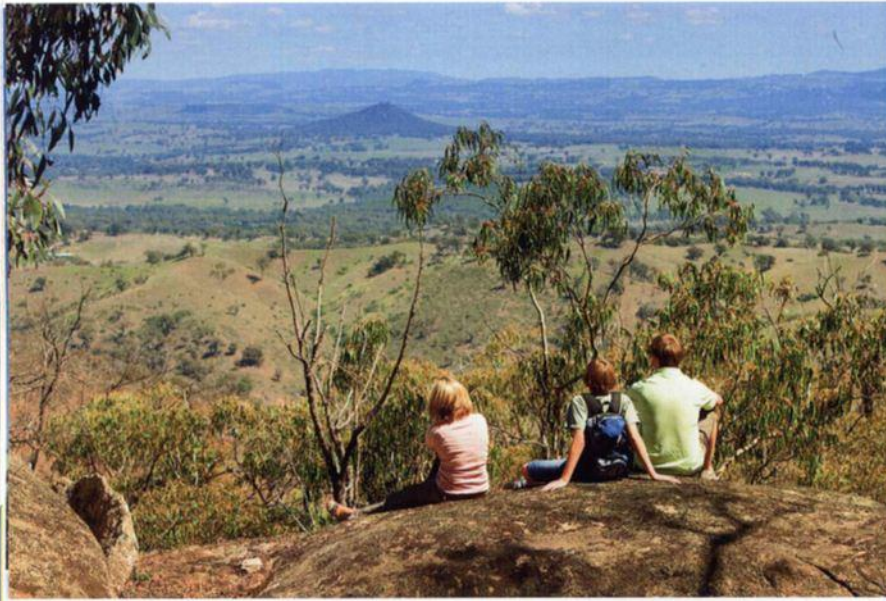


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RA | GOULBURN VALLEY



HUME WITH A VIEW

Strath Creek's picturesque cricket ground is just one surprise in this lovely pocket of central Victoria. Story: Tricia Welsh

We feel like Hume and Hovell – the original explorers of the area – as we turn off the Hume Fwy at Broadford and take in the unexpected and spectacular view at Murchison Gap on the southern edge of the Tallarook State Forest, 90km north of Melbourne.

Like us, maybe these two ill-matched explorers – they fought bitterly over many things, from which route to take, to who had claim to the party's frying pan – must not have believed their eyes when they encountered this valley on their expedition from Sydney to Port Phillip in 1824, having crossed rivers and streams, and finally trundled up the rugged mountain with their bullock drays.

So it's largely thanks to Hamilton Hume and William Hovell that today's visitors can easily find their way into these undulating pastoral lands dotted with stands of majestic gums and welcoming little communities in a region aptly called the Valley of a Thousand Hills.

Kangaroos might leap ahead of you, as if showing the way down the winding road to the tiny settlement of Strath Creek (population 262). A cairn near the pub celebrates the Hume and Hovell expedition which opened up vast tracts of grazing lands that earlier explorations had deemed "useless".

King parrots abound in the trees that edge King Parrot Creek, named by the same early explorers and filled now with

Macquarie perch and the odd platypus. Wombats are also frequent visitors; there's a resident one in the grounds around Strath Valley View B&B.

There's no record of Hume and Hovell having taken a bat and ball on their trek, but in these valleys their names are firmly linked to the summer game. We take a scenic track just south of Strath Creek – signposted: Hume & Hovell Cricket Ground. We're indeed expecting a cricket

LEFT | The sweeping vista from the edge of the Tallarook State Forest. ROB BLACKBURN / VISIONS OF VICTORIA

IT WAS A 'BUILD IT AND THEY WILL COME' PROJECT THAT NOW HOSTS 35 MATCHES A YEAR.

ground, but not quite a little slice of the old country flourishing in the Australian bush. It's a re-creation of an English ground – complete with pavilion, picket fence and a rose garden.

Established by local resident Don McQueen – who as an amateur cricketer enjoyed five playing tours to England – it was a 'build it and they will come' project that now sees some 35 matches a year played on the plush turf, more than at the MCG! Bunk accommodation in the Not Out Inn at the rear can cater for up to 26 – or two-and-a-bit cricket teams.

Not long ago, Don and his wife Anne recruited good friends and neighbours Shaunna O'Grady and

Chris Adshead to run the on-site Pavilion Cafe, Bar and Gallery, which is open 10am-4pm(ish) most weekends and public holidays. They serve terrific home-made fare – think country-style pies and Devonshire teas, and cater to cricketers' thirsts.

Don, a noted bush poet, often regales guests with his repertoire. A collection of cricket memorabilia – photographs, equipment and artworks – adorns the walls in the Long Room Gallery. Works by local artists are displayed in the adjacent gallery named for former Victorian and Australian captain Lindsay Hassett.

Howzat for a hidden gem in this glorious pocket of Victoria? ■

MORE

www.humeandhovell.com.au, 5784 9344,
www.strathvalleyview.com.au, 5784 9209,
www.goulburnrivervalley.com.au.
Tricia Welsh was hosted by Goulburn River Valley Tourism.

FAR LEFT | Walking in the Tallarook State Forest near Strath Creek.
ROB BLACKBURN / VISIONS OF VICTORIA

TOP LEFT | The Hume & Hovell Cricket Ground at Strath Creek.

BOTTOM LEFT | Driving through the Tallarook State Forest.
ROB BLACKBURN / VISIONS OF VICTORIA

