

Things change. The drive from the city of Canberra to the foothills of the mighty Brindabellas is eerily different these days. Since the bush-fire holocaust of summer 2003 the pine plantations that had carpeted the slopes with pine needles and dense green foliage are no more.

The only legacies are wind rows of dead pine saplings, serving to control erosion, and the short, blackened stumps of former plantation giants. Useful conifer stems have been whisked away to the mills, to remove the charred evidence of the January 2003 fire storms and to exploit their remaining worth.

It's easy to be wise after the event, but

CAPITAL GAINS

Although scorched by bushfires the Brindabella

Ranges near Canberra cop an **ALLAN WHITING** thumbs-up

a wide corridor between the native forests of the Brindabellas and the suburban pine plantations would have prevented the alpine blaze igniting the pines – and the houses on Canberra's outskirts.

The National Parks Association of NSW quotes figures that prove the lightning-ignited and drought-fed blazes of 2003 were beyond control, given our strained fire fighting resources, and they well may be right.

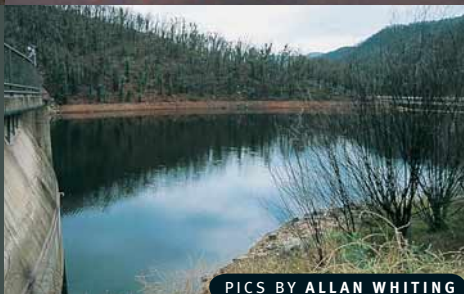
The NPA claims that more than 100 fires were ignited by freak electrical storms on January 8, 2003 and within hours were blazing out of control in remote country.

A fleet of Skycrane choppers might have suppressed the fires before they took hold, but we don't have them do we? Funny, we seem to be able to afford to go warring in foreign countries against imagined threats, but can't afford to defend our own land against real ones...

We wanted to check out the damage, which is why we went Nissan Trekking in the Brindabellas in early 2004. We found much of the countryside burnt out, but recovering, and some of it untouched.

Our trek kicked off at the Cotter Campground, just across the Murrumbidgee River Bridge, on Cotter Road.

Brindabella Road climbs through burnt-out hills on its way to the cross roads at Piccadilly Circus, changing from bitumen to well-graded



PICS BY ALLAN WHITING



gravel just before the Namadgi National Park boundary.

Although the plantation pines have succumbed to the fire most of the natives are recovering, sprouting fronds of juvenile foliage as they struggle through the rebirthing process. They looked somewhat like giant cactuses, with most of their limbs gone and oversized leaves coating their surviving trunks, but they're alive.

Log trucks have been regulars on Brindabella Road for many years, but they're more numerous since the fire clean-up began, so keep an eye out for their tell-tale dust clouds and don't cut blind corners.

There are several drive options emanating from the cross roads at Piccadilly Circus, but we chose the Mt Franklin Road and the Bendora Dam Road for our off-road excursions. The road is well maintained and remains open

in winter, unless the snow falls are very heavy. Cross country skiing is popular when the road is open.

The fires spared much of the Mt Ginini and Mt Franklin area, so we had some respite from driving between rows of recovering natives and could enjoy an unburnt bush experience.

Mt Franklin walking track was closed when we visited, because of the risk of falling dead trees, but the road to Mt Ginini was open.

The Mt Franklin Road runs along the edge of Namadgi National Park and is easily trafficable by soft-roaders, even in wet weather. The short climb to the Mt Ginini summit is rougher, but negotiable with care.

At the summit there's an interesting air navigation facility that most Sydney-Melbourne aircraft rely upon and magnificent views of the Brindabella Ranges to the west and Kosciusko National Park to the south.

If this short trail excites your interest in Namadgi there's an extensive network of tracks through the Park, running off Tourist Drive 5, a visitors' centre on Nass Road and campsites at the end of Orroral Road and Apollo Road. There are also 160km of walking trails.

There's a side track down to Bendora Dam off the Mt Franklin Road that's well worth the drive and short walk. Namadgi's granite outcrops line the narrow, steep track and are even more stark than usual in burnt-out areas.

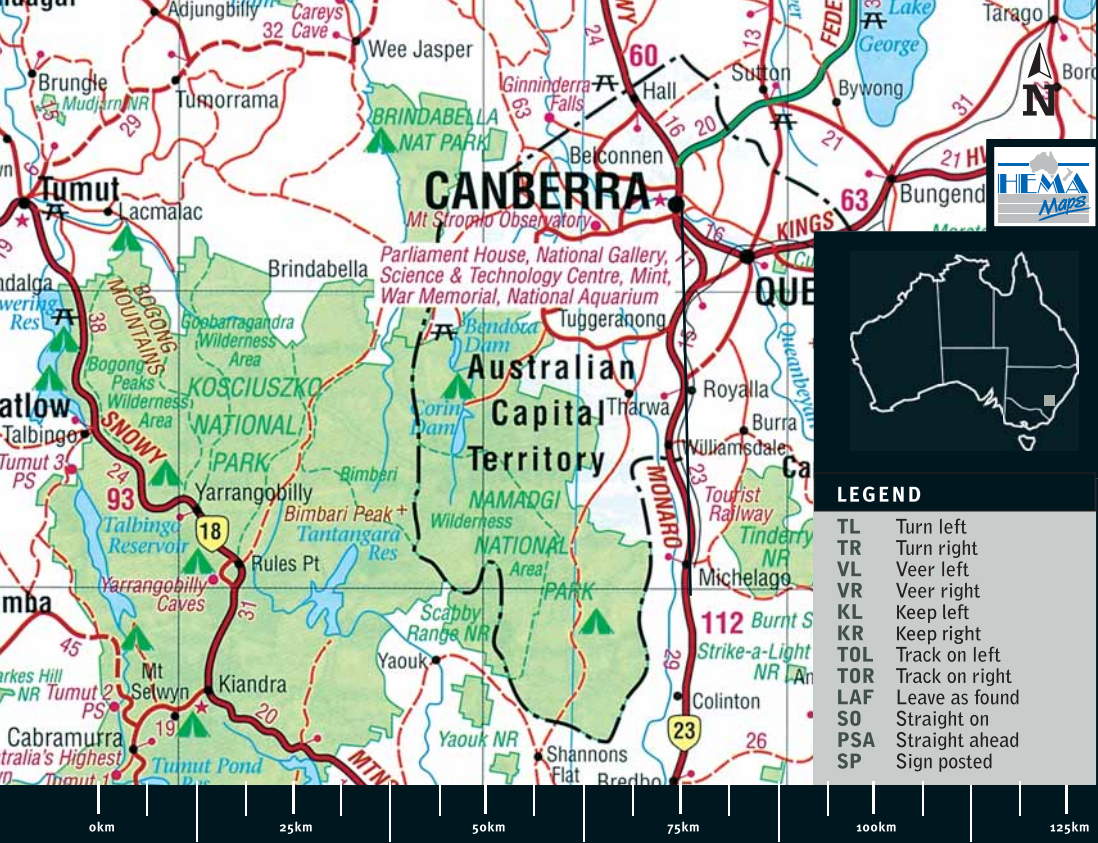
After our side track excursion we rejoined Brindabella Road at Piccadilly Circus and continued northwards towards Tumut. The once-wide road narrows dramatically beyond Piccadilly Circus, there are many tight bends and the surface isn't as well maintained, but it's still soft-roader territory. The descent ends at the beautiful Brindabella Valley, where there's riverside bush camping available, and the road turns right towards Tumut just beyond a narrow bridge.

The well graded road then enters Buccleuch State Forest, so you need to keep a look out for log trucks once more. This region was

Logging trucks are regulars so keep an eye out for them



The delights of Brindabella Valley (above); the Mt Ginini countryside (below); immerse yourself in Buccleuch State Forest's greenery (far right)



spared by the 2002-3 fires and has a mixture of native trees and plantation pines, clustered on hillsides that provide views of the surrounding mountains.

We took the Nottingham Road turn-off to Wee Jasper, but an alternative route is via Wee Jasper Road, about eight kilometres to the north. This alternative may be necessary if tree-felling work in the State Forest closes Nottingham Road.

Nottingham Road starts as a flat run through the Forest, but then descends steeply through pastoral country to a beautiful campground at Micalong Creek Reserve, just four kilometres from Wee Jasper. From there, it's an attractive, winding drive on good dirt and bitumen to the Hume Highway at Yass. For those who wish to loop back to Canberra, Mountain Creek Road is a scenic south-running option.

We drove from Canberra to Micalong Creek Reserve in one day, but a two-day Trek would allow more bush-walking time.

ACCOMMODATION AND SUPPLIES

There are city facilities in Canberra and camping areas at Brindabella Valley, Namadgi National Park, Micalong Swamp, Micalong Creek Reserve and Wee Jasper.

There are tight bends and tricky surfaces but softies can tackle this

Fuel and food are available in Canberra, at Wee Jasper and in Yass.

PERMITS AND RESTRICTIONS

No permits are necessary to travel the planned route, but severe winter conditions may close some roads. Camping fees are payable.

TREK TIMING

The Brindabellas are a year-round destination, provided the roads are passable. However, freak snowstorms have occurred outside the gazetted snow season, so carry emergency food, water and warm clothing.

MAPS

A detailed road atlas, such as Hema's *Australia Road Atlas*, and the Namadgi National Park 'mud map' are adequate.

For more on the Brindabella region read *On A Mountain High*, in our April 2002 issue. To buy a copy call magshop on 136 116. ✕

4x4 VEHICLE RECOMMENDATION

✕ This trek is navigable by a soft-roader (no low-range gearing) that's running on tyres that aren't pure street rubber and have good tread depth. Vehicles with 'toy' inflatable spares shouldn't attempt it.

For more treks and four-wheel drive information check out the Nissan website: nissan.com.au/patrol

NISSAN GREAT AUSSIE TREK NOTES

- | | |
|---|--|
| 0.0 (0.0) Zero trip. Cotter Campground, Murrumbidgee River Corridor. TL on Cotter Rd | 0.0 (0.0) Piccadilly Circus |
| 0.4 (0.4) TR. SP Brindabella, Brindabella Rd (beware log trucks) | 5.2 (5.2) SO at Y-intersection. SP Gentle Annie Trail |
| 7.5 (7.1) TL. SP Brindabella 30 km, Brindabella Rd | 10.2 (5.0) SO at T-intersection. SP Brindabella Valley Rd |
| 16.9 (9.4) Gravel road | 10.5 (0.3) TR at Y-intersection. SP Tumut 70km |
| 21.3 (4.3) Namadgi National Park boundary | 10.9 (0.4) Narrow wooden bridge |
| 25.3 (4.0) VL at Piccadilly Circus. SP Mt Franklin Rd | 21.7 (10.8) Buccleuch State Forest. SO at numerous logging track intersections |
| 28.6 (3.3) Bulls Head picnic area | 27.7 (6.0) VL at Y-intersection. SP Ridge Rd |
| 28.8 (0.2) SO at T-intersection. SP Bendora Dam | 34.8 (7.1) TR at Nottingham Rd. Zero trip. (Note: there's bush camping two kilometres ahead on Brindabella Rd at Micalong Swamp.) |
| 29.0 (0.2) SO at gate. LAF | 0.0 (0.0) Nottingham Rd |
| 33.5 (4.5) SO at Y-intersection | Zero Trip Meter |
| 42.5 (9.0) SO at gate. LAF | 3.5 (3.5) SO at T-intersection. SP Limestone Creek Rd |
| 44.9 (2.4) SO at gate. LAF | 6.4 (2.9) SO at T-intersection. SP Ridge Rd |
| 49.6 (4.7) TR to Mt Ginini summit | 12.2 (5.8) SO at T-intersection. SP Nottingham Rd |
| 49.7 (0.1) SO at gate. LAF | 13.0 (0.8) Grid |
| 50.4 (0.7) Mt Ginini parking area. Return to main track | 17.0 (4.0) Grid |
| 51.2 (0.8) TL on Mt Franklin Rd | 18.1 (1.1) Grid |
| 71.9 (20.7) TR at T-intersection. SP Bendora Dam. | 18.5 (0.4) Grid |
| Zero Trip Meter | 18.9 (0.4) Wooden bridge |
| 0.0 (0.0) Bendora Dam intersection | 20.7 (1.8) Grid |
| 0.1 (0.1) SO at gate. LAF | 22.9 (2.2) Grid |
| 3.3 (3.2) VR at T-intersection. SP Bendora Dam. Gate. LAF | 24.8 (1.9) Grid |
| 7.2 (3.9) SO at T-intersection | 25.1 (0.3) Micalong Creek Reserve |
| 10.5 (3.3) Bushrangers Creek. Narrow bridge | 27.4 (2.3) Swinging Bridge Reserve |
| 12.5 (2.0) Narrow bridge | 28.2 (0.8) Grid |
| 14.3 (1.8) Bendora Dam parking area. Return to Mt Franklin Rd | 29.8 (1.6) SO. SP Wee Jasper Station |
| 28.6 (14.3) TR on Mt Franklin Rd | 30.9 (1.1) SO. SP Rangers Office |
| 32.1 (3.5) TL at Piccadilly Circus. SP Brindabella Rd. | 31.0 (0.1) TR. SP Wee Jasper 4km, Yass 56km |
| Zero Trip Meter | 34.8 (3.8) Wee Jasper Village |