

Craters and Limestone Precinct:

Mount Gambier's Blue Lake and Crater Lakes Complex



This volcanic area incorporates Brownes Lake (dry), Valley Lake, Leg of Mutton Lake and the Blue Lake, and formed some 30,000 years ago.

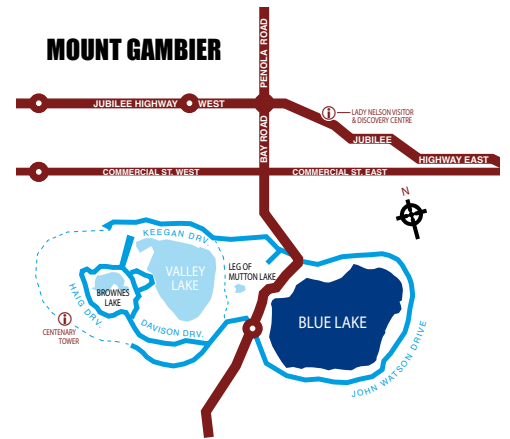
Dreamtime legends of the local Boandik Tribe tell of the giant Craitbul and his family who wandered around the south-eastern region looking for a place to settle and live in peace. They camped and made ovens at Mount Muirhead and Mount Schank, but were frightened away from both sites by the moaning voice of a bird spirit. Moving to Mount Gambier, they managed to escape from the spirit. Again they made an oven, but one day, water emerged from below and put out their fire. They made others, until they had four, which are now the craters of Mount Gambier.

A study of relationships between the volcanic rocks and fossil beach deposits has shown that Mount Gambier has experienced two closely-spaced periods of eruptive activity, each with distinctive characteristics.

Initial eruptions took place at the western end of the crater lakes complex and the Leg of Mutton Lake crater. A series of small maars resulted from this activity, covering the surrounding landscape with ash and lapilli. Lava flows extruded from fissures in the location of Brownes Lake and from the Leg of Mutton Lake crater. A large scoria cone developed at the western end of the complex, sediments of which are now exposed at Bootlace Cave. Activity ceased for a short period of time, allowing the lava flows to cool and crystallise.

The second series of eruptions were on a much larger scale than the first – partly because of the explosive reaction which occurs when a large volume of ground water comes into contact with high temperature magma. Explosions from such a cocktail eventually produced the large open craters seen today. The large craters containing the Blue Lake, Valley Lake and Brownes Lakes were formed when several small vents close together eventually joined.

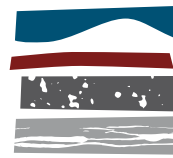
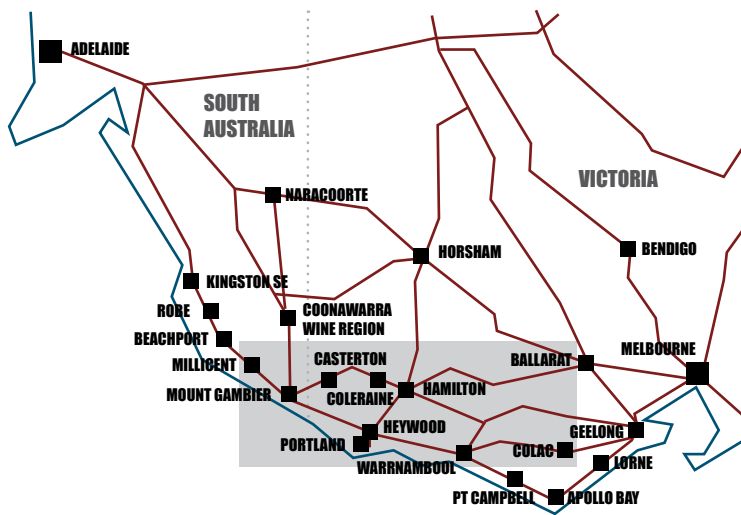
The Leg of Mutton Lake, now dry, is situated in its own smaller crater and is believed to have formed towards the end of the eruptive activity. This lake has had a history of varying water levels, and was recorded as being near-dry as early as 1859. Levels rose again soon after this period to regain the leg of mutton shape from which it has been named.



Things to do:

- The Crater Lakes area offers many holiday and recreational experiences, with its significant network of walking and mountain bike trails, lookouts, and an adventure playground. All are fully accessible by motor vehicle and foot. A complete range of public services including public toilets with disabled access, barbecues, car parks, public telephone is also available.
- The Valley Lake, situated in the largest of the three craters, is very popular year-round thanks to its excellent playground and recreational area. Within the delightful, well-kept picnic areas are 16 free gas barbecues and covered shelters.
- The Wildlife Park and Boardwalk presents indigenous species of flora and fauna in an environment very similar to that which would have originally been found in the area. With lookouts, nature walks and a boardwalk, the area is an ideal place for families to spend many hours of pleasure. Free entry.
- Surrounded by many varieties of deciduous trees which are particularly spectacular in autumn, The Leg of Mutton Lake is popular for its walking trails. The 1.6km Leg of Mutton Lake Walk starts at the car park near the underpass. Walk down the access road to the lake area. Near the second bend in the track is the area once used as a tree nursery. Follow the track around the circumference of the now dry lake bed. Other walks of the area include the Mountain Trail, Rook Walk/Peppercorn Trail, Valley Lake Walk, Blue Gum Walk and The Oaks Walk.





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Australia may be referred to as a relatively young nation, but the well-preserved ancient landscape provides many precious windows into the past. The Kanawinka Global Geopark can take you on an amazing journey through this landscape, enabling visitors to travel back in time over thousands and thousands of years.

The surface geology of South Western Victoria and South Eastern South Australia is a striking contrast of sweeping plains and spectacular mountains which are largely the product of volcanic activity. In fact, with six sites of international significance and 14 of national significance, this area is Australia's most extensive volcanic province.

The history of these geological masterpieces stretches back to the Tertiary and Quaternary eras, when great outpourings of volcanic material through vents took place. Lava flows spread evenly across the existing plains, followed valleys, flowed under water, and in some cases forced upwards into rough, stony hills called tumuli, or steeper scoria cones.

In total, the flows cover an area of some 23,000 square km, extending north to the hills beyond Ballarat, and reappearing in a small section of south-eastern South Australia. This area is known as the Newer Volcanics Province, and features nearly 400 individual eruption points, most of which occurred between 4.5 and 2 million years ago.

Many of the eruptions were witnessed by the indigenous peoples of the area who have inhabited this region for up to 45,000 years, and feature prominently in stories of the Dreamtime.

Aboriginal people also made use of the stones from the lava flow to construct channels linking the wetlands, weirs, fish-traps, wind breaks and stone huts, and excellent examples created by the Gunditjmarra people can be found around Western Victoria's Lake Condah region in particular.

Later, during the 1870s and 80s, European settlers utilised the volcanic stone cleared from the land to construct dry stone walls in order to grow crops and introduce stock. Many examples can be found surrounding Corangamite on the Dry Stone Walls Heritage Trail.

The region's spectacular and intriguing volcanic landscape also offers a range of other visitor experiences, from a 45-minute tour to the surface of Mount Gambier's Blue Lake, to the gruelling trek up Mount Schank and down to the crater floor.

In western Victoria, you can go on a chartered boat tour to Lady Julia Percy Island, which has the largest colony of Australian fur seals in the southern hemisphere. Or, take The Alan Marshall Walking Tour of Mount Noorat and the nearby township, or swim in the turquoise-coloured waters of Lake Surprise.

There are also plenty of picturesque picnic and camping spots just waiting to be discovered. Alternatively, you can take your time and spend the night in one of the numerous towns in the Kanawinka Global Geopark.

The Geopark is known as KANAWINKA GEOPARK, meaning Land of Tomorrow from the Buandik people. It is also the name of a geological fault line from Naracoorte Caves to Bass Strait at Portland and a Parish name west of Casterton about 1911 so all levels of the history, Geological, Indigenous and European are brought together in one name.

The Kanawinka Geopark was declared the 57th Member of the Global Network of National Geoparks assisted by UNESCO on June 22, 2008.



Accredited Visitor Information Centres

Victoria

Casterton
Shiels Terrace
03 5581 2070

Colac
Cnr Queen & Murray
Streets
03 5231 3730

Dunkeld
Parker Street
03 5577 2558

Hamilton
Lonsdale Street
1800 807 056

Nelson
Leake Street
08 8738 4051

Port Campbell
26 Morris Street
03 5598 6089

Port Fairy
Railway Place,
Bank Street
03 5568 2682

Portland
Lee Breakwater Rd.
1800 035 567

Warrnambool
Flagstaff Hill
Merri Street
1800 637 725

South Australia

Beachport
Millicent Road
08 8735 8029

Millicent
Mt Gambier Road
08 8733 0904

Mount Gambier
The Lady Nelson
Jubilee Hwy East
1800 087 187

Penola/Coonawarra
27 Arthur Street
08 8737 2855



Camperdown
Old Court House
179 Manifold Street
03 5593 3144

Lake Bolac
2110 Glenelg Hwy
03 5350 2204