

# GOLDFIELDS TRACK, VIC

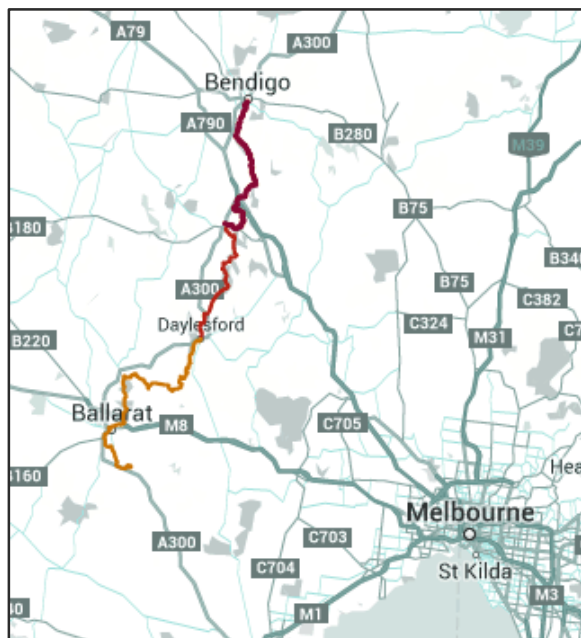


## BALLARAT – DAYLESFORD – CASTLEMAINE - BENDIGO

Linking the great gold rush cities of Ballarat and Bendigo, the 210km Goldfields Track takes bushwalkers and mountain-bikers through some of Central Victoria's most historic towns and beautiful forests.

The Goldfields Track is actually three inter-locked tracks:

- **Wallaby Track** (90km) from Mt Buninyong (20km south of Ballarat) to Daylesford – though we shall start our **73km** adventure at Ballarat Railway Station. Much of this track contours what was once a productive working forest on-top the Great Dividing Range.
- **Dry Diggings Track** (60km) from Daylesford to Castlemaine is arguably one of the best stretches of single-track in the country. From wet temperate forests on top of the Great Dividing Range to the drier northern plains near Castlemaine.
- **Leanganook Track** (58km) from Castlemaine to Bendigo offers more spectacular scenery; from the granite tors around Mt Alexander, to the golden plains near Bendigo. From gold rush relics to the (operational) engineering marvel that is the Coliban Water System, heritage abounds on this track.



*... Riding the Goldfields Track completely exceeded my expectations. It's a rewarding expedition that offers beautiful scenery along with fantastic food and history ...*

**Wil Barrett**

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## THE RIDE

### **Wallaby Track** : *Ballarat - Daylesford* 73km

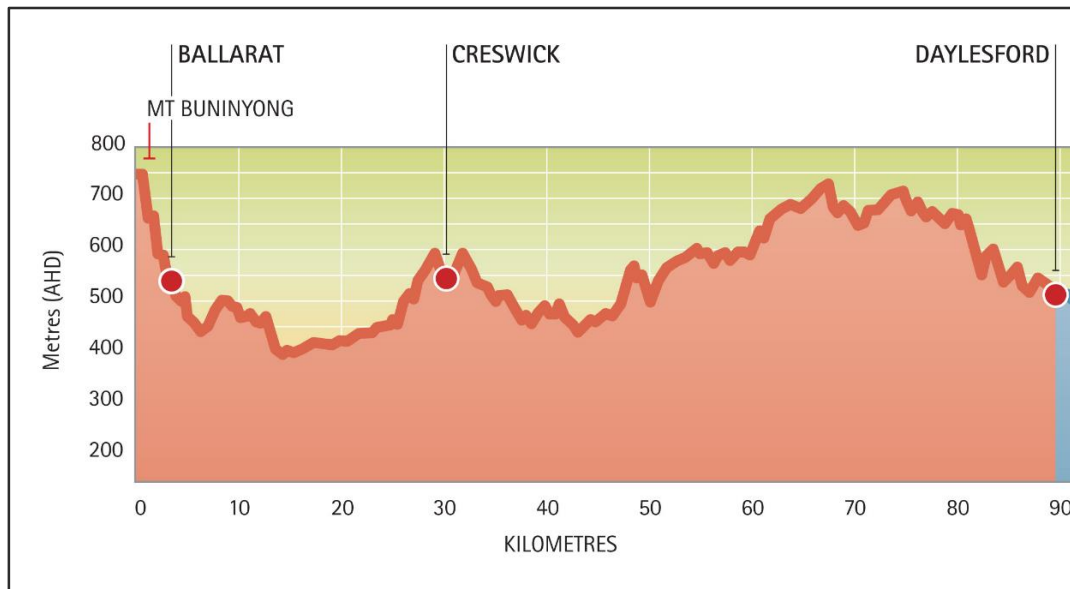
Swagmen used to talk about “taking to the wallaby track” and swamp wallabies are common in the regrowth messmate and peppermint forest on top of the Divide.

From an ancient volcano above the gracious township of Buninyong, the Wallaby Track heads through the heart of stately Ballarat, plunges into a gold rush era churned landscape and on to Norman Lindsay’s home town of Creswick. From there, it’s uphill past St Georges Lake and rolling pastoral countryside ringed by volcanic hills to contour next to the state’s longest timber tramway system and a traverse through an impressive one kilometre long railway cutting on a long abandoned railway line. More tall forest with a side trip to Sailors Falls delivers you to the cluster of mineral spas waiting for weary bodies and feet at Daylesford and Hepburn Springs.

- **Ballarat – Creswick** (25km)  
Bitumen soon gives way to dirt, and gentle gradients soon give way to lung-busting climbs as you head into the Dividing Range. Long sections of single-track through open native forest have recently been upgraded by Dirt Art on the roll into and out of Creswick; it’s great riding and there are a few climbs to test the legs. Rest up and refuel in Creswick for the fun ahead.
- **Creswick – Wombat Station** (29km)  
Exiting Creswick Regional Park there is some well-timed respite for weary legs as the Wallaby Track takes you along rolling roads (mostly bitumen) that afford beautiful views across the fertile lava fields. Back into Wombat Forest it’s more great single-track mixed in amongst fascinating gold rush relics and amazing engineering feats. Take a break at the Wombat Station rotunda, built on the grassy platform of a long gone railway station.
- **Wombat Station – Daylesford** (19km)  
The forest is greener in these higher parts and some stands of natives appear sky high. Try the waters at the Sailors Falls mineral springs, you may need the nourishment as there is still some serious climbing to be done. By the time you reach Daylesford you will know you’ve covered just over 70km.



Google Maps: Ballarat – Daylesford (73km)



Elevation Profile: Ballarat - Daylesford

## **Dry Diggings Track** : *Daylesford – Castlemaine 60km*

Australia's first National Heritage Park, the Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park was created in 2002 in recognition of the region's intimate association with the Victorian gold rush era. From the wet temperate forests on top of the Divide to the dry northern plains, it's a roller coaster journey for most of the way and not recommended for the inexperienced walker or novice rider. At its outset, the walking track contours on steep slopes above Sailors Creek, hidden away in forest from the mineral spa towns of Daylesford and Hepburn Springs. The bike route goes through town before rejoining the shared use track at Golden Springs. Soon after, your arrival at the spectacular erosion columns of Beehive Gully acts as a fitting introduction to the typical narrow, high-walled gullies pockmarked with mine shafts and riddled with stone ruins, encountered throughout this track. What you are traversing in places like Browns, Sebastopol and Sailors gullies is an open air museum consisting of a century and a half of old mining artefacts – a ghostly, abandoned landscape fading back into bush.

- **Daylesford – Chocolate Mill (8km)**

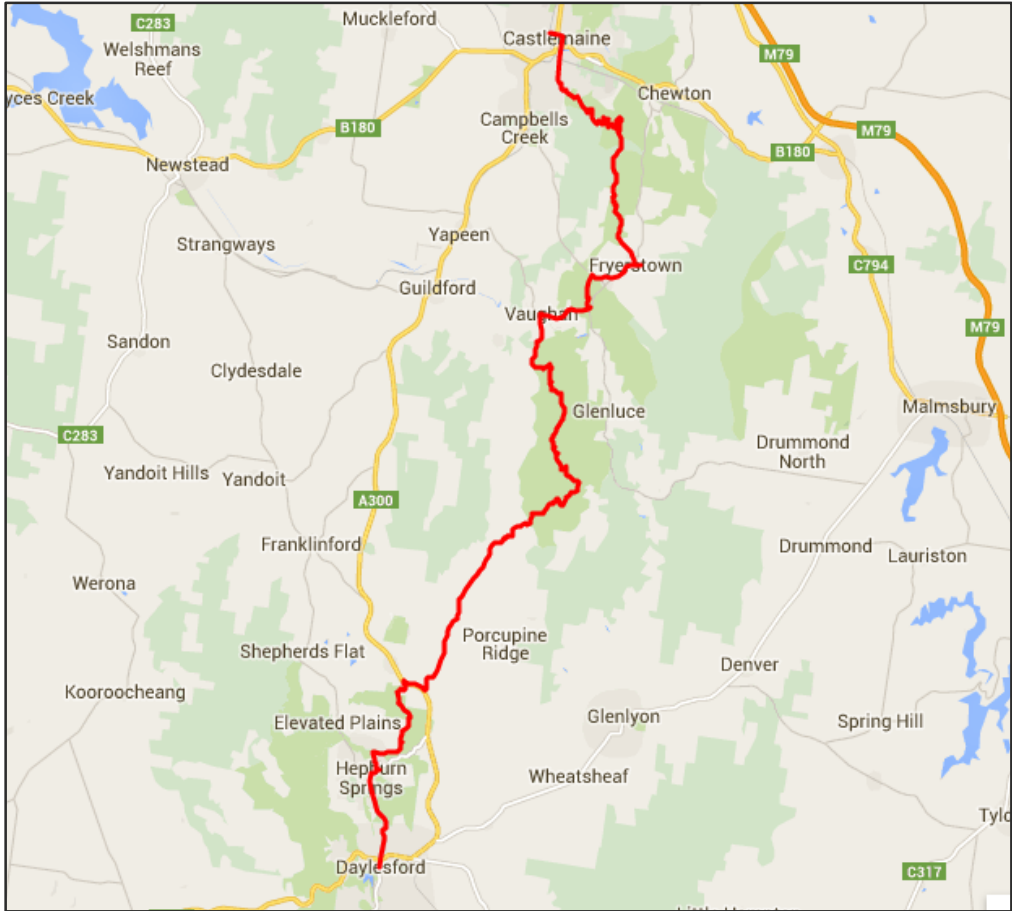
Again it's easy to be fooled by the long descent from Daylesford to Hepburn Springs, these first few kilometers belie the truth that is to come. The steep climbing through the northern end of the Hepburn Regional Park will make you feel as though Daylesford is trying to draw you back, but once past the Chocolate Mill and the letterboxes at Sawpit Gully Rd you will be set free into the sweet single-track of the Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park.

- **Chocolate Mill – Vaughan Springs (21km)**

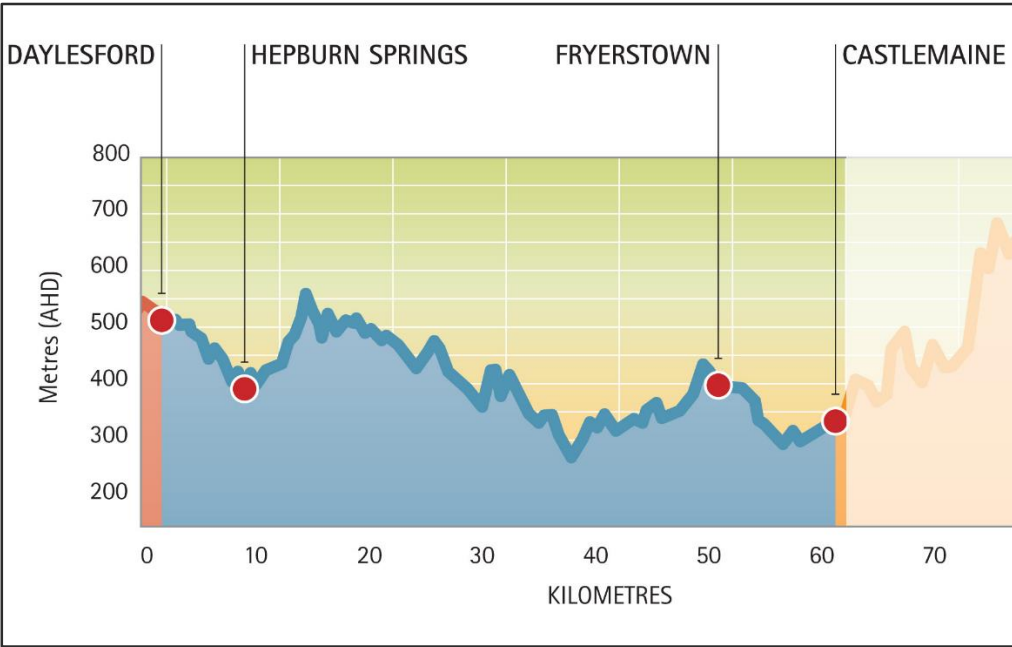
Now on the northern side of the Dividing Range you'll find drier, rockier terrain and stands of box eucalypts jostling for position in unforgiving soils. Soon you'll cross Porcupine Ridge Rd and start what is widely acknowledged as the best mountain biking section along the entire length of the Goldfields Track. A gradual descent, the track winds through fascinating old mine sites, long vanished villages and awesome geological features before dropping into the beautiful Vaughan Springs picnic area.

- **Vaughan Springs - Castlemaine (19km)**

From this point there is a brief section of tarmac before the track re-enters the forest and winds toward Fryerstown. Dense bushland is occasionally broken by moonscape-like clearings revealing vast expanses of reef rock; look closely and you may spot a remnant streak of gold passing under your tyres. More flowy single-track takes you past the Spring Gully mine site and following a steep pinch up the Monk you arrive at the Poverty Gully water race - this engineering marvel still carries water to paying customers 140 years after its construction. Nowadays it doubles as a shared walking and cycling trail providing an unforgettable finish to a great day's riding.



Google Maps: Daylesford – Castlemaine (60km)



Elevation Profile: Daylesford – Castlemaine

## **Leanganook Track** : *Castlemaine – Bendigo* 58km

An initiation site, Leanganook was the Aboriginal name for Mt Alexander.

The Leanganook Track completes the Goldfields Track's linkage of central Victoria's three 'golden' cities – Castlemaine, Bendigo and Ballarat. Gold rush era heritage abounds from Castlemaine and Bendigo's glorious streetscapes to the massive foundations for the giant Garfield water wheel and the ruins of a Welsh village and its associated slate quarry.

After heading up and over (for walkers) Mt Alexander's massive granite tors, the track joins the historic Coliban Water main channel (constructed in the 1870s, and still operating today). In its final stage, the track passes through forest dominated by black-trunked ironbarks. Wildflowers and orchids of many hues and varieties line your route in spring and summer. Before not too long you'll find yourself in Bendigo. Stay awhile and enjoy all that this vibrant and cosmopolitan town has to offer.

- **Castlemaine – Harcourt** (19km)

As you climb through the Chewton bushlands towards and beyond the imposing Garfield Water Wheel, spare a thought for the tens of thousands of miners working these once denuded gullies in searing heat, without water and with seemingly few rights as human beings. Puts that back pain in perspective huh? The native woodlands of the Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park soon give way to pine plantations and the apple orchards of the Harcourt valley. Harcourt is the perfect place to grab a great coffee, something to eat and fill the water bottles before you push on towards Bendigo.

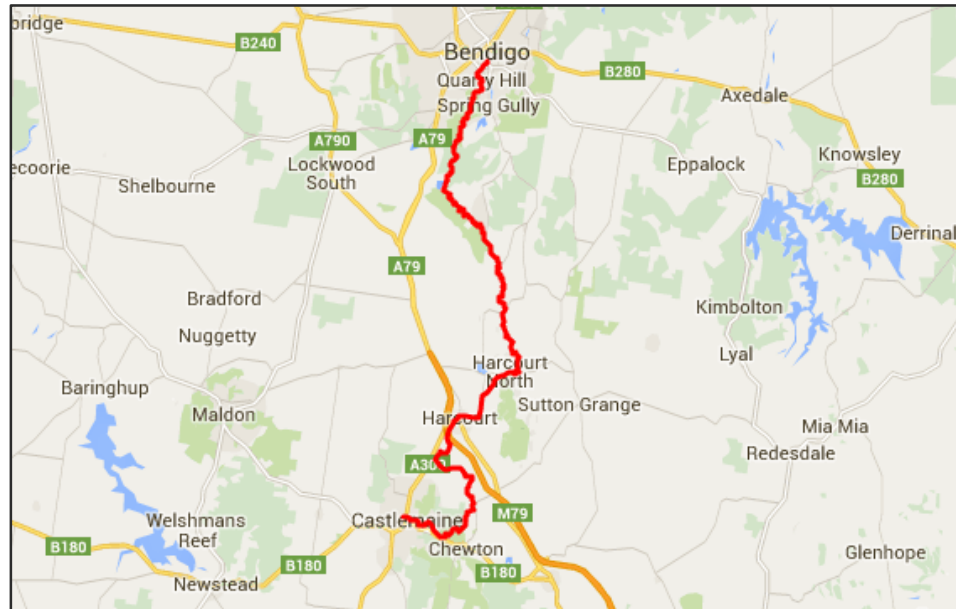
- **Harcourt – Springs Road** (16km)

As you climb back on the bike, whilst the walking route passes over Mount Alexander, riders are taken through Harcourt and around the Mount to rejoin the walking route on the Coliban Main Channel. The route through Harcourt takes you past Henry of Harcourt, drop in for a taste of their real cider. The recent announcement of funding for construction of a mountain bike park on the west flank of Mount Alexander will markedly improve the Goldfields Track experience for riders through the Harcourt area – so stay tuned. Orchards soon give way to grazing country as the old gravity fed water channel heads north. There are two tunnels through this section. Where water goes through riders must go over. Be sure to stop when cresting these climbs as the views are spectacular. Make sure you also stop to take in the extraordinary engineering features along the Coliban Main Channel, many still in operation after 140 years of service.

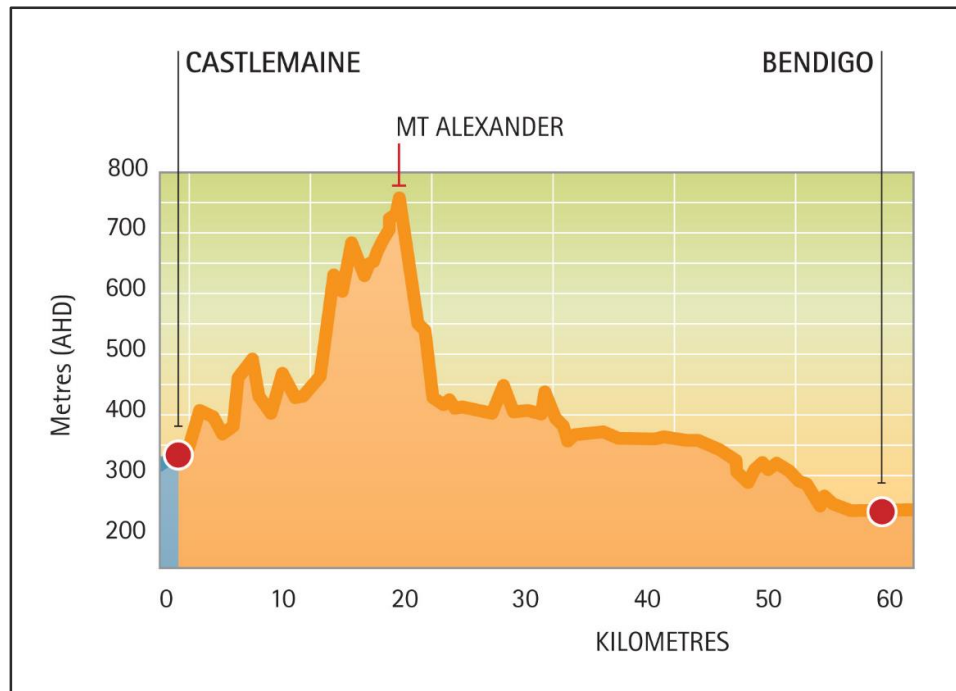
- **Springs Road – Bendigo** (23km)

While there are still a few pinches, the big climbs are done, so you can relax a bit. At Sandhurst Reservoir, one of many water storage facilities around Bendigo the track

enters the Bendigo Regional Park and follows mostly non-technical access tracks. The route passes endless mine relics and old water channels giving a sense of the intensity of mining operations during the gold rush era. Entry into Bendigo, unlike the Poverty Gully descent into Castlemaine, is at a relaxing pace on generous tracks and trails allowing time to wind down and reflect on your 191km Goldfields Track adventure.



Google Maps: Castlemaine – Bendigo (58km)



Elevation Profile: Castlemaine – Bendigo

## RE-FUEL & RECHARGE

Amazing ride aside, another great reason to experience the Goldfields Track is the gourmet produce; from delicious restaurants and cafés to inviting country pubs, wineries, cideries and breweries (and of course the indulgent Chocolate Mill).

- [Yellow Espresso Café](#), Ballarat
- [Old Hepburn Hotel](#), Hepburn Springs
- [Hepburn Bathhouse & Spa](#), Hepburn Springs
- [Chocolate Mill](#), Mt Franklin
- [Public Inn](#), Castlemaine
- [Re-Public Café](#), Castlemaine
- [Bress](#) (Winery & Cidery), Harcourt

## RIDE TIPS

- Take water. At present you won't find many drinking taps outside of towns, so using a 2-3L hydration pack is highly recommended.
- Suspension is smoother. Whilst there is a good dose of 4wd tracks and fire roads, single-track is strewn with chunky rocks.
- Tubeless is terrific. The shale and quartz of the Goldfields region is no friend of lightweight race tyres. Punctures and sidewall cuts are the most common mechanical experienced on the track, so take spares. A tubeless set-up will offer more protection, especially tyres with extra sidewall reinforcement (e.g. Maxxis EXO or Schwalbe SnakeSkin version tyres).