



Looking for a cracking weekend up in the Victorian High Country without a massive drive out of town? Then head to Baw Baw National Park, well-known for skiing and snow play in the winter months and terrific hiking in the off-season ‘green’ summer months. From beginners trying out their first backcountry experience to ultralight trail runners crossing the plateau in a day, this national park covers over 13,500-hectares of the Baw Baw Plateau has plenty of options for all the adventurers out there.

*Baw Baw* is thought to be a Gunai/Kurnai word meaning ‘echo’, though Woiwurrung translations of *bo-ye* ‘ghost’ or *bo bo* ‘bandicoot’ are also documented. The National Park is the traditional country of the Gunaikurnai and Wurundjeri Peoples and covers a vast area of the plateau with plenty of outdoor activities available throughout the year.



*The green summer months in Baw Baw National Park offer plenty of options for hikers and mountain bikers.*

## Getting there

The backcountry can be accessed from the south – via unsealed Mount Erica Road, the east – via unsealed Mount Saint Gwinear Road, and the north – via unsealed Thompson Valley Road. These logging roads can be rough in places, but in dry weather are easily managed. For summer hiking, the most straightforward way to get up into the mountains is to drive to the Mount Baw Baw Alpine Resort. Travel from Melbourne takes approximately 2 hours and 40 minutes along a well-maintained bitumen road. It gets windy and narrow at times towards the end, and outside the declared snow season, free entry and parking are available. During the “white” winter season, usually from the June long weekend through to October, chains on vehicle tyres are required.



*You can also hike the trails during the winter months but be prepared for snow.*

As Victoria is currently in a CovidSafe Summer, it’s critical to check current travel conditions both when planning for and during any regional travel. As always if anyone is feeling unwell, stay home and get tested. If it’s safe to do so, consider supporting local dining and accommodation options in the region. The Village Central

Restaurant at Baw Baw Resort offers spectacular views over the Gippsland region and is a great place to grab a coffee and enjoy a bite to eat before heading off on the trails.

There are multiple trail options along the Baw Baw Plateau, so feel free to mix up these suggestions to tailor-make your own hiking experience. This article focuses on an overnight return trip out from the alpine resort to Talbot Hut ruin, with several options for side-trips if your time allows. It’s also important to remember that when exploring the alps, snow can occur any month of the year. Wearing layers and packing suitable cold-weather gear with a decent sleeping bag is always recommended, even in the warmer summer months.



*The ‘green’ summer months on the Summit Trail are a contrast to the ‘white’ winter landscape.*



## Day 1

Time to get on the trails! A great way to start the journey is at the south-eastern end of the alpine resort. Follow the Summit Trail as it winds its way up the mountain, and offers glimpses of the valleys between the snow gums and alpine resort. Towards the top, scrubby paths lead into the surveyor's cairn and the official peak of Mount Baw Baw. The summit is thickly surrounded by snow gums and although beautiful, they make it difficult to gain any vantage point over the surrounding landscape. Instead, a further 100 metres along the Summit Trail, brings us to Mueller's Lookout, with an excellent opportunity to enjoy the surroundings as you take in the sweeping views of the Baw Baw Plateau.



*A beautiful sunset over the surrounding peaks.*

From the lookout, a few return trail options lead back to the resort and out into the National Park beyond, but in my experience, it's best to continue towards the Five Ways and then out the back on the Village Trail. Other routes like Tanjil Link are bike-only paths during the summer, so check the resort's [summer maps](#) to see which trails are suitable for hikers. There's an information sign at the trailhead into the National Park where the 1.5 km link track between the alpine resort and the [Australian Alps Walking Track](#) (AAWT) offers a teaser of the sensational alpine scenery Baw Baw has to offer. The gentle rises drop down out of the snow gum and mountain ash forests into wide expanses of alpine heath fields. Thoughtful boardwalks take hikers over the delicate sphagnum moss bogs, both protecting the fragile alpine environment and keeping [boots dry](#) at the same time.



*Saint Phillack trail junction amongst gnarled snow gum woodlands.*

Once at the AAWT junction, take a right and a mere 80 metres brings us to our next destination. Saint Phillack Saddle affords great eastern views over the Thompson Reservoir and surrounds, and also back west towards the heavily-timbered Mount Baw Baw. Now on the Australian Alps Walking Track, the path continues over the timbered Mount Saint Phillack and the plateau's highest summit. We then head downhill, to a rocky outcropping and small overhanging rock shelter. The undulating trail navigates through stout and gnarled snow gum woodlands and continues southeast across the plateau past spectacular wildflowers in the open patches of alpine heath. Keep an eye out for endemic [snow gentians](#) in bloom, as they are only found here on the plateau and nowhere else. Bush-pea, daisy bush, and alpine pepper are also discovered along the track.



*Talbot Hut ruins where just the brick chimney remains.*

Dispersed backcountry [camping](#) is permitted anywhere along the Baw Baw Plateau, but please remember to pack your [fuel stove](#) as open fires are not permitted to protect the alpine environment.

It's worth continuing right along the plateau to the Talbot Hut ruins, 8 km from the link track earlier. This site features the remains of the brick chimney of Talbot Hut and offers a wide-open area for camping, plus a reliable stream for water – just remember to [boil or filter](#) all water to ensure there are no troubles on the trail.



*Mount Erica offers hikers an opportunity to walk from one end of Baw Baw Plateau to the other.*



If time permits and you’re up for more exploring, Mount Erica is the final and southernmost named peak of the plateau. There’s also Mushroom Rocks, an interesting outcropping of large granite tors just a bit further beyond. The rocks are great to explore, but the fairly steep 250-meter descent down the side of Mount Erica, means you are committed to the return ascent back to camp. I’ll let you decide!



*My Zempire Atom Hiking Tent is pitched for the night at Saint Phillack Saddle.*

## Day 2

Once up and underway it’s time to return on the Australian Alps Walking Track and start heading northwest. It’s not all straight back to the carpark though, as there are a couple of side-trip options to explore today.

Back at the rock shelter, the Saint Gwinear trail turns off to the right. Keep an ear out for the local frogs as the track dips down to open boggy heathland before heading up to the dry, rocky summit of Mount Saint Gwinear. Hikers are rewarded with wide-open views over the Thompson and onto the Victorian Alps far beyond. The peak sure does make an excellent place for lunch.



*Rolling peaks over the open heathland before the track heads up to Saint Gwinear summit.*

Returning to the AAWT, continue back to Saint Phillack Saddle. For hikers wanting some extra kilometres on Day 2, a further 5 km north leads walkers to the Whitelaw Hut ruins, another heritage site where only the stone chimney remains.

When it’s time to head home, take the link track back to the Mount Baw Baw Alpine Resort. Once out of the park boundary and at the signpost again, either choice of left or right on the Village Trail will take a wide arc around the Baw Baw summit, returning to the alpine village and the carpark.



*There are so many trail options for hikers to enjoy the Baw Baw Plateau.*

## Other options

After a rewarding weekend away hiking, you’ll be eager to return and explore one of the many other trails. The Great Walhalla Alpine Trail (41 km) between the quiet village of Walhalla and covering the first leg of the AAWT through to the alpine resort, offers a challenging yet rewarding experience. Alternatively, Mount Erica carpark to Stronachs camping area (27 km) offers hikers an opportunity to walk from one end of the Baw Baw Plateau to the other.

**What’s your favourite season to visit Baw Baw National Park?**