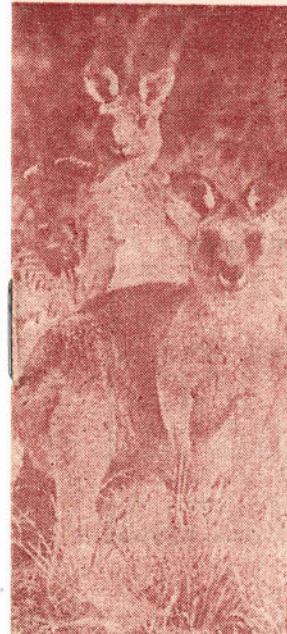

Hattah Lakes National Park

Lake Hattah Trail

THIS TRAIL has been designed to show you some of the natural features of the lakes section of the Park. You are welcome to drive around it, but you will of course see more if you walk.



• NATIONAL PARKS SERVICE •



Drive slowly and carefully.

Take your time.

Enjoy the peace and beauty which the Park has to offer.

Total length of the trail is approximately 6 kilometres.

- ★ Do not drive off the track in any circumstances. If you meet another car, one driver should pull off into one of the parking bays provided.
- ★ Do not drive around the trail after dark; by doing so you would disturb kangaroos and other fauna.
- ★ Numbered pegs correspond to paragraphs in the booklet.
- ★ Begin the trail just beyond the Rangers' houses.

1 The open sand dune over which the track first passes was once covered with a stand of native pine. Timber cutting, fire and rabbits in the early days destroyed this stand.

Desert Lantern *Abutilon otocarpum*), a grey-green shrub about a metre tall with lemon-yellow flowers at most times of the year, now covers the dune in this vicinity. This is an uncommon plant in Victoria and was virtually unknown in the National Park before rabbits were controlled.



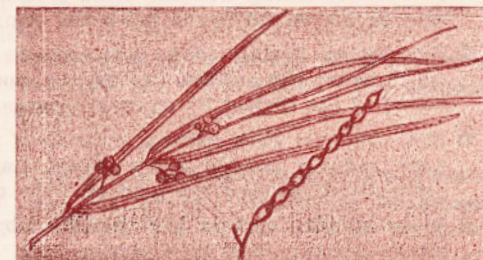
2 A single tall bush of Slender Hop-bush (*Dodonaea angustissima*) grows on the edge of the track. The pale yellow flowers in spring are followed by fruits bearing pinkish, papery wings (called "Hops"). As you proceed you will see many more hop-bushes on both sides of the track.

3 On the left of the track stands the Victorian Railways' pump-house, which pumps water to a concrete tank on top of the hill behind the Rangers' houses. From there it gravitates to Hattah township. In the early days the water was used to refill the boilers of steam locomotives which used the railway line after its construction in 1903.

4 The track now follows more-or-less along the upper level of the Murray River flood plain with its characteristic vegetation of River Red Gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*). The old Red Gums growing well away from the lake, in the dunes on the right hand side, are in an unusual position. They probably arose from a major flood (possibly more than a century ago), which carried seed high up the dunes and then gradually receded allowing the seeds to germinate and establish their roots in the moist sand.



5 On the shore of the lake, about 20m from the peg, grows a stand of Eumong (*Acacia stenophylla*), a species of wattle with long narrow drooping "leaves" —



which are not true leaves but actually flattened leaf-stalks called "phyllodes". The large seeds make the long pods look like necklaces.

6 Note the ancient Hooked Needlewood (*Hakea vittata*) surrounded by young seedlings. *Hakea* fruits are in the form of hard woody nuts which split in half when dry, or after a fire, to reveal two seeds with broad wings. These seeds are readily blown about in the wind.

7 Take the left hand or lakeside fork in the track at this point: Garland Lilies (*Ca'ostemma purpureum*), are abundant beneath the Red Gum trees to the left of the track. These lilies bear yellow and purple flowers in spring on the ends of the 0.6 metre-long stems, and produce grape-like clusters of "berries" in late summer. Motorists are reminded not to drive off the prepared tracks. Not only do vehicles frighten animals, but they destroy vegetation and cause scars which, in dry mallee soils, may remain as eyesores for many years.

Vehicles also spread weeds. Patches of the noxious weed Caltrop (*Tribulus terrestris*), have been growing in some spots near this track and have left behind an abundance of hard spiny fruits which easily lodge in tyres and may thus be transported far and wide.

In a national park, any plant introduced from overseas or distant parts of Australia is a weed since it is an intruder and is out of balance with the local vegetation.



8 Can you guess how the large, almost bare expanse on the right of the trail originated?

As far as we can tell it probably developed in the following fashion:

- ① Sheep and rabbits overgrazed the vegetation in the early days, particularly during drought. Wind eroded the bare sand. Driving sand grains helped to cut down the remaining vegetation.
- ② Clay subsoil, slightly saline, was exposed. Rainwater raced unimpeded across the surface, causing yet more erosion. Salt concentrated at the surface by upwards seepage and evaporation.
- ③ 1900. National Park created. Grazing of stock ceased and rabbits were gradually brought under control. Salt tolerant marsh plants gradually recolonized the land on their own accord.
- ④ Worst-affected sections were ploughed by Park staff, in order to retain moisture and trap moving sand grains. Even with this

assistance and rigorous control of rabbits, it will still take many, many years for the original vegetation type and dune form to be restored.

9 From the track near peg 9, you can look out over Lake Hattah and the channel which connects Lakes Hattah and Bulla. In 1965, a small weir was built at the northern end of Lake Hattah in order to prevent water from flowing back into the Murray River when a flood recedes.

10 The grove of River Red Gum and Black Box saplings along the track at this point was created by the record floods of 1956. Only one or two of these seedlings need survive to maturity in order to ensure the continuation of the forest in this locality.

11 Enjoy the good view of Lake Bulla (on left) and Lake Arawak (on right) from this point.

The spreading trees with the dark furrowed bark growing along the shores of the lakes here are Black Box (*Eucalyptus largiflorens*). These trees retain dead bark on the trunk thus building up the rough, flaky texture. Black Box grows higher up the slopes (and further away from the lakes) than River Red Gum. Being termite and rot-resistant, Black Box timber is highly prized for fence posts in Mallee districts.



12 The lakes in the Hattah Lakes/Kulkyne system fill via Chalka Creek every time there is a major flood on the Murray River. Since the record floods of 1956, this has happened in 1960, 1964, 1966, and on several occasions since 1970. Inflows may be frequent enough to keep water in the system for years on end, but often the lakes dry up completely.

The various species of fish present in the Murray River are brought in with floods and remain until the water recedes. The introduced European Carp is common.

13 Kangaroos and emus are occasionally seen in the grassland in this vicinity. However, the best time to see kangaroos is in the early morning or evening, and visitors must be prepared to walk (quietly).

14 The trail passes beside a stand of Moonah (*Melaleuca lanceolata*) as it skirts around Black Box Waterhole. This shallow claypan retains water very well and fills quickly from rainwater. Ducks, herons and other water fowl, frogs and tortoises appear as if from nowhere when this happens.



15 Some fifty metres to the left is a small fenced plot around a gnarled old Umbrella Wattle (*Acacia osswaldi*).



In the early days, groves of Umbrella Wattle were widespread throughout the lakes section of the Park. Old trees progressively die, and no young ones have arisen to take their place. Several plots have been fenced to exclude all grazing animals (specifically rabbits), but still no seedlings have appeared. It is possible that the seeds require a bush-fire for germination and investigations to test this view are in progress.

16 Rejoin the two-way section of the trail at this point.

17 Colours on the trunks of the Red Gums are often mottled due to the shedding of old dark-coloured bark in patches. This reveals new living bark, very pale or white in colour, which gradually turns darker as it matures.

18 It is possibly a century or more since Aborigines cut away the living bark from the "canoe tree" on the right of the track to leave the characteristic scar still visible on the tree trunk. The Latjilatji tribe, which occupied the land from Chalka Creek to Mildura, was about 50 strong when recorded in the early 1860's. The tribe gradually declined until the last survivor, Mary Woolong, died in Mildura on November 11, 1942.



19 The pale grey wildflowers scattered near the peg are Woolly Scurf-pea (*Psoralea eriantha*), which superficially resembles the Desert Chinese-lantern (peg 1). However, the Scurf-pea bears mauve pea-shaped flowers in spring and has leaves made up of three separate leaflets.

20 There is some doubt as to whether "sand-blows" such as the one on the right originated through natural causes, by over-grazing of sheep and rabbits or from Aboriginal camps in the shelter of the dunes.

Whatever the cause, in the absence of rabbits now the vegetation is regenerating slowly of its own accord.

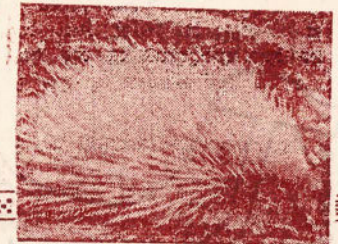
ON COMPLETING the trail you may turn left to rejoin the Murray Valley Highway, or take the road to the right past the site of the former Ranger's cottage (marked by a small grove of planted shrubs) and on to the camping ground.

National parks have two main aims:

- ★ to protect indigenous plant and animal wildlife and features of special scenic, scientific or historical interest.
- ★ to provide for the education and enjoyment of the people. In order that the parks may remain unimpaired visitors should take a pride in them and care for them.

Remember!

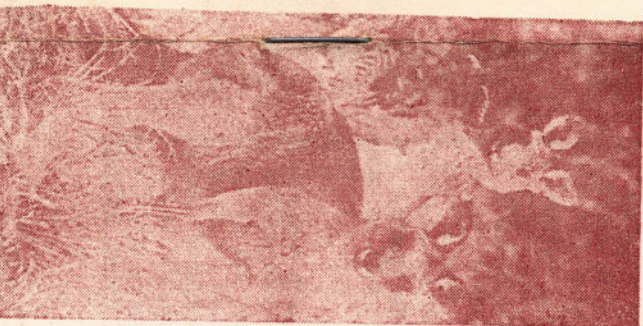
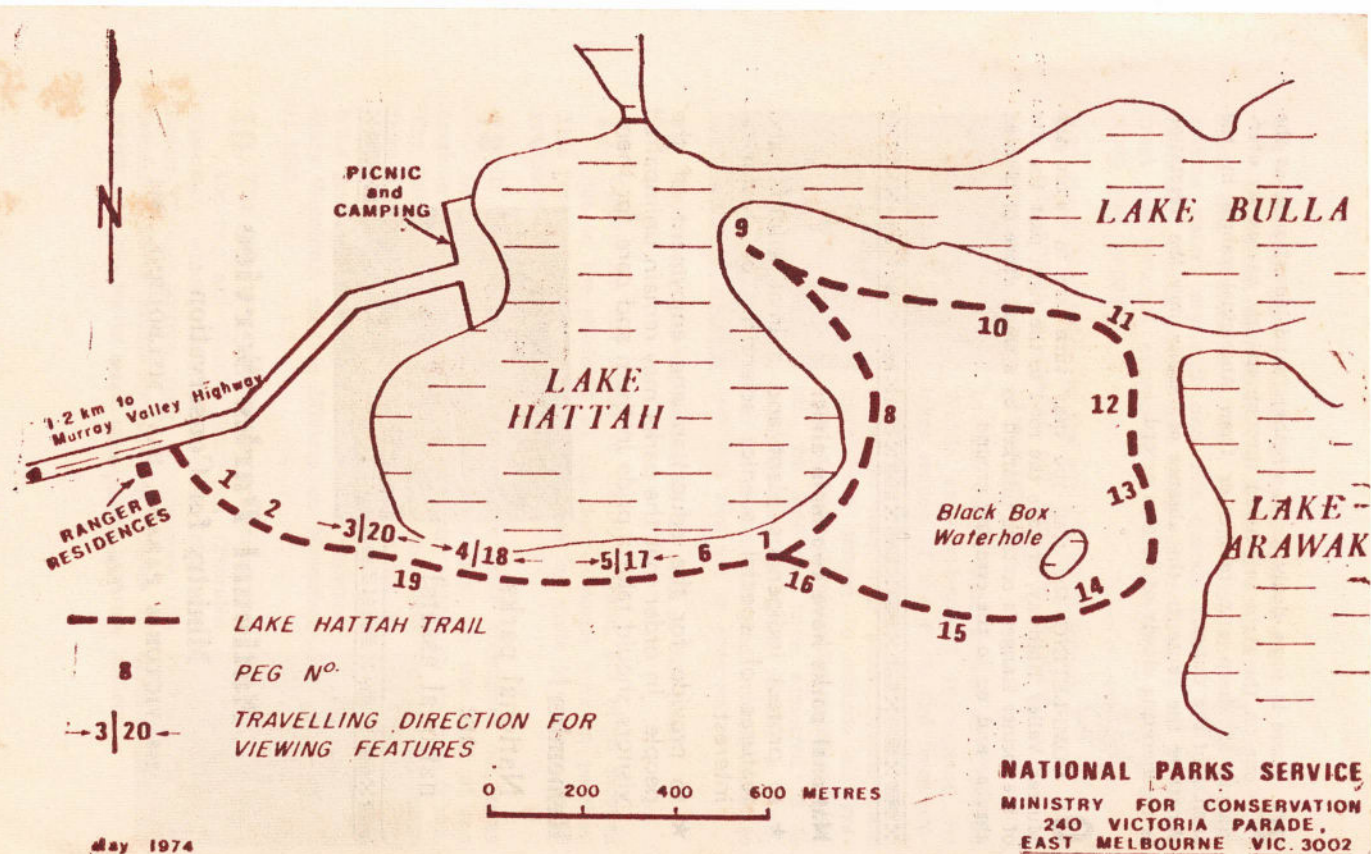
National parks
are
national assets!



National Parks Service Ministry for Conservation

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