



## ***Barmah Forest Brumbies.***

Barmah State Park (7,900 ha) and Barmah State Forest (21,600 ha) are on the Murray River flood plain between Echuca and Tocumwal, about 225 km north of Melbourne. Together they make up the largest River Red Gum forest in Victoria. Equally, the area could be called a wetland as much of it is frequently flooded.

Brumbies have been present in the Barmah Forest since the beginning of the last century. The Barmah Forest for many years was a State Forest and used for logging its spectacular Redgums as well as grazing both cattle and Horses. Many of the original horses grazed there were the Clydesdales that worked in the logging industry. The forest was used as a 'winter paddock' for the horses during quiet seasons, a place where they could graze, roam freely and recuperate from their hard work. There was also a large Standardbred stud which used the Barmah Forest as a spelling paddock for their breeding horses.

During World War I, when the young men of the region went to war, many of the working horses ran wild in the forest for several years. When these horses were eventually rounded up after the war, the foals which had been born wild were the beginnings of the Brumbies we see in Barmah today.

With their mostly Clydesdale and Standardbred heritage, the Brumbies from Barmah Forest are generally solid horses with great 'bone', calm temperaments and big feet. Mostly darker chestnuts, bays and browns, many of them have large white markings, showing their Clydesdale origins, the Barmah Brumbies mature between 14 and 15hh.

In the Barmah Forest, the feed is generally plentiful, water is the biggest threat to the Brumbies, many of whom die in years of drought due to a lack of access to water.

In 2008, laws were passed, denying the local cattlemen access to graze their cattle in the Barmah Forest. It was clear that the Brumbies future was under a cloud. Parks Victoria called for community input into a plan to remove all of the Brumbies from the Barmah Forest, stating that the 76 000 acre forest couldn't sustain the 300 Brumbies currently there.

In 2009, Barmah State Park and Barmah Forest became the Barmah National Park. Currently, the huge community outcry against the removal of the Barmah Brumbies – icons of the region – has slowed plans for their removal. More realistic counts place the population nearer 100 than 300 and the locals want them to stay, both for their heritage and their tourism value. Only three hours from Melbourne, accessible on made roads, you can drive a normal passenger car around the Barmah Forest and you would be unlucky not to sight Brumbies.

The Victorian Brumby Association has been working with Parks Victoria to be involved in the Management of the Brumbies within the Barmah Forest. We have offered to take in and rehome any that



must be removed but would dearly love to see a genetically viable population (around 150) stay in the Barmah Forest for future generations of Australians to visit and enjoy.

For the moment, Barmahs Brumbies are safe. Only Australia's public can keep them that way.

*Left: Brumbies in Barmah Forest*

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