

This country is worth a good look!

When you're riding it's a great idea to look where you're going, and not to gaze around you at great risk to your own and maybe other people's safety. But you can pause to take in the country at convenient points. And it helps if you are primed to appreciate its more interesting features. This guide takes you on routes traversing some intriguing landscapes, along little frequented lanes offering all sorts of variations in vegetation, geology and land use.

The first variation you may notice is the difference between the trees in the road and lane reservations and those in adjacent forests. Our forests were cleared during the gold rushes and what we see in them now is relatively spindly regrowth. Large trees are unusual in these bushlands—but in the road reserves you can see impressive old trees, especially Grey Box eucalypts, which seem to be roadside specialists in our region. These old trees are glimpses into a pre-settlement past, when there were fewer trees, but bigger, and more widely spaced. It's interesting to pause under one of these veterans, and imagine a landscape where most trees were that size, set in plains of native grasses and herbs.

The second variation in these rides is that between the north and west of Maldon, on the one hand, and the south and east of the town.



Granite rocks, Back Cemetery Road Bronwyn Silver



Three Chain Road Bronwyn Silver



Grey Box along Lewis Road Bronwyn Silver

The landscape to the north and west of Maldon around the Nuggety Ranges and west of Tarrengower (rides G1, G2, G4, G10 and G11) is granite country: rolling hills marked by scattered and often impressive boulders, similar to the ones you find on Mount Alexander. Most has been cleared as farming country, but in corners where the natural vegetation is preserved you can find some fascinating native vegetation not common elsewhere in the region. Around the Rock of Ages (ride G10), for example, the boulders shelter Flat-leaf Bush-pea plants, and the very pretty Rock Isotome. Lightwood wattles with their sickle shaped leaves, favour granite country. For some reason the prickly Hedge Wattle, common enough in the region, is especially abundant in the granite areas.

The landscape to the south and east of Maldon is sandstone country. The rocks appear more jagged where they appear above the surface. More of this country is wooded, because the soils are poorer, so substantial areas have not been cleared for agriculture, and are in a more 'natural' state. The Muckleford Forest and Maldon Historic Reserve (rides G2, G5, G6, G7, G12 and G13) are examples. Parts of these bushlands are biodiversity treasures. The trees here—prominently Red Stringybark eucalypts—are often not impressive: they aren't recent growth and take a long time to thin out and grow to their optimum size. But the understorey is rich in plant variety. In late winter and spring, the land along the Maldon railway, especially near Sinclairs Lane (rides G2 and G5) is especially spectacular, and in a good year draws comparison with the great wildflower areas of Western Australia.

Of course, many riders like to go for broke, to take in the air and general outlook, without concerning themselves with minutiae—and that's great! But if you pause occasionally to check the details, then after a number of rides (and yes, these routes definitely invite repeat runs) you'll find that familiarity with the details enhances the experience. Stop every now and again, and have a look around!



Rock Isotome, Rock of Ages Bernard Slattery



Lightwood, Three Chain Road Bronwyn Silver