

History of Mt Majura

Living with Nature on your Doorstep

A Mountain with a fiery past

At 890 metres, Mt Majura is the highest peak in suburban Canberra. The creation of the Mountain dates back millions of years, as the direct result of violent volcanic activity. Once upon a time, the peak itself would have reached an impressive height of five kilometres.

The landscape you see today has developed and changed, shaped by over 425 million years of geological processes, climatic change and the evolution of plants and animals in the area. In more recent times, the impact of farming and agriculture as well as other land use practices has changed and will continue to change the environment of the Mountain.

The rocks on the lower slopes of Mt Majura show evidence of having been formed from the bed of a shallow tropical inland sea. This is supported by marine fossils found near to The Fair which includes brachiopods, corals, bryozoans, and trilobites. Amongst them is a beautiful specimen of *Batocara mitchelli*, a trilobite found during excavation of the John Gordon Building in central Canberra.

Around the peaks of Mt Majura and neighbouring Mt Ainslie, you can also see the evidence of the region's fiery volcanic past. There you can find the remains of volcanic ash flow and pumice fragments.



Mt Majura's varied past has left numerous fossils such as this beautiful example of a trilobite *Batocara mitchelli*
Courtesy Waltraud Pix.



This Mt Majura Scribbly Gum *Eucalyptus rossii* was standing tall when Captain Cook landed in Australia in year 1770. Courtesy Waltraud Pix.

Vegetation

Australia's current vegetation was shaped in the last 50 million years as the continent drifted towards warmer latitudes and the plants adapted to aridity, drought and poor soils. The vegetation patterns seen today were formed about 10,000 years ago.

Grazing in the Mt Majura area was quite popular from the 1830s through to about 1985. This resulted in the widespread loss of much of the native vegetation. The vegetation we see today is regrowth, with some remaining older trees still intact. The removal of trees altered nutrient cycles and diminished habitat and food supplies for birds and animals. Grazing and sheep droppings also encouraged the introduction of many weeds - which today, are being kept in check in the Mt Majura Nature Reserve by the dedicated work of volunteers, community groups and local Government.

The most common trees on the upper slopes of Mt Majura are Brittle Gum (*Eucalyptus mannifera*) and Scribbly Gums (*Eucalyptus rossii*). On the lower slopes, you find grassy woodland, featuring Yellow Box (*Eucalyptus melliodora*), Blakely's Red Gum (*Eucalyptus blakelyi*) and Apple Box (*Eucalyptus bridgesiana*). Mt Majura also has a diverse understorey of native bushes, grasses and wild flowers.



National Tree Planting Day. Friends of Mt Majura has 2-4 activities a month. Lend them a hand and have some fun too. Courtesy Friends of Waltraud Pix.

Indigenous Australian settlement

Aboriginals settled in the Canberra region around 21,000 years ago. Their presence indicates that there was sufficient food and material resources to support them, and trading with both inland groups and coastal groups extended their range of resources.

Mt Majura is covered in a hard rock called 'chert', which protrudes from the soil surface. Chert forms sharp shards when broken and was often used by Aboriginal people to make tools. The Ngannawal people are currently documenting some of their knowledge of land use practices in and around the ACT region so that it can be shared with the Canberra community.

Early European settlement

In 1825, the first squatters and sheep graziers appeared in the Canberra region, attracted by the area's naturally treeless grassy plains, the presence of water, good drainage and source of timber on the hills.

By the 1830s, the Campbell family had established the 'Duntroon' property on the Majura foothills. It is thought that Robert Campbell named Mt Majura after a place he had visited in India.

The region continued to attract early settler families and by the 1860s, the Darmody family arrived in the area and purchased lease holdings on Mt Majura for one pound per acre. A parish map of the Mt Majura area from 1911, shows that the Darmody family owned the majority of the Mt Majura land with a smaller holding still held by the Campbells.

Mt Majura today

Today, the forested ridges and the grassy woodlands of the lower west slopes of Mt Majura are preserved in the Mt Majura Nature Reserve. The reserve covers an area of approximately 481 hectares of remnant vegetation and is one of over 30 reserves in and around suburban Canberra that form Canberra Nature Park. Gazetted in 1993, Canberra Nature Park provides habitat for a wide range of wildlife, including many threatened species, whilst also providing opportunities for recreation. It is managed by the ACT Parks and Conservation Service.

Current and significant threats to the Mt Majura Nature Reserve include: woody and herbaceous weeds - introduced through suburban gardens, nearby paddocks or garden waste dumping; increased pressure from pest species - rabbits, hares, foxes and feral cats; walking and Mountain bike riding on illegal tracks; poaching of native animals; off-leash dogs; and general littering.

Rabbits and Kangaroos, deprived of access to lower grasslands, are overgrazing Mt Majura's grassy woodland. This severely hinders the regeneration of native ground-cover plants. The resulting bare ground is open to soil damage and weed growth, which further hinders regeneration of native plants.

The Friends of Mt Majura ParkCare group (FoMM) have been responsible for thousands of hours of 'on ground' work to rehabilitate the reserve. The group initiated a new walking trail specifically for The Fair residents, called Clancy's Track.

FoMM volunteers work closely with the ACT Parks and Conservation Service, the Conservation Council, the North Canberra Community Council, the Watson Community Association, and the Village Building Company to care for the bush on your doorstep.

For more information visit www.majura.org and www.tams.act.gov.au

Sources, extracts and kind thanks are due to:
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Friends of Mt Majura Park Care Group, Waltraud Pix, Conservation Council ACT Region
Richard Larson, Watson Community Association