

Mt Napier (Tapoc) State Park

Location: Drive south out of Hamilton on the Port Fairy Rd for 8 km and turn left down Murroa La. Cross the Byaduk-Buckley Swamp Rd and enter the forest at Murroa corner. Drive along Menzels Tk (dirt) 5 km to the former Menzel's scoria pit and park there. Walk from the car park 1.5 km up the steep trail to the top of the mount. Alternatively, walk in the opposite direction (that is, north) down the fence-line 400 m to the Devil's Hole – a crater worth seeing, 20 m east of, but not obvious from, the fence line. **Watch out for leeches!**

It is possible for 4WDs to drive on past Menzel's Pit and connect with Harmans Rd.

Landform and geology: The classic "volcano" shape of this peak makes it one of our most photogenic volcanoes. Recent dating of the rocks suggest that Mt Napier erupted about 32,000 years ago. There are good distant views of all sides from the summit.

The mountain has a central steep-sided scoria cone (the tallest and most intact scoria cone in southern Australia), with a breached crater at the top, which rises above a broad flatter lava shield built of flows that radiated out from the volcano. These lava flows blocked the Harman Valley to dam up Buckley Swamp (see site 21) on the northeast side. A long flow ran westward down the valley and contains the lava tubes of the Byaduk Caves and the unusual lava mounds of the tumuli.

For the fit and adventurous, Elmore's Cone, lava channel and bridge may be found in the forest directly west of Mt Napier. Start from Menzels Pit and proceed along the rough track south that skirts the mount. After 700 m a stone wall

is seen. Follow the old track west along that wall for 1.2 km (a tall Blackwood near the wall is a marker), then walk south through the bush for 250 m to the scoria cone and associated features.

The presence of several stone walls through the dense bracken and stony landscape tells us that the vegetation has changed since the walls were constructed – most probably due to the increased frequency of burning by the settlers that encouraged bracken at the expense of grasses and herbs. Details of history and fauna can be found in *The Victorian Naturalist* (1997) Vol. 114(2).

Flora: Manna Gum is the sole eucalypt in the stony rises landscape, although Swamp Gum occurs on the surrounding basalt plain. Blackwood is the main wattle, although there are a few Black Wattles, mainly on the edges of the park. Tree Everlasting and Cherry Ballart are the main understorey trees; there is a small stand of Prickly Tea-tree on the slope of the mount (an unusual place for this species) and occasional bushes of Sweet Bursaria, Western Golden-tip, Sticky Boobialla, Kangaroo Apple, and Shiny Cassinia throughout the forest. Variable Groundsel, Small-leaved Clematis, Austral Stork's-bill, Bluebells and Ivy-leaf Violets are in flower in late spring. A drive into the forest in December and January is a delight! You will note that the top of the mount is relatively treeless (pictured next page, RB), but it was not always so. Major Mitchell's men cut down the trees on the summit in 1836 to allow a view of the country. Fires (the last in 1972 to burn the mount) have kept it clear of timber. Most of the Blackwoods and Manna Gum now on the

summit were planted from local seed by HFNC in 1986.

Fauna: Surveys by members of HFNC have revealed the presence of Koala, Eastern Grey Kangaroo, Black Wallaby, Echidna, Common Brushtail Possum, Sugar Glider, Brown Antechinus and Swainson's Antechinus, Brush-tailed Phascogale, Bush Rat and Swamp Rat in this forest. Eight species of bat, including Gould's Wattled Bat, Chocolate Wattled Bat, Gould's Long-eared Bat and the Lesser Long-eared Bat, have also been recorded in the forest. The Spot-tailed

Quoll also once lived here. Feral goats established a presence in the 1980s, causing damage to the flora on cones and in sinkholes. They are not controlled.

A list of 114 species of bird has been recorded by HFNC, including 16 species of waterbirds seen when the margins near Murroa corner are flooded. Significant bird sightings include Grey Goshawk, Peregrine Falcon, Black Falcon, Rose Robin and Satin Flycatcher. Uncommon birds sighted include Bassian Thrush, Crested Shrike-tit, Sacred Kingfisher and Blue-winged Parrot.

