

# GIPPSLAND HIGH COUNTRY TOURS

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P.O. Box 69, Bruthen Vic. 3885

Australia

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## Southern Ark

**Giving East Gippsland's fauna a chance  
by Simon Ruff and Andrew Murray  
Southern Ark Project Team**

When Jenny leads tours through Far East Gippsland, she is giving people the opportunity to see some of Victoria's most remote and pristine natural areas, teeming with biodiversity. This corner of Victoria provides habitat for some of our most elusive and iconic threatened fauna, such as the Long-footed and Long-nosed Potoroos, Long-nosed and Southern Brown Bandicoots, the Spot-tailed Quoll, the Diamond Python and the Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby.

While most of Jenny's visitors will love the bush scenery, they will probably not be aware that it forms a backdrop for a deadly but silent battle between the introduced Red Fox and the Southern Ark team in support of native fauna. Predation by the Red Fox is **THE** single most important threat to the ongoing survival of many species in the forested public land of Far East Gippsland, and it is against this adaptable carnivore that the Southern Ark Project is working. The main aim is to reduce the fox population to a point where our native species are able to increase in number, repopulate the landscape, and kick-start the wide range of critical ecological processes that they are involved in.

The Southern Ark Project team is involved in ongoing fox control and mammal monitoring in an area stretching from Lake Tyers in the south to the Snowy River and Alpine National Parks in the north, all the way to the east beyond Mallacoota in Croajingolong National Park. Contained within this vast area are other national, coastal and state parks, as well as large areas of State Forest. By poisoning foxes with a sustained baiting program we are able to tackle the issue of fox control on a very broad landscape scale, an approach that has already yielded some exciting results.

Following five years of research that demonstrated that populations of potoroos, bandicoots and possums responded positively to fox control

**Continued on page 5...**

## Cape Conran Explorer Ecotour

New for 2011 is this short tour to explore the biodiversity of Cape Conran. Maria will be your local guide and she has a variety of great short walks to share with you along with a wealth of knowledge about the area. Bird watching will be rewarding, there is a rich history to be told and after dark she will lead you on a night walk to meet the nocturnal residents. Perhaps you too will be lucky and see a Long-nosed Bandicoot?

**April 4 & 26, plus October 24, 2011**

**4 Days from \$1320 (cabin accommodation)**



A camper photographed this Long-nosed Bandicoot as it foraged in the Cape Conran campground. This species is now frequently seen in the campground after 10 years of on-going fox control.

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## Editorial

I hope you enjoy reading this full and interesting News-letter. The story of the Southern Ark project is inspiring and I thank Andy and Simon for taking the time to contribute this article.

I also thank others who have contributed articles or stories from recent trips, most are included in this issue, but some will appear at a later date. I do appreciate you sharing your experiences with other readers.

Well, what a wet and tropical summer we have had, however our thoughts are with those affected by storm, flood and cyclones across Australian and those affected by other natural disasters across the seas.

Cattle grazing in Victoria's Alpine National Park has received a lot of publicity since January and I include some facts for you on page 6.

Beyond the High Country I enjoyed sharing a great Tasmanian nature experiences with a fun group during December last year. The weather provided the usual mix of seasons, including some snow at Mt Field, but we were lucky to have one truly glorious day at Cradle Mountain with picture postcard views. The day of rain that followed reminded us just how lucky we were, but wet weather gear was donned and many short walks still enjoyed.

The program on page 4 runs through to summer 2012 but if you need dates even further ahead, you can go to my website- [www.gippslandhighcountrytours.com.au](http://www.gippslandhighcountrytours.com.au) for a more extended program. There are still some great trips left during Autumn and a full spring/summer program of old favourites along with this year's new ecotour to Cape Conran.

So take advantage of the mild autumn weather to enjoy an escape now or plan something to enjoy later in the year. Please contact me you'd like to discuss any aspect of the trips. *Jenny*

## What Does the Tick Mean?



Australia's Ecotourism Certification Program is an innovative "world first" program. It is a national scheme with hundreds of products across every state and territory of Australia. [www.ecotourism.org.au](http://www.ecotourism.org.au)

Choosing a product that displays an **Eco Certification** logo means you will enjoy an experience with a quality operator, leaving minimal impact on the environment.

**Advanced Ecotourism Certification** recognises Australia's leading and most innovative ecotourism products, providing an opportunity to learn about the environment with an operator who is committed to achieving best practice when using resources wisely, contributing to the conservation of the environment and helping local communities.

**Gippsland High Country Tours is proud that all ecotour and walk products in the regular program have received Advanced Eco Certification.**

## Electronic version of Newsletter

This Newsletter is now available electronically as a (fairly large) pdf. file. If you have a preference for receiving future newsletters electronically, just email me and let me know.

Please include in the email your name and postal address so I can cross reference on my database and ensure you don't get a hard copy as well as an electronic copy.

*Established in 1987, Gippsland High Country Tours is an Accredited Tourism Business and a full member of Tourism Alliance Victoria. All product has Advanced Ecotourism Certification under Ecotourism Australia's Eco-Certification Program.*

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## Autumn Discount

Select any Gippsland High Country Tour experience & book **before April 30, 2011** attach this coupon and receive

**5 % Discount**

**in addition to the regular discounts** off the advertised fare for any High Country departure of 3 – 7 days duration.

## REGULAR DISCOUNTS

Available on all 3-7 day departures

*NOTE: Only one discount or special offer can be used on any one Booking.*

*Before April 30, 2011 5% may be added to these discounts*

- Past Passengers 10% Discount.
- Pensioners 10% Discount.
- Early Booking (90+ days in advance) 10% Discount.
- Children (under 15) 25% Discount.
- Group Booking (5 or more persons on any trip) generous discounts apply, contact me for details.

## TRIP HIGHLIGHTS

### Birds of the Snowy River Ecotour - January 2011

Within minutes of being met by Jenny at the Bairnsdale Station, a quick change of programme had us eating a lovely salad lunch on the serene banks of the Mitchell River. Our original lunch was to have been at the Buchan Caves Reserve which Jenny thought would be rather crowded because of the school holidays. She was so right! When we reached The Caves Reserve it teemed with people! We had to drive quite a way in to find the small birds such as the Superb Fairy Wren and the Yellow-faced Honeyeater. Larger birds such as Kookaburras, Magpies and Sulphur-crested Cockatoo were more obvious. A special treat were Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos.

From Buchan we took the road to Gelantipy and soon arrived at Karoonda Park where after settling into our rooms we were able to take a short walk before dinner. Here we spotted Crimson Rosellas, the White-throated Tree-creeper, Thornbills and many more, as well as a Koala. After a lovely 4 course meal we chatted with our hosts who combine farming with teaching and tourism – outdoor activities including nature walks, horse-riding and rock-climbing to name just a few of the activities on offer.



Next day we were soon on the road passing through areas devastated by the 2003 bushfires where we saw just how well the forests had regenerated. Climbing up on to the Wulgulmerang Plateau we drove along the precipitous sides of the Snowy River Valley with magnificent mountain views. We stopped for a short walk to visit the Little River Gorge and Falls. The steep-sided walls of the gorge were covered in trees and the water sparkled as it splashed and sprayed down the falls to the rocks below. Along the way we saw a number of Jacky Dragons and Cunningham Skinks as well as a Gippsland Water Dragon. Very few plants were in flower. Back in the 4wd and now on a gravel road we continued along, with Jenny

spotting birds here and there, even a recently dead (she collected it to show us and it was still warm) but beautifully coloured Sacred Kingfisher. We stopped along the road and Jenny told us about the Brush-tailed Rock-Wallaby and the great efforts to help preserve it and rid the area of feral animals, on both public and private land. Soon we arrived at our accommodation for the next three nights at Deddick after crossing the Snowy River.

At “Kurrajong” we settled in to a comfortable house with everything we could possibly need. A fan for each bedroom, comfortable lounge, verandahs to see the birds from and a terrific selection of books to read as well as the “Nature “ books provided by Jenny. From then on we took short walks early and late in the day, bird-watching. My count – inaccurate I’m sure, as Jenny saw many more birds than I did, was over 35 species at Deddick alone. Some were new to me and even Jenny had not seen the Scarlet Honeyeater at Deddick before! We visited Joanna and Kevin across the Deddick River, our hosts, to see their swimming hole and watched a platypus feeding and diving for quite a while. The river was brown and not very inviting, a storm having “coloured” the water. Joanna and Kevin showed us around their orchard; the trees laden with fruit, especially the Mulberries which we ate with relish, while the red juice ran down our hands and arms. There were many white and yellow-brown butterflies flying everywhere and a very large and beautiful Orchard Swallowtail too. As well we saw their registered collection of Aboriginal artefacts found around the property and had a private viewing of Kevin’s pastel and gouache paintings; beautiful works of leaves and barks and the surrounding scenery, clouds and sky.

After packing up, having enjoyed an early morning walk we set out to retrace our steps along the Deddick River and across the Snowy River on McKillops Bridge down past “Seldom Seen” and back to Buchan where we bought our own lunch before continuing on with a stop at Canni Creek Race Track and on to Bairnsdale to catch the train home. All in all, a lovely few days in quiet and serene areas with almost no traffic and no radio or TV or phones to intrude. Thank you Jenny for your skill, your knowledge your cooking and your patience. I’ll hope to come again on one of your carefully organised and enjoyable trips. **Pat Macdonald (Victoria)**

## Calendar of Ecotours and Walks 2011 –2012

<b>April 4</b> <b>NEW</b>	<b>Cape Conran Explorer</b> Graded: EASY Fully accommodated. Easy walks 4 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$1320 4 Days ex. Melbourne \$1430
<b>April 11</b> <i>A choice of two departures running concurrently</i>	<b>Eastern Peaks Walk</b> (Walking Ecotour) Graded: MODERATELY CHALLENGING <b>Threatened Fauna of the Cobberas</b> (Wildlife Research Ecotour) Graded: MODERATE Both departures - 3 nights camping, 1 nights accommodation. 5 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$1570 5 Days ex. Melbourne \$1680
<b>April 23</b> <b>EASTER</b>	<b>Wonders of Wildlife Ecotour - Snowy River</b> Graded: EASY/MODERATE 2 nights camping. Combined Ecotour and Wildlife Research Project. 2 nights camping. 3 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$960
<b>April 26</b> <b>NEW</b>	<b>Cape Conran Explorer</b> Graded: EASY Fully accommodated. Easy walks 4 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$1320 4 Days ex. Melbourne \$1430
<b>August 28</b> <b>SPECIAL</b>	<b>Flinders Ranges Natural History Tour</b> Graded: EASY-MODERATE Fully accommodated. Easy-Moderate walks. 14 Days ex. Melbourne \$4400
<b>September 21</b>	<b>Spring into Nature at Waterholes</b> Graded: EASY Fully Accommodated. Easy Walking. 4 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$1570 4 Days ex. Melbourne \$1680
<b>September 28</b>	<b>Walking from Waterholes</b> Graded: MODERATE Fully accommodated. Walking all day, from an accommodation base. 4 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$1570 4 Days ex. Melbourne \$1680
<b>October 3</b>	<b>Walking Croajingolong</b> Graded: MODERATE Fully accommodated. Lots of Moderate Walks. 7 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$2550 7 Days ex. Melbourne \$2660
<b>October 9</b>	<b>Crojajingolong Coastal Ecotour</b> Graded: EASY Fully Accommodated. Easy walks. 7 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$2550 7 Days ex. Melbourne \$2660
<b>October 24</b> <b>NEW</b>	<b>Cape Conran Explorer</b> Graded: EASY Fully accommodated. Easy walks 4 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$1320 4 Days ex. Melbourne \$1430
<b>November 7</b>	<b>Snowy River &amp; Errinundra Explorer Tour</b> Graded: VERY EASY Fully accommodated. Touring with Short Easy Walks. 6 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$1900 6 Days ex. Melbourne \$2010
<b>November 21</b>	<b>Birds of the Snowy River</b> Graded: VERY EASY Fully accommodated. Easy walks with a focus on birdwatching. 5 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$1750 5 Days ex. Melbourne \$1860
<b>December 30</b> <b>NEW YEAR</b>	<b>Wonders of Wildlife Ecotour - Haunted Stream</b> Graded: EASY/MODERATE 2 nights camping. Combined Ecotour and Wildlife Research Project. 2 nights camping. 3 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$POA
<b>January 2</b> <b>2012</b>	<b>Alpine Discovery Tour</b> Graded: VERY EASY Fully accommodated, lots of short easy nature walks . 6 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$2070 6 Days ex. Melbourne \$2180
<b>January 9</b>	<b>Mt Feathertop Adventure</b> Graded: MODERATE - CHALLENGING Fully accommodated with moderate to challenging full day walks. 5 Days ex. Bairnsdale \$1740 5 Days ex. Melbourne \$1850

More than just a holiday, a rewarding High Country experience featuring expert guidance and lots of interaction with nature. These small group tours promote an appreciation and understanding of the High Country's varied environments, rich history and diverse flora and fauna. **Full itinerary for each trip available on request.**

**More details also available on website– [www.gippslandhighcountrytours.com.au](http://www.gippslandhighcountrytours.com.au)**



**Continued from page 1**

across three 10,000 hectare areas of forest, the Southern Ark Project was born in 2003 and has gradually expanded its operations to now cover around 1,000,000 hectares of public land. Over recent years, the success of the ongoing fox control program has become evident to many visitors and campers at Cape Conran, with Long-nosed Bandicoots, Southern Brown Bandicoots and the odd Long-nosed Potoroo being seen foraging through the campground at night.

With this success in mind, the possibilities for species recovery across the rest of Far East Gippsland are very encouraging. The Southern Ark team will soon commence a baiting program (in conjunction with other agencies and private landholders) on the western side of the Snowy River in the Gelantipy/Wulgulmerang area in order to increase the level of protection afforded the population of the Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby, a species that many Victorians will recognise from the registration sticker on their wind-screens, within the stunning Snowy River National Park.

Fox control is also continuing amongst the majestic old growth forests of Errinundra National Park. Regular fox baiting within the park and across adjacent public land is a vital measure in maintaining this area as a stronghold for threatened species such as the Long-footed Potoroo and Spotted-tailed Quoll. Community Baiting Programs to the north of Errinundra National Park have also achieved great results through the cooperation of local landholders with Southern Ark, Department of Primary Industry and Parks Victoria to broaden the landscape approach to fox control in the area to include fox control on private land. This initiative provides immense benefits not only for the biodiversity of the park, but for adjacent landholders as well, and is a great example of what can be achieved by working together against a common enemy. A similar program has also been running in the Snowy River/Alpine National Park and Deddick valley area.

To the far east of Victoria, Southern Ark has most recently initiated fox control in the east of Croajingolong National Park. This vast area of coastal wilderness is the southern-most extent of the range of the impressive Diamond Python, which few have had the privilege to see in Victoria. Reducing the numbers of foxes in and adjacent to the park will not only decrease the threat of predation on smaller pythons, but see an increase in native small mammal populations restoring previously abundant food sources for the species.

All members of the seven-person Southern Ark team are very passionate about the work that we do, and are always excited by the steadily improving statistics coming from the monitoring activities that we undertake, such as trapping, hair-tubing and remote camera works. The Southern Ark Project has created a model for successful broad scale fox control that has subsequently been adopted in other areas of the state, seeing the creation of the Grampians Ark and Glenelg Ark Projects. The current funding for the project is due to expire at the end of June 2011, and we are working as hard as we can to ensure that the project can continue beyond this point and build upon the great successes that have been already achieved. Fox control will always be an ongoing battle, and the recovery of our threatened species is a long term goal – not one that can be realised in a mere decade or so. Planning within the project already goes well beyond this current time frame of funding; it is hoped that by reducing the critical threat of fox predation, we may open the door for the re-introduction of some species pushed to extinction on mainland Australia, such as the Tasmanian Bettong and Tasmanian Pademelton – a very exciting prospect to anyone with an interest in our natural heritage.

The battle is being won against the wily but predictable fox in Far East Gippsland, and the magnificent fauna that inhabit our forests are the beneficiaries.

**Simon Ruff and Andrew Murray, Southern Ark Project Team**



**In July each year a group of 70 - 100 first year wildlife-management students from Deakin University descend on Cape Conran for a week to learn how to handle wildlife. This student has just processed a Long-nosed Potoroo prior to release.**

## Cattle grazing in Victoria's Alpine National Park

Cattle grazing in Victoria's Alpine National Park ceased in 2005 under the then Labor government.

In January this year, Victoria's newly elected Coalition Government honored its election promise to return cattle grazing to the Alpine National Park. The government has returned cattle grazing in order to conduct a research project led by Department of Sustainability and Environment. The trial seeks to assess the benefits and impacts of cattle grazing as a fuel reduction tool to reduce the risk of bushfire. Around 400 cattle were moved into six trial sites across the Alpine National Park in early January.

What followed has been a barrage of articles in the media and letters with many different angles presented. One of the leading arguments has been that cattle grazing in the alps could significantly impact on species or ecological communities protected under the federal Environment Protection & Biodiversity Conservation Act.

The Federal Environment Minister Tony Burke has now stepped in and ordered that cattle be removed while a proper federal environmental investigation is conducted.

I encourage you to read more on the cattle grazing issue and look at the facts presented by different sides to allow you to develop an informed opinion of the issue.

**Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) explains its cattle grazing trial-** [www.dse.vic.gov.au](http://www.dse.vic.gov.au)  
Go to the Parks & Reserves page, then Whats New page.

**Victorian National Parks Association (VNPA) explains its opposition to the cattle grazing trial-** [www.vnpa.org.au](http://www.vnpa.org.au)

### Your fellow travellers

On any Gippsland High Country Tours departure, you will find on average at least half of the participants are return clients.

- ◆ Perhaps its because of the personal touch and caring guides?
- ◆ Perhaps its because we think of everything and take care of the small touches along the way?
- ◆ Perhaps its because special diets can usually be accommodated with ease, provided we know at the time of booking?
- ◆ Perhaps it's the no fuss approach and the leisurely time to get to know each other?
- ◆ Perhaps because this is the 20th year Jenny has been leading ecotours and walks?
- ◆ Perhaps its because we strive to exceed your expectations?

*"I have done at least seven trips with Jenny and each one has been an adventure and an experience that keeps coming back to me in photographs and conversations. Just go with her and see what happens!!! Thank you again" Claire B*

## NATURE NOTES

### A line of ants

An interesting phenomena greeted us on the ocean beach at Wingan Inlet during Croajingolong Coastal Ecotour last spring. The dark "wave line" along the beach was not in fact comprised of seaweed or shells as usual, but instead was almost entirely made up of the tiny bodies of beach-washed flying ants! There must have been hundreds of thousands of them.



This day followed a day or two of warm north-westerly wind so we presume the warmth and humidity had set off a mating flight of winged male ants following queens. Normally the male ants would eventually return to the ground and drop their wings. However on this occasion, the strong off shore winds had blown them out to sea, later to be washed ashore.

### Lunch with the birds

After a productive morning wandering and enjoying the birds, we settled back at "Kurrajong" for some relaxing time before lunch.

We were disturbed from our rest by bird song, so out to the verandah with binoculars. A Yellow-tufted Honeyeater sat in the dead branches on top of the old fig tree, its striking yellow catching the eye. Then a flurry of bird activity erupted. As well as the immature Jacky Winter that seemed to call the garden home, an adult arrived to dive for insects as well. In the fig tree, two immature Diamond Firetails appeared along with a brilliantly coloured adult. Brown Treecreepers hopped confidently across the lawn and a Sacred Kingfisher perched briefly on the barbed wire fence but was too shy to stay. As the activity died down, we returned inside to lunch keeping a watchful eye on the garden.

Lunchtime the following day also commenced with excitement with a single Scarlet Honeyeater singing

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## Beyond the High Country - Flinders Ranges

This is fast becoming a firm favourite on my program and unlike many tours to the Flinders Ranges this one has a natural history focus, so the pace is slow and there is time to see and learn about what makes the Flinders Ranges so special.

Of course there is walking to see rugged scenery and discover wildflowers, but we will also investigate the fascinating geology that forms these rugged ranges and valleys. Our birdlist from the past few years is very comprehensive and if history is more to your liking, you will be rewarded with a wide variety ranging from the early aboriginal rock art through to many ruins highlighting the hardships of early European settlers.



The trip is fully accommodated and one of the highlights is our 5 nights in basic but cosy shearers quarters near Blinman in the heart of the Flinders Ranges. Another highlight is the opportunity to visit Arkaroola, once a sheep station, now a private sanctuary featuring some of the most spectacular rugged scenery in South Australia. **August 28-September 10, 2011**

*“My second visit to the Flinders Ranges was with Jenny. What a wonderful area of our Australia!! The speciality of this place was enhanced by Jenny’s ability to share her knowledge and love of all things in nature.*

*Magnificent scenery, caused by ancient events and land movement which has created a variety of geological features for us to admire and learn about. This area abounds with the best of our flora and fauna, as well as Aboriginal sacred sites and legends and many of our country’s special fossil sites. Rich deposits of valuable minerals also abound. All of the above create a special place where history is very rich! With Jenny as your guide you will be introduced to this and be amazed as you learn. Thank you Jenny for a very memorable trip.”* **Dot Prout (East Gippsland)**

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### **Strzelecki Track and Cooper Creek - Arid Environment Natural History Tour**

This trip which is being offered fully accommodated for the first time next year (May 6-20, 2012) so you can enjoy the experience of outback travel without the need to camp. Birds, red sand dunes, deep waterholes in Cooper Creek, Burke & Wills historic sites, surprising landforms, wide horizons and star-filled nights. After two amazing rainy seasons, the country will be more alive than ever!

#### **Continued from page 6 (Lunch with the Birds)**

strongly from a lofty perch on the very top branch of a tree in the yard. Despite his height, our binoculars soon brought the brilliant scarlet colour closer as he shone in the sunlight. Later I was surprised to see not one or two, but five Speckled Warblers foraging together beneath the fig tree. These are not uncommon in the open woodland here but this is the first time I have seen such a group together. Perhaps this group included immatures, but sadly my observation was brief as some passing Ravens startled them and they disappeared from view.

The bird list for this visit grew to 66 species, with the overall list for this trip since 2007 now up to 102 species. A couple of notable new additions for this visit were the Scarlet Honeyeater and a pair of Turquoise Parrots at Canni Creek on the last day. However the numbers on lists is no where near as much fun as the sitting and enjoying birds coming to us as they did over these two lunches!

## Walking, walking, walking

### Walking Croajingolong (October 3-9, 2011)

Wide open spaces along Victoria's Wilderness Coast. Walks that take you along white beaches and through peaceful foothill forests with banksias and birds, then up small peaks to superb views over the coastal plains. But, stop walking for a moment to sit and enjoy still inlets with perfect reflections, to photograph spring wildflowers or to just breathe in the peace and tranquillity. At Point Hicks maybe there will be a whale or two passing by or a Sea Eagle soaring overhead. Lots of good walks and at the end of each day, good conversation, lovely accommodation and a meal that appears before you like magic. Now that's a holiday!!!

*Two of the highlights were watching the young whale practicing flips, while eating breakfast at the lighthouse and finding rock orchids growing on the top of Genoa Peak! Liz (Victoria)*

### Walking From Waterholes (September 28-Oct 1, 2011)

No long drives, in fact all the walks start right outside the door of your well appointed Guesthouse room. A few hundred metres away, the Nicholson River tumbles noisily over rocks before settling in still pools. At dusk wildlife are often easily watched from the private balcony of your room and after dark a chorus of frogs starts up from the nearby lagoon. Music for sleeping! By day, our energetic walks follow forest tracks and minor walking trails through the bush, connecting the river with sites that boast an interesting history. Small group, limited to 7 participants only, so book early.

### Mt Feathertop Adventure (January 9-13, 2012)

Alpine splendour. Summer is wildflower time on the roof of Victoria. Every day, good long walks enjoying the views, the sculptured snowgums and the wonderful clear air. As you walk, feel the stresses of modern life slip away. You will return weary, but after a shower, a meal and time to relax in the comfortable lodge lounge, you'll be ready to do it all again tomorrow.

*"Amazing walks, scenery and comfortable accommodation. A lot of fun!!" Cathy (NSW)*

**ACCOMMODATION**



**Snowy River WilderNest**

**Bush Holiday Retreat**

Secluded natural bush setting on the banks of the Snowy River  
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