

European heritage

Gunbower Forest is a large River Red Gum Forest of international significance that has suffered a serious decline in condition in recent years from lack of water. Through The Living Murray's Gunbower Forest project, works will be undertaken to provide water to protect and improve the forest's health.

Local people and many outside the region have a special connection to Gunbower Forest. This stems from a reliance on things provided by the forest, including a spiritual and cultural link that can be difficult to quantify but remains significant.

In addition to the Indigenous connection to Gunbower Forest, there are many European historical sites and values that remain a strong part of our heritage today.

Early activities

In his third expedition in 1836, Major Thomas Mitchell was the first European to visit Gunbower Forest. Settlers followed soon after, bringing with them a range of new activities. Two sheep and cattle grazing runs covered the forest from about 1845 onwards – the Gannawarra Run across the northwest of the forest and the Gunbower Run across the remainder. Other early activities in Gunbower Forest included logging and sawmilling, a boat building and nursery business, bee-keeping, gum (resin) collecting, and recreation (picnicking, fishing, camping and later water-skiing).

Evidence of these activities still exists in the forest today, including remnants of old sawmilling sites and a fishing hut along the Murray River, a timber tank stand on Gunbower Creek, tree stumps from logging, cattle yards and home sites, channel crossings, cattle yards, old tracks, fence lines, small channels and levee banks. It is also likely that other archaeological sites not mentioned in contemporary records or local oral history are present in the forest, such as remnants of temporary loggers' camps, sleeper cutters and charcoal burners.

As well as archaeological sites, two large trees remain very important to the local community – the 'Eagle Tree' near Koondrook and the 'Big Tree' near Cohuna. These trees remain highly regarded by local people and reflect their long connections to the River Red Gum forests.

Significant sites

Timber cutter's steps – footholds (timber planks) were inserted into trees to assist early loggers with harvesting.



Evidence of timber cutter's steps on Five Sleeper Track

The Gunbower Forest project is delivered by the North Central Catchment Management Authority (CMA) in partnership with Goulburn–Murray Water, and Parks Victoria, and coordinated at a state level by the Department of Sustainability and Environment. It is part of The Living Murray program, a joint initiative of the New South Wales, Victorian, South Australian, Australian Capital Territory and the Commonwealth governments, coordinated by the Murray–Darling Basin Authority. Together with Koondrook–Perricoota Forest in NSW, Gunbower Forest is one of The Living Murray's six icon sites.

Gray's Mill – evidence of a sawmilling operation on the Murray River. Sawlogs cut in the River Red Gum forest were carted to the mills and sawn timber was transported by paddle steamers along the Murray River.



Part of a multi-tubular boiler at Gray's Mill

Graham's Hut (also known as Morris's Hut), pictured below. Built in 1943, it is the only surviving fishing hut on the Victorian side of the Murray River between Swan Hill and Torrumbarry.



Corduroy Crossing, pictured below – evidence of corduroying in Gunbower Forest, which involved the laying of poles over boggy ground to allow wheeled vehicles to pass.



Tank stand – associated with several houses that existed at the site, which housed people associated with grazing and forestry operations in the forest.



Tank stand between River Track and Gunbower Creek

Eagle tree – a significant River Red Gum near Koondrook that is highly regarded by the local community as an expression of their long connection to the Gunbower River Red Gum forests.



The base of the majestic Eagle tree – an example of the big trees that were once distributed throughout the Forest

In response to the need to preserve these culturally-significant sites, the Gunbower Forest project has undertaken a European heritage assessment. All archaeological sites in Victoria over 50 years old are protected under legislation.

Information about Indigenous heritage and values is provided in **Fact Sheet 5: Indigenous connection** in this series.

All photos courtesy of R Kaufman, 2010

CONTACT

This fact sheet is one of a series providing information on the Gunbower Forest project. Further fact sheets and other project information are available from the North Central CMA on 03 5448 7124 or by visiting www.nccma.vic.gov.au.

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