

Grand Ridge Road

An escape from the modern race of hustle and bustle leads us along the Grand Ridge Road.

Grand Ridge Road snakes 132km along the ridge of Victoria's Strzelecki Ranges between the Latrobe Valley & South Gippsland. It gives wonderful views across the green Latrobe Valley to Mt Baw Baw to the north and to the sandy beaches and blue waters of the Bass Coast and Wilson's Promontory to the south. Its beauty is largely because of the ever-changing scenery, from fern forests to rolling pastures, towering mountain ash to forestry plantations.

Along the way are quaint villages and towns hidden from the highway and many national parks to explore. You can get hold of good information from information centres at Traralgon, Korumburra and New Haven. From west to east it begins at the Mt Worth State Park, not far from Warragul. Warragul's population is 9000; it is the regional centre for the district's dairy farms.

Not far from where the road begins is the Mount Worth State Park, 1040ha of natural forest, regenerating native bush and cleared pastures. McDonald's Track has wonderful views over the Latrobe Valley.

The halfway point of the Grand Ridge Road is Mirboo North, where 1500 people live, making it a major town in that area. In the 1870s it was settled as a timber town and now services the local dairy industry. The Grand Ridge Brewery is in an old butter factory; they brew nine varieties of beer. There is an interesting wall of murals which depict the history of the town. Commissioned by the community, the wall depicts crop dusting, cricket in the park, the last train and the Mirboo lily. The beautiful old Colonial Bank is now an antiques and craft shop; next door are the old butcher shop and police station.

As you head on, you'll reach one of the major attractions of the drive, Eilean Donan Garden and Country House. It features a 90-year-old all-seasons garden. This wonderfully-relaxing retreat is the perfect base for exploring the area. Eilean Donan is self contained, combining old-world charm and modern convenience, with a charming open fire overlooking the gardens. It has three spacious double bedrooms with ensuites and garden views from private balconies.

The California bungalow was built in 1905, with changes made in 1911 and 1939. It was named after a McKenzie clan castle in Scotland and is now owned by a grand niece of WH McKenzie, who purchased it in 1911. The grounds are bordered by the original stone fence and the Tarra River, which is home to a shy platypus. It's a haven for native birds and lyrebirds can be heard in the gullies.

Tarra Bulga National Park is one of the last remnants of the great forests which once covered all of southern Gippsland and has some of the best cool temperate rainforests of the Strzeleckis. Relatively small, the 1230 hectares is in two sections and is an absolute delight to visit. A canopy of towering mountain ash enclose sassafras, myrtle beech and mulberry trees and the ground is covered with tree ferns, Christmas bush, mosses and more than 200 varieties of fungi. Lyrebirds, parrots, robins and honeyeaters revel in this superb environment.

At the eastern end of the Grand Ridge Road is the little hamlet of Balook. Here you will find the Tarra Bulga Visitor Centre, Tarra Bulga Guesthouse and Cayzer's tearoom, shop and petrol supplies. They serve Devonshire teas and make great sandwiches to enjoy during your walk in the national park.