



# The Australian Alps

A challenging landscape of physical and spiritual contrasts.

The Australian Alps — where endless mountain ranges give way to uninterrupted horizons and ever-changing weather reveals a world of winter snow and summer wildflowers. This ancient landscape has a long human history steeped in tradition and adventurous tales of fame and fortune. For Indigenous Australians it is a place of great spiritual significance.

The Australian Alps contain 11 national parks and reserves, the highest mountain peaks on the continent and in winter, the most extensive snow-covered areas in the country.

Spend some time on the roof-top of Australia and learn about nature and the landscape from the people and their stories.

## THE CREATION OF A WORLD-CLASS ALPINE ENVIRONMENT

Over 600 million years of geology has shaped Australia's unique alpine environment. The mountain ranges are some of the oldest in the world, with some minerals in the rocks found to be over three billion years old.

The age of the mountains and diversity of the rocks has meant that unlike other alpine areas in the world, the Australian Alps has fertile soil, up to one metre deep in places. This soil is capable of supporting a diverse range of distinctive plants, animals and ecosystems.

Water-loving ferns, sphagnum bog and fen (mineral-rich wetland) communities can be found in moisture-pockets. Woodlands and arid grasslands exist in the dry shadows of mountains and cliffs, and the striking silver and red snow gums stand out amongst a snow-filled landscape. Alpine

meadows explode in spring and summer once the snow-melt begins — masses of yellow billy buttons, pink trigger plants and silver and white snow daisies.

## AUSTRALIA'S ALPINE PLANTS — THERE'S NOTHING ELSE LIKE THEM

The diverse habitats of the Australian Alps have given rise to high levels of endemic species — species that don't live anywhere else on earth. About 25 per cent of Australia's alpine plant species are endemic — five times higher than other similar regions of the world.

Over 46 different species of eucalyptus trees exist in the Alps, living in all climates from cool, lush forests through to the harsh subalpine terrain. No other tree in the world shows such rugged versatility.

## FROGS IN DANGER

### *Baw Baw frog*

The Baw Baw frog is found only in an 80 square kilometre range on the Baw Baw plateau, Victoria. Unlike the young of other frog species, Baw Baw tadpoles do not swim or feed! Instead, they hatch with a yolk sac that sustains them until they turn into frogs and live hidden under vegetation and leaf litter.

Once thought to number between 20–30,000, fewer than 600 frogs remain. The reasons for the decline of the Baw Baw frog are unknown, but could include climate change, pollution, habitat destruction or disease.

### *Southern corroboree frog*

The striking black and yellow southern corroboree frog grows to 30 millimetres in length and is found only in a very small part of the subalpine area of Kosciuszko National Park. It is thought that there are fewer than 100 frogs, including just 16 breeding males remaining in the wild. Similar to the Baw Baw frog, the exact reason for their declining numbers is unknown.

## PART OF AUSTRALIA'S BROADER CONSERVATION EFFORTS

The Alps are a part of the Great Eastern Ranges Initiative which links landscapes for conservation purposes across the entire east coast of the country, from Queensland's far north through to Victoria in the south.

Conservationists are increasingly trying to link landscapes to provide breeding and habitat corridors for Australia's wildlife. Managing entire landscapes against weeds and pests helps build more resilient ecosystems and healthier water catchments. Wildlife Corridors give threatened species and communities room to move and can help them adapt to climate change.

## CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Alps have a long record of human history. Humans have lived here for at least 21,000 years, even through the ice age. Many Indigenous clans adopted the Alps as an annual meeting place because of the seasonal abundance of bogong moths — a major food source. They were also a place of important ceremonies, cultural and political discussions, and a trade link between tribal groups across the region.

The Australian Alps are also steeped in European history. Pioneers flocked here to make their fortune — cattle grazing in the 1830s, the gold rush era of the 1850s and logging in the 1860s. Their legends live on through stories and song. The cattlemen's huts that dot the high plains are a legacy of those days.



## HELP PROTECT THIS UNIQUE ALPINE ENVIRONMENT

Biodiversity is life — conserving our natural world means clean water, clean air and fertile soil for us all. You can make your own contribution to conserving our natural world when you visit the Alps. Low-impact activities such as bushwalking, cycling and canoeing all provide fantastic opportunities to get off the beaten track and discover new worlds that are like nothing else on earth. In the winter season, try low impact activities like snow shoeing, cross country skiing or ski touring to really experience this environment.

Remember, stay on track when walking, cycling or driving on alpine paths to minimise disturbance of plant and animal populations.

- If you would like to show your support for this precious environment, find out more about Bush Heritage Australia's Scottsdale Reserve at [www.bushheritage.org.au/scottsdale](http://www.bushheritage.org.au/scottsdale)
- Ensure the stories of Australia's wild alpine environment continue to live on! Volunteer and support endangered wildlife conservation in the ACT. For more information go to [www.naturewise.com.au](http://www.naturewise.com.au)



Alpine National Park



Southern corroboree frog

For more information on this landscape or to learn about other naturally beautiful places which offer a different but uniquely Australian experience. Visit [www.australia.com/nl](http://www.australia.com/nl)