see are liverworts (some as fine as one cell thick), mosses and lichens. These help retain moisture like a sponge, even on the hottest days. Once logged and exposed to direct baking summer sun, the environment becomes drier and more fire prone.



gliders which make a quiet yip-yip sound. The large Mountain Brush-tailed Possums, delicate Feather-tailed Gliders and Ring-tailed Possums all live in these forests.



Greater Glider



Powerful Owl chick

The tall trees also provide hollows for roosting and breeding for the endangered Powerful and Sooty owls; East Gippsland is the stronghold for these owls. They

hunt and eat possums and gliders that also need hollows to nest and breed in. That means they need vast areas of forests with hollow-bearing trees, up to 5,000 ha per pair of birds. Without a large 'dining room' they would quickly 'eat-out' small areas.

### Down to the rainforest creek

As you walk off the road and into the edge of the forest, you'll wander through a **narrow path of thick regrowth**. This is from the disturbance of logging machinery when the coupe to the south was clearfelled in the early 90s. Such tightly packed regrowth is very flammable.



Lofty

The first tree you come to after climbing over waste logs (from the same logging coupe), is 'Lofty'. This

**Errinundra Shining Gum** sits to the left of the track and measures in at 10.6 metres. This would have started life as a seedling in about 1400 AD - a respectable middle-aged **600 years old**.

Just down the track keep an eye out for a large dark gum tree on the left with heart or V shaped scars up and down its trunk. These are the chew marks that the Yellow-bellied gliders leave when they 'tap' the tree bark to lick the sap. This has been a **favoured feeding tree** for possibly 200 generations of gliders.



Gliders' feed-tree

Further down the track you enter a **tree fern 'forest'**. These ancient plants were around when the planet was still the dominion of giant reptiles. They remain an important part of any damp or wet forest. The large umbrella tops create a damp micro-climate underneath to help cool and shade the forest. Their fibrous trunks also act as 'jiffy pots' on which many rainforest species start their lives. After clearfell logging and the follow-up intense hot management burn of an area, only 2-13% of these wonderful prehistoric plants survive. They can survive bushfires very well, but not bulldozers.



Mature trees dot the walk, with many more off the track. You can see their heads - weather scarred and with

hollows galore and still going strong. You'll pass another large Shining Gum to your right, which we called **the Brumby Tree**, the namesake of our State Premier. This venerable old giant is 12.4 meters around its girth. Will John Brumby and his Labor government dare cut down this tree and its surrounding family? We'll see.

On the other side of the track to this tree, is a **lyrebird mound** behind the greenery. On this small circular cleared mound the male Lyrebird performs his mimicking song.

Keep your eyes out further along the path for the amazing structure of the **Satin Bower Bird**. It has built a very



handsome stick 'bower' on the ground, carefully decorated with the bright blue track tags (we've since changed to pink!) and blue Rosella feathers. The male Satin Bower Bird builds this structure to hop around and through to woo females. This fella should really

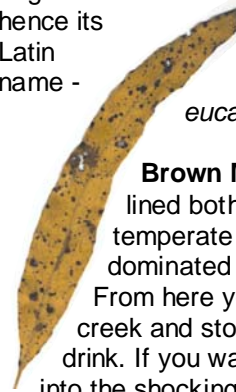
impress the local ladies.

From here on you'll be walking down amongst **Southern Sassafras**, an ancient 'dinosaur' plant that dates back to Gondwanic times before Australia broke away from Antarctica and South America. The small shiny dark leaf is slightly serrated and when crushed, smells of cinnamon, nutmeg and sarsaparilla! See if you can find it. This is a rainforest plant. On your way to the creek you'll come across another giant

Shining Gum measuring in at 11.5 metres. This is '**Uncle Rennie**'. Look for the leaves at the base of this tree.



The **Shining Gum leaves** have an unusual pattern of glands down the edges of the leaf - hence its Latin name -



*eucalyptus denticulata*.

**Brown Mountain Creek** is lined both sides with cool temperate rainforest plants, dominated by the sassafras. From here you can cross the creek and stop for a snack and drink. If you walk up the hill and into the shocking war-zone of a **clearfelled old growth forest** logged in January 2009 and deliberately burnt in April 2009 as part of 'sensitive forest management'. This is where the 600 year old tree stump was sampled to determine its age.

The other alternative is to follow the pink tags up the creek (right) a short way and back into the forest to meet '**Ally**', **another great grandmother of the forest**. This Mountain Grey Gum has



stood at this site for maybe **700 years**, weathering storms, droughts and the odd fire. If you follow the pink tags further along this path, it will take you



to **two more enormous 'senior citizens'** standing almost together, 'Holly' and 'Molly'. The darker one is Molly, a giant Messmate.

Retrace your steps and return to the road via the same track. There are many more grand old trees in this forest, but we hope those you have met have given you an appreciation of what an old growth forest of the Errinundra Plateau is like.

### The forgotten fungi

A myriad of amazing fungi - both above ground and below, exist in a healthy forest. These are essential for soil and plant health. They also help 'digest' leaf litter and even fallen tree trunks in the moist understorey.



### Fungi feeders

Two small mammals that live in the undergrowth are the endangered Long-footed Potoroo and the Long-nosed Bandicoot, both of which dig and eat the underground fungi. You can often see signs of their foraging in the soil under trees; small conical digs where they have sniffed out and unearthed their favourite food - native truffles. These have evolved to be dug up and eaten to allow their spore to dispersed through the forest in little poo pellets. They then grow under-



*Endangered Long-footed Potoroo*

ground again and latch onto tree roots to exchange nutrients. Without the truffle eating hoppers like the Potoroos and Bandicoots, these fungi couldn't keep growing and dispersing, the tree roots would'nt be able to extract important nutrients from the soil via the fungi, and the forest would be less healthy.

### Native mammals

There are also the native bush rats (clean and cute) and small native marsupials called the Dusky and Agile Antechinus. These two are like large mice but with delicate pointy noses and pouches to carry their young in. They hunt and eat insects and other smaller animals like frogs and lizards.

### High-rise 'flats'

The large tree hollows are also used by forest dwelling bats and native birds. The large Yellow tailed Black Cockatoos need spacious hollows. Sacred kingfishers, Boobooks, Owlet nightjars, Red-browed tree-creepers, Crimson Rosellas, Gang-gang cockatoos, King Parrots and Tawny Frogmouths all need tree hollows.

### **Hollow trees - critical habitat**

This type of untouched hollow-rich habitat is becoming extremely rare. So much of SE Australia's forests have been clearfelled, logged, selectively logged, burnt and/or grazed and generally degraded over the past 50-150 years. Less than 10% of our old growth forests remain and East Gippsland is a stronghold for much of our endangered wildlife. The region's old growth forests are like an ark in a sea of young, flammable, single aged logging regrowth. Under the State Government's environmental laws, the loss of hollow-bearing trees is a known threatening process (Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act), however thousands of hectares of mature and old growth forest is still clearfelled every year.

*We hope you have been inspired and amazed by this small sample of old growth forest. We can't afford to lose any more. Please let the government or your local Member of Parliament know how you feel.*

For more information go to [www.eastgippsland.net.au](http://www.eastgippsland.net.au) or become a member of EEG and support our work to save these forests.  
Membership is \$20 a year. Post to Locked Bag 3, ORBOST Vic. 3888 or join online.

### **Other residents of Brown Mt.**

Scarlet Honeyeaters, Yellow Robins, Black-faced Monarchs and Crescent Honeyeaters are just a few of the native birds that live in these forests.

The critically endangered Square-tailed Kite has also been seen here and is directly threatened by logging.

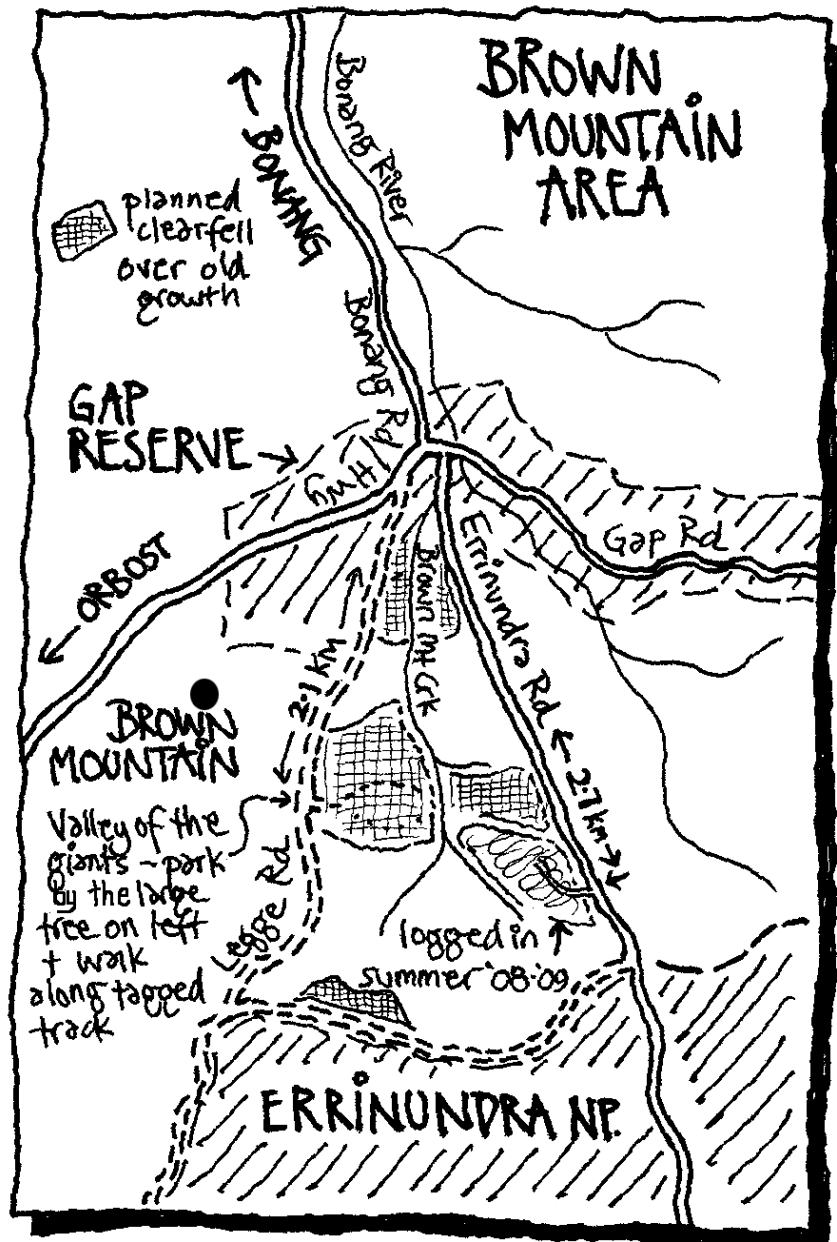
The Swamp Wallabies feed and live in the thick undergrowth. They are better adapted to live in a thick forested environment rather than more open forests. And of course there are signs of wombats. You'll see their burrows and 'poo atop log' calling cards.

The Brown Mountain area is also prime habitat for the nationally endangered Spot-tailed Quoll. It is mainland Australia's largest meat-eating, pouched mammal. It has beautiful spots on its body and long tail. Weighing up to 7kg, it also needs hollow logs, trees and a



healthy population of possums, gliders and birds. Again, these rare animals need large areas of intact forest to survive and flourish but their population is crashing as their habitat is degraded and destroyed more every year.

In the creek lives a rare Crayfish; the Brown Mountain Cray. They need clear, cool water, not dirtied by logging mud and silt. Many native fish species are rare in bigger streams because introduced trout eat them. They rely on the smaller upper reaches of creeks for sanctuary and survival. The headwaters of stream catchments are very important for a number of reasons and their values as safe havens for native animals is again threatened by logging.



Brown Mountain's forests are about 90 km north of Orbost off the Bonang Hwy/Rd. Turn right up the track just before the large metal sign board if coming from the south.

## EEG's Valley of the Giant's Walk is NOT authorized by DSE

If any of you plan to wander through this wonderland of tree giants, just be aware it's extremely treacherous! Or say says the government.

We have formally been told by DSE that our old growth walk at Brown Mountain must **not** be promoted.

The government even went so far as to hire an engineering consultant to write a 6 page report with lots of bad photographs to prove it doesn't comply with walking track standards. This is despite it fitting more than adequately into DSE's definition of a class 6 walking track.

Of course the track is not 'officially sanctioned'. The government doesn't want the public to see this type of beautiful forest that it is systematically clearfelling. The report claims there are potential trip/slip hazards and branches way above are a safety concern. Not to mention the new threat of 'quickly changing weather'. A forest is a *very* risky place.

But what *is* authorized is clearfell **logging**. This may only cause escalating climate change, biodiversity loss, water reduction and general planetary collapse.

However, **tourism is** dangerous and so is **not** authorised as it may cause a bumped knee.

Enjoy this magnificent forest at your own peril!