

INTRODUCTION



Plate 1 – An aerial view of the Buffalo Plateau and the eastern escarpment. A high-valley plain (Hospice Plain) can be seen beyond the gorge. Lake Catani is on the left.

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The Area

The great granite massif of Mt. Buffalo dominates the southern part of the Ovens Valley in north-eastern Victoria, and is bordered to the west by the valley of the Buffalo river and to the east by the Buckland River valley. Both these rivers are important tributaries of the Ovens. The boundaries of the Park enclose 27, 280 acres of mainly rugged, rocky plateau at 4,500 feet to 5,300 feet and steep precipitous escarpments down to the valleys at about 800 feet. The highest peaks are The Horn (5,645 feet), the Hump (5,410 feet). There are numerous peaks at about 5,00 feet (Plate 1).

Mt. Buffalo was first sighted and named by the Hume and Hovell expedition on 25th November, 1824, and was again sighted by Major Sir Thomas Mitchell in 1835 as he returned to Sydney from Portland. But the mountain was not climbed by white man until 1853, when on 26th February, Baron von Mueller, Government Botanist, and John Dallachy, Superintendent of the Melbourne Botanical Gardens, climbed The Horn.

In 1854, two miners, James Samuel Manfield and his brother Jon, climbed the plateau up a long spur from the Buckland valley, and in 1856 James Mansfield led the first party of tourists to the top, by the way of the spur which became known as Goldie's Spur.

From this time it appears that tourists were attracted to the mountain. In the late 1880's several residences were built on the plateau to provide accommodation.

The Bright Alpine Club was formed in 1887 to develop the district as a tourist resort. They advertised and organised tours of "The Buffalo" and other mountains in the area, and provided money for the first track up the eastern escarpment.

In 1888 the Bright Progress committee made the first move to have areas around Eurobin Falls, The Horn and The Hump reserved as public parkland. Another attempt was made in 1897 by E. Lyndon Smith, Shire Secretary and Secretary of the Bright Alpine Club, to have the Eurobin Falls area reserved.

On 31st October, 1898, 2,880 acres was reserved temporarily as a National Park and in October, 1908, a further 23, 100 acres was reserved temporarily. It was not until 1948 that these two areas together with a further 1,300 acres, were gazetted as a National Park totalling 27, 280 acres.

Access to the plateau is by way of a good sealed road from Porepunkah up the eastern escarpment. The Horn, near the southern corner of the Park, can be reached by a gravel road. The area is a popular tourist resort in summer and winter. Two skiing areas equipped with tows operate on the plateau in winter and accommodation is available.*

Reasons for the Study

Sound land management requires an understanding of the ecology of the land. This statement is based on recognition of the fact that when free from the influence of man, the environment maintains a balanced condition and that a change in one factor results in changes in others until a balance is again achieved. This is a dynamic process in which changes are continually occurring. This intrusion of European man into the environment has usually resulted in marked and often rapid

* Information in this section has been derived from "The Romance of Mt Buffalo" a Victorian Railways publication of an abridged version of an address by J. F. Wilkinson in 1929, and "The Buffalo Mountains – A Brief History" by W. F. Waters in The Melbourne Walker 1967.

changes. His objective is usually to modify or replace the soil or vegetation, to make it more suitable for a specific purpose. It is generally hoped that the change will result in a permanent improvement. However, unless the effect on the environment balance is considered, changes in other factors may make the new situation fire out of the area.

The present activities of man on Mt. Buffalo are first, the management for preservation of the environment, and secondly the development of the area as a tourist resort, which involves road making, provision of facilities for camping, picnicking and other outdoor recreations such as skiing, walking and horse-riding. Cattle grazing is no longer permitted in the Park. Vigorous efforts are made to keep fire out of the area.

The effects of the various aspects of development on the environment should be studied to predict likely changes, and means of controlling or preventing any undesirable changes should be devised before development begins. Before this can be done, the environment must be studied and its balance understood.

This study brings together information on the various environmental factors for this purpose.