

Folly Track

Distance: 2.3 km	Land status: State Forest, National Heritage Park
Ascent: 87 metres	Track Difficulty: Moderate - steep hill
Site Type: Loop Walk	
Habitat: Box and stringy-bark woodland, pine forest, dams	
Best time to visit: Spring/Summer	Paths: Minor vehicle road - unsealed
Facilities: None	
Typical birds: Whistlers, White-winged Choughs, robins, thornbills, honeyeaters	
Rare or unusual sightings: Yellow-tailed Black-cockatoo, Varied Sittella	

Folly by name and folly by nature, this track exemplifies how birding in the old mining areas around Castlemaine can be a bit hit-and-miss. Sometimes this spot is really good, and at other times it is very quiet. The diggings area to the north of Chewton has a range of habitats heavily modified by mining activities from the 1850's onwards and more recently by pine plantations, some of which are currently (2017) being harvested. Although birding can be variable in the regenerating woodland of the old abandoned mine sites a bit of local knowledge helps. There are



small dams scattered throughout the area and these generally have a higher concentration of birds, especially in the warmer weather. Hence this route was selected as it has two small dams along the walk.

Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoo - always check the pines

As a bonus, the nearby pine forest areas attract significant numbers of Yellow-tailed Black-cockatoos - a bird that was first recorded around Castlemaine in the 1980s. There is now a local population of a few hundred birds, possibly as a result of the food provided by the pine trees. At this site you can sit quietly and watch the birds come in for a drink at one of the two dams near the parking area.

Directions: At Chewton turn into North Street - located next to the general store and opposite the swimming pool and sports grounds. Follow this road across the old wooden bridge and then continue on straight up the hill. The bitumen road quickly ends in a dirt track at the top. About 800 metres past the bridge there is a signposted Garfield Wheel turnoff to the right. An interesting diversion if you want

to see some mining history. Continue on the main track to the left. At this point, the name of the track changes from North Street to Quarry Road. Follow Quarry Road for about 1.1km to a five-way junction of signposted tracks including Rons, Quartz Hill and Tobys tracks. Take Rons Track straight ahead. **Note:** Some maps show this as “Roms” track, but the signposts on the ground show “Rons” track. A further 650



metres will bring you to the intersection with Folly Track (I). Turn left and follow Folly Track you to the dam about 100m ahead at (A). Plenty of parking beside the dam.

Folly Track main dam - always worth the time to sit and wait for the birds to come to you

The Walk: Before commencing the loop walk, the main dam site (A) is a good place to sit and watch birds come in for a drink

- particularly in the early morning or late afternoon on warm days. Species likely to be seen here include Golden and Rufous Whistlers, Varied Sittella, various thornbills, Eastern Yellow Robin, Superb Fairy-wrens and several honeyeaters. The mud nests of White-winged Choughs can also often be seen in trees near the dam.

Start this loop walk along Folly Track on the right side of the main dam (A) away from the intersection with Ron's Track. The track climbs steeply here with a couple of turns. The elevated section of track from (B) to (C) places you closer to the canopy height of trees located downslope on the left side, providing easier views of smaller woodland birds as you are at the level of some of the treetops.

At the top of the slope where Folly Track first meets the pine plantation (C) stop and listen for Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos - you will often hear them before seeing them. Often groups of twenty or more birds can be seen working the pine cones throughout the pine forest. You will often see partially chewed cones lying around the trees here as evidence of Cockatoo feeding. Continue straight ahead through the pines for about another 250 metres until reaching the intersection with Clarks Road and four other smaller tracks (D). Check the sky from this high point as you may see circling birds of prey, swallows and over the warmer months perhaps even needletails and swifts. **Note:** Clarks Rd is called Clarkes Hill Road on some maps.

It is a little confusing here with several tracks, but follow the middle track - Clarks Road - which gradually climbs uphill and pass Dog Leg Track. Along this section you will be moving mainly through pine plantations. Even in the pines ravens, currawongs and smaller adaptable birds may be seen here such as Grey Fantail, Superb Fairy-wren, Golden Whistler and Grey Shrike Thrush. After a

distance of 150 metres you will reach the next signposted intersection to The Folly Track. Turn right here into Folly Track at (E). Continue to walk through the pines for 200 metres until reaching another minor track intersection (F). Continue straight ahead, with the vegetation changing from pine plantation to stringy-bark and Red Box dominated forest. There are good views to be had on the right of the track here before it starts to descend. As the track begins to descend with adjacent trees



increasing in height you once again get views into the canopy which is handy to see small foliage birds from (G) to (H). The trees change to Yellow and Grey Box as you head downhill.

Golden Whistler - common in spring and summer, but some are present all year

The track winds its way back to the original dam going past the intersection with Rons Track at (I).

Extras: Near the main dam there is a second smaller dam (J). Secluded and with denser vegetation it is harder to see. The vegetation here favours the smaller birds looking for a drink. To reach this dam continue along Folly Track from the first dam (away from Rons Track) for about 50 metres as before. Where the main track bends to the left continue on straight up a narrow foot track. About 100 metres up this minor track you will reach the second dam at (J). It is worth spending some time here in warm weather.

There are a variety of other tracks heading in multiple directions through this forest that are often worth a look for smaller bush birds.

Note: Due to the maze of tracks it is useful to carry a good map or a GPS as it is easy to get lost. Some of these tracks are rather rough and best walked and some are dangerously steep such as the unnamed track between (C) and (F)) which is used by 4-wheel drive enthusiasts to test their limits. As there are open and hidden mine shafts scattered throughout the area it is best to stay on the marked tracks.

Gold fossickers and mountain bikers are common throughout this part of the forest so you may come across people and vehicles from time to time.

