

FALLS TO HOTHAM ALPINE CROSSING

Walk Victoria's Icons

Master Plan



Healthy Parks
Healthy People



Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing Master Plan

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A full-page background image showing a sunset over a mountain range. The sky is filled with warm, golden light, and the sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright glow. The mountains are silhouetted against the light, and the foreground shows the dark silhouettes of trees.

Traditional Owner Acknowledgement

Parks Victoria acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Victoria, and pays respects to their Elders past, present and future, and their ongoing connection and responsibilities in caring for Country. Parks Victoria will continue to work with the Traditional Owners in the ongoing development of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing.

Executive Summary

The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will be Australia's world-class alpine walking experience that captures the essence of the Australian Alps — the solitude, the seasons, the breathtaking beauty and the stories of the High Country.

The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing is part of a branded portfolio of four long-distance walks called Walk Victoria's Icons. Developed by Parks Victoria, the walks are located in iconic regions across the state renowned for their outstanding natural landscapes, wildlife and cultural values. With a vision to be compelling, world-class, year-round sustainable walking experiences, the Walk Victoria's Icons are tailored to enable a broader community to engage with Victoria's national parks, and be challenged and rewarded, both physically and intellectually, while contributing to the regional economy.

As the roof of Australia, comprising some of the country's highest, often snow-capped mountain peaks, the Victorian Alps rise dramatically over the surrounding fertile plains and valleys and are a popular destination for winter sports. Attractions during summer months, ranging from recreational activities to cultural magnets such as local produce, idyllic historical townships and an array of events and fares, the region has the potential to become one of Australia's hot spots for nature-based tourism.

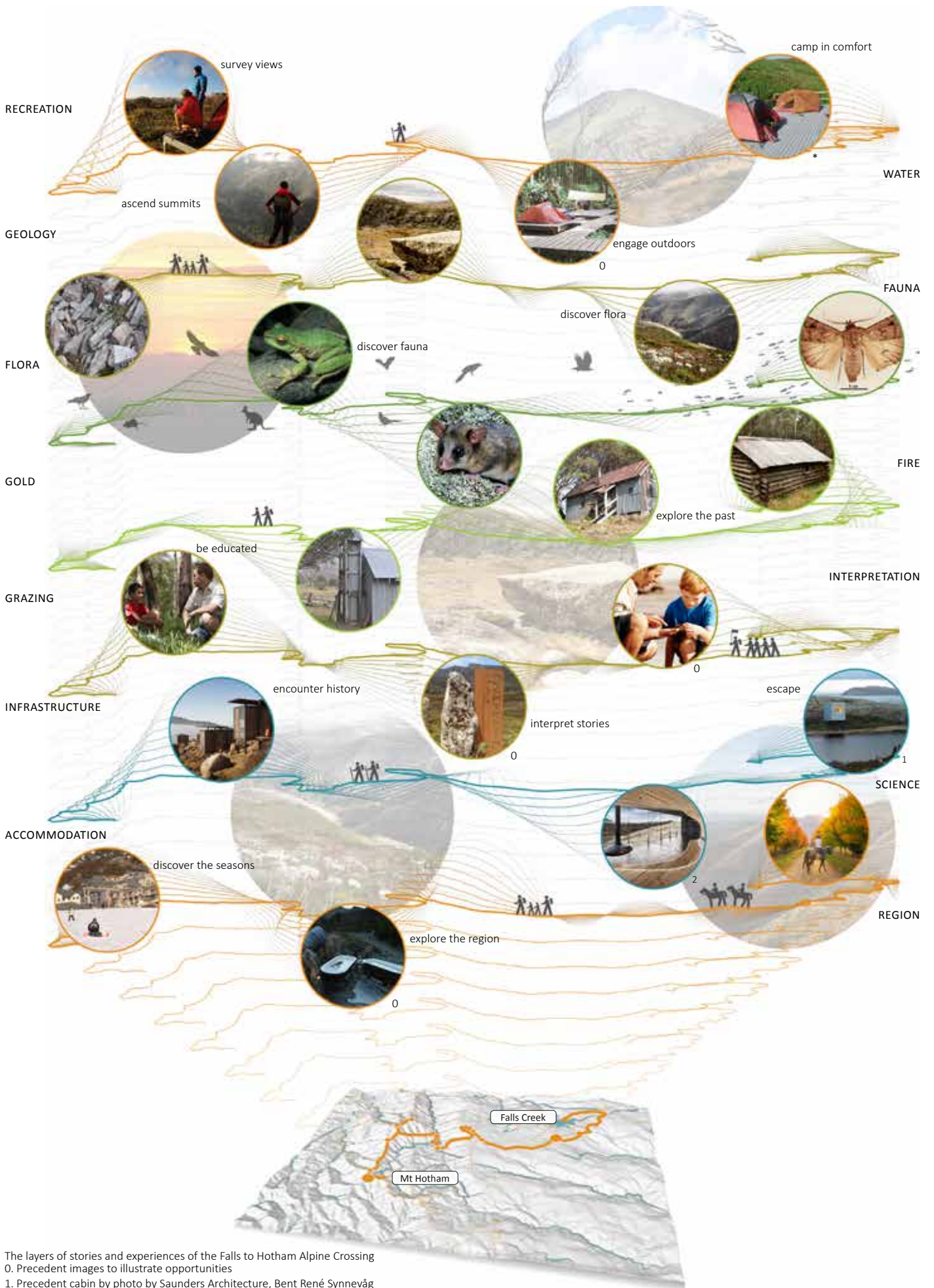
Already a popular hiking destination, the High Country between Falls Creek and Mt Hotham is criss-crossed with a fine network of existing walking tracks, currently used by individual walkers, school groups, and tour operators for day walks and a limited number of overnight walks.

The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will be a 5-day 4-night mid-distance hiking experience through the unique and captivating alpine environment, from Falls Creek to Mount Hotham. Visitors will walk 57 kilometres of Australia's Great Dividing Range, consisting of unique and fragile alpine and subalpine environments that have been shaped over aeons by glacial forces, harsh climate, fire, seasonal movements of the Traditional Owners, introduced grazing animals, scientific discovery and recreational uses.

In order to maximise the experiences for a diverse array of walkers, including individual adventure seekers, small and self-guided groups, larger educational and school groups and guided tours, a suite of improvements and additional infrastructure will be developed to the highest standards of sustainable planning, design and management. These upgrades will consist of a higher track quality to enable improved engagement with the surrounds, rest stops to fully appreciate the breathtaking beauty of the High Country, interpretation to gain understanding and insight into the landscapes narratives, and a choice of well-designed, low-impact accommodation options that cater to individual levels of comfort along the walk.



The iconic landscape of the alpine region



The Walking Experience

Traversing the varied landscapes of the high plains, river valleys, ridgelines and mountain peaks, the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will provide an authentic connection to the many wonders of the Alpine National Park and a deeper appreciation of the stories that form it. From the alpine high plains with their stands of ancient snow gums and fragile cover of herbs and spring flowers, down into valleys of lush and dense Alpine Ash forests, showing scars of the destructive rage of bush fires, the landscape is filled with stories of natural drama and demonstrations of human occupation and interaction with these landscapes. From ancient Indigenous inhabitation through to more recent European quests to utilise the land, such as the hydro scheme aqueducts that follow the contours around Falls Creek, modified flora and fauna is observed that speaks of extensive cattle grazing, and truly Australian vernaculars of independent gold mining.

These specific High Country wonders and stories will be accessed through high-quality hiking infrastructure and interpretation showcasing the park's natural and cultural values. Perhaps more importantly, visitors will be immersed in these stories by a track alignment that takes advantage of fantastic views, moves through diverse landscapes and ecosystems, connects to significant landforms and passes numerous heritage huts.

The track will enable more comfortable hiking that allows eyes and minds to wander and take in the surrounding scenery. Designed to the highest standards of environmental sensitivity, new assets and services will allow for a truly authentic and holistic experience of the land's values and will create a unique walking experience for all.

Accommodation

Four overnight nodes on the trail will offer accommodation options to suit a diverse range of walker profiles.

Separated from existing popular dispersed camp areas that will remain to operate as usual, new Hiker Camps will offer environmentally sound and more convenient platform tent-based camping, including new shelters to enable weather-protected social engagement after the day's walk, while the proposal of low-impact Operated Huts are tailored for those who desire an added level of comfort. Guided tours, education groups and private and public operators will be encouraged to

tap into this existing and additional camping and hut-based accommodation to provide a range of curated experiences and tourism products.

Trail connections to the alpine resorts and nearby towns enable the potential for off-trail accommodation to play a part in further diversifying the offer and additional walking experiences through private operators.

Trail Infrastructure

World-class trail infrastructure will be durably constructed with environmentally sustainable materials and designed with sensitivity to the immediate environment. The walking experience will be improved to engage with the outstanding beauty of the scenery, while keeping added infrastructure to a minimum to reduce environmental and visual impact. This will include new rest stops inviting the walker to soak in the spectacular views, interpretive signage or artwork to engage with the stories of each place and track upgrades to ease access for a wider range of walkers.

In particular, educational groups may benefit from the added opportunities to discover and learn about the natural and cultural values of the area.

Services and Products

The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will support a range of experience-based walking products including guided and catered walks provided by licensed tour operators who can utilise Hiker Camps. The on-trail experience will be supported by branding and marketing campaigns that communicate and facilitate an accessible world-class, iconic walking experience. A wide group of walkers will be catered for with easy-to-use digital platforms for information and booking, access to complementary tourism offers in the region and cutting edge technology to share their experiences with others.

Who will use the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing?

Currently the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing and its existing network of trails caters to a well-established community of walkers — a large portion being education groups as well as individual adventure seekers. These groups value the 'wild' experience and are relatively self-sufficient. The peak season of individual walking is the summer months between November and Easter. A large number of day walkers also visit parts of the park in these months.

While these existing trail users will still be catered for, the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will also appeal to a new target market not currently fully serviced — the experience seeker. This walker market is looking for immersive outdoor experiences with a choice of accommodation options, and a desire to combine other complementary experiences or activities. Many walkers in this market often look to tour operators to plan and guide their trips. Existing walks such as the Three Cape Track in Tasmania and the Milford Track in New Zealand successfully cater to this market.

The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will increase visitation into the region, boosting overall tourism activity.

What are the project costs and benefits?

Costs

This master plan proposes a total estimated public investment of approximately \$34M total cost to develop the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing, consisting of a \$26M in capital costs covering the provision of all proposed track infrastructure such as track upgrades, resting and viewing spots, interpretation and way-finding, as well as all additional accommodation options (refer to Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing Master Plan Cost Plan No. 2-revA August 2017). Alongside the capital costs, a budget of approximately \$8M will be required to cover all project governance and management, project planning and detailed design, as well as enabling costs covering branding and marketing, cultural and environmental impact management and an allowance for contingencies and inflation over the period of implementation. The delivery time is currently estimated to be between 5 and 10 years.

Benefits

Benefits of this project are manifold. The development of the trail will provide Victoria with a major icon that strengthens the state's role as a premium provider of nature-based tourism in Australia. Societal benefits will be improved physical and mental health, creation of environmental awareness and improved opportunities for education. The project also provides opportunities for Traditional Owners to re-connect with Country and secure their role as custodians of the land for future generations. Economic benefits are widely spread. The project is estimated to create approximately 208 jobs directly and indirectly linked to the construction

and operation of the trail (of which 99 will be regional) as well as another 130 full-time jobs in the servicing sector.

The public investment will create opportunities for the private sector, mainly for local and regional tourism service providers, offering services on each end of the trail.

Visitor spending supports employment in the region and in the state of Victoria more widely. The trail will give impetus to economic activity at the trailheads and in towns in the region as accommodation and service providing businesses take advantage of new custom. Off-trail services will include accommodation, catering, tent drop-off and shuttle services. It is estimated that there will be an uplift in visitor spending, both regionally and by means of travel, to the potential total spend of **\$23.4 million per annum** by 2027 when the trail is fully operational.

The master plan includes the opportunity for Traditional Owners to work in partnership with government and investors to protect important cultural and natural assets while building economic and employment opportunities through sustainable tourism and other business. This includes gathering and sharing the Traditional Owners' experience and knowledge of the area to ensure a richer, deeper tourism experience.

How will it be implemented?

A business case for this project will be required to secure funds to undertake detailed studies comprising economic modelling, site studies and determination of preferred accommodation locations and designs, as well as the documentation of all environmental and cultural risks associated with this project.

The master plan and future work will adhere to the triple bottom line approach, assessing all development and strategies against environmental, economic and social and cultural outcomes.

Project Facts

7,777 new walkers per year on the trail.

Providing better infrastructure for education and health.

Extended tourism opportunities and seasonal activities for alpine resorts and towns.

Local businesses and tour operators to supplement the walk with **experience-based products and services**.

Public Investment of \$34M.

Uplift in visitor spend to \$23.4M p.a. by 2027

[on trail and off trail through additional accommodation and recreation].

Creation of **80 direct full-time jobs** in construction sector.

Creation of **128 indirect jobs** in construction and supply sector (of which 99 would be regional).

Creation of **130 ongoing full-time jobs** in tourism services sector.

Increased demand for accommodation, hospitality, food and local produce.





Chapter 01
**What is the Falls to
Hotham Alpine Crossing?**

01 What is the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing?

The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will be a world-class multi-day walking experience that crosses the picturesque and challenging mountain territory of Australia’s Victorian Alps.

Walk Victoria’s Icons

Nature-based tourism is one of the fastest growing tourism sectors internationally, and with its diverse natural attractions, Victoria is well placed to capitalise on this growth.

The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing is part of a branded portfolio of four long-distance walks known as 'Walk Victoria's Icons'. These stem from the 'Victoria's Nature-based Tourism Strategy 2008–2012' which was developed by the former Department of Sustainability and Environment (now the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning), Parks Victoria and Tourism Victoria to facilitate and coordinate development that supports nature-based tourism within Victoria.

The four walks will be managed by Parks Victoria and located in iconic regions across the state renowned for their outstanding natural landscapes, wildlife and cultural values. With a vision to be compelling, world-class, year-round sustainable walking experiences, the Walk Victoria's Icons portfolio includes the Great Ocean Walk, Grampians Peaks Trail, Coastal Wilderness Walk and Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing. These four walks represent the quintessential nature-based attributes of the State — from dramatic coastlines to rugged mountain peaks, from remote waterways and inlets to alpine and sub-alpine scenery.

As distinct trips, the four iconic walks are designed to allow walkers to experience natural and cultural landscapes at their best. These four walks underpin the potential for Victoria to be recognised as a leader in sustainable nature-based tourism.

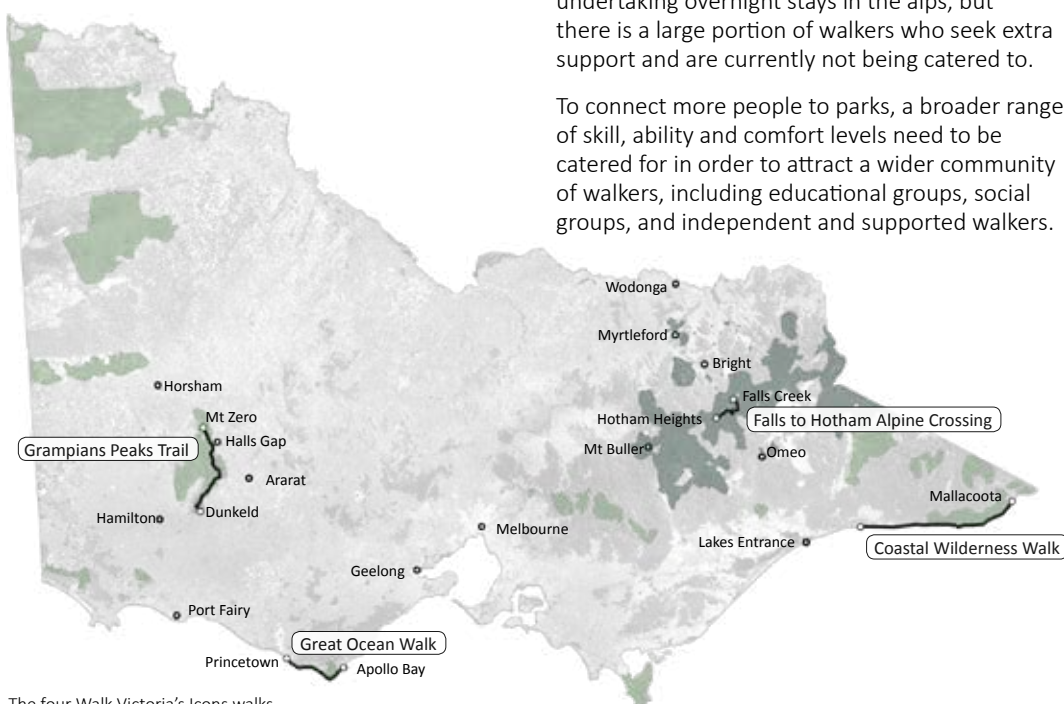
Connecting People and Parks

Parks Victoria's vision is to be a 'world-class park service ensuring healthy parks for healthy people'. To achieve this vision Parks Victoria seeks to improve access to and activities in national parks for a broader range of people. This is to generate a larger appreciation of parks and environments, support healthy lifestyles, nurture environmental sensitivity and create regional economic benefits.

Nature-based tourism is key to broadening the appeal of Victorian national parks and encouraging visitation. The 'experience seekers', who are the key market for nature-based tourism, are characterised by their desire to be actively immersed in a new place and to have a variety of authentic and personally compelling experiences while travelling.

The Alpine National Park is already an extremely popular destination for day walkers, but offers limited opportunities for extended stays in national parks. A portion of independent, self-guided 'experience seeker' walkers are currently undertaking overnight stays in the alps, but there is a large portion of walkers who seek extra support and are currently not being catered to.

To connect more people to parks, a broader range of skill, ability and comfort levels need to be catered for in order to attract a wider community of walkers, including educational groups, social groups, and independent and supported walkers.



The four Walk Victoria's Icons walks

The Master Plan

The master plan articulates a new vision and framework to convert the existing Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing into a world-class hiking experience that enriches the current walking offer opportunities in the High Country. The master plan explores how the natural and cultural values might be interpreted to improve the walking experience, proposing an alignment to capture the quintessential elements of the alpine region generating a memorable, unique and truly iconic experience.

By providing better infrastructure, track quality, and accommodation, the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will provide better opportunities for school, social and education groups, tour operators and a broader spectrum of individual walkers to engage with the area.

The master plan serves as a foundation for future detailed studies including; Business Plans; Management Plans; Economic Analysis; Safety and Risk Assessments; Interpretation Strategies; Environmental Risk Assessments; and studies, including business plans, management plans, economic analyses, safety and risk assessments, and detailed trail alignment and site planning.

Staging and process

The master plan has undergone a three-phase process to listen and learn, investigate, and interrogate and refine the proposal for the future Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing.

Stage 1 | 2015

- Issues and opportunities of the existing Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing.
- Testing of five alternative route alignments.
- Regional community consultation to receive feedback on alignment and project vision.

Stage 2 | 2016

- Refining and developing the preferred design for the trail route, experiences and accommodation.
- Draft cost planning and draft economic analysis.
- Consultation and engagement with key stakeholders, the community and government agencies. This draft master plan was then put out for public comment.

Stage 3 | 2017

- Working Groups establish the final direction for the master plan based on community and stakeholder feedback.
- Preparation of the final master plan.



Diagrammatic overview of planning phases. [Note that this is not a time line, as the various planning exercises can shift in their commencements and durations.]

The Vision and Guiding Principles

"The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing is envisaged to be Australia's world-class alpine walking experience that captures the essence of the Australian Alps — the solitude, the seasons, the breathtaking beauty and the stories of Victoria's High Country."

An Exceptional Experience

The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will strengthen the positioning of Victoria and the North East as a vibrant nature-based destination through the delivery of an exceptional multi-day alpine walk with distinctive experiences that are attractive to a broad range of walkers.

Stewardship of the Alps

The natural, cultural, landscape and other significant values of the Victorian Alps will be protected through the use of best-practice design, planning, management and interpretation that result in greater community appreciation, stewardship and advocacy for the area and its values.



A Sustainable Management Model

The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing experiences will be offered through public and private partnerships that establish infrastructure, products and services, and improvement of the Park's values.

Benefits for the Region and State

The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will support Parks Victoria's approach of Healthy Parks Healthy People by increasing interest and opportunities for a broader number of visitors and educational groups to engage with the natural beauty of the alpine region. The trail will provide demonstrable economic benefit to the local community, the region and the State by supporting a wide range of investment opportunities for tourism, complementary services and infrastructure that provide a holistic and integrated walking experience.

Cross a landscape of turning seasons and transforming colours; experience the freedom of vast, exposed mountain ranges; feel the intimacy of dense woodlands; travel the paths of Traditional Owners; visit the huts of early European settlers; and witness the mass migration of the Bogong Moth.

The Study Area

The High Country

Straddling the boundary between the Alpine and East Gippsland Shires, the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing is set within the wider context of Victoria's High Country, a region within the south-eastern portion of Australia's Great Dividing Range and includes some of Australia's highest mountain peaks.

For thousands of years, the region has been home and Country to the Traditional Owners of the Australian Alps: the Bidawal, Monero-Ngarigo, Gunaikurnai, Jaithmathang, Taungurung, Mitambuta, Ngarigu-Currawong, Dhudhuroa, Waywurru and Wurundjeri Peoples.

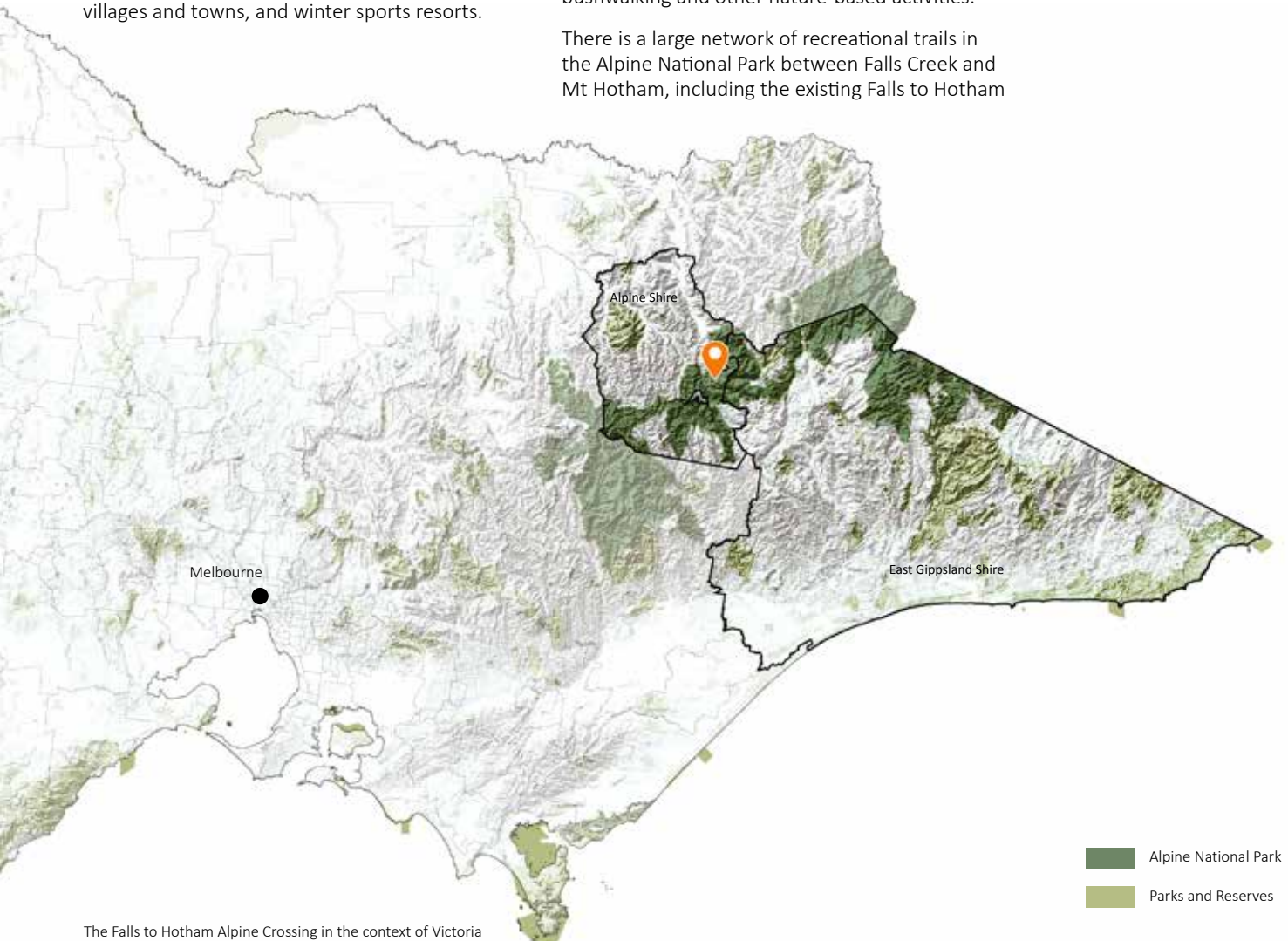
The High Country is a popular tourist destination, offering numerous national parks, alpine lakes, villages and towns, and winter sports resorts.

Crossing through the Alpine National Park, the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing covers significant natural environments and cultural sites. It connects the two alpine resorts of Falls Creek and Mt Hotham and offers connections to the surrounding townships of Harrietville and Dinner Plain.

The Alpine National Park

At about 660,000 hectares, the Alpine National Park is Victoria's largest national park, protecting stunning alpine landscapes which range from grassy high plains to dramatic mountain peaks and snowy escarpments. Roughly a 4.5-hour drive from Melbourne, the park is a major attraction in regional Victoria, offering a wide range of year-round opportunities for recreation including bushwalking and other nature-based activities.

There is a large network of recreational trails in the Alpine National Park between Falls Creek and Mt Hotham, including the existing Falls to Hotham



The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing in the context of Victoria

Alpine Crossing which follows a 37 kilometre segment of the much longer 655 kilometre Australian Alps Walking Track.

The proposed realignment of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing would utilise much of this track between Falls Creek and Pole 333, but would divert northwards from there to include some of the landscape's most prominent and stunning features.

The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing

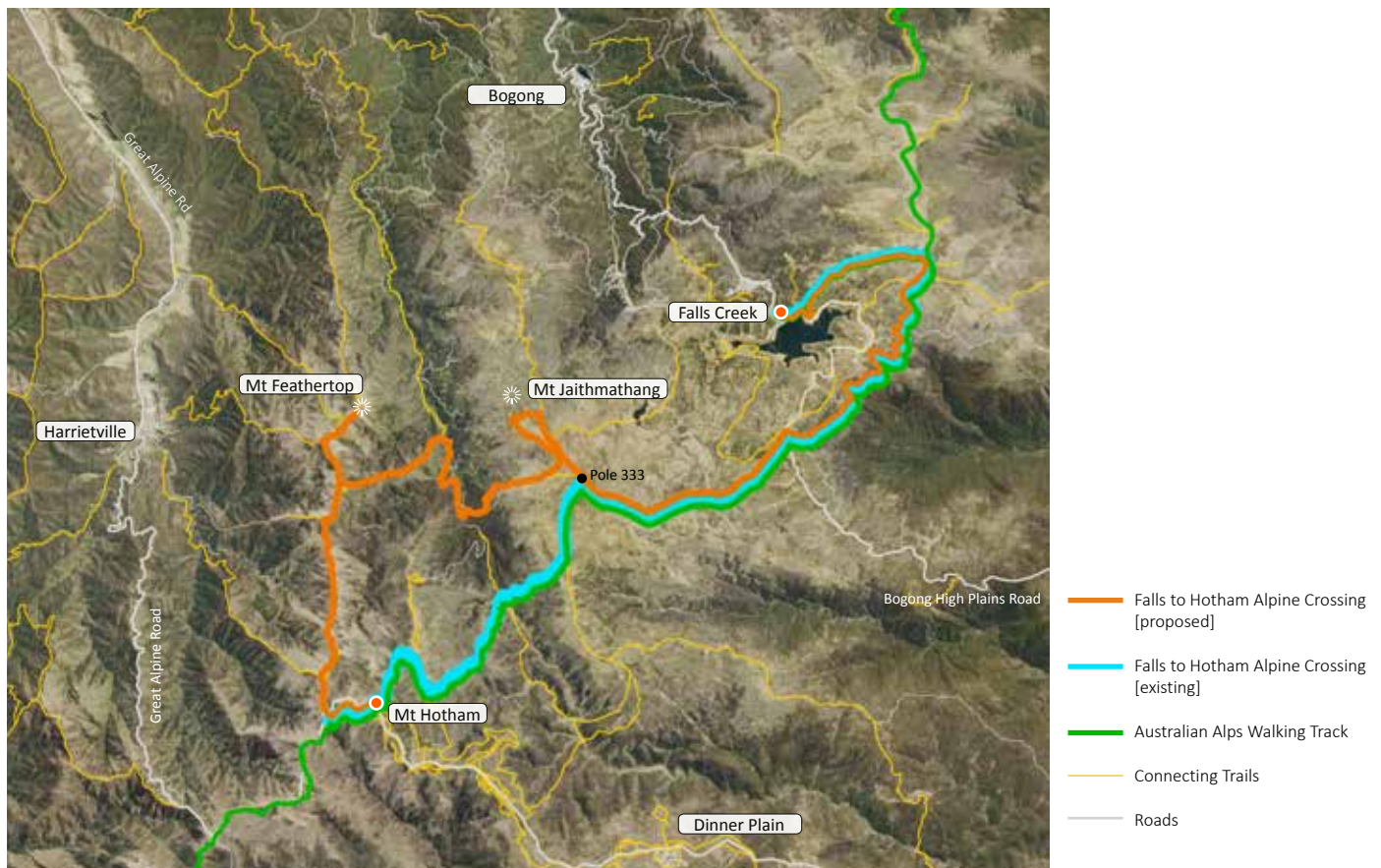
The area through which the existing Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing traverses is already a very popular hiking destination used by independent walkers and school groups. However, the existing crossing fails to deliver on the expectations of an iconic walk.

As an iconic walk, the crossing should be distinctive and different from other walks, traverse changing and diverse environments, scenery and topography, and be an adventurous and

challenging, yet achievable, hiking experience. Set within distinctive and outstanding natural landscapes, the walk should provide signature moments and 'wow' factors.

A crucial element to the success of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing is that different experience options should be available to walkers. These include a choice of accommodation at different rates, experiences both guided and unguided, and having access to high quality information and interpretation.

This master plan proposes that the realignment of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing capitalises on the strengths of the area; incorporating the region's highest peaks; traversing ecologically diverse high plains and remote and natural areas; providing a cultural and heritage experience with the development of trail infrastructure; and supporting services to create an iconic Victorian High Country walking experience.



The trail set within the extensive Alpine National Park and High Country trail network

Regional Context

Enabling the High Country Experience

Today Victoria's High Country is a popular tourist destination that draws visitors through its cycling trails, touring routes, local cuisine, arts and culture, skiing and nature-based tourism destinations. The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing has the potential to draw on this extensive offering, potentially hosting packages that incorporate local food, cycling, horse tours or cross-country skiing, enabling a full assortment of High Country products and experiences. Additionally, the trail has the opportunity to fill a gap in the regional trail hiking market by providing accommodation and services in a spectacular and remote natural setting, benefiting the regional and local economies through year-round tourism opportunities.

Cycling

The High Country is a true cycling hub, offering a range of opportunities for mountain biking, rail trails and road cycling. There are a host of cycling trails and parks in the region, including the 100 kilometre Murray to Mountain Rail Trail that winds on sealed off-road paths from Wangaratta to Bright, and the Big Hill Mountain Bike Park in Mt Beauty. Cycling clubs are common in the region, and programs such as the 7 Peaks Ride, which challenges riders to ascend Mt Baw Baw, Mt Buffalo, Mt Buller, Dinner Plain, Falls Creek, Mt Hotham, and Lake Mountain, are increasingly offering both individual and group opportunities for people to engage with the parks.

Arts and Culture

The landscapes of the High Country have a rich history associated with Aboriginal heritage, culture and gold mining. The Man from Snowy River by AB 'Banjo' Paterson is one of these iconic stories of the Victorian High Country. Visitors to the region can experience the huts of legendary cattlemen located on the Bogong High Plains, Mt Stirling, Howqua Historic Area and the Bluff. Additionally, live music performances by local artists can be experienced in the region's many cafes and breweries.

Snow Sports

The Victorian High Country provides some of the best skiing on the Australian continent. The three largest resorts of Falls Creek, Mt Hotham and Mt Buller, which offer over 250 downhill runs, are strong domestic and international tourism drawcards. Cross-country skiing is also a popular attraction, with major annual events such as the Kangaroo Hoppet international cross-country skiing race being a premier attraction. Family-based activities are also available, including guided snowshoeing, tobogganing, snow tubing, sled dog tours and snow play parks.

Food, Wine and Beer

Locally grown wines, craft beer, and artisan foods are also major attractions of the region. Local cuisine is often paired with an experience of the region's gorgeous landscape features, for example the 150 kilometre High Country Brewery Trail which leads visitors along scenic roads to seven local breweries. Similar food-based journeys catering to cyclists and walkers are available as well, such as the Pedal to Produce ride which takes cyclists through the food and wine regions of Rutherglen, Beechworth, Milawa, Myrtleford and Bright along the Murray to Mountain Rail Trail. Additionally, High Country restaurants and wineries host small annual events in which local producers of wines, churned butter, artisan cheeses and chocolates come together to offer unique seasonal meals.

Nature-based Tourism

The region in and around Alpine National Park offers world-class eco-tourism opportunities, including fishing, cycling and horse riding. Iconic mountain rivers, clear streams and tranquil inlets serve as a backdrop for anglers as they fish for a variety of species. Guided horseback adventures through Victoria's legendary pioneering trails cater to both seasoned equestrians and families on holiday. The National Park and the surrounding country are popular destinations for outdoor education groups. Although there are plentiful opportunities for experience seekers in the High Country, walking and hiking experiences have yet to fill the gap for those seeking a level of comfort in nature.



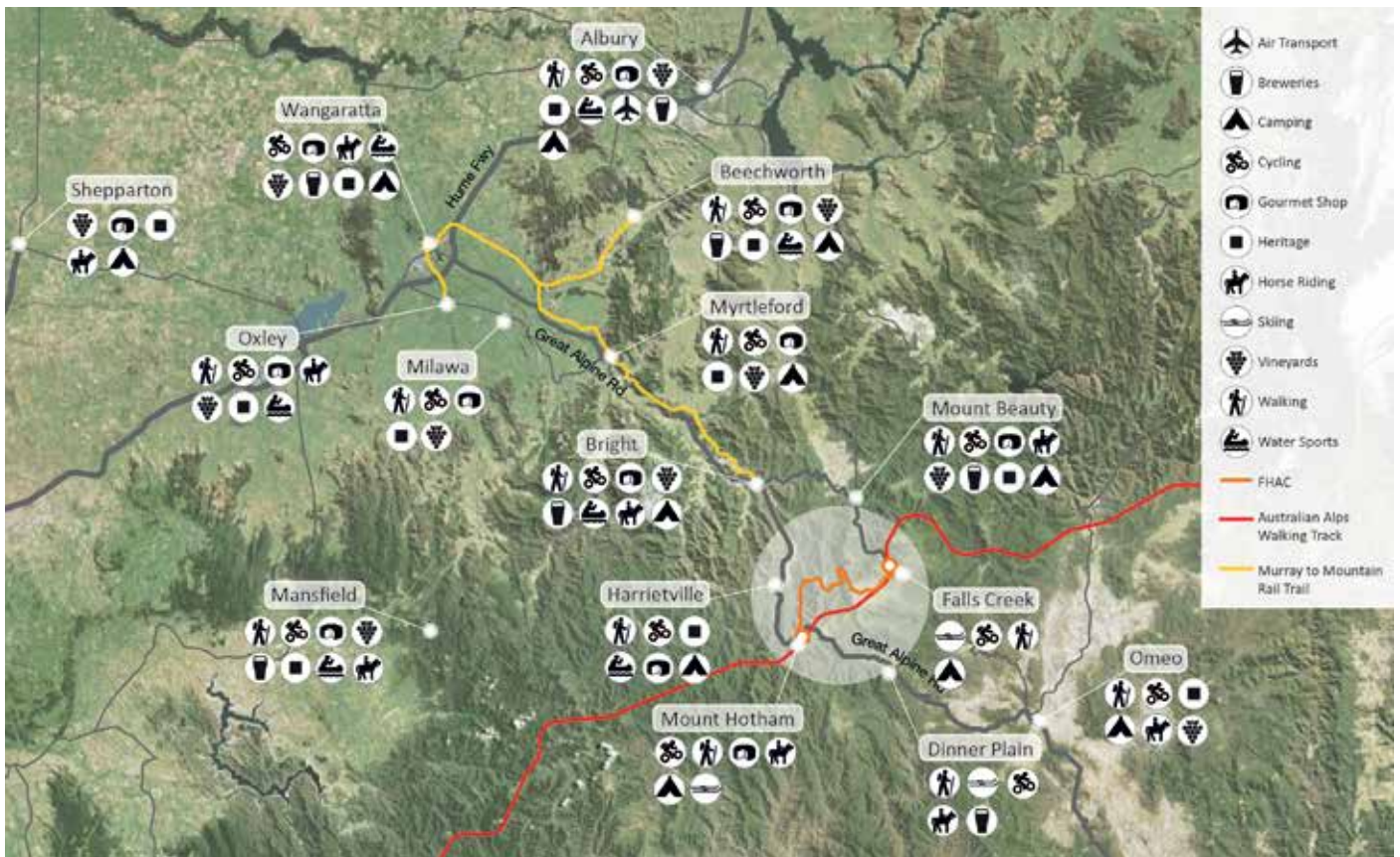
Mt Hotham Alpine Resort



Mountain biking near Mount Bogong



Outdoor education in the High Country



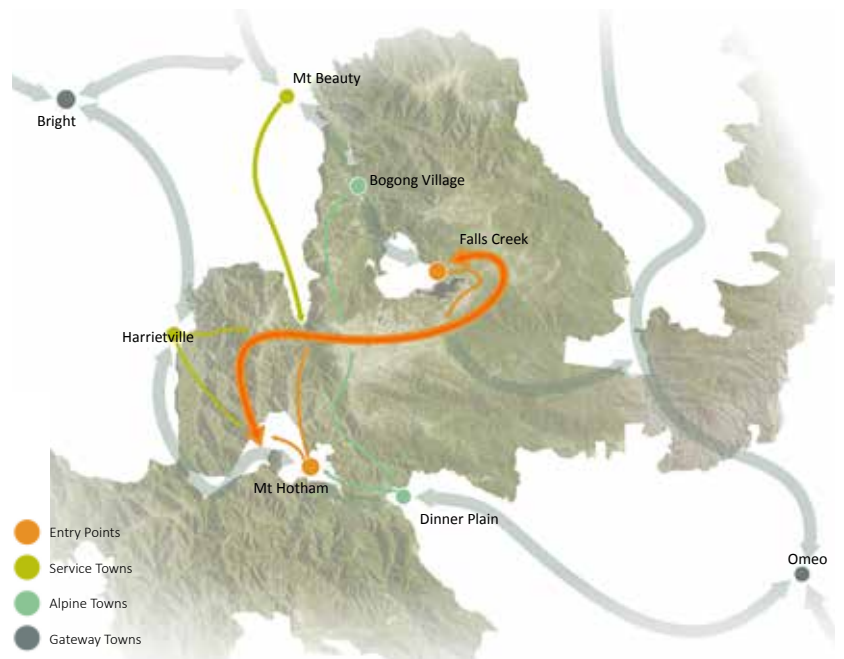
Regional offerings surrounding the Alpine National Park

Local Context

Linking Communities

While visitors to the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will hike the distance from Falls Creek to Mt Hotham, there are ample opportunities for walkers to extend their trip or modify their journey through the surrounding network of trails. The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing links the two alpine resorts, and can also connect Harrietville to the western section of the trail, and Dinner Plain to the southern section of the trail experience.

Mt Beauty and Bogong Village, to the north, are also well placed to service the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing given their direct vehicular access to the trail. These communities can position themselves as nature-based tourism hubs in the High Country, offering supporting services and host tour operations for the trail, bringing additional jobs to the region.



The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing and its connections to local towns





Chapter 02
**What guides the design of
the Falls to Hotham Alpine
Crossing?**

02 What guides the design of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing?

The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will improve access to the splendours of the Alpine National Park and a broad variety of natural and cultural values through the High Country. With the privilege of access comes the responsibility of protecting and conserving.

Stewardship of the Alps

Visitors to the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will journey through chapters of High Country history that span thousands of years of human occupation and even longer of diverse ecologies and changing landforms.

Conserving and protecting environments is vital for biodiversity, ecology, water quality, air quality and carbon storage. Parks support a vast array of ecosystems and their inhabitants, often safeguarding fragile and vulnerable environments. The Alpine National Park alone accounts for more than one quarter of the carbon stocks in the Victorian parks network, highlighting its significance in the face of global warming.

These parks also provide a wide range of health and education benefits to visitors, encouraging physical activity and recreational pursuits, and providing a platform for education.

Parks provide opportunities for Traditional Owners to re-connect with Country and to continue their traditional relationship with Country. Parks Victoria utilise joint management or other partnerships with Traditional Owners to foster a shared understanding of how parks and their natural and cultural values are to be nurtured.

This master plan promotes stewardship as the guiding objective for all proposed initiatives in order to protect, safeguard and conserve the environmental and cultural values of the Alpine National Park. The three key values, environmental, cultural and natural, are outlined further in the following pages. These create the backbone of all further initiatives such as track upgrade works, interpretation and wayfinding works, as well as informing the design and placement of additional accommodation.

Assessing the risks

The in-depth master planning process has involved an Environmental Risk Assessment (ERA) that looks at environmental and cultural values that could be at risk through the construction of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing.

The ERA was conducted by ecology and heritage consultants Biosis. Providing independent advice, their technical specialists have used a variety of techniques such as GIS analysis, mapping, database reference and ongoing workshops

to complete the study. The objectives of the assessment were to undertake a desktop analysis of the proposed Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing walking track and overnight settings within the Alpine National Park, and establish potential risks to values posed through the development of the hike and associated infrastructure.

Biosis identified that, at a top level, there were no significant adverse environmental impacts of the track, and that priority risks could be adequately managed by following normal planning procedures and detailed on-ground assessments prior to construction.

Biosis conducted the risk assessment in accordance with government guidelines, AS/NZS ISO 31000: 2009 Risk management — Principles and guidelines, and HB 203: 2006. Environmental risk management — Principles and process, working closely with Parks Victoria during this process. The outcomes from the ERA include recommended options to mitigate risks and minimise environmental impacts, as well as providing planning advice to Parks Victoria. Because of the unique alpine and subalpine environment of the park and the sensitive nature of the surrounding landscape, careful consideration and further study of environmental values will be required as part of implementation.

Within the ERA assessment a range of environmental and cultural values were identified by Biosis as priorities. The following high-priority risks were identified:

Cultural

Potential archaeological sites that need further assessment through a Cultural Heritage Management Plan. A Cultural Heritage Management Plan has already been prepared for Tawonga Huts area, but needs to be implemented throughout the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing to ensure heritage sites are not impacted during the construction and implementation of the trail.

Environment

A single Sooty Owl sighting at Tawonga Huts means that specific construction management will need to be implemented to avoid the removal of hollow-bearing trees that could be potential habitat for the owl.

Ecological risks included valued sporadic communities of remnant unburnt Snow Gums. These patches are to be avoided during the construction of new sections of track and hiker facilities.

Dwarf Sedge, Snow Daphne and Mountain Daisy are of high ecological value, and are all known to occur between Tawonga Huts and Wallace Huts. Targeted searches for both these species will be undertaken prior to the construction of new sections of track and hiker facilities and along the Tawonga Huts — Wallace Huts section.

A number of invasive species as well as phytophthora have been found in various communities within the Alpine National Park. Invasive species risks will be minimised through proper hygiene measures both during and post construction, and a visitor management plan will need to identify how these risks will be mitigated with visitors.

Alpine bogs are protected under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act of 1999*. Appropriate siting of track and facilities to avoid direct impacts, particularly in relation to drainage.

A Bushfire Management Overlay covers the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing proposed area and will be considered during the development.

Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing is within a declared water catchment area, and the ERA notes that there is a potential for contamination of waterways by human waste. A considered waste treatment plan for the storage and disposal of human waste will be required to ensure water quality is not contaminated and is continually managed along the entirety of the track.

Ongoing monitoring of risks and impacts

The environmental and cultural values outlined in the ERA will continue to influence the detailed design of the route and accommodation experience. Ongoing methods of control, monitoring and assessment will be implemented to ensure the environmental and cultural values of the park are protected.

Working within a national park context, assessing environmental risks and impacts and delivering works such as trail construction are at the core of Parks Victoria business.



Outdoor education and interpretation of natural and cultural values

Celebrating Cultural Values

Inhabiting the High Country

The unique environment of the Victorian High Country has been a source of legend and provider of sustenance for thousands of years. As one of the highest parts of the Great Dividing Range, this area is subject to extreme climate and consequently is home to unique flora and fauna. The abundant landscape has been a rich source of sustenance for the Traditional Owners, also providing reprieve from the sweltering heat of the hot summer temperatures experienced in the valleys below. Since the arrival of Europeans to Australia the grassy plains have been used for cattle grazing and the stony mountains dug deep for gold.

Today the High Country is recognised for its unique environmental value and supports a broad range of nature-based recreation activities throughout the year. Many of the trails and huts established for cattle grazing and mining are today used for bushwalking and ski touring. They also provide an insight into a bygone way of life in an era of pioneering and discovery.

Traditional Owners

For thousands of years, the region has been home and country to the Traditional Owners of the Australian Alps.

The Aboriginal people of the Victorian Alps have a rich living culture whose heritage is embodied in the landscape, environment, languages, oral histories, cultural law / lore and customs, and their Dreaming stories. This heritage is a vital legacy for the generation of Aboriginal people today and those in the future.

A number of Traditional Owner groups assert historical and familial connection to the Australian Alps through generations of economic activity, gatherings and ceremony, material culture and settlement patterns. As with all lands and other natural assets, the Alps are therefore part of a traditional Aboriginal landscape that is today maintained by various natural resource managers.

The area is significant for its creation stories, with its forests rich in cultural places and sacred sites. Cultural heritage surveys undertaken after the 2003 Alpine fires rediscovered numerous cultural places, demonstrating how the area was used and occupied by the ancestors of today's Traditional Owners, including how far and wide they travelled.



Displays of wildflowers such as trigger-plants and alpine daisies cloak the slopes during summer.

Traditional Owners travelled up into the mountains in summer, living under the shade of the Snow Gums and looking out over the treeless plains, escaping the heat. During the summer the High Country provided more abundant plants, animals, and other accessible food resources than that of the low plains. The Bogong Moth was a special food only eaten under Traditional law/lore and custom, and in years when the moths were plentiful, filling the cracks and crevices of the exposed rock, large numbers of people could gather on the high plains to collect and feast on them. Emus and wallabies were also abundant and provided a readily available food source. The mountains were also a source of spiritual vitality, and a meeting place where groups settled disputes, traded and participated in ceremony.

The intact nature of this landscape today makes it vitally important in enabling Traditional Owners to continue to practise and strengthen their culture, a human right enshrined in the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Traditional Owners also have inherent rights and responsibilities to use and care for their traditional lands, and its natural and cultural resources.

During the preparation of the master plan Traditional Owner groups were engaged to provide comments, ideas and feedback on the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing as it evolved.

This master plan provides an important opportunity for Traditional Owners to express their connection to Country, and the significance and meaning of particular sites, places and events in the alpine region.

The master plan captures the opportunity for Traditional Owners to work in partnership with government and investors to protect important cultural and natural assets while building economic and employment opportunities through sustainable tourism and other business. This includes gathering and sharing the Traditional Owners' experience and knowledge of the subject area to ensure a richer, deeper tourism experience.

Engagement with these groups will continue to play a vital role in the planning of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing to ensure that Traditional Owners' aspirations for their Country, their interpretation and opportunities for Aboriginal employment and businesses are understood.



Bogong Moth (*Agrotis infusa*) swarm

The Arrival of Europeans

The first recorded visit to the High Plains was made by John Mitchell in 1843, who was shown into the Kiewa Valley by local Aboriginal people. It was not long after that settlers moved into the area and continued to explore the new country for grassy plains to support cattle grazing. Mining quickly followed as the country was opened up and its resources were a means to wealth and prosperity.

The Search for Grazing Country

The opening up of the High Plains to grazing can be attributed largely to the station owner George Gray and stockmen James Brown and John Wells, who went in search of grazing country following the bushfire of Black Thursday, 13th February, 1851. The fire denuded the grassy plains of Gray's 'Pelican Station' located near Wangaratta and so it became imperative to search for new grazing country. After moving the cattle north and east through the Mitta Mitta valley, Brown and Wells arrived at Cobungra on the eastern side of the High Plains.

However, their new grazing land was a long way from the cattle markets and supplies located in the Riverina district — at Wangaratta and Beechworth. The route that had taken them to Cobungra was long and circuitous. A local aboriginal man, Larnie, told them of the High Plains and how the Gunai people would travel up there via the spur from their camp on the Bundarra River. Brown and Wells travelled this spur and found themselves in the vicinity of today's Mt Cope. After taking in the landscape they soon determined the Fainter ridgeline as the most direct route from Cobungra over to the plains district and on to Beechworth and Wangaratta.



Cattle grazing — Tawonga Huts (1888 first hut built)

Brown and Wells also pioneered the route from the Ovens Valley over Mt Hotham to Cobungra. They also explored the slopes of Mt Feathertop in search of new stock routes and new grazing country. Many of the landmarks in the High Plains were named by Brown and Wells, and many of those names remain with us today including Rocky Valley, Pretty Valley, Rocky Knobs, Mt Feathertop, the Razorback and Mt Fainter.

The Official Visit

Although much of the early European exploration can be attributed to the settlers who were in pursuit of resources from which to furnish a prosperous and meaningful life, the colonial government also contributed to the opening up of the newly discovered lands and ultimately the harnessing of its abundant resources. Hence the official visit to the north-east by Baron von Mueller in 1854 and his naming of Mt Hotham on the 6th December of that year. This purpose of this visit was an official survey of the land to provide the basis for the granting of grazing leases and mining licences.

The Early Cattlemen and their Huts

While Brown and Wells are recognised for the first European exploration of the High Plains, the first official grazing runs were not established until the mid 1860s. These grazing licences were granted to the settlers of the upper Kiewa Valley. It was a local tradition that these families would together take a number of cattle up to the 'top country' each summer, and then bring them back down in the early autumn.

Gold Fever

Gold mining occurred on the slopes of Mt Feathertop from the 1870s to the mid 20th century. The Champion Reefs on the spur of



Gold mining — Red Robin Battery (gold in quartz reef first discovered 1941)

the same name were mined from 1868 to 1874 producing 1927 ounces before the gold ran out. Attempts to revive the mine were made from 1920–1925 and in 1945, but no more gold was produced. The Razorback Mine operated intermittently on the Razorback from 1895–1903. It was about 1½ kilometres south of where Champion Spur joins the Razorback; remnants were visible after the 2003 fires. Another mine on the Razorback was the Government Grant and Birthday Gold Mining Co. which in 1895 built a large water-powered crushing battery with a one kilometre inclined tramway connecting it to the mine. But the ore did not live up to forecasts and it produced only 55 ounces before being abandoned in 1897. Tribute parties mined a little more before the mine and battery was burned by wildfires in 1906.

Falls Creek and the Thirst for Power

The modern ski village of Falls Creek has its beginnings in the transformation of the High Plains for the harnessing of power — hydro-electricity. Originally conceived in 1911, construction of the Kiewa Valley Hydro-electric Scheme commenced in 1949 following almost half a century of political debate regarding the investment of public finance into power generation projects.

The State Electricity Commission (SEC) was granted a Crown lease over the upper Kiewa Valley extending across the Bogong High Plains for the purpose of the Kiewa Valley Hydro-electric Scheme in 1930. Increasing pressure on the national economy saw the project shrink in size from the original proposal which had Pretty Valley Dam at over ten times its current size. A critical factor for this was the design of the aqueduct system which provided for the capturing and

channelling of water to a smaller dam. Today the maintenance tracks alongside the aqueducts provide another route across the High Plains for walkers and skiers.

Skiing

Skiing in Australia has its beginnings in the migration of Europeans, particularly Norwegians, during the gold rush years. Their native knowledge of skiing, particularly cross-country assisted early prospectors to negotiate the snow country during the onset of winter and snowfall.

Recreation in the High Country is recorded as far back as the 1880s when the Bright Alpine Club actively promoted bushwalking and snow-shoeing in the region to boost tourism. While early activity was focused at Mt Buffalo, trips were also made to Mt Hotham and Mt Feathertop. A growing interest in skiing eventually led to the establishment in 1924 of the Ski Club of Victoria (SCV), whose members went on to explore the Victorian alpine country in pursuit of skiable terrain. The efforts of the SCV ultimately led to the recognition of Mt Hotham and Falls Creek as viable ski areas.



Scientific Monitoring — Wallace Hut (1889 cattle grazing, 1920s occupied by SEC for data on snow fall)



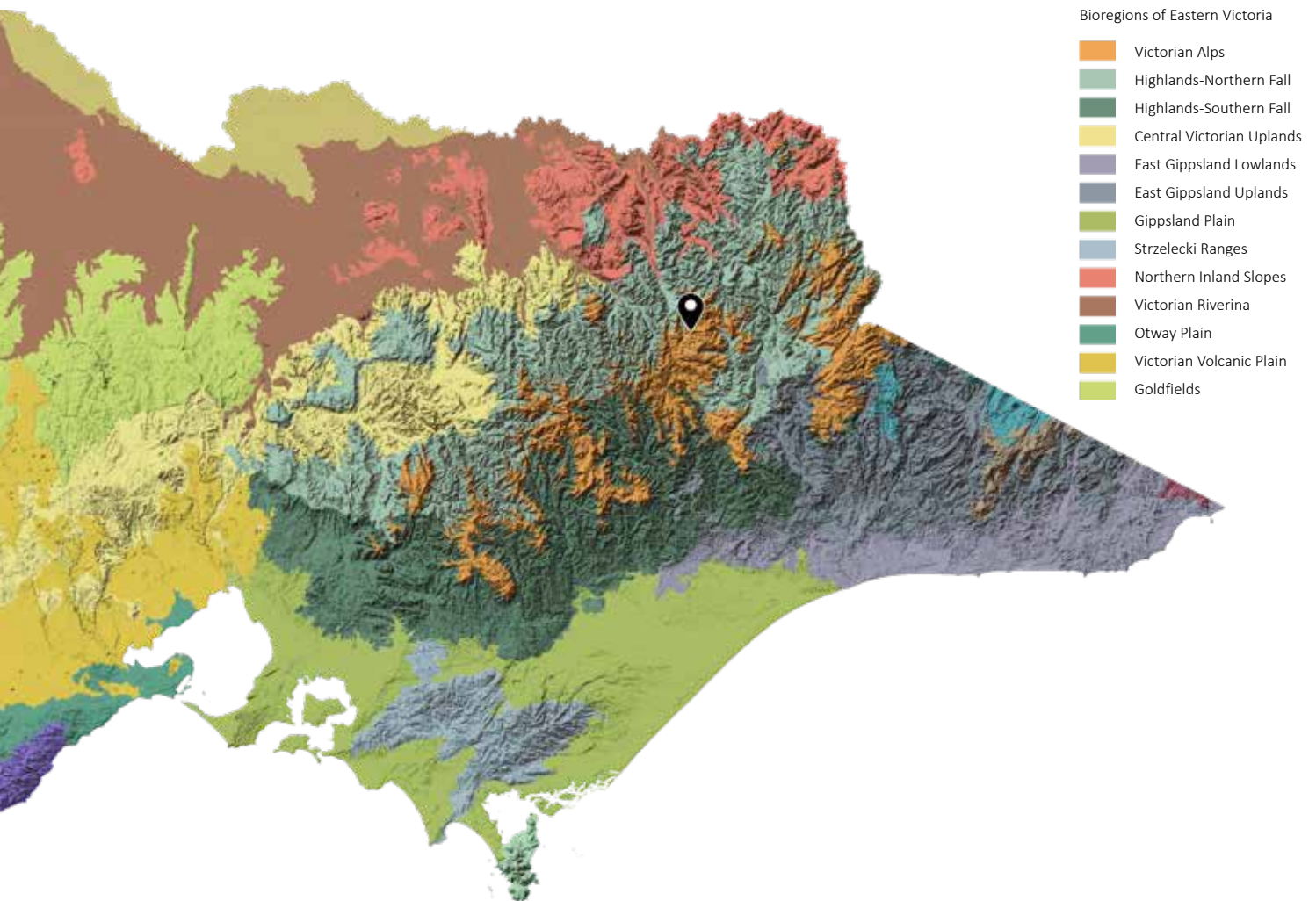
Ski Touring — Cope Hut (1929 built by Ski Club of Victoria as winter refuge)

The alpine and subalpine landscapes are unique landforms and ecosystems in Australia. These incredibly rich landscapes and the variable climate they experience are possibly the region’s most beloved assets.

Experiencing and Protecting Environmental Values

The Alpine National Park’s protected ecosystems support a number of nationally important and endemic plant and animal species including the Bogong Daisy Bush, Mountain Pygmy-possum, Broad-toothed Rat, Alpine Water Skink and a distinctive insect fauna, making the area highly significant for nature conservation. Many of these species have limited distributions and highly specialised habitat requirements that are reliant on ecosystems that occur wholly or predominantly within the alpine environment; these are species that have evolved in the harsh conditions of the high-altitude environment.

About one third of Victoria’s native plant species, more than half of the terrestrial bird species, 40 per cent of the State’s mammal species and roughly one third of Victoria’s rare and threatened species are found in the Greater Alpine National Parks. Some native plant and animal species of the Alps, such as the Snow Gum (*Eucalyptus pauciflora*), have appeal beyond their ecological value and are recognised by the Traditional Owners as culturally significant for culinary or medicinal uses.



Regional Victoria’s Bioregions highlight the extent and uniqueness of the alpine environment

Landform

The Australian Alps are the highest part of a larger entity, the Eastern Highlands of Australia or the Great Dividing Range, which runs the length of the east coast from northern Queensland to the Grampians in western Victoria. The crest of the range is defined by the separation of two major watersheds that flow in opposite directions to the east and south, and to the South and West.

The splendour of the Australian Alps is best appreciated through an understanding of the vast timescale and energy involved in shaping them. However, the when and how of their formation remains a debate amongst geologists. The mountain ranges of the Alps are characterised by their high plateaus and gently rolling slopes, in contrast to the rugged peaks of other major mountain ranges of the world. This is most likely due to the process of continental splitting rather than continental collision, when 80 millions years ago the super-continent Gondwana split, forming New Zealand and Australia’s eastern coastline. Over aeons, weather shaped the mountains through frost, wind and water, creating deep valleys out of the high plateaus.

Today the geology of the trail is composed primarily of schist and gneiss. The Bogong High Plains are formed of granite, gneiss and basalt. The granite bodies of the High Plains are resistant to erosion, and hence form plateaus and ridges with large blocks, or tors, of rock sticking up. The surrounding sedimentary rocks of the lower country are more susceptible to erosion from weathering, forming the valleys and slopes cutting through the plateau. Periglacial landforms (where ground froze for long periods) formed block streams, or stone rivers formed by semi-frozen subsoils that moved down slope as a mass of rock fragments of various sizes bound together by snow. While smaller particles were washed away, today larger boulders and rock are exposed on the mountain sides and can be seen along the upper slopes from the trail.

The Victorian Alps contain some of the highest mountains in Australia. Mt Feathertop, a spectacular peak to climb on the trail, towers at 1922 metres above sea level. It is the second highest peak in the state after Mt Bogong, just north-east of the trail.



Steep landform leading to Mt Feathertop



Loose shale and sedimentary stone of the Diamantina Spur



Granite boulders atop the Bogong High Plains plateau

Climate

The major changes in elevation mean the climate of Australian Alps is generally characterised by extremes. Annual patterns of temperature and precipitation bring seasonal variation in visitation. While the Falls Creek and Mt Hotham alpine resorts are most popular in winter, and Alpine National Park in warmer months, all destinations have the potential to extend their popular seasons through the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing and particularly through the types of accommodation offered along it.

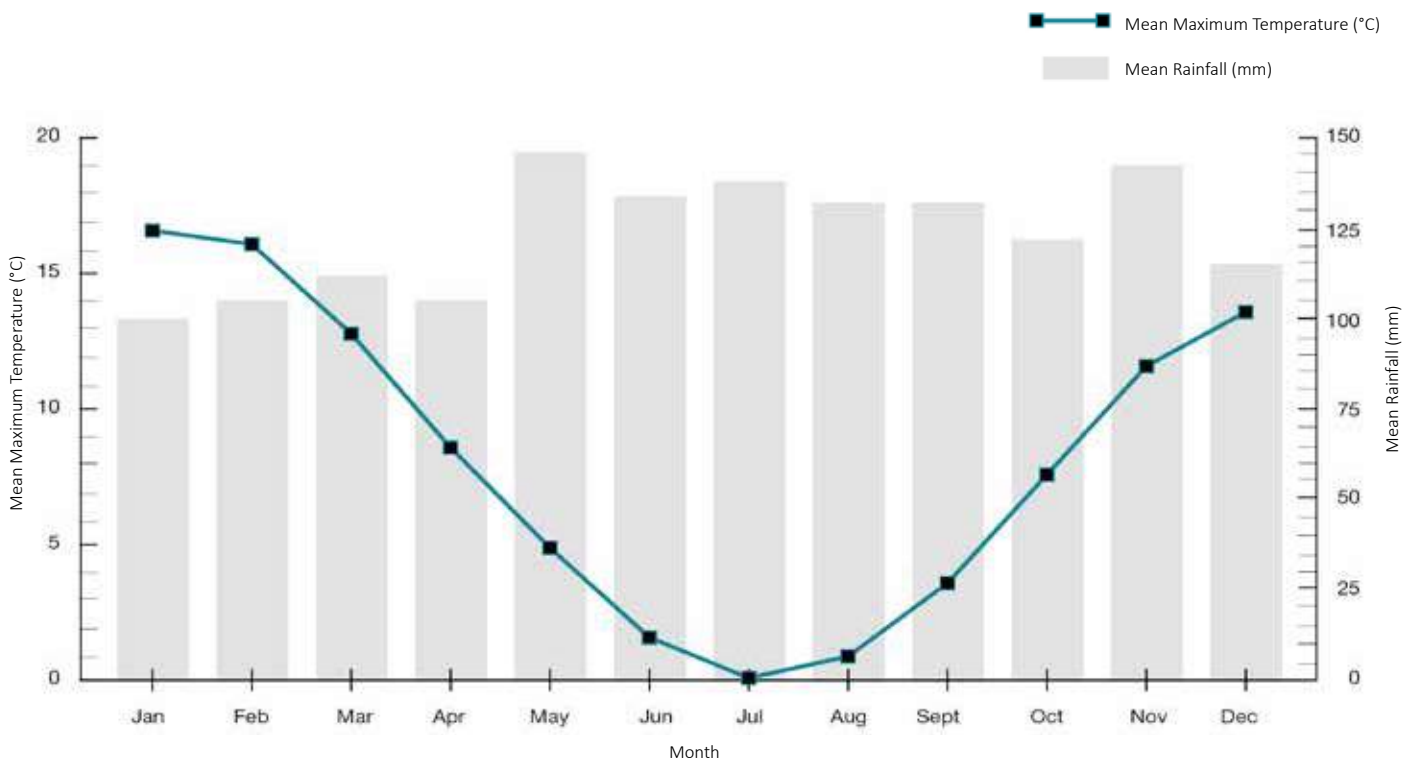
Alpine mountains and environments are susceptible to rapid changes in rain, winds, snow and fog. Local variations in temperature and precipitation can be significant; for instance, leeward slopes can receive up to twice as much snow as windward sites, often retaining it for several weeks longer.

While the peaks and plateaus receive the most wind, snow and colder temperatures, cold air drainage — the flowing of cold air off hills and settling into valleys — can create localised differences that make it too cold for tree growth in open valleys. Prevailing winds come from the

north/ north-west, impacting the location of accommodation and necessitating protection in exposed areas.

The Alpine National Park has the largest mean annual water flow of any park in Victoria and the highest quality water in the state — supplying regional High Country towns with irrigation, urban, industrial, hydro-electric, stock and domestic uses and additionally supplementing Melbourne’s water supply.

Low temperatures, winter snow fall and heavy fog impact visitor experience and safety, necessitating careful monitoring and up-to-date communication of the risks presented to visitors. Track upgrades and climate-appropriate accommodation will be required to extend the shoulder seasons and encourage year-round use.



Mount Hotham climate patterns
 Data source: Bureau of Meteorology Annual Climate Statistics for Mt Hotham, 1990–2016

Fire

While fires are a natural occurrence in most Australian ecosystems, there is little historic evidence of widespread bushfires in the alpine environments. The alpine, subalpine, rainforest and riparian communities do not rely on fire for regeneration and are generally slow to recover after bushfires. With a changing climate, hotter and drier summers pose a threat to the flora of the region today, which — due to their slow growth — potentially do not have enough time to recover and regenerate before a subsequent fire. Alpine Ash (*Eucalyptus delegatensis*), for example, can take 15–25 years to reach seed-bearing maturity. More frequent fires reduce their capacity for regeneration and therefore the viability of the species and its habitat to survive. After fire, when ash forests are slow to regenerate, they tend to shift to highly flammable heaths and wattles which in turn perpetuate the cycle of fires.

Even so, fires have, and will, continue to shape the alpine region. In 2013, lightning strikes started a major bushfire in the park roughly 4 kilometres north-east of Harrietville, burning for 55 days across 36,000 hectares around Mt Feathertop, Mt Hotham Alpine Resort and the surrounding State

Forest, severely impacting the Alpine Ash forest. Planned burns are now part of the management regime of Alpine National Park to protect sensitive and recovering communities. These smaller, controlled burns help to create a mosaic of different growth stages and reduce the hazard and risk to visitors and surrounding communities.

Bushfires present significant risks to visitors and park assets, including heritage sites and rare and endangered ecological vegetation classes. The entire Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing passes through the Bushfire Management Overlay (BMO), which relates specifically to the protection of human life and property. Compliance with the BMO triggers the need for a planning permit and appropriate bushfire protection measures for any development.

Through emergency management plans, collaboration with Traditional Owners and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, bushfire risk is effectively managed and mitigated. Parks Victoria is a support agency for bushfire management, and is responsible for responding to emergency flooding and rehabilitation, clearing and restoration of roads and other park assets.



Visible forest regeneration after fire. Burnt Snow Gums in the foreground and the taller Alpine Ash in the distance.

Plant Communities

The vegetation of the Alps environment is largely defined by changes in elevation. Four major zones create unique plant communities from the lower river valleys to the upper plateaus and peaks: riparian environments and lower elevations, montane, subalpine and alpine zones. The ecological structures of these zones are characterised by the height and density of vegetation due to their exposure to the natural forces of wind, water, frost and fire. Higher elevation communities include grasslands, heathlands and peatland communities above the tree line. Subalpine communities include Snow Gum (*Eucalyptus pauciflora*) Woodlands, and montane communities include unusual combinations of species that can tolerate both exposed montane and wet conditions — dominated by Alpine Ash (*Eucalyptus delegatensis*) in higher elevations.

More than 60 ecological vegetation classes (EVCs) are recorded in the Greater Alpine National Parks planning area, which includes the Alpine National Park, Baw Baw National Park, Mt Buffalo National Park, and other national parks across the Australian Alps. Over half of these EVCs are classified as endangered, vulnerable or depleted. Roughly 46 species of *Eucalyptus* are recorded in the Greater Alpine National Parks.

Pressures on flora in the Alpine National Park include compaction and disturbance from grazing animals, introduced pests and pathogens, invasive exotic species intrusion and climate change — particularly in the occurrence of extreme fires, storm events and increasing severity of drought and heat. Recent intense drought years and bushfires have been particularly harmful in the lower elevations, though recovery has been recorded as being faster in moss beds, grasslands, heathlands and amongst threatened flora in the alpine zones.

The overleaf map demonstrates the diverse range and spread of ecological vegetation classes across the study area. In particular, the High Plains showcase a rich and finely arranged patchwork of sensitive, rare and partly endangered communities.

The protection of these ecological communities will guide all planning and development along the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing.



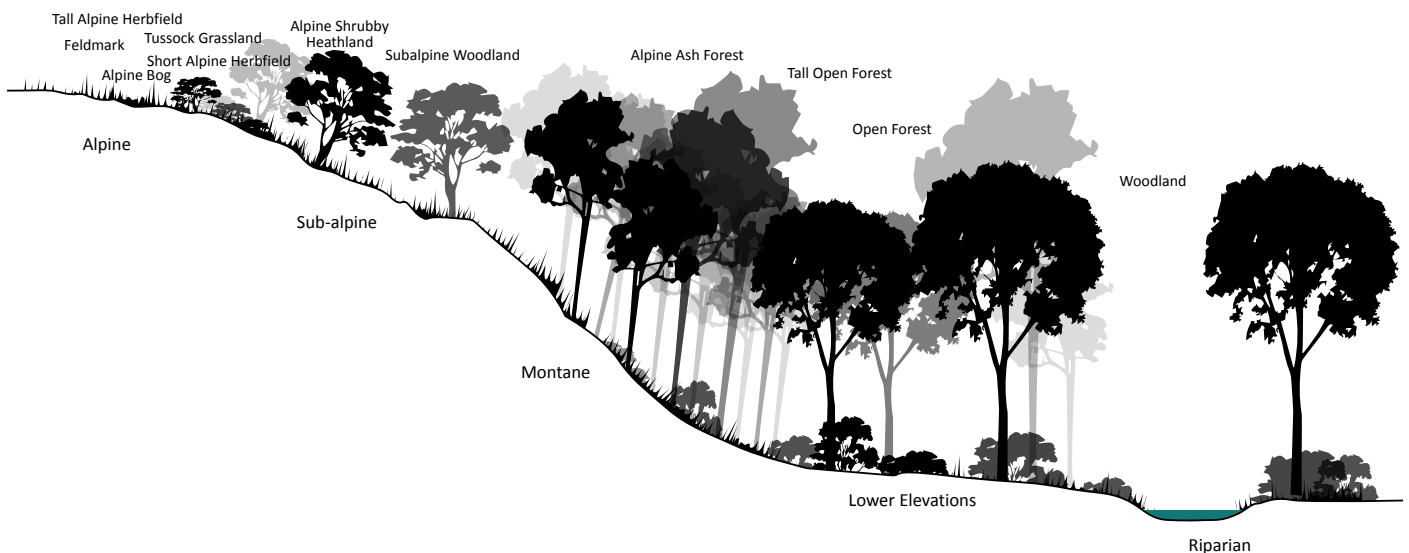
Alpine Herbfield: Alpine Everlasting (*Xerochrysum subundulatum*)



Subalpine Woodland: Snow Gum (*Eucalyptus pauciflora*)



Open Forest (Wet Sclerophyll): Alpine Ash (*Eucalyptus delegatensis*)



Typical cross-section of the alpine, subalpine and montane ecological zones

Fauna

All the major animal groups are represented in the Greater Alpine National Park planning area, including over 300 native vertebrate species, more than half of Victoria’s terrestrial bird species and 40 percent of mammal species. Of particular interest are the endemic species found nowhere else in the world. Four species confined to the alpine and subalpine zones — the Mountain Pygmy Possum, Northern and Southern Corroboree Frog and the Baw Baw Frog — are especially at risk from human activity, partly because they are restricted not just to these zones but also to specific vegetation communities within them.

Careful planning and management will ensure that the loss of habitat and displacement of these species is avoided.

Non-native animals such as deer, rabbits, foxes and trout were introduced to the area for hunting and food. Horses, cattle, pigs, and goats were

brought to the High Country by early settlers in the 1800s.

While many find cultural and historic significance in the presence of horses in the High Plains, there is no doubt they, along with deer, are severely impacting the alpine ecology. These disturbances range from soil compaction and erosion, trampling of vegetation, damage to peatland habitat and water bodies, weed dispersal and reduction in plant species richness.

The Bogong moth (*Agrotis infusa*) is of particular cultural significance to the Traditional Owners of the regional Alps. In the early summer, to escape the heat, the native moth migrates to the High Plains from the lowlands where it breeds and feeds. They can be found in the thousands clustered in rock crevices, under boulders and in caves, remaining dormant for months. At dusk during migration, hundreds of thousands of Bogong Moths can fill the air in black vibrating masses.



Bogong Moth (*Agrotis infusa*)
Photo credit: Lucinda Gibson and Ken Hiker, Museum Victoria



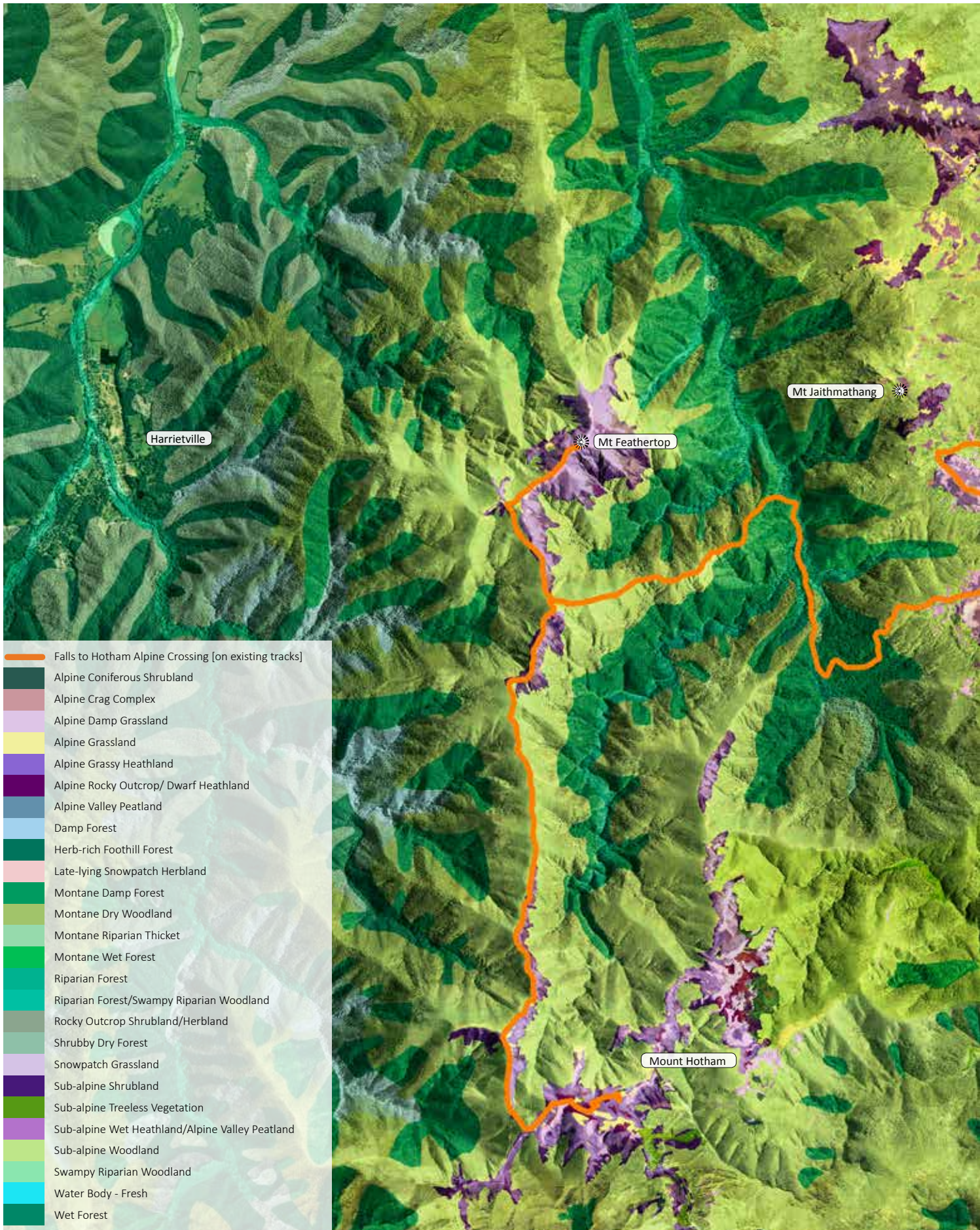
Common Wombat (*Vombatus ursinus*)
Photo credit: Bret Charman



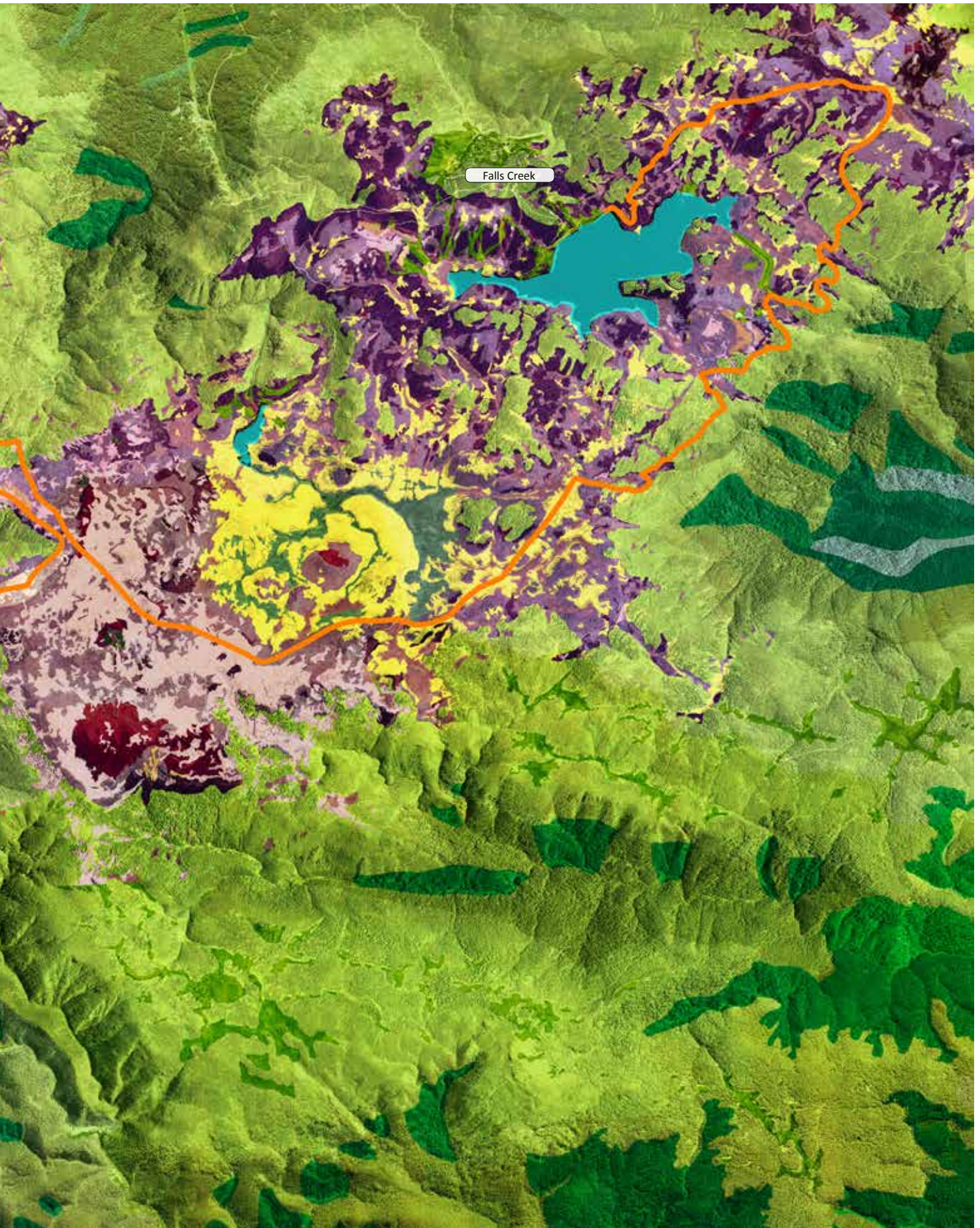
Mountain Pygmy Possum (*Burrmys parvus*)
Photo credit: Gerhard Koertner



Wedge-tailed Eagle (*Aquila audax*)
Photo credit: Fir0002/Flagstafffoto



Ecological Vegetation Classes of the region



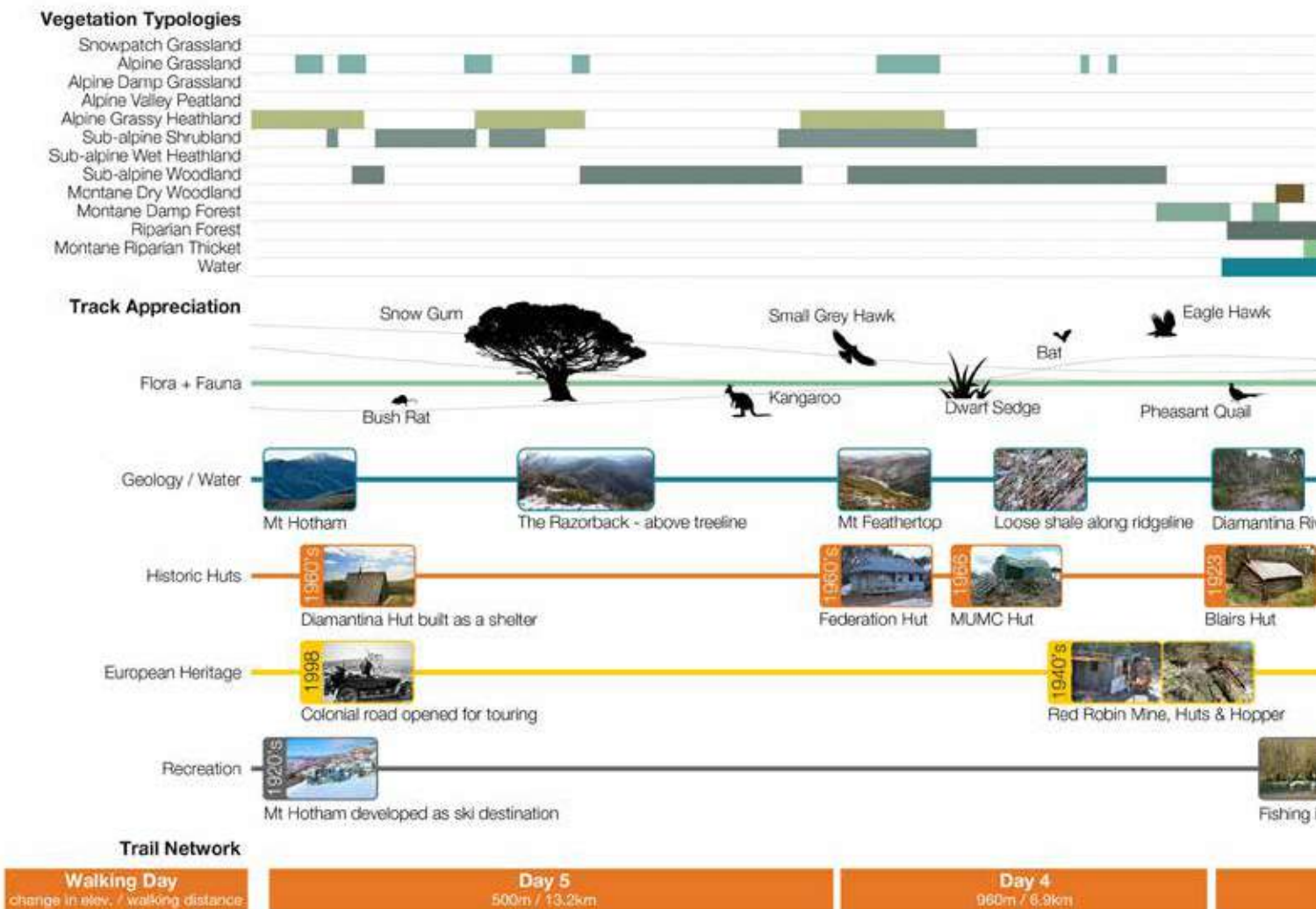
Interpreting the Values of the Landscape

The many cultural stories and existing ecologies of the land provide wonderful opportunities to interpret the values of the region. The understanding of these values through education, interpretation and immersion not only enhances the visitor experience, but provides a foundation for the appreciation of the land narratives and nurtures awareness and therefore stewardship.

Each segment of the trail presents unique narratives of life in the Victorian Alps, from the expansive ghosts of burnt Snow Gums and Alpine Ash to infrastructure and structures spread throughout the landscape. While traversing the trail there is an abundance of opportunities to tell these stories and provide strategies to protect these stories and values.

The interpretation of values will play a major role in the curation of experiences for all who visit the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing. This provides the opportunity for outdoor education groups, school groups, scout groups, Junior Rangers, guided tours and independent walkers to become fully immersed in the values of the land.

Artefacts and places of cultural significance can be found throughout the area that is traversed by the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing. A process of continuing consultation is necessary to ensure that Traditional Owners' aspirations for their Country, their interpretation and opportunities for Aboriginal employment and businesses are



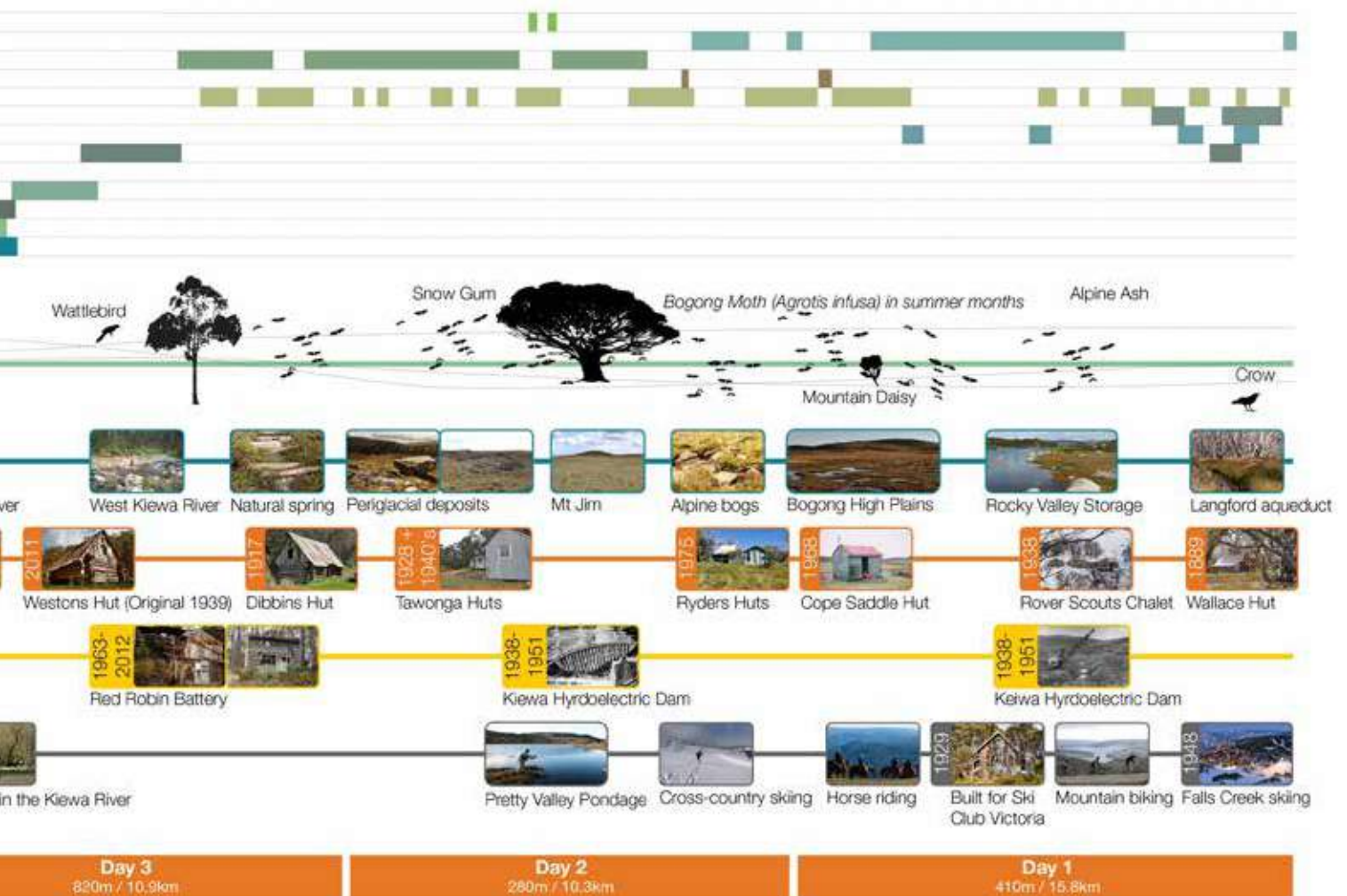
A journey through the changing stories of the landscape

understood. An opportunity exists to establish a Centre for Cultural Heritage at one of the trailheads to provide a single go-to place for a broader visitor group to engage with the cultural values of the place.

Implementation of the master plan will need to be informed by the preparation of a detailed interpretation plan developed with the region's Traditional Owners and historians. The interpretation plan will require comprehensive research in order to present a complete, accurate, balanced and integrated approach to Aboriginal and post-European cultural landscape themes and stories.

A palette of tools will be employed to convey the stories. Interpretation strategies and a marketing and branding exercise will identify the content and range of the stories to be told. New technologies will be used to reduce visual clutter in the landscape and allow visitors to curate their own experience.

Detailed site design and development of rest stops and viewing spots, signage strategies, online information and handouts, audio tours, digital and hardcopy booklets are part of the suite of tools to convey stories and interpretations.





23K

TAWONGA HUB

WESTONS HUB

TERRA GAP

DOPE



Chapter 03
**What route will the Falls to
Hotham Alpine Crossing take?**

03 What route will the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing take?

The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will offer a range of walking experiences that improve access to the wonders of the Victorian Alps, offering visitors a full choice of transformative, personally compelling experiences.

Track Alignment

Traversing the Alps

The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will run 56 kilometres through the Alpine National Park on a network of existing and new trails. The track will navigate through stunning alpine and subalpine environments, cross significant geological and cultural features and pass by historic cattlemen's and recreational huts.

This new alignment connects the park's quintessential landscape features into a diversified walking experience, in which each day offers a distinct focus and experience. The sum of these experiences will provide walkers with impressions and appreciations of the richness of natural and cultural values of the Victorian High Country.

Unlike many middle to long distance walks in Australia, the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing is both remote in some segments and incredibly well connected in others. While many precedent existing trails such as the Overland Track and Milford Track are located entirely within remote areas with very little access points onto the trail, the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing forms part of a track network that crisscrosses over the High Country and includes well-established tracks linking to the adjacent mountain townships of Harrietville, Dinner Plain and, farther away, Bogong.

This network creates many opportunities to step onto the iconic track, and many ways to use, extend and step out from it. While this allows people to curate their own personalised hiking

experience, it also means that users of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will encounter fellow walkers walking in different directions. A sense of remoteness is intermittently replaced with a sense of being in a hotspot of recreation, with opportunities to engage with other users and share experiences. This engagement may create a desire to further investigate the area to understand alternative walking routes, and creating potential for 'return walkers'. This is an advantage over other precedent existing walks which, once walked, are 'ticked off the list' and a return is unlikely for many years. The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing is therefore in a much better position to facilitate economic growth in the region, with the ability to draw repeat walkers. The region's current green season events and attractions in return offer a great pre and post-trail offer experience would add to an overall satisfaction level.

In peak season parts of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing, in particular the Razorback, attracts hundreds of day visitors. This potential 'loss of remoteness and wildness' during this last segment will need to be addressed within the marketing and branding strategies of the Falls To Hotham Alpine Crossing. In order to facilitate booking and management of the accommodation options and to improve the curation of experiences along the track, it is proposed to walk the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing in a single direction, from Falls Creek to Mt Hotham, similar to well-established walks such as the Overland Track in Tasmania and the Milford Track in New Zealand.



The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing terrain and track alignment

The Core Offer

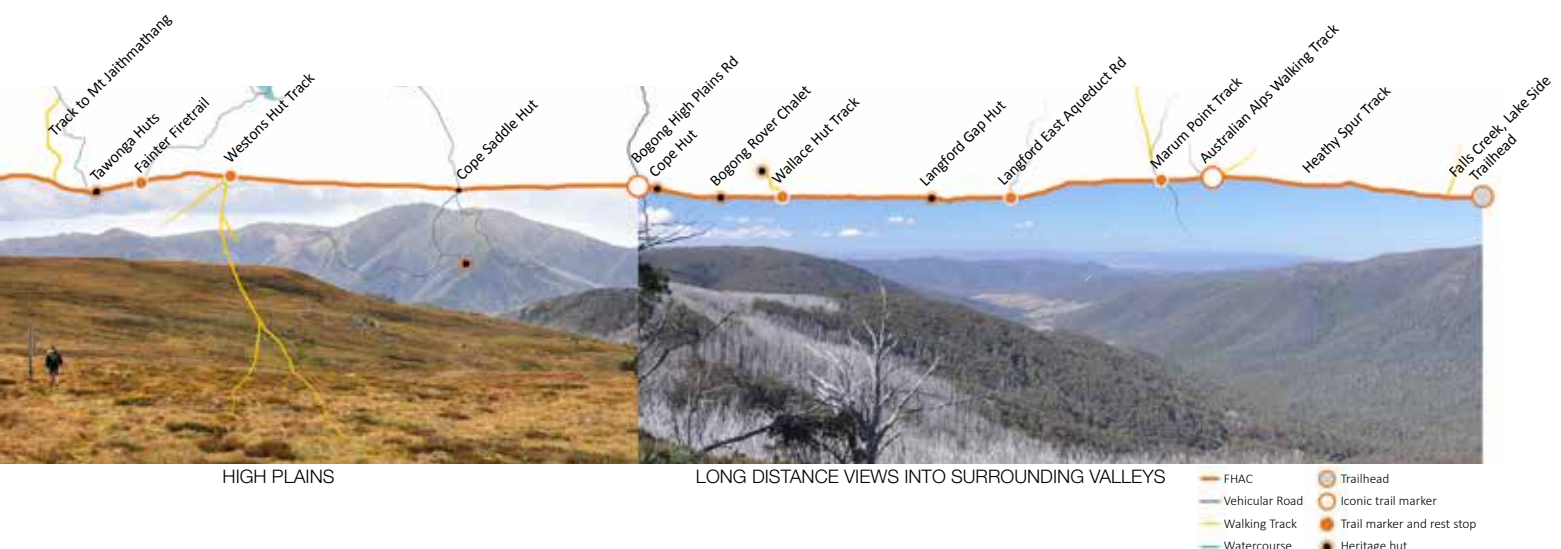
The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing is a 5-day, 4-night hike through the Victorian High Country that provides a challenging but rewarding experience for a wide demographic of walkers.

The hike consists of long sections of relatively flat areas, such as the Bogong High Plains and the Razorback at the end of the walk, and steeper sections such as the descent and following ascent of the Kiewa River Valley which add a dramatic and physically challenging component to the overall experience. Day segments are designed to extend between 9 and 15km of walking to leave enough time in the afternoons to embark on alternative activities such as exploring, photographing and relaxing. The overnight nodes are located in areas of greater interest, linked to heritage huts or in awe-inspiring landscapes, encouraging users to stroll, watch a sunset or sunrise, or just simply relax in the communal accommodation spaces.

The establishment of an efficient and regular shuttle service (walker drop off and pick up) by licensed tour operators will improve access, increase the attractiveness of the single-direction trail and reduce demand for car parking facilities at trailheads.

In short, as a series of High Country chapters the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing is summarised in the adjacent table.

	Location	Key Features
Start	Falls Creek Lakeside Carpark Trailhead	Alpine Resort, recreation, sports, food and entertainment. This location is under master planning by the resort management and coordination is required to satisfactorily integrate the hiking facilities.
Day 1	Heathy Spur and Langford Aqueduct	Hydro scheme, winter sport, high plains, heritage huts.
Day 2	Bogong High Plains	Remote and Natural Area, mountain peaks, wildflowers, history and heritage huts.
Day 3	Westons Spur into Kiewa River valley	Descent from alpine to mountain forest valleys, remnant bush fires, gold mining, grazing, geology.
Day 4	Diamantina Spur	Ascent into the alpine area, remnant bush fires, physical challenge, Mt Feathertop.
Day 5	Razorback	Alpine views, mountaineering.
Finish	Mt Hotham, Loch Carpark Trailhead	Alpine Resort, recreation, sports, food and entertainment. This location is under master planning by the resort management and coordination is required to satisfactorily integrate the hiking facilities.



Walking Products

Guides and tour operators currently offer a range of walking products utilising the track network of the area. The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing supports and encourages Licensed Tour Operators (LTOs) to develop packages that can further enrich the experiences and engagement with the area. This may include education-focused walks on Indigenous or European histories, or walks focused on environmental issues such as endangered flora/fauna or geomorphological facts.

Tour operators and service providers can further provide equipment supply or catering services, for example, a glamping experience utilising the Hiker Camp platforms to install their own tent systems or by taking a lease of the Operated Huts to provide a very distinct, singular walking experience.

Walking product opportunities include:

Independent walks

For individuals and groups who wish to undertake a self-guided day walk or overnight walk. Self-sufficient for all transport, accommodation and food needs within the park.

Supported, self-guided walks

For individuals and groups who may rely on an LTO to provide transport to and from the park, and/or food drops along the route with pre-booked camp sites.

Guided walks, on-park camping

Small group-based walking guided by an LTO who utilises Hiker Camps. The LTO may provide meals, tents and other goods.

Guided walks, on-park roofed accommodation

Small group-based walking guided by an LTO who utilises the Operated Huts. The LTO may provide meals, bedding and other goods.

Guided walks, off-park accommodation

Products developed by commercial operators for day-walks into the park. Suited for those seeking a higher level of accommodation and meals.

Multi-activity adventure packages

Products developed by commercial operators to provide a variety of adventure activities including horse riding, mountain biking, fishing and kayaking.

Connections and Diversions

The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will be well connected to a network of existing tracks and roads within the park. With connecting tracks to Harrietville, Dinner Plain and even Bogong Village, the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing can open up to a broader set of potential experiences for visitors. Walkers would have the option to amend their journey and customise their own 'Alpine Crossing' by stepping off the main track at one of the many trail markers.

There are additional walking opportunities throughout the middle section of the trail, including short trips to Mt Jaithmathang, Mt Jim, the Red Robin gold mine, and the Melbourne University Mountaineering Club geodesic dome hut near Mt Feathertop.

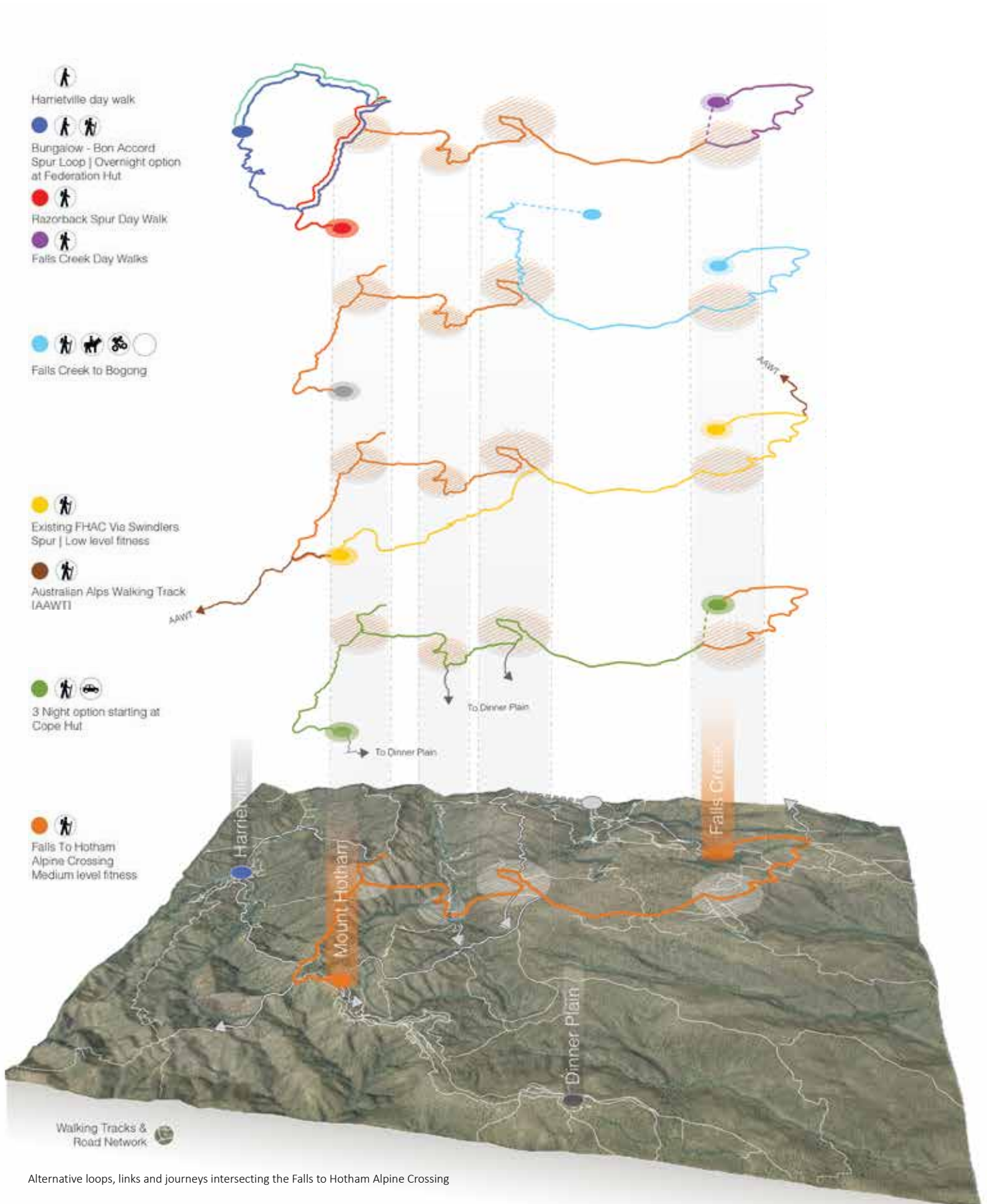
The two links of Bungalow Spur and Bon Accord Spur offer the mountain village of Harrietville as an alternative finish location, a place filled with gold mining heritage and an ambitious interpretation scheme developed for easy and informative access to the stories of the place.

Alternatively, the former existing route of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing via the valley plains at Dibbins Hut and Swindlers Spur up to Mt Hotham offers an ascent less challenging than Diamantina Spur.

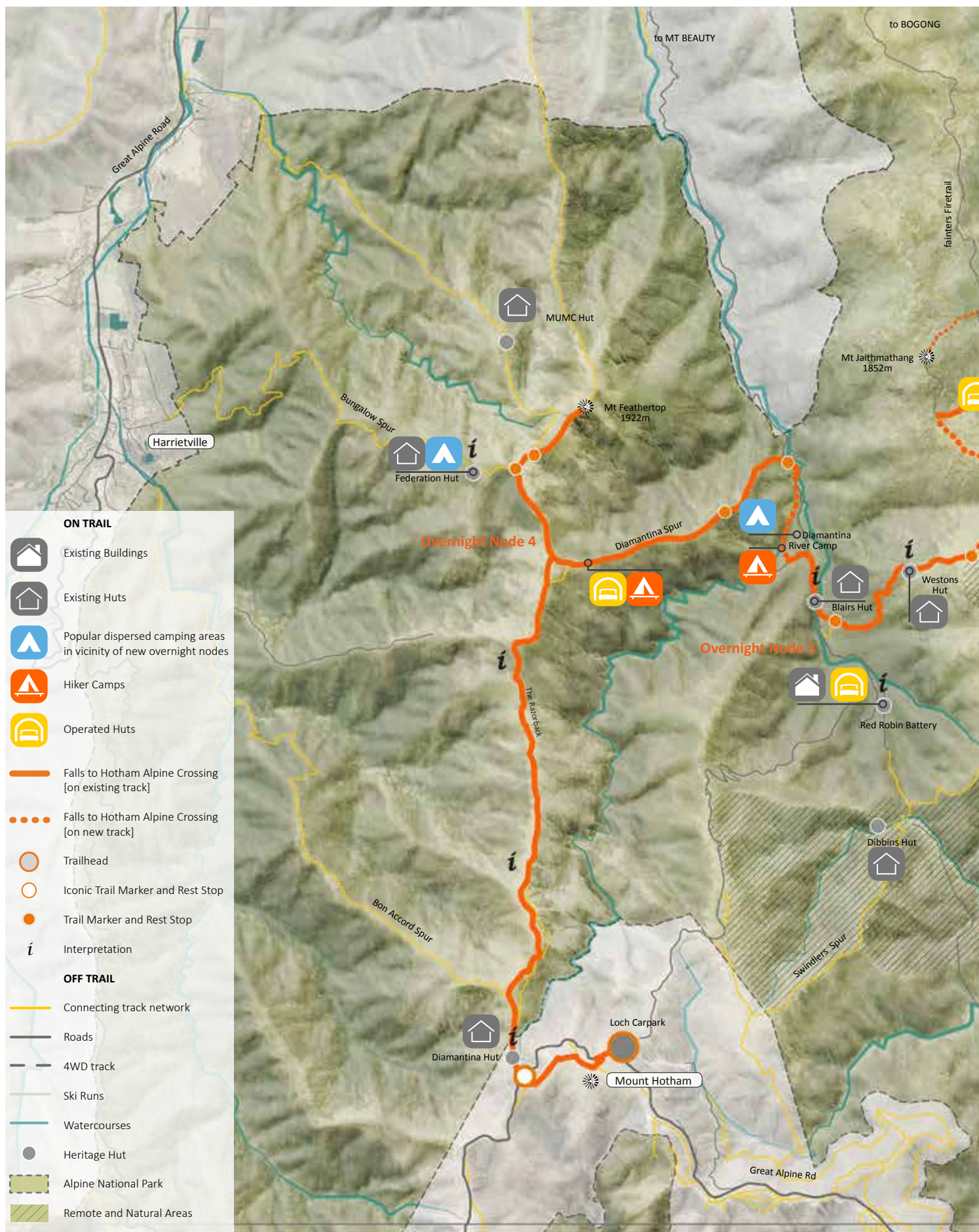
Once arrived in Mt Hotham, a walking extension along the newly constructed Brabralung Trail to Dinner Plain is available.

These options may provide the more advanced individual walkers and school and educational groups a chance to extend their walking experiences and customise the core experience to suit their individual interests.

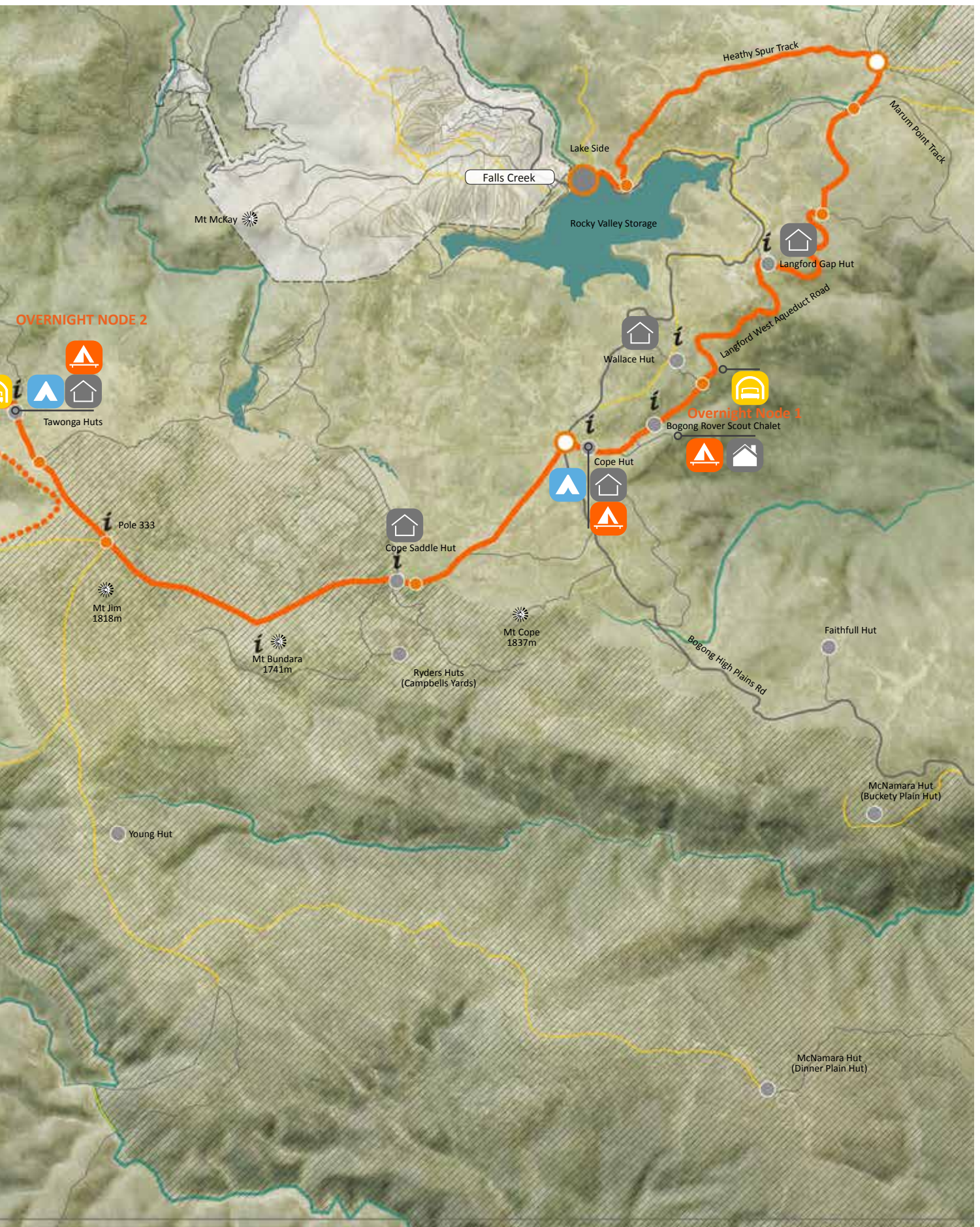
Additionally, the region's current capacity to host other year-round recreational activities can add to the walking experience, with the potential to extend visits and encourage repeat visitation. Due to the length of the walk, the trail could be undertaken as a week-long trip with extended stays in the alpine resorts and towns surrounding the trail, allowing visitors to fully engage with the regional tourism offerings.



Alternative loops, links and journeys intersecting the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing



Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing trail alignment



Track Segments

Along man-made waterways, leave the hustle and bustle behind and delve into the serenity of the High Country.

Day 1:

Falls Creek, Lake Side–Cope Hut

15.8 km walk — change in altitude approx. 410 m
Estimated walking time: 4.5 hrs

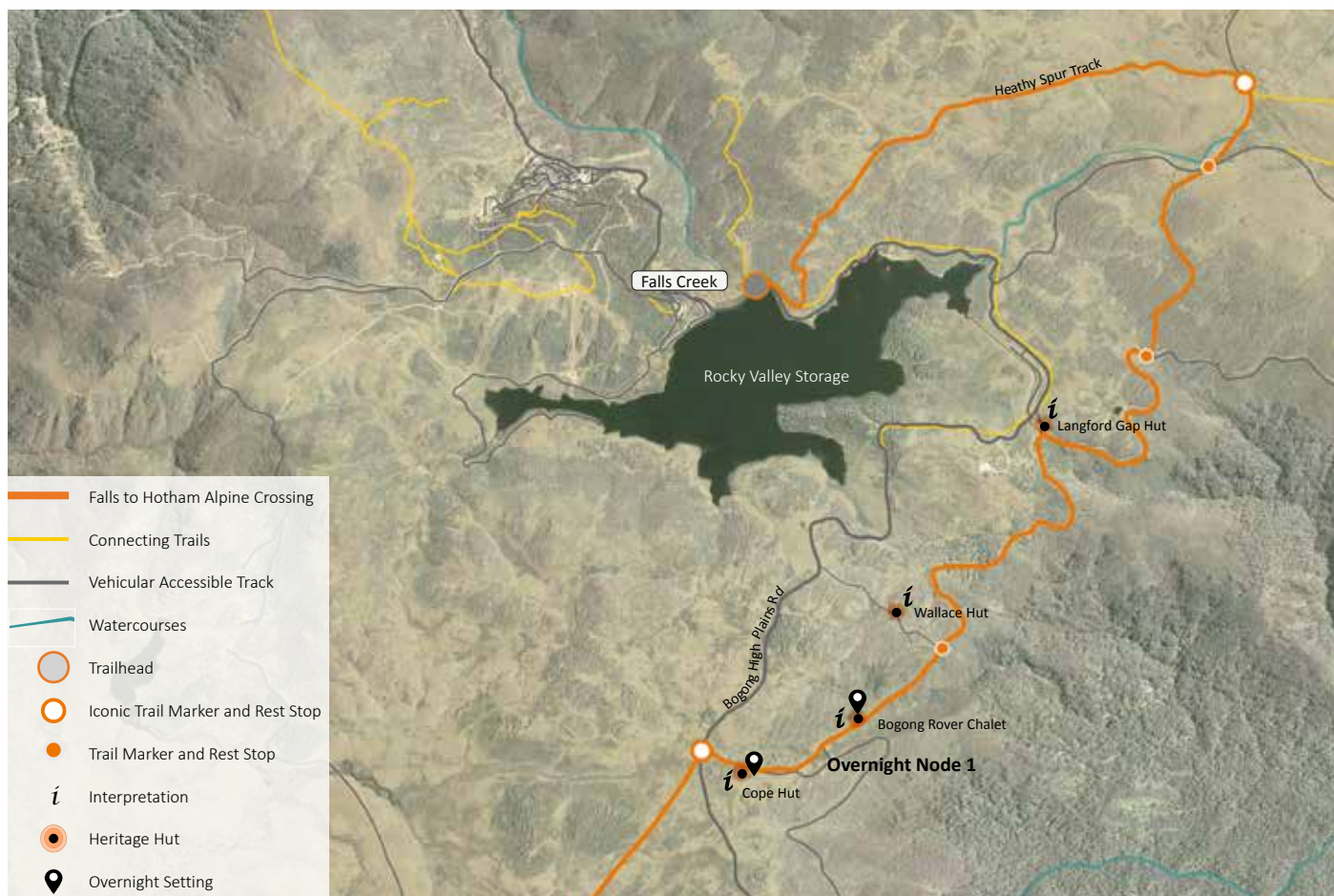
Walkers on day 1 will have a rich experience full of stories embedded in the cultural history of the Bogong High Plains; the remnants of the Kiewa Hydro-electric Scheme, historic cattlemen's and engineer's huts and a skiing chalet that has potential for redevelopment.

Starting out at the trailhead at the Rocky Valley Dam, walkers head out on the Heathy Spur Track. The well-established track will continue to attract day visitors and curious walkers who may wish to spend one night on the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing. The Langford Gap Aqueduct, originating at Rocky Valley Storage, runs next to the trail and gives walkers an insight into the ambitions of past infrastructure projects in the High Country.

In the future, other potential starting options could enable Licensed Tour Operators to offer shuttle or driving services, and mountain biking.

An opportunity exists to shorten the walk by one day by cutting off the Heathy Spur section of the track and starting at Cope Hut or Wallace Hut car parks, which are serviced by the Bogong High Plains Road. A secondary trailhead is proposed at the Cope Hut car park.

Falls Creek Resort is currently developing a master plan re-visioning, beside other areas, the Lake Site Carpark. The proposed assets, such as upgraded parking and cafe/restaurant facilities need to be coordinated with the aspirations of the Falls Creek Master Plan to ensure that the best possible investments are achieved.



Track segment 1 site plan



① Rocky Valley Dam



② Langford East Aqueduct Track



③ View from Langford West Aqueduct Rd



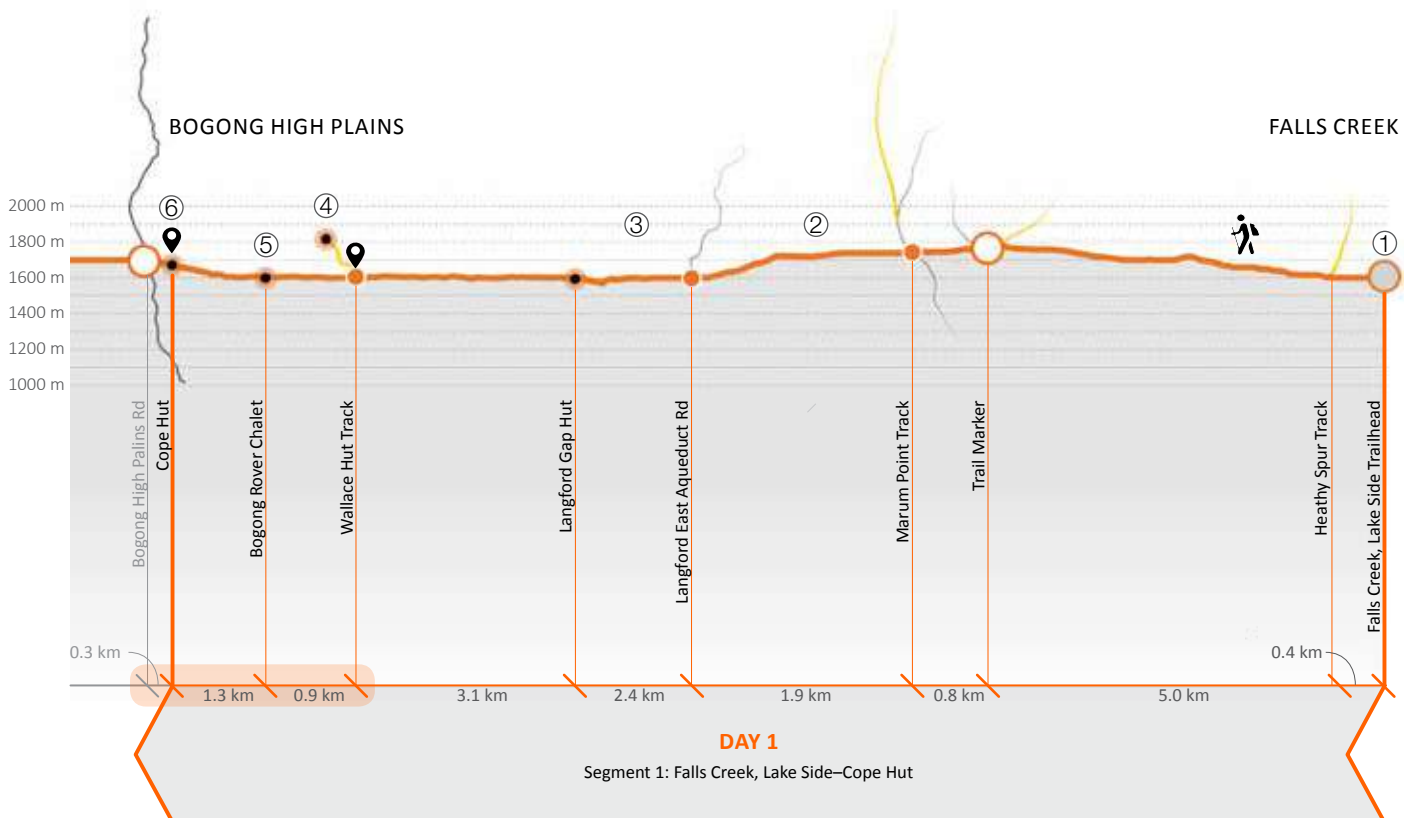
④ Wallace Hut



⑤ Bogong Rover Chalet
Photo credit: Maelgwn,
Wikimedia Commons



⑥ Cope Hut



Track segment 1 terrain

Enjoy the solitude of the High Country, open skies above and delicate flowers beneath.

Day 2:

Cope Hut–Tawonga Huts

10.3 km walk — change in altitude approx. 280 m
 Estimated walking time: 3.5 hrs

Passing Cope Hut and across Bogong High Plains Road, the trail opens up to the quintessential High Plains experience: vast open views of the plateau, rare alpine flora and endangered peatlands.

Visitors walk the trail for 10 kilometres, passing through the Bundara–Cobungra Remote and Natural Area and eventually descending into the Tawonga Huts complex and former grazing pastures. This area features large granite boulders which dot the landscape. Walkers might also recall the summer celebrations of the Traditional Owners in the feasting of the Bogong Moths.

The trail quality will be simple and subtle. Only where required for reasons of environmental protection, elevated single file boardwalks will be provided. This day enables walkers to appreciate the delicate nature of the treeless landscape.

After settling in for the evening, walkers could take a side trip of about two kilometres to Mt Jaithmathang, a significant geologic feature and site for the Traditional Owners, and a vantage point to watch the sun set over Mt Feathertop before a loop walk back down for the night.

A new track alignment is proposed to take walkers from Tawonga Huts along the ridgeline closer to the dramatic drop into the Kiewa Valley. This new track would avoid the Remote Wilderness Area and offer a different experience to the existing approach into the huts.



Track segment 2 site plan





① Alpine Flora



② Bogong High Plains



③ Seasonal Watercourses



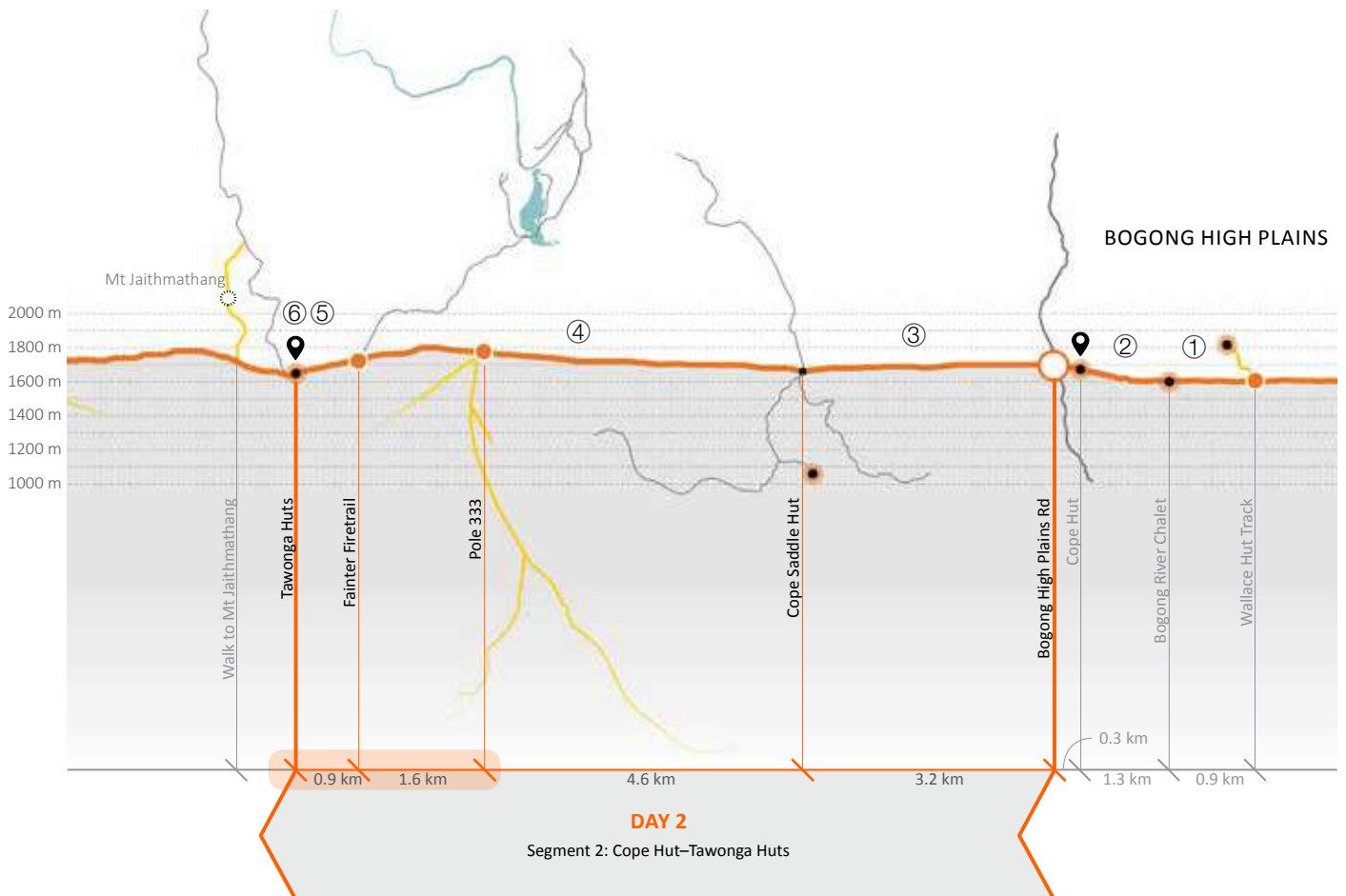
④ Traversing the High Plains



⑤ View from Tawonga Huts



⑥ Tawonga Huts Complex



Track segment 2 terrain

Drop steeply through silver burnt skeletons into a world of torrent streams filled with gold.

Day 3:
Tawonga Huts–Diamantina River Camp

10.9 km walk — change in altitude approx. 820 m
 Estimated walking time: 3.5 hrs

The walking experience on the third segment is characterised by the approach to the steep edge of the plateau and the descent into the West Kiewa River valley. The experience of this changing landscape is heightened by the expansive views towards Mt Feathertop and the Razorback (a peek at what’s to come) and by the noticeable changes in vegetation moving down the mountain.

A rest stop with views westwards provides a breathtaking spot for photography and morning tea. Westons Hut also provides an opportunity to rest before embarking on the descent through the Alpine Ash forest.

While the walking distance on the main track is short, it can easily be supplemented by a number of options to finish off a full day, or it may even lead to an extended stay in the West Kiewa River valley with independent or serviced activities such as horse riding, mountain biking and fishing. There is also the potential to hike down the road to Red Robin Battery and take a tour of the historic gold mines or explore the open valley farther south. In the boggy plains surrounding Dibbins Hut, visitors may be surprised by an early morning frost, unaware of cold air drainage from the surrounding mountains.

This section will require some careful upgrading of the existing track to provide environmental protection when crossing boggy areas or creeks.



Track segment 3 site plan



① High Plains



② Snow Gum Woodland transition



③ Alpine Ash Forest



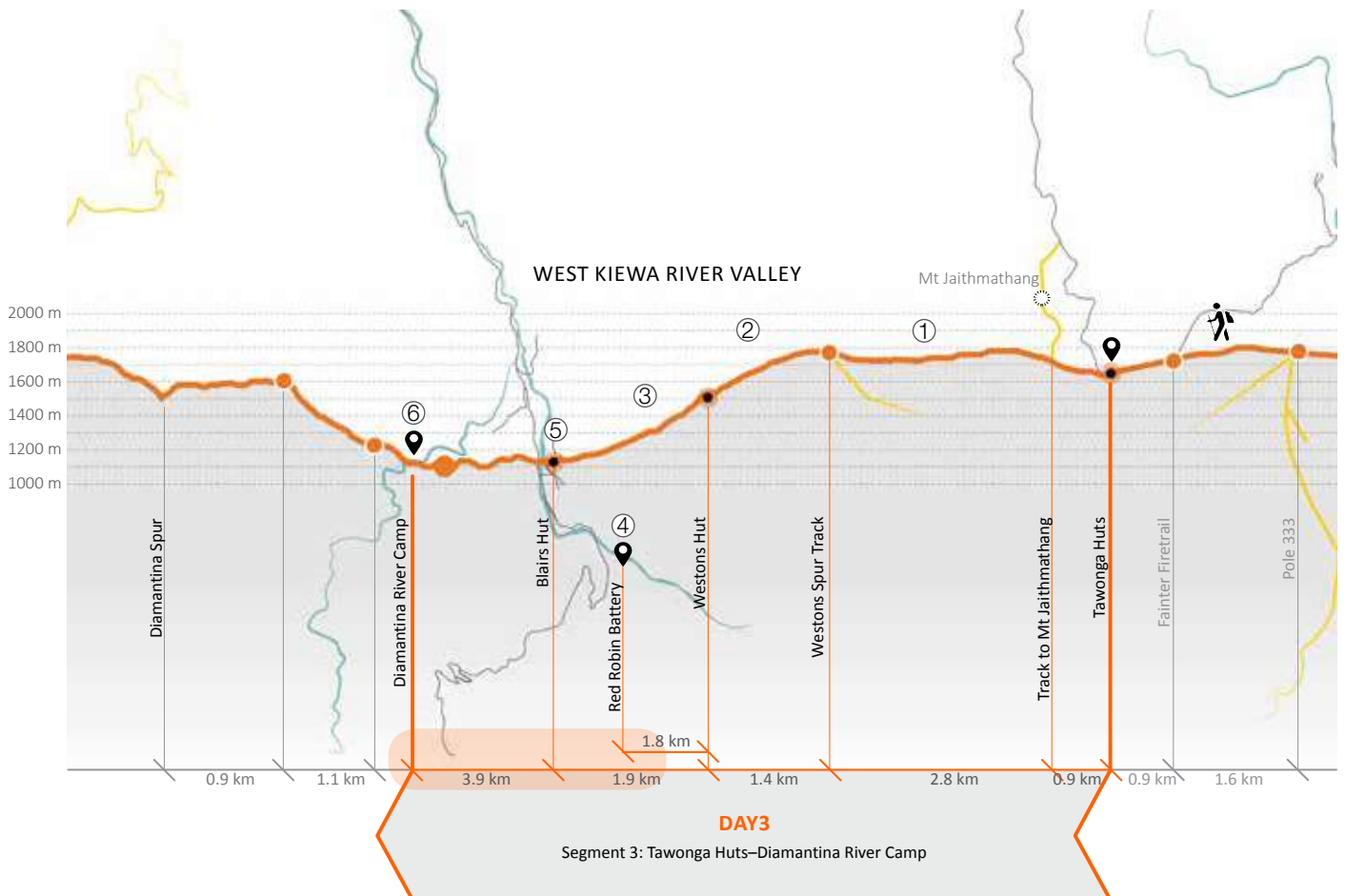
④ Red Robin Battery



⑤ Blairs Hut



⑥ Diamantina Creek



Track segment 3 terrain

A day of physical challenge up the steep Diamantina Spur, rewarded by breathtaking views from Mt Feathertop.

**Day 4:
Diamantina River Camp–Mt Feathertop**

6.9 km walk — change in altitude approx. 960 m
Estimated walking time: 7 hrs

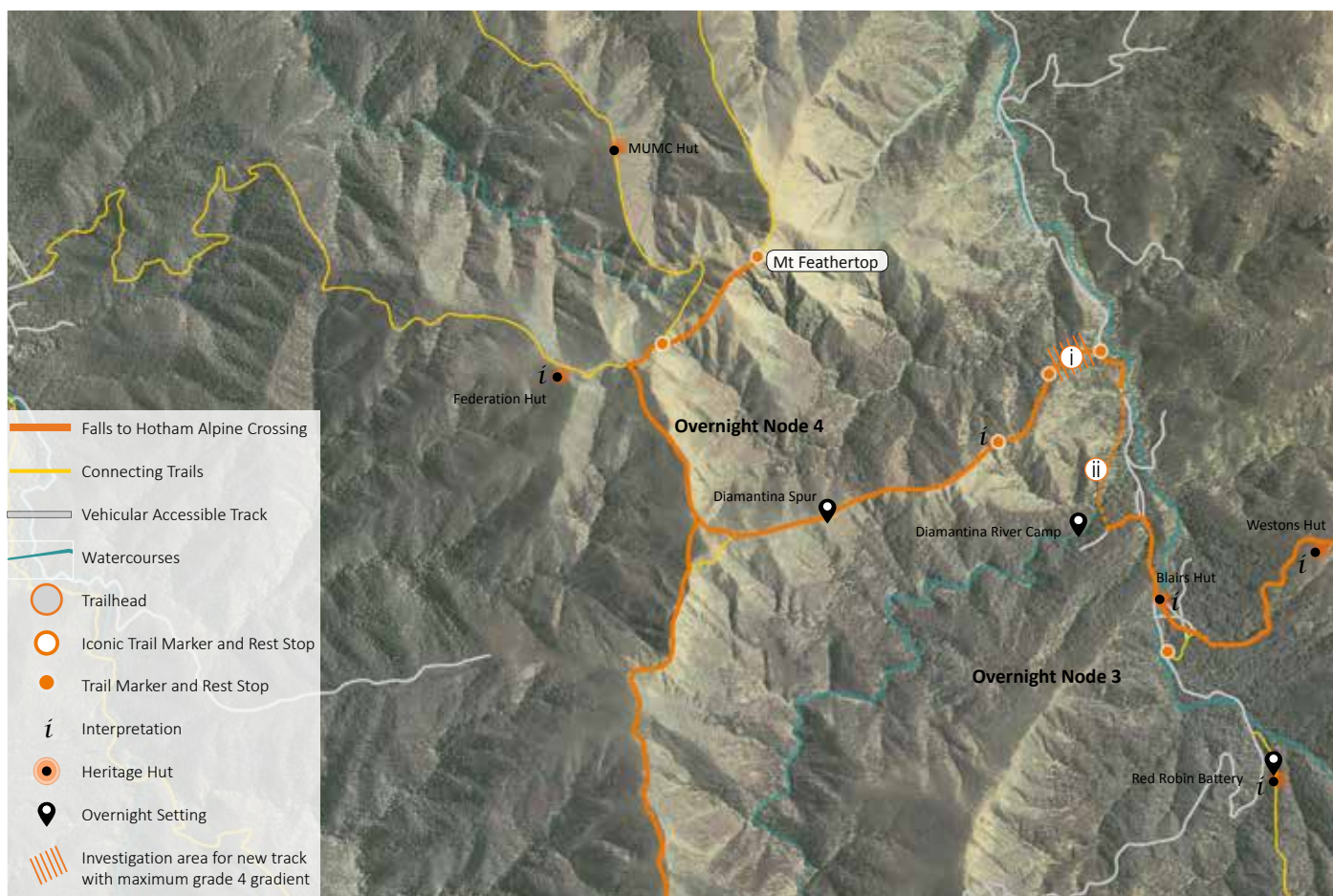
The most physically challenging of all segments provides walkers with a grade 4 track to conquer. Diamantina Spur heaves up from the valley floor, rising 450 m in roughly 1.5 km. This track is not long, but it is arduous, and its steepness necessitates adequate rest stops to recharge and take in the surroundings. The reward at the top is a narrow ridgeline with long range views of the mountains and back across the valley which was just ascended.

Walkers can stop on the spur to spend the night in an area protected by snow gums. An add-on is the climb to Mt Feathertop for sunset or sunrise. Either way, 360 degree views afford

walkers spectacular scenery of the alps and high plains. This challenging climb offers the chance for walkers to visually trace their path through the changing alpine, subalpine and mountain environments all the way back to Falls Creek.

(i) The installation of a new track segment is required at the lower section of Diamantina Spur. This is required to minimise ongoing erosion occurring on the existing track and to circumnavigate rocky sections providing a more accessible, grade 4 connection.

(ii) Subject to detailed investigations, a new track is to be established on the northern side of the Diamantina River to create a richer walking experience and minimise walking time on the existing West Kiewa Logging Road.



Track segment 4 site plan





① Alpine Forest



② Views to High Plains



③ Diamantina Spur



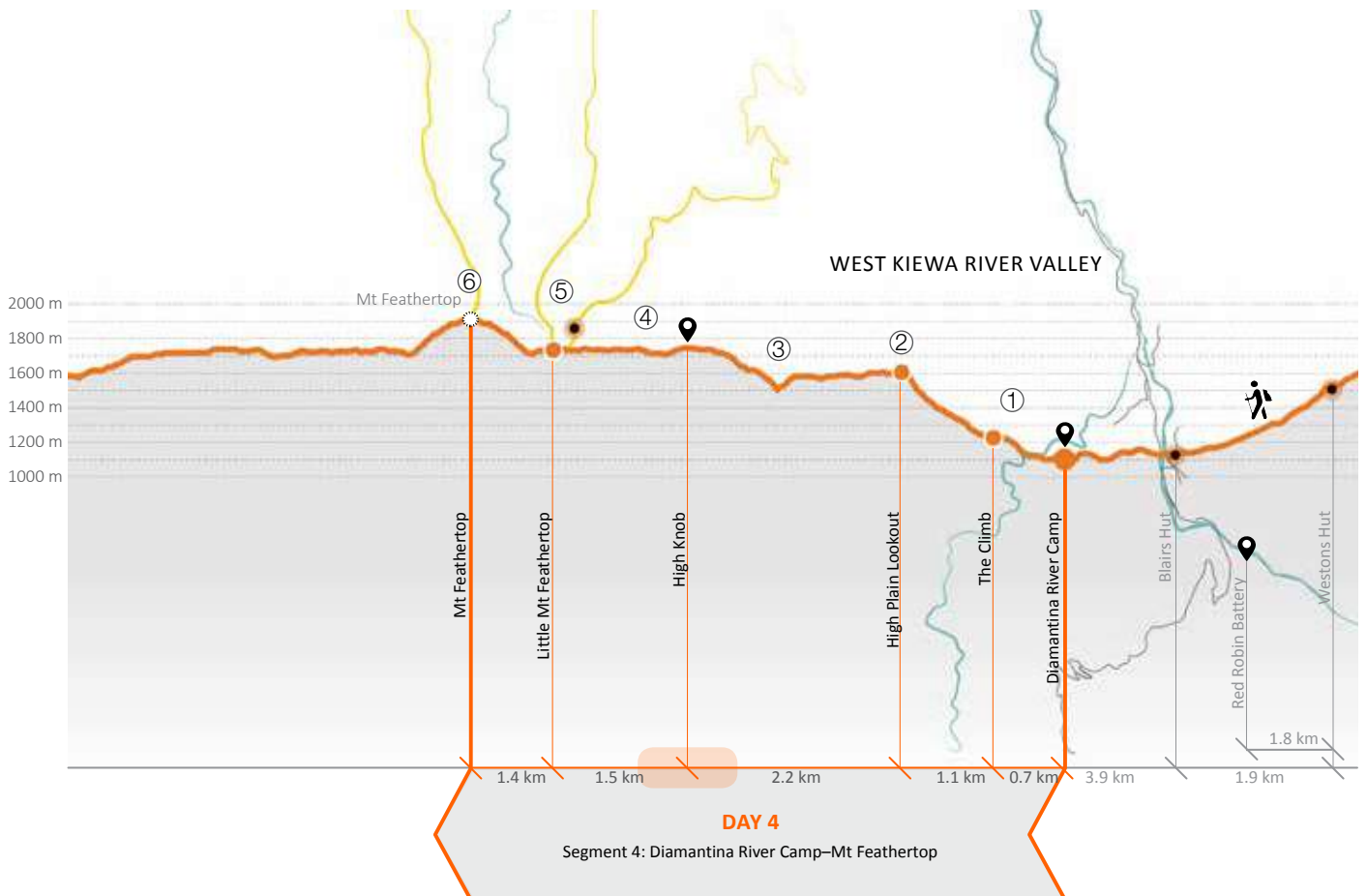
④ Highland Fog



⑤ Trail to Mt Feathertop



⑥ Mt Feathertop



Track segment 4 terrain

Ease your way out across the narrow ridgeline of sculptural Snow Gums and alpine horizons.

**Day 5:
High Knob–Mt Hotham, Loch Carpark**

13.2 km walk — change in altitude approx. 500 m
Estimated walking time: 5.5 hrs

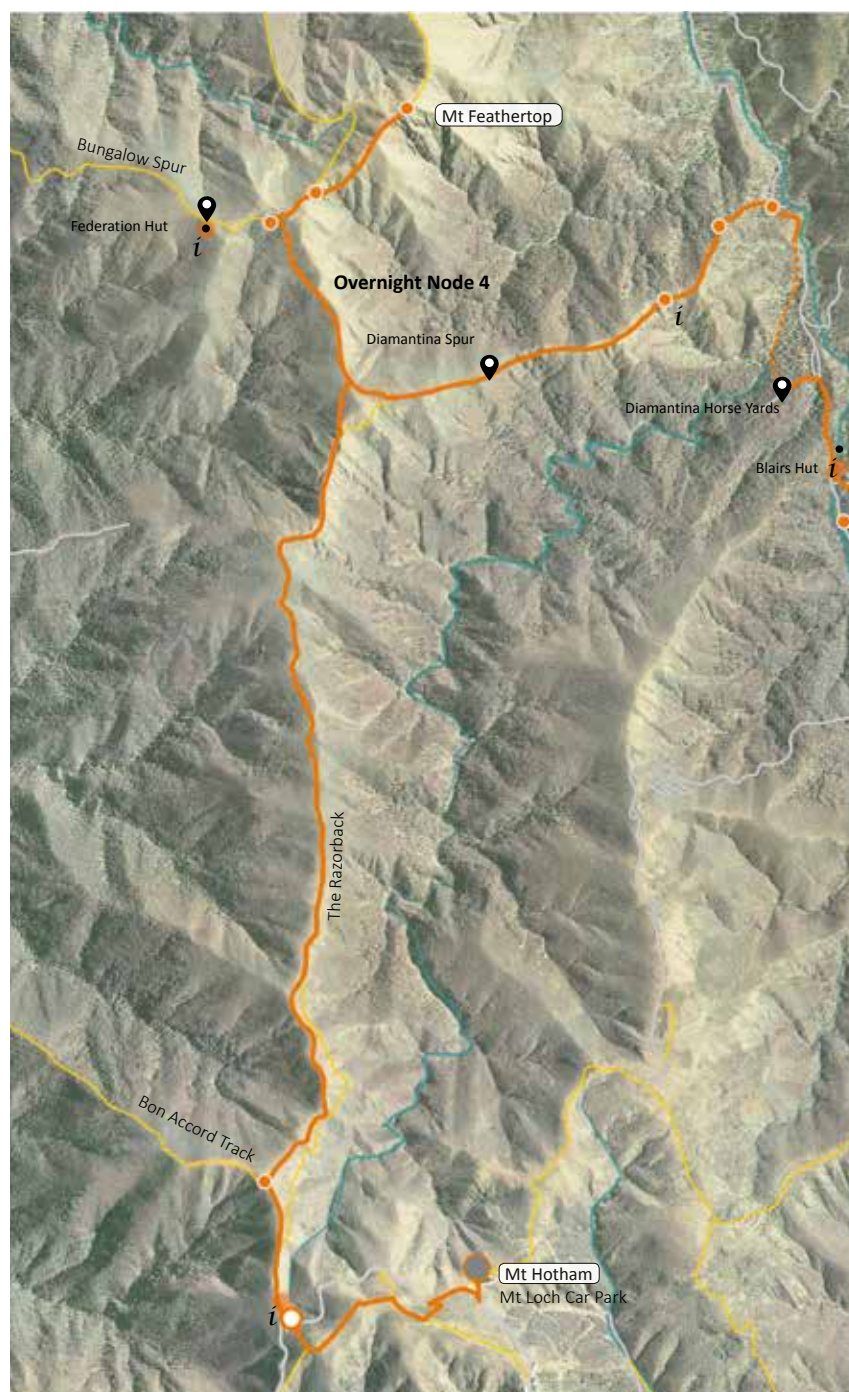
Following a sunrise climb to Mt Feathertop, the final day of the trail takes walkers along the Razorback, a narrow ridgeline that connects to the Great Alpine Road and Mt Hotham resort. The experience of the wide open views engulfs visitors as they move along the narrow path that weaves through rare alpine snow-patch vegetation, gnarled Snow Gums and wildflowers.

This dramatic trail, offering views across the High Country over to the Mt Buffalo Plateau, will be shared with day walkers and trail runners from Harrietville and Mt Hotham.

Ending at the trailhead at Mt Loch Car Park, there are opportunities for celebrating the return to civilisation by enjoying the offer of food and drinks in a proposed cafe/ restaurant overseeing the alpine silhouette or to purchase a book on the environment and cultural history of the region or some local produce in a possible trailhead store.

These options will form part of and will be explored in the Mt Hotham Master Plan.

Walkers may wish to stay in the region with an additional night in Hotham Village, Harrietville, or to continue the walk on to Dinner Plain. If not yet tired, the trail continues on as the Australian Alps Walking Track, taking those interested and prepared on to Baw Baw National Park.



- Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing
- Connecting Trails
- Vehicular Accessible Track
- Watercourses
- Trailhead
- Iconic Trail Marker and Rest Stop
- Trail Marker and Rest Stop
- i Interpretation
- Heritage Hut
- 📍 Overnight Setting

Track segment 5 site plan





① Sunset from Mt Feathertop



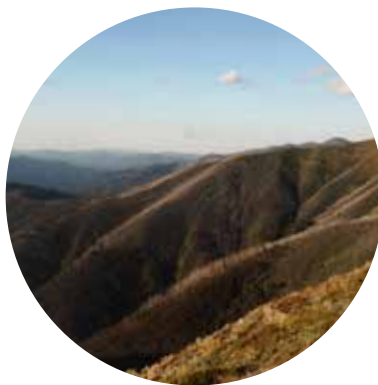
② Mountain Descent



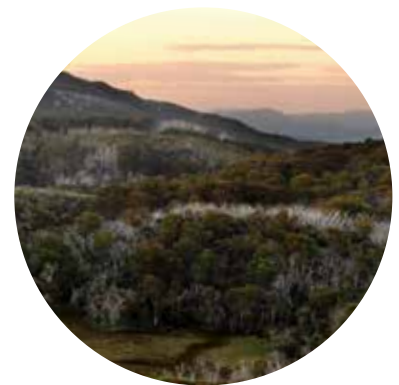
③ High Meadow



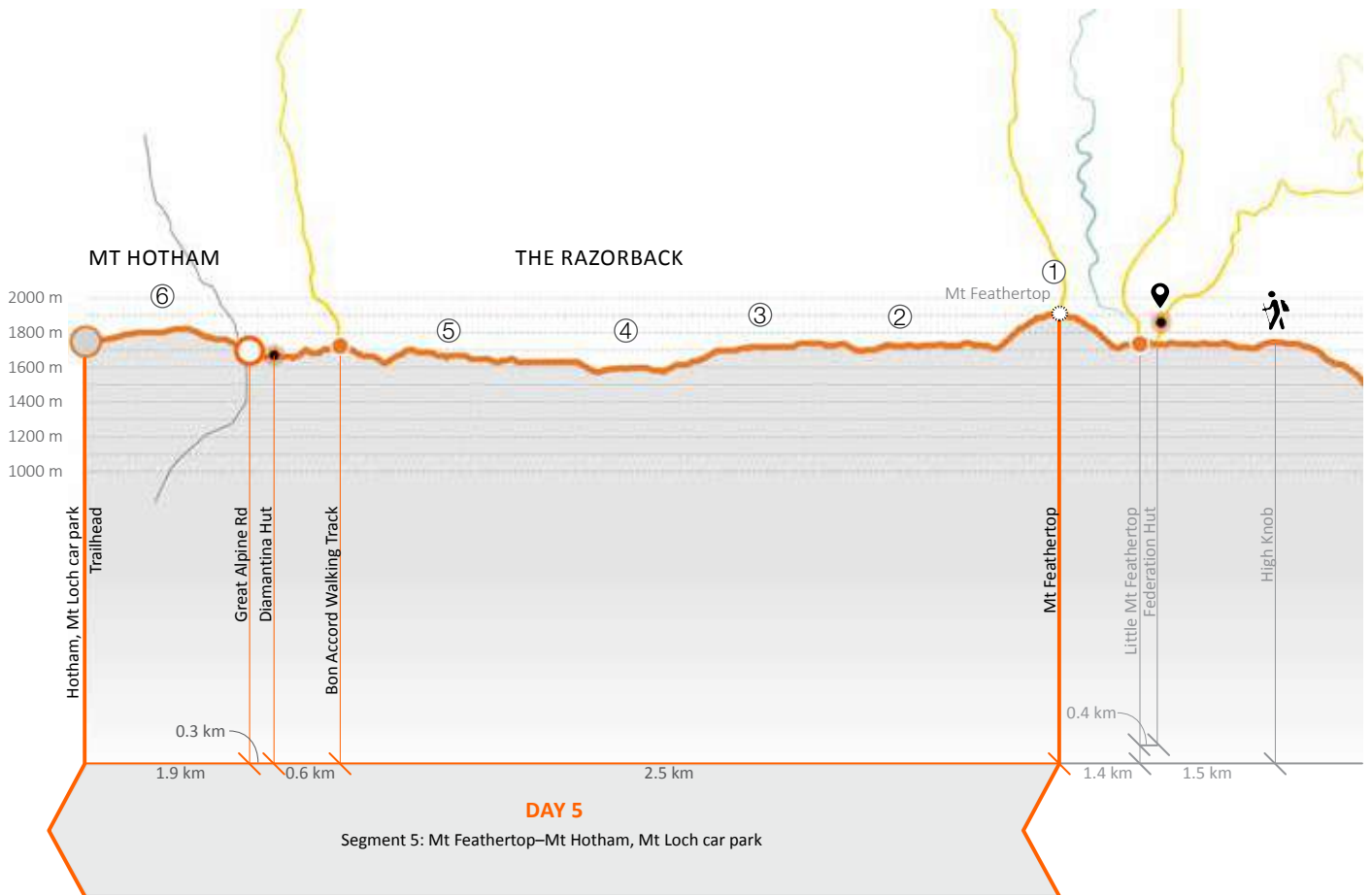
④ Snow Gum Woodland



⑤ The Razorback



⑥ Mt Hotham



Track segment 5 terrain



Stone pitching on Feathertop Summit track



Chapter 04
**What will the Falls to Hotham
Alpine Crossing look like?**

04 What will the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing look like?

The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will provide a comfortable yet challenging walking experience that maintains a sense of environmental rawness and immersion in nature, adventure and achievement.

Track Design

The materials and finishes, track widths, construction implementation and grading of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing are critical design factors to achieve a unique walking experience that resonates with, but does not have unnecessary impact upon, the surrounding alpine landscape.

The track design principles reflect two key considerations; the minimisation of environmental and visual impact of any built assets within the park, and the experiential quality of the track for walkers.

Materials and Finishes

A sensitive suite of materials and finishes will be utilised to reflect the rawness and power of the Victorian High Country, and will help differentiate the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing from its connecting tracks. Track materials will consist primarily of locally-sourced materials that are visually harmonious with the surrounding landscape and can be deployed across a variety of conditions.

This will include at-grade gravel surfaces with natural stone edging and steps that blend seamlessly with their context (refer to image on page 52 of this document, stone pitching on Feathertop Summit track). At-grade tracks will respond to detailed site conditions, meandering

around vegetation and rocks, to create an intimate exchange with the landscape. The use of steps will be minimised and step heights not exceed 200 mm in height. A grouping of multiple steps is preferred over single steps which often are overseen and create a trip hazard.

The inclusion of stone edged drainage strips and channels will be investigated in detailed site responses to manage surface water run-off and mitigate erosion.

Track Widths

The track width will be between 600 mm and 900 mm for most sections to enable single-file walking, and will be occasionally expanded up to 1200 mm for short distances to allow for side-by-side walking. Single-file walking encourages individual appreciation and reflection of the surrounding environment, while double-file walking offers an opportunity for walkers to engage in conversation and fellowship.

Construction implementation

Track construction will be driven by a need to minimise impact upon ecological communities and reduce the track's visual impact within the landscape. Visually obtrusive elements such as handrails and balustrades will be avoided where possible. In areas requiring increased



Precedent track using a simple stone edging to crushed rock - 3 Capes Track

environmental protection, such as boggy zones and areas of highly-sensitive vegetation, the track will be elevated.

Track implementation and construction will be led by Parks Victoria to meet current standards and comply with the Australian Track Grading system. Further detailed planning will determine all required operational and risk management procedures associated with trail design, use, and construction.

Track Grading System

An important feature of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing is the broad range of users who will be able to access and enjoy the trail. This will be made possible through trail segments ranging from Grade 2 through to Grade 5, with predominantly Grade 3 segments. New tracks will be constructed as grade 3 or 4 to ensure the route is safe and achievable for a wider range of walkers.

While the majority of walking can be accomplished via simple at-grade gravel surfaces, the occasional steeper sections will require design elements such as stairs to moderate the grade and allow for improved access while maintaining a level of physical challenge.

Parks Victoria has adopted the Australian

Walking Track Grading System to provide helpful information about walking trails. Track grading is the primary means of informing people about the features of walking tracks, and by providing a standardised level of difficulty or track grading, users are able to gauge whether a particular track is suitable for them. This will also assist in the marketing and promotion of walking as a leisure activity.

Further investigation into detailed alignment and ongoing assessment will be undertaken by Parks Victoria to identify and manage risks and safety issues associated with the hike, which is core business for Parks Victoria.



Grade 1 walk

No bushwalking experience required. Flat even surface with no steps or steep sections. Suitable for wheelchair users who have someone to assist them. Walks no greater than 5km.



Grade 2 walk

No bushwalking experience required. The track is a hardened or compacted surface and may have a gentle hill section or sections and occasional steps. Walks no greater than 10 km.



Grade 3 walk

Suitable for most ages and fitness levels. Some bushwalking experience recommended. Tracks may have short steep hill sections, a rough surface and many steps. Walks up to 20 km.



Grade 4 walk

Bushwalking experience recommended. Tracks may be long, rough and very steep. Directional signage may be limited.



Grade 5 walk

Very experienced bushwalkers with specialised skills, including navigation and emergency first aid. Tracks are likely to be very rough, very steep and unmarked. Walks may be more than 20 km.

Design Guidelines

Environment

Walk track widths will respond to ecological communities, topography and geology, varying predominantly between 600 mm and 900 mm for single file with some shorter, wider sections of 1200 mm for side by side walking.

Avoid crossing ecologically sensitive areas, but where unavoidable, apply best practice design response to mitigate impacts.

Avoid new track construction in the Bundara-Cobungra Remote and Natural Areas.

Upgrade tracks to eliminate informal branches and tracks and mitigate existing impacts to the environment.

Avoid significant existing trees or fragile vegetation. Align the trail on the up-hill side of large trees to protect the root system from unnecessary compaction and erosion.

Elevated tracks and bridges to be used in areas of endangered or vulnerable ecological vegetation classes, wet areas and watercourses, with the primary objectives of protecting vegetation, reducing trampling and erosion and allowing vegetation to grow underfoot.

Establish any new tracks in a way that minimises potential erosion through surface water flows.

Use materials that harmonise with their surrounds, ideally sourced locally, to minimise environmental footprint and visual impact.

Materials and construction methodologies selected to minimise environmental impact, with a preference for prefabrication over on-site construction.

Experience

The trail will be comfortable enough to encourage people to look up and around and also present more technical challenges for a richer walking experience.

Space rest stops between overnight nodes at key links or roughly 3 to 5 kilometres apart.

Walking grades will be a mix of grades 2, 3 and 4.

Where possible, track design will facilitate universal access by enabling the use of all-terrain wheelchairs.

Minimise visual impact of the trail by avoiding handrails where possible and minimising structural details of engineered elements.

Use track widths to curate both the experience of the landscape and social behaviour with fellow walkers.

Pass heritage huts and maximise cultural and environmental interpretation and stories of the High Country.

Maximise access to views, scenery and significant geologic features and peaks.

Minimise the need for constructed infrastructure, such as steps, boardwalks, bridges and other elements in order to maintain a sense of remoteness and discovery in the landscape.

Curate a carefully narrated journey that encourages a sense of curiosity, anticipation, exploration, revelation and drama to maximise the impact of the majesty of the natural landscape and setting.

Engage with the surrounding landscape and features to offer a site-specific experience that differs along the trail.



Example of well crafted stone track. Ascent to Mt Feathertop Peak.



Simple gravel path with visible steps integrated.



Single file boardwalks to protect fragile environments.



Use of open steel grates to enable plant growth underneath.

Siting

- Utilise existing trails where possible.

- Utilise existing infrastructure as much as possible, minimising the need for additional construction.

- Traverse through a range of environments and vegetation, optimising access to a rich diversity of landscapes and variety of experiences in nature. Avoid long, continuous sections of trail that may look out of place.

- Create separation between accommodation options and the main track in order to maintain a sense of privacy.

- Avoid existing constructed features, such as roadways and carparks, that may detract from the walking experience.

- Consider routes that walkers would prefer to walk along to avoid the development of off-track 'goat' paths.

- Rivers and watercourses to be protected and crossable to avoid contact and protect from erosion and contamination.

- Integrate existing site features, such as significant rocks and trees, into the walking journey. Some obstacles may be useful for rest areas, seats, trail markers or for trail protection.

Buildability

- Ensure the trail is always clearly visible to the walker and use existing fallen tree branches and/or loose stones to clearly mark the direction and edge of the trail (without impeding drainage).

- Material selection should place priority on life cycle cost over up-front costs, with consideration given to required maintenance, ease of transport to the site, and ease of working with the materials on site.

- Track construction should incorporate local construction crews and techniques where possible, which will foster craftsmanship and create jobs in the region.

- Construction of the track and all associated elements are to be in accordance with Australian Standard AS 2156.1 Walking Tracks. Part 1: Classification and Signage and AS 2156.2 Walking Tracks. Part 2: Infrastructure Design.

- Materials should be free of toxins and are to be assessed for their performance and durability, life cycle cost, availability, logistics, aesthetics, ability to work on site, salvageability, maintenance, sustainability and prefabrication.

Provision / Management

- Comply with the requirements of management zones as per the Greater Alpine National Park Management Plan 2016, Bushfire Management Overlay, the *National Parks Act 1975* and the *National Parks (Wilderness) Act 1992*.

- Prepare a Cultural Heritage Management Plan for the entire trail length and obtain all necessary environmental and planning approvals.

- Prepare appropriate risk management and visitor safety strategies.



Use of materials that blend with the landscape.



Limit the use of steps only to steep sections.



Homogenous, well-designed track infrastructure.



Use locally sourced materials where possible.

Supporting infrastructure

Access to trail information will be provided through a consistent language and branding strategy that engages visitors before, during and after the walk. On-trail infrastructure will be beautifully designed, functional and sympathetic to the environment. It will be well crafted with locally sourced materials, inspiring engagement with the surrounding views, ecologies and cultural histories.

Trailheads

The points of entry and exit on the track will mark the start and finish of the walk and provide connections to the respective resorts. Trailheads will be properly identified with the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing and Walk Victoria's Icons brands. They will be located at:

- Falls Creek–Lake Side; and
- Mt Hotham–Mt Loch car park.

The trailheads may provide the following elements:

- Bus drop off and turnaround; car park; waiting shelter; toilets; plentiful seating; trail description and map; key user and risk regulation and safety information; iconic/ photogenic location to take advantage of views; and trail signage and potential for site-specific artwork.

The proximity of the trail to the Alpine Resorts presents opportunities for both Falls Creek and Mt Hotham to be involved in the development of the trailheads. The Mt Hotham trailhead is located within the alpine resort on Crown land. Mt Hotham has developed a master plan which establishes the potential for a ski hub and food outlet at the Mt Loch car park site where there is an existing snow-making reservoir. Close collaboration with Mt Hotham and Falls Creek will be important for further development opportunities for supporting trail services at the trailheads in the future.

The trailheads provide a great opportunity to establish an information centre that can showcase the richness of cultural and natural values of the whole region. This provides opportunities to engage with Indigenous values and communities and can create a great synergy with the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing.

Trail markers with rest stops

Iconic trail markers

Iconic Trail markers will be placed where there is a significant trail connection or road crossing at points such as:

- Cope Hut at Bogong High Plains Road; and
- Diamantina Hut at Great Alpine Road.

Trailheads: Celebrate the start and arrival moments of the track through the provision of appropriately designed and constructed infrastructure.



Tom's Thumb Trailhead, McDowell Sonoran Preserve. Arizona, USA. Fucello Architects
Photo credit: Bill Timmerman

Trail markers positioned at intermediate entry points onto the track.



Three Capes Track, Tasmania



Overland Track Trailhead, Tasmania
Photo credit: Megan Hogarth

Fine craftsmanship and subtle interventions to assist movement and create subtle contrast between the natural and the constructed.



Cap de Creus, Catalunya, Spain. EMF Landscape Architecture

The Iconic markers will include:

- Iconic and photogenic signage or artwork;
- Trail bump out — paved area with stone or timber deck; and
- Basic seating for a group of people.

Basic trail markers

Basic markers will be placed where there is a connection or intersecting track and may include:

- Interpretation and directional signage;
- Trail bump-out — trail widens to allow for rest; and
- Basic seating for a few people.

Wayfinding

Wayfinding and directional signage will be kept to a minimum through clear track definition and alignment. Signage will be required to assist with directions at difficult locations, track junctions and overnight nodes. Further information can be provided through a detailed map with suggested walking itineraries, route notes, distances and average walking times between key features to aid navigation.

Where signage and track markers are required, they should be designed to reflect the unique identity of the walk. The track marking system will incorporate trailhead signage and information boards, trail markers and appropriate interpretive signs where required.

Existing huts

Under the Greater Alpine Parks Management Plan, existing huts will be conserved as heritage assets, and continue to be utilised as communal rest areas and places to cook during the day. The huts will provide sign-in books and information on the natural and cultural values of the trail, the hut and the immediate surrounding landscape. The huts will continue to function as emergency refuges, and over-nighting will continue to be prohibited in Wallace Hut and Federation Hut, and discouraged in other huts.

The Red Robin Battery site is now vacant, having still produced small amounts of gold until 2015. The refurbishment into a place of public exhibition with potential to extend an educational / interpretive program is suggested and should be further explored in future planning exercises as an additional experience for walkers. Red Robin Mine site is still undergoing closure in accordance with DEDJTR processes. Until this is complete and the site is determined to be 'safe', the future use of this site is uncertain.

Interpretive signage should be sympathetic with its surrounds and of a sculptural quality.



Three Capes Track, Tasmania



Three Capes Track, Tasmania

Seating and spaces for rest that integrate with the surrounding landscape through locally sourced materials.



Freycinet National Park, Tasmania



Three Capes Track, Tasmania

Narrate the stories of the landscape - use existing heritage huts as key component of the overarching narrative.



Blairs Hut



Cope Hut interior





Chapter 05
Where will visitors stay?

05 Where will visitors stay?

Accommodation options along the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will expand upon the walking experience, offering an improved, high-quality time of relaxation after a day of walking. Multiple options to choose from ensure a personalised experience for everybody.

Accommodation options

The alpine region is already a popular destination for large numbers of independent walkers, school groups and scouts, and the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will provide a range of new accommodation options to complement the popular dispersed camp areas with two managed and operated overnighting options.

As a 5-day, 4-night walking experience, each night of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will be located in an 'overnight node' providing new accommodation options: elevated camping platforms found at the 'Hiker Camps', or weather-sealed huts with bedding at the 'Operated Huts'. They will extend on the quality of built form, design and materials established along the track, providing a high-quality, memorable experience of overnighting in the national park.

These extended accommodation options will be offered to meet the needs of an expanded set of walker groups, which includes walkers who seek more certainty and comfort when hiking, young families or maturing walkers with less level of fitness that need to minimise the carrying weight, through to walkers who seek a fully catered, guided and organised hiking experience.

Each of the four overnight nodes are located in key areas of natural and cultural interest, including historic huts, amongst Snow Gum and Alpine Ash forests, on the High Plains close to mountain peaks, and beside rivers in the valley.

Dispersed camping

As defined in the Greater Alpine National Parks Management Plan 2016, dispersed camping will be permitted except within 100 m of designated Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing camping areas, 200 m of other designated camping or picnic areas; within 20 m of any waterway or waterbody; or within 200 m of Bogong High Plains Rd, Pretty Valley Rd or Howitt High Plains Rd. Spatial separation optimises the experience for existing and new walkers. Each user group have their own expectations for interacting with and staying in the park, and separation allows each of these expectations to be met and respected.

Hiker camps

Elevated camping platforms can improve the camping experience, especially during bad weather, and better protect the surrounding environments. Each Hiker Camp is proposed to offer 12 elevated 3-person platforms, each able to secure one tent or swag. Connected via boardwalks to control movement and reduce the risk of camp creep, the Hiker Camps further offer a communal shelter for social engagement at the end of the day and areas for safe cooking and food preparation. A sealed vault toilet system and LTO storage facilities are also provided.

The management and operation of the hiker camps is proposed to be provided by Parks Victoria. Alternative operational models, such for example the management of the hiker camps through the operator of the Operated Huts, may be viable and should be tested through future planning.



Accommodation offer along the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing

Operated huts

Operated Huts provide an accommodation option that is less susceptible to seasonal weather changes, opening up opportunities for an extended walker season. Operated Huts will offer beds for two or three people per hut, and are supported with a communal hut for dining and social life. A communal hut consisting of group dining areas and a separated kitchen enables the hut operator to provide fully catered hiking packages. Toilet facilities would be shared, and an extra hut for storage and accommodation is provided for the operational and maintenance personnel.

Designed to best-practice environmental standards, the huts will provide amenities and comfort at a level that maintains an experience which complements the landscape values quintessential of the national park setting.

Subject to weather conditions and servicing access, roofed accommodation may have the potential to operate year-round to cater for cross country skiers and snowshoers. This white season use would be subject to further investigation and consultation with potential user groups and private operators.

A final management model for the Operated Huts is to be determined, but the current

preferred model is to provide a lease to a single private operator who would offer serviced hiking packages, similar to the private walking tours for the Overland Track in Tasmania and Milford Track in New Zealand.

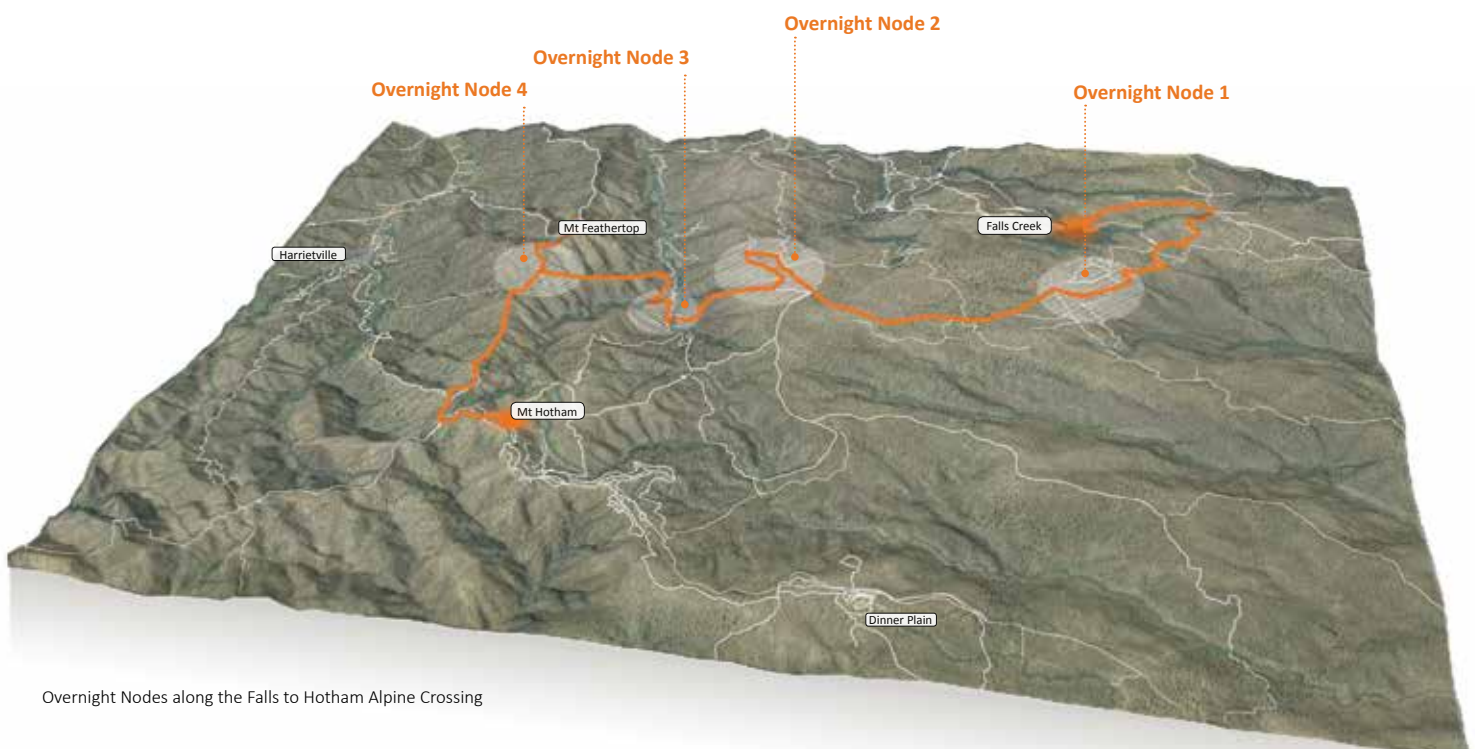
Reuse of existing buildings

The track passes the Bogong Rover Chalet, currently leased by the Scouts Victoria. This building could be re-purposed to provide accommodation for walkers on the Crossing, subject to negotiations between Parks Victoria and Scouts Victoria.

Off-trail accommodation

Off-trail accommodation will play an important part in developing a range of trail experiences. Many walkers of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will spend a night or more before and after the hike in neighbouring townships and alpine resorts and will provide necessary complementary off-park accommodation for walkers.

Other organised walkers may wish to utilise local bed and breakfasts or farm stays as part of their walking packages. This type of offering has the added benefit of contributing to local economies without significant infrastructure investment.



Overnight Nodes along the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing

Hiker camps
Accommodation



Elevated camp platforms.

4 x 4 metres.

Hardwood timber decking.

12 x platforms accommodating 2–3 people per platform. Platforms to be located individually and some groups of 3 or 4 to accommodate larger group settings and families.

Elevated boardwalks are suggested as the preferred track within Hiker Camps in order to minimise environmental impact from informal tracks.



Tent platforms elevated off ground, Bugiga Camp Site, Grampians

Supporting facilities

1 x communal shelter/ or hut, providing weather protection to cater for platform users.

Tables and chairs for dining.

Cooking facilities (benches for carry in-gas stoves).

Water provision by roof water harvesting (non-potable water quality).

Solar power (for charging of low-voltage devices such as cameras and phones).

Outdoor decking for social engagement and relaxation.

The new shelters or huts, although provided for booked walkers, will be available to all walkers in cases of emergency.



Communal Shelter design, Bugiga Camp Site, Grampians

Toilet facilities

2 x drop toilet cubicles over a sealed vault system.

Large roof for rainwater collection (approx. 20K litres).



Design integrated WC units, Bugiga Camp Site, Grampians

**Operated huts
Accommodation**



Operated Huts for twin or triple share beds, fully weather protected.

Approx. 4 x 4 metre, some outdoor decking with deck chairs.

Modular structures with natural finishes.

Located individually and some grouped to sets of 3 or 4 to accommodate larger group settings and families.

Hut numbers will be determined by the footprint of each overnight node and a business study at a detailed planning stage.

Supporting facilities

1 x communal hut.

Full weather protection.

Tables and chairs for dining.

Kitchen for fully catered services.

Water provision by roof water harvesting (non-potable water quality).

Solar power (for charging of low-voltage devices such as cameras and phones).

Outdoor decking for social engagement and relaxation.

Integrated lockers and drying room/ area.

The new shelters or huts, although provided for booked walkers, will be available to all walkers in cases of emergency.

Toilet facilities

2 x drop toilet cubicles over a sealed vault system.

Large roof for rainwater collection (approx. 20K litres).

Locations with excess water supply such as the Red Robin Battery may be suited for cold or hot water shower systems.



Simple, natural materials are suggested for the Operated Huts Bay of Fires Lodge, Tasmania. Photo credit: Total Luxury Australia



Simple, natural materials are suggested for the Operated Huts. Private Micro cabin by students of the University of Colorado Denver. Professor Rick Sommerfeld, Colorado Building Workshop. Photo credit: Jesse Kuroiwa



Communal Huts provide opportunity for informational talks, example shown on the Three Capes Track, Tasmania

Design guidelines

Accommodation options are an important part of attracting a broader range of visitors. It is expected that walkers will spend a good portion of time within the camps, enjoying the opportunity to relax and socially engage with fellow walkers, take in views, explore the surrounds, or just simply take their time.

With an expected widening of the user profile, expanding from the traditional 'adventure seeker' walker to include walkers that seek a more comfortable yet authentic experience of the natural setting, the addition of two options, Hiker Camps and Operated Huts, are designed to be flexible, adaptable and usable by a multitude of users. Individual walkers, guided groups and larger educational and school groups would be capable of individually booking and occupying the options provided across the four nodes.

The following lists provide some guidance for the detailed site assessments to be undertaken in the next planning phases of the project. Careful on site investigation will be required to test the siting options discussed in this master plan for each node and accommodation option.

Environment

All buildings and associated structures to be constructed to the highest possible environmental standards in accordance with the Green Star Rating system, reflecting their context within a national park setting.

Undertake detailed assessments to identify natural and cultural values to be protected.

Employ the philosophy of protecting natural and cultural values, avoiding impacts wherever possible and mitigating impacts where unavoidable.

Comply with all state and federal environmental, cultural and heritage legislation and regulations.

Avoid ecologically sensitive areas and do not build facilities in Remote and Natural Areas.

Ensure protection of water quality by maintaining buffer distance to natural hydrological flows and riparian edges.

Disturbance of sensitive ecological communities and vegetation to be avoided.

Maintain cultural value and heritage experience of existing huts by ensuring accommodation is screened by vegetation and not visible from the existing huts.

Design and build to have a light footprint and disturb as little soil, vegetation and cultural values as possible.

Siting

Infrastructure to be located on already disturbed sites where possible.

Infrastructure to be located in areas protected from high winds.

Infrastructure to be located to take advantage of solar radiation.

Smaller and seasonal watercourses and depressions are to be avoided.

Accommodation types to be separated by a buffer distance and ideally screened with vegetation to reduce noise and traffic.

Accommodation to be offset from the trail, and, where possible, not be visible from the trail.

Locate overnight nodes within an achievable day's walk from previous night.

Overnight nodes to be located to have options for extended walking or activities in the vicinity – loop walks or natural/ cultural features to visit.

Avoid potential conflicts between different fee paying and dispersed camping visitors at walker accommodation nodes.

Infrastructure to be arranged to take advantage of vistas where possible.

Co-locate platforms at Hiker Camps in groups of 2,3 or 4 to accommodate group and family hiking.

Experience

Design infrastructure and facilities to support and enhance visitors' experience of the national park.

Infrastructure design to reflect its natural landscape and cultural setting.

Create a sense of isolation and immersion in the national park at overnight settings.

Capitalise on views and vistas to heighten the experience at accommodation nodes.

Where appropriate, design should provide for universal access.

Buildability

Take advantage of existing infrastructure and roads.

All on-site waste is to be removed.

Shelters to utilise local building techniques and be constructed of local materials sympathetic to the surrounding visual environment.

Prefer natural materials such as stone and timber and avoid the use of artificial materials such as plastic that will appear foreign in the natural environment.

Roofed shelters must be suitable for the alpine climate and able to provide comfortable accommodation in a broader usable season.

Building construction systems using prefabricated elements will be considered to minimise construction impact.

Consider transportation of materials to and off site via helicopter or existing access roads.

Utilise quality design and construction to ensure minimal maintenance is required.

Design facilities for the prevailing weather conditions and climatic events such as bushfires.

Provision / Management

Comply with the requirements of management zones as per the Greater Alpine National Park Management Plan 2016, Bushfire Management Overlay, the *National Parks Act 1975* and the *National Parks (Wilderness) Act 1992*.

Prepare a Cultural Heritage Management Plan for the entire trail length and obtain all necessary environmental and planning approvals.

Provide appropriate risk management and visitor safety strategies.

Work with Traditional Owners to ensure cultural values are protected, appropriately acknowledged, interpreted and celebrated.

Consider the life-cycle maintenance, repair and replacement costs of assets in the context of Parks Victoria's asset management policies.

Ensure that facilities are designed to be safely and easily accessed, repaired and maintained without the need for expensive equipment. Provide safety harness connection points where required.

Hiker camps are provided by Parks Victoria. Management models are to be tested in future planning phases and economic modelling and may include operation by Parks Victoria or by licensed operators.

Operated Huts are provided by the public sector. Private sector lease and licensing required to run and manage Operated Huts and associated facilities.



Prefabricated shelter transported to site.

OFIS arhitekti, AKT II and Harvard GSD.

Photo credit: OFIS Architects

Overnight nodes

Overnight node 1: Bogong High Plains

Overnight Node 1 is located within the vicinity of the Wallaces Heritage Trail, offering walkers easy access to one of the oldest huts in the area while maintaining privacy and separation of the camps.

The area is a very popular destination for day visitors, overnight walkers, skiers, horse riders, and mountain bikers.

Hiker camps

Landscape values

Endangered peatland to the north of Cope Hut.

Well connected to shorter walks near Falls Creek.

Cultural values

Close proximity to Wallace Hut, Cope Hut and ruins of Wilkinson Lodge.

Heritage building and ski infrastructure.

Proposed locations

A. This site proposes co-location with existing hiker platforms that would expand the existing accommodation options. This option would require a spatial separation from established dispersed camping near Cope Hut. This is not the preferred location for camping due to limited availability of weather-protected areas.

B. Located adjacent to the main track and set amongst the snow gums, this site provides commanding views to the south-west over the valley below.

C. Located underneath the main track, set amongst the Snow Gums and providing commanding views to the south-west over the valley below.

Servicing access

There is very good access from Bogong High Plains Rd (sealed). From here, frequent servicing access can be accomplished on foot. For less-frequent and larger servicing requirements (e.g. waste removal), there is access via Langford West Aqueduct Road 4WD MVO.

Key considerations

Potential to capture views to south from accommodation while considering wind protection of campsites.

Operated huts

Landscape values

Endangered peatland to the north of Cope Hut.

Well connected to shorter walks near Falls Creek.

Cultural values

Close proximity to Wallaces Hut, Cope Hut and ruins of Wilkinson Lodge.

Heritage building and ski infrastructure.

Proposed location

D. Located adjacent to the main trail and set amongst Snow Gums, this site provides commanding views to the south-west over the valley below.

E. In conjunction with the Hiker Camps located at option C, this site becomes an alternative for Operated Huts, extending day 1 walking distance and shortening the distance to Cope Hut.

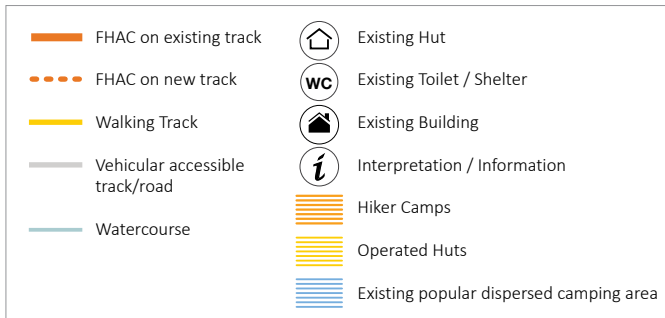
Servicing access

There is very good access from Bogong High Plains Rd (sealed). From here, frequent servicing access can be accomplished on foot. For less-frequent and larger servicing requirements (e.g. waste removal), there is access via Langford West Aqueduct Road (for maintenance vehicles only).

Key considerations

Potential to capture views to south from accommodation.

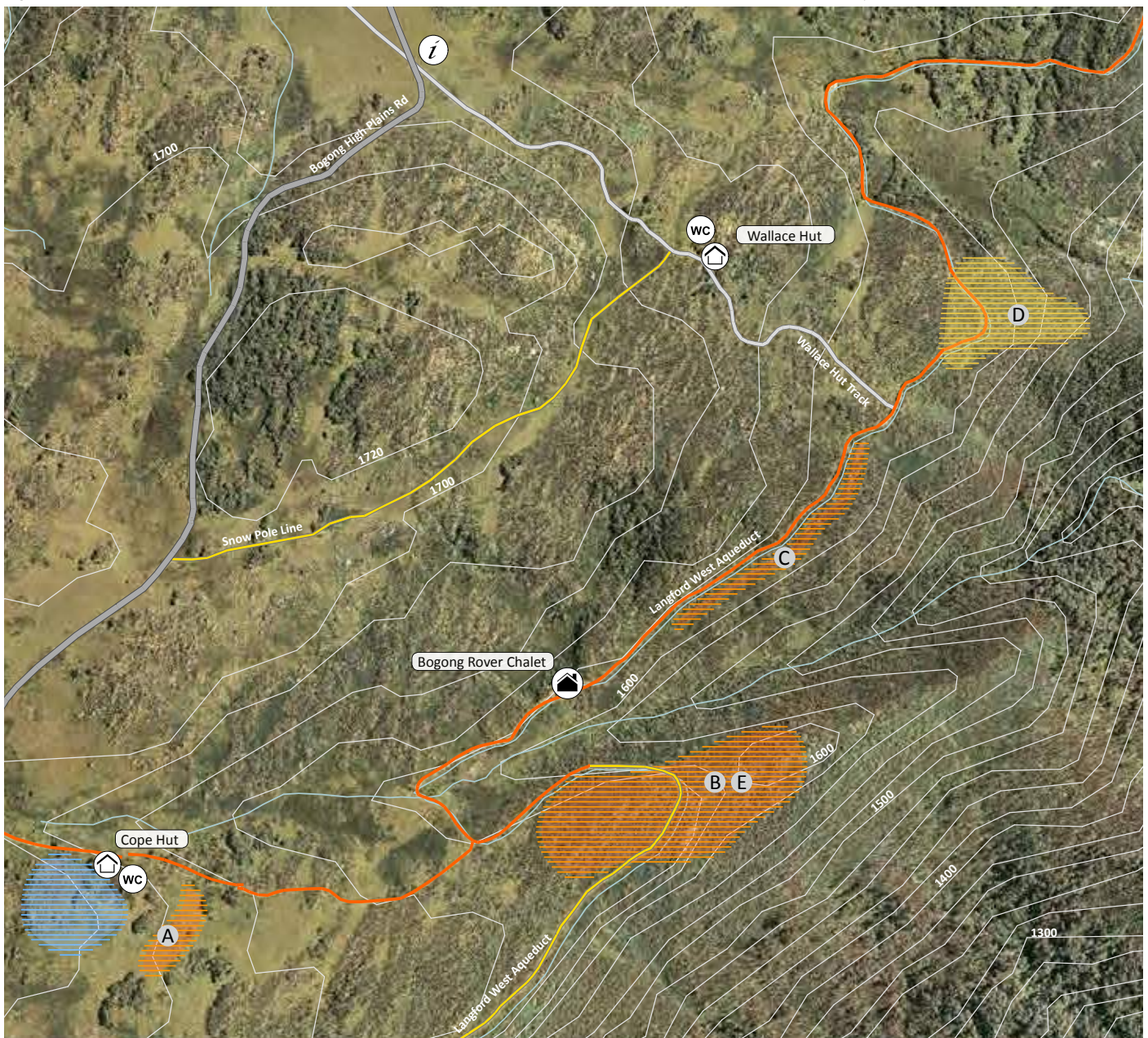
Potential to expand accommodation and/or interpretation program by utilising the existing asset of the Bogong Rover Chalet, pending discussion and agreement between Parks Victoria the current operator of the chalet, Scouts Victoria.



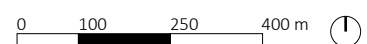
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Key Plan



Overnight Node 1 Location Plan. NOTE: Locations on plan are indicative only and are intended to provide principles for site planning. Further site analysis will be required prior to any detailed design is being undertaken.



Overnight node 2: Tawonga Huts

The large disturbed area and former pasture surrounding Tawonga Huts, with its established camping for independent walkers, horse riders and day visitors, will form the centre of the precinct. The beautiful heritage fences, grazing structures and much of the pasture will be protected. Heritage interpretation can be employed within this picturesque precinct. Excursions to the peak of Mt Jaithmathang can be undertaken for sunset or sunrise spectacles, with dramatic views to Mt Feathertop.

Hiker Camps and Operated Huts would be located within the vicinity of the Towanga Huts precinct along the Fainter Firetrail.

Hiker camps

Landscape values

Close proximity to Mt Jaithmathang.

Views to The Razorback and Mt Feathertop.

Adjacent to the Remote and Natural Area of the Bogong High Plains.

Snow Gum woodland.

Seasonal waterways run through the site and pastures.

Cultural values

Close proximity to Tawonga Huts and iconic Pole 333.

Proposed locations

A. Visibility issues and protection of significant trees will be assessed during site planning phase.

Servicing access

Servicing is very good from Fainter Firetrail (unsealed).

Key considerations

Assessment needs be undertaken to ensure the protection of seasonal waterways and to avoid flooding risks.

Optional additional hike up to Mt Jaithmathang, potentially for sunset viewing.

Operated huts

Landscape values

Close proximity to Mt Jaithmathang.

Views to The Razorback and Mt Feathertop.

Adjacent to the Remote and Natural Area of the Bogong High Plains.

Snow Gum woodland.

Seasonal waterways run through the site and pastures.

Cultural values

Close proximity to Tawonga Huts and iconic Pole 333.

Proposed locations

B and C. Offer two options to locate the Operated Huts. Both need to be carefully assessed for visibility issues and protection of significant trees during the site planning phase.

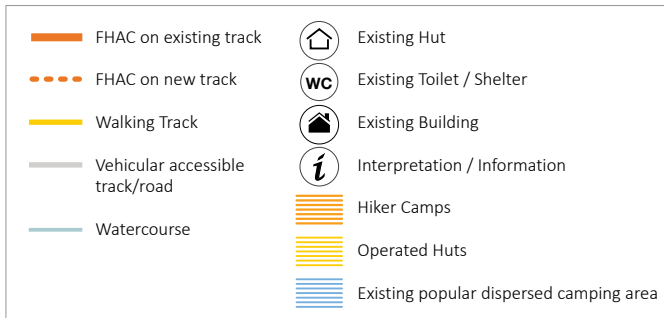
Servicing access

Servicing is very good from Fainter Firetrail (unsealed).

Key considerations

Assessment needs be undertaken to ensure the protection of seasonal waterways and placement of huts amongst trees to mitigate visual impacts and risk of flooding.

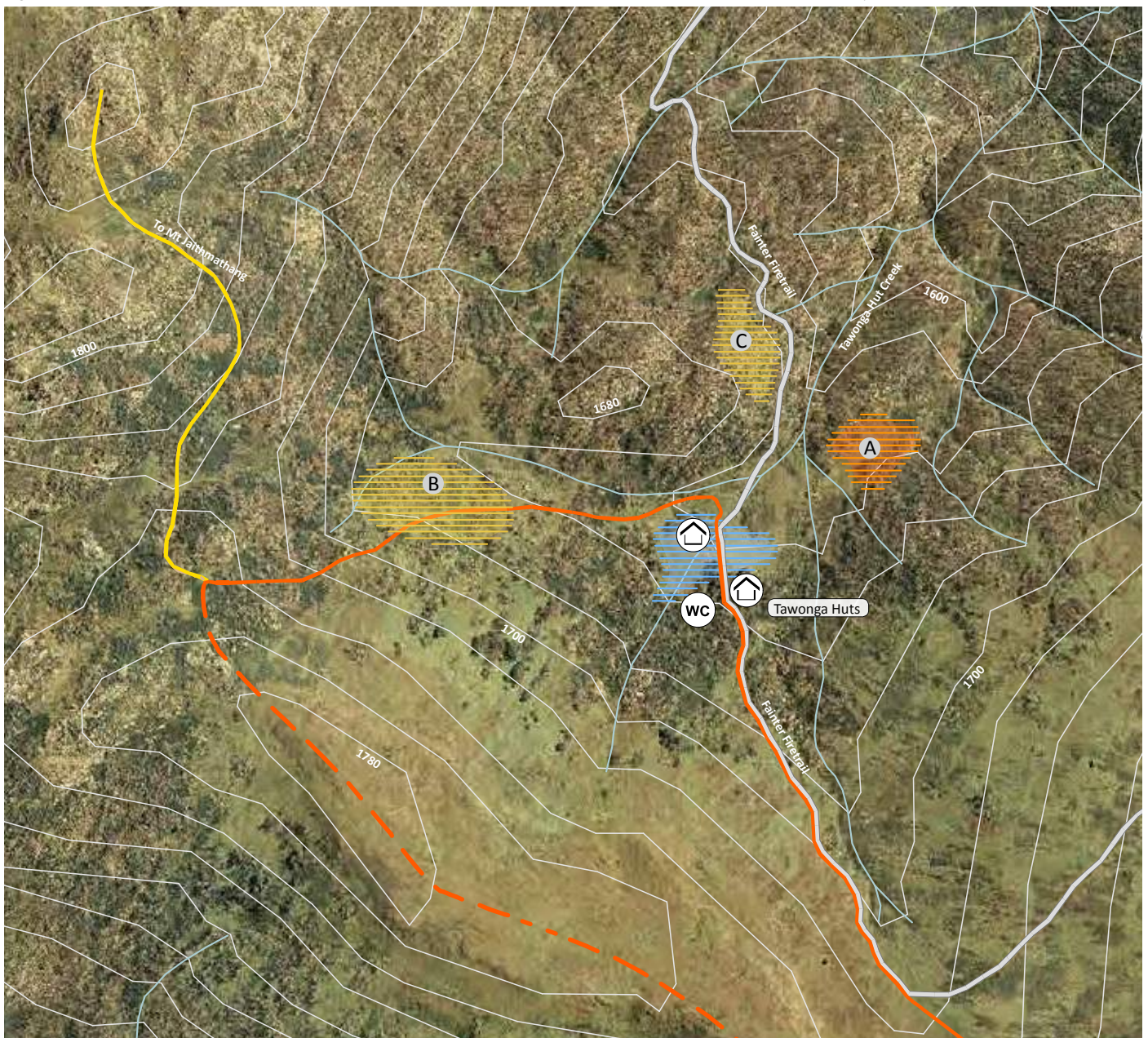
Optional additional hike up to Mt Jaithmathang, potentially for sunset viewing.



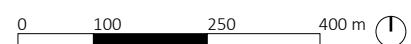
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Key Plan



Overnight Node 2 Location Plan. NOTE: Locations on plan are indicative only and intended to provide principles for site planning. Further site analysis will be required prior to any detailed design is to be undertaken.



Overnight Node 3: Diamantina River and Red Robin Battery

Existing stone structures at Red Robin Battery and the quirky vernacular of associated machine rooms is a highlight in the Kiewa Valley for walkers interested in post-settlement heritage. Guided excursions could be a unique experience and a highlight of the hike. This will certainly be a draw card for Operated Huts within this precinct. The battery itself will be maintained as a historic relic, with the opportunity for a small interpretation and exhibition facility on geology and gold-mining history in the region. The existing West Kiewa Logging Road, which provides access to the site, will be upgraded for more frequent servicing.

The Hiker Camp setting by the river would be ideal for a relaxed afternoon by the water. Camping platforms would be installed to the south along the water's edge to take advantage of viewing opportunities. Adequate placement and construction techniques will be required to address flooding scenarios and mitigate environmental impacts. Opportunities to explore the area and experience stories of the landscape abound, including side trips to the State Forest, the open valley at Dibbins Hut and the Red Robin Mine.

Hiker camps

Landscape values

Diamantina River.

Riparian forest.

Cultural values

Proximity to Blairs Hut and Red Robin Battery.

Proposed location

Upstream from the popular camping area at Diamantina Horse Yards along the river bank. Ensure enough physical separation to existing popular camping areas.

Servicing access

Good via West Kiewa Logging Rd (unsealed). Extension of access road to new Hiker Camp required.

Key considerations

Siting will maintain buffer to water's edge to respond to allow for seasonal flooding.

Ensure adequate separation of campsites and other user groups.

Operated huts

Landscape values

Spectacular setting within Alpine Ash forest.

Montane damp forest.

Kiewa River West Branch.

Cultural values

Historic gold mining battery and other mining remnants.

Proposed location

Along a slope with possible views into Alpine Ash canopies.

There is potential for the Operated Huts to be located closer to the main route. Further investigation would be required to determine locations.

Servicing access

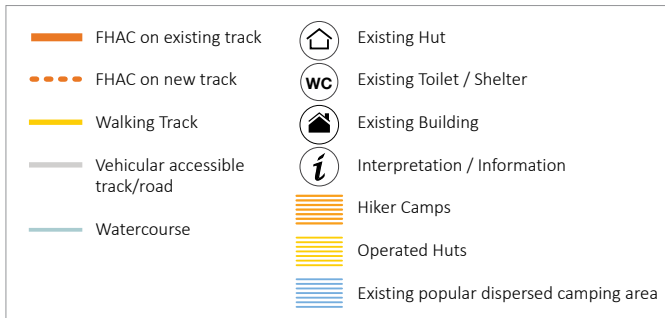
Good from West Kiewa Logging Rd (unsealed, road quality rough). Road also used as walking trail so vehicular use should be limited. Consider reducing cross section width of road to increase attractiveness for walkers. Consider closure to public vehicles.

The existing helipad could be used for emergency and supply services.

Key considerations

Consider reuse of the Red Robin Battery for exhibition and heritage interpretation.

Consider extending a special accommodation option for educational groups at the Battery if possible.

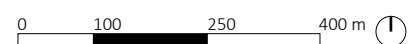


Legend

Key Plan



Overnight Node 3 Location Plan. NOTE: Locations on plan are indicative only and intended to provide principles for site planning. Further site analysis will be required prior to any detailed design is being undertaken.



Overnight node 4: Mt Feathertop

After the steep climb through the Alpine Ash forest, Diamantina Spur flattens out offering spectacular long-distance views towards Mt Hotham and back over to the Bogong High Plains. Mt Feathertop now dramatically exposes its bare flanks covered in colourful herbs to the walker. Through stands of Snow Gums the track continues its way towards the peak. One of the flatter sections, just before ascending towards High Knob, provides an open grassland with stands of Snow Gums. Tucked away from the track, dispersed amongst the trees, the Hiker Camps and the Operated Huts would hug the edges of the ridge line, offering spectacular views into the adjacent valleys.

Hiker camps

Landscape values

Fantastic views along narrow ridge leading to Mt Feathertop.

Close proximity to Mt Feathertop.

Cultural values

Federation Hut.

Proposed location

Co-located with the Operated Huts on the flattening of Diamantina Spur just below High Knob. Set amongst Snow Gums north of the trail.

Servicing access

Poor access with no vehicle access in close proximity. Walk in would be required via Razorback.

Helicopter access potential for servicing sites. Helicopter operations require management and limitation to off seasons and off-peak day times.

Key considerations

The Federation Hut site is currently used by a high number of existing dispersed campers, and the master plan has been careful not to impact these users. However, has come at a compromise where existing walkers who used to dispersed camp at this location will lose this option within 100 m surrounding the new accommodation options.

Consideration of views and impacts of new structures from elsewhere. Siting of any built structures will require careful attention to avoid visual impact from Mt Feathertop.

Ensure adequate separation of campsites and other user groups.

Water to be provided through rainwater harvesting.

Strong north/north-westerly winds.

Siting of any structures amongst Snow Gums will require arborist assessment for impact on root systems.

Operated huts

Landscape values

Fantastic views along narrow ridge leading to Mt Feathertop.

Close proximity to Mt Feathertop.

Cultural values

Federation Hut.

Proposed location

Co-located with the Hiker Camps on the flattening of Diamantina Spur just below High Knob. Set amongst snow gums, the Operated Huts would sit south of the trail.

Servicing access

Poor access with no vehicle access in close proximity. Walk in would be required via Razorback.

Helicopter access potential for servicing sites. Helicopter operations require management and limitation to off seasons and off peak day times.

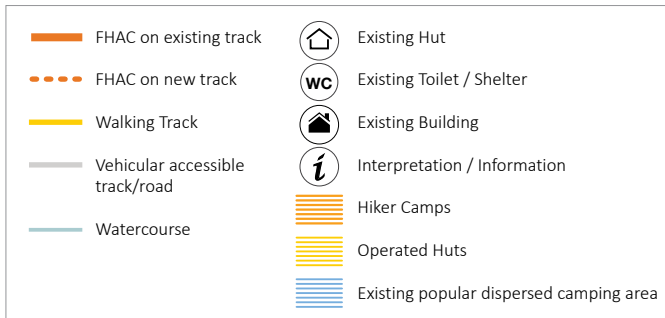
Key considerations

Consideration of views and impacts of new structures from elsewhere.

Ensure adequate separation of campsites and other user groups.

Water to be provided through rainwater harvesting.

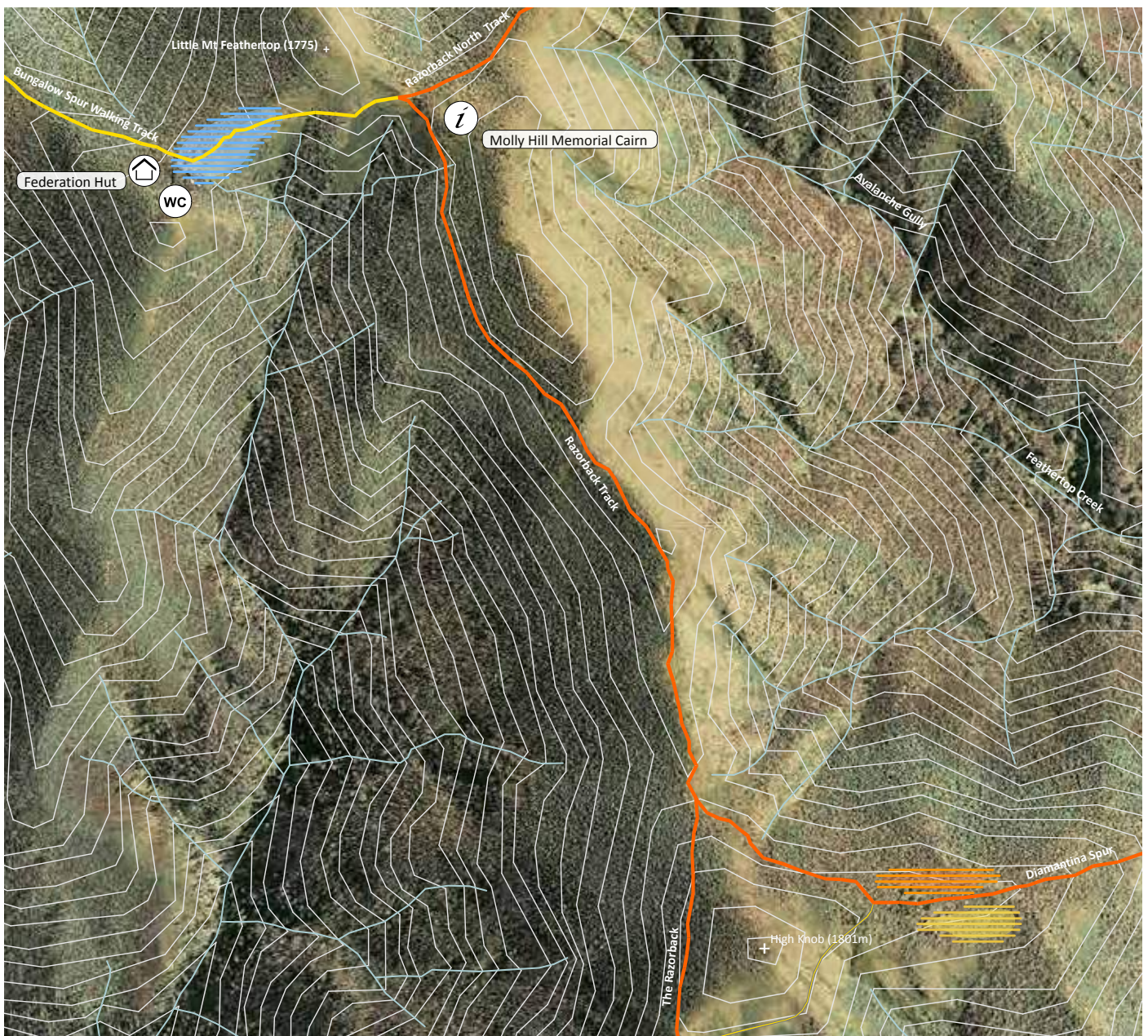
Strong north/ north-westerly winds.



Legend



Key Plan



Overnight Node 4 Location Plan. NOTE: Locations on plan are indicative only and intended to provide principles for site planning. Further site analysis will be required prior to any detailed design is to be undertaken.







Chapter 06
**How will walkers engage
with the Falls to Hotham
Alpine Crossing?**

06 How will walkers engage with the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing?

Access to information

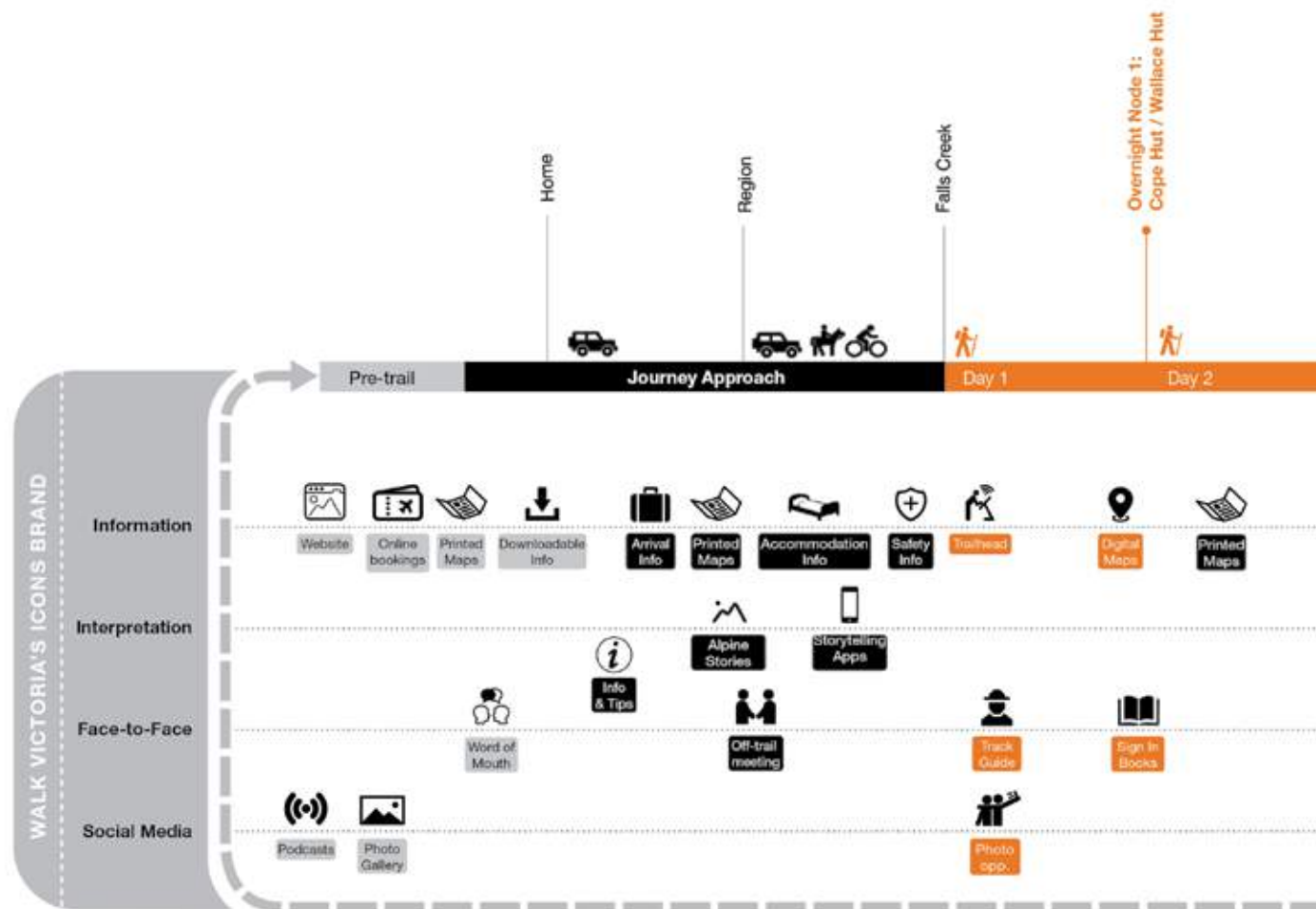
The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing journey begins long before the backpack is shouldered and the trailhead passed. It starts with trip research, organisation, travel arrangements and booking of accommodation on and off the track.

Access to information, ease of finding desired background information and simply getting inspired by a good online presence of the 'Iconic Walk' is critical for an overall level of satisfaction.

The success and demand to walk the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will not only derive from its iconic setting but also its iconic management.

Online presence and booking

The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing should meet or exceed the pre-walking standards of other iconic walks. Existing walks such as the Larapinta Trail, the Overland Track, Milford Track and the Three Capes Track all offer a 'one-stop-shop' online platform where transport options, booking information and tools, and generic information such as preparation tips and photo galleries are accessible. Links to LTO websites, regional tourism offers and events are helpful for creating an overall understanding of options and add-ons, leading to a holistic and comprehensive holiday experience.



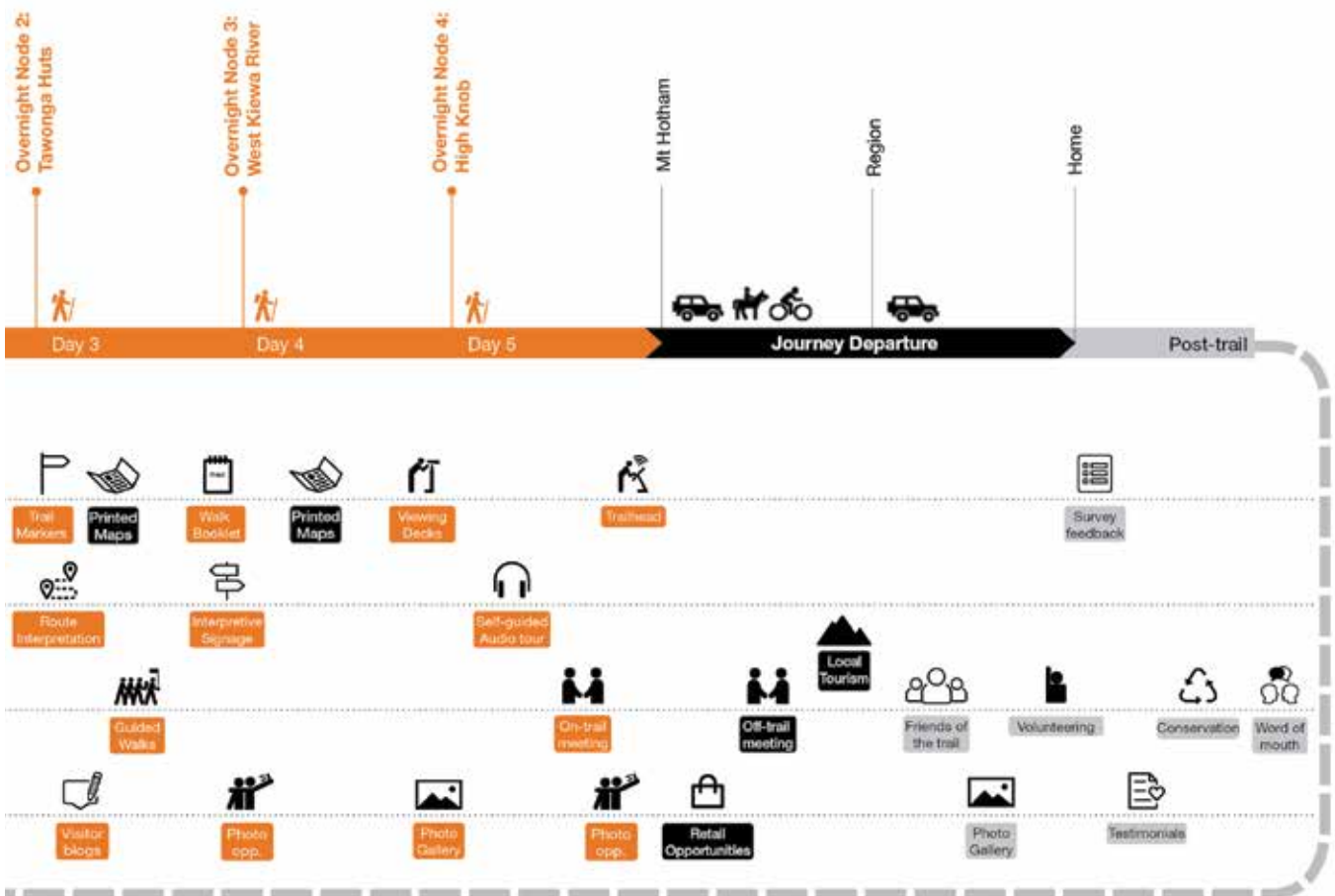
Access to information, pre, during and post undertaking the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing

The experiences before, during and after the walk will be a critical component in attracting and maintaining visitation. This will be done through consistent branding and easy access to information that can take visitors on a journey from their online research and booking experience to the regional communities in the High Country, through to their departure from the trail and post-trip sharing of experiences.

The diagram below outlines a visitor experience framework that is based on improving access to the natural and cultural values of the National Park both for existing and future walkers. Information access points will include websites

and other online presence such as social media portals, printed and digital trail information, interpretation, as well as face-to-face interaction with park rangers and guides. Licensed Tour Operators and the private sector will be able to tap into this opportunity and provide the experiences and information illustrated below.

A great opportunity exists here to expand on access to information by establishing through separate funding a larger information/visitation centre at one of the trailheads. This might be managed as a joint venture with Traditional Owners to provide a platform for cultural interpretation.



Off-track information

Branding

The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will be branded as part of the Walk Victoria’s Icons portfolio. Developing, enhancing and promoting these iconic walks collectively will drive demand and the creation of an iconic product range. An effective strategy will prevent one iconic walk from competing directly with the others by promoting the differences of each walk, with the idea that people will want to complete all four.

A branding strategy should adopt an industry-wide approach in which all agencies and businesses support and promote the walk collectively.

Marketing

Collaborative marketing of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will be critical for its success and will require both initial investment to stimulate demand and ongoing commitment to a sustainable marketing budget. A marketing campaign should be developed to:

- Create awareness and build identity and recognition of the trail;
- Raise the profile of the Alpine National Park, the High Country and Victorian tourism;
- Understand and target the user markets;
- Promote the uniqueness of the walking experience;
- Be cost effective and consumer focused;
- Tap into social media, for example with photo-

- sharing apps to increase word of mouth; and
- Develop and utilise digital technologies that can be used on-trail and off.

Online platform

The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will require a one-stop online platform that provides all information, trip planning and bookings.

The website will be able to provide:

- All trip planning information, including links to on and off-trail service providers and other recreational opportunities in the region;
- Potential trail walking options, including starting options, loops and links, and connections to Dinner Plain, Bogong Village, and Harrietville;
- Identification and location of all accommodation options, segments lengths and difficulty;
- Accommodation booking for publicly managed Hiker Camps;
- Links to private tour and accommodation operators, including pre and post-walk opportunities;
- Up-to-date track information and seasonal weather conditions;
- Safety information and risk regulations;
- Accurate visitation information to assist in ongoing maintenance of the trail and management of visitor numbers through



Informational booklets and maps provide on-trail information and wayfinding.

- available accommodation;
- Travelling and hiking tips;
- Photo galleries;
- Downloadable maps, wayfinding apps and detailed trail descriptions and access to hard copies of trail booklets;
- Information on natural and cultural values of sites and features in the landscape;
- Information and portals for transportation options and private shuttle services;
- Links to social media platforms that allow for photo-sharing and increased access to trail information for a wider population; and
- Links to regional tourism offerings, such as events, destinations and attractions.

On-track information

A seamless experience between trip planning, arrival and trail walking is important for both attracting walkers and enabling private sector involvement in services that may encourage a wider range of visitors.

Interpretation and wayfinding

An Interpretation Framework, Signage Plan, Visitor Experience Strategy and detailed design for elements along the trail will be developed for the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing.

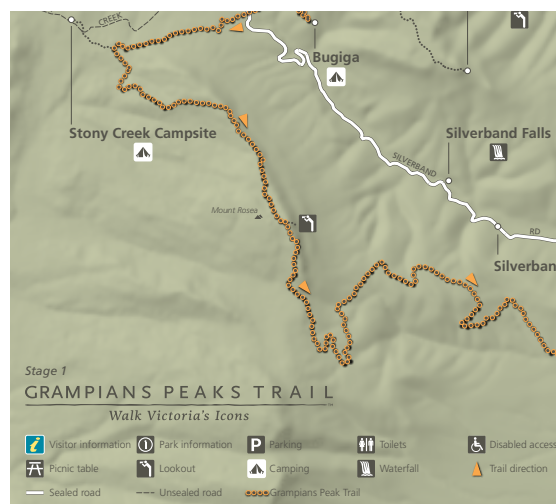
The Interpretation Framework will identify stories,

tools and methods to be integrated into the walking experience. An essential component to this will be the interpretation of the natural and cultural values of the landscape by the Traditional Owners. The following will be considered in a successful framework:

- Opportunities at trail markers;
- Opportunities where there is a noticeable change in vegetation or landform;
- Opportunities at all heritage huts, trail markers and rest stops;
- Should differ depending on setting — could range from wilderness protection, fire in the landscape, views and mountain peaks; and
- Provide basic seating for a few people;
- Opportunities for pre and post-trip, online or through digital platforms and apps; and
- Opportunities for audio stories to activate storytelling for guides, groups and independent walkers.

Products

There is a need to be clearly focused on offering a distinctive experience on a multi-day walk, given the increasingly cluttered market. Walkers have wide-ranging preferences and they seek to know the nature of the offering. Some iconic walks have had a large number of operators, and only a few that have met market expectations have survived. For a new walk to be successful it will need to be



One-stop websites, hard copy and downloadable informational booklets and maps, provide pre-trip and on-trail information and wayfinding.

distinctive and offer something outstanding.

To a large extent, the levels of use of the trails will be dictated by the supply side; that is, the design of the track itself, the nature of the accommodation and the services provided.

A range of accommodation options will be required to create a distinct and desirable walking experience that attracts a wide range of potential users. These include:

- **Hiker camps:** Tent-based accommodation (self-catered or provided by licensed tour operators, this provides a close encounter with nature and offers a remote hiking experience).
- **Operated huts:** Roofed accommodation (a managed and comfortable way of engaging and taking in the grandeur of the natural setting, providing a sense of safety, comfort and relaxation in nature). The provision of Operated Huts will extend the season, for example, for cross-country skiers. This will be offered by a single lease holder experienced in servicing roofed remote accommodation.

It is understood that operated or guided groups would consist of 8 to 10 participants. This would make up approximately 50% of the booking of accommodation options within the Hiker Camps, and around 80–100% within the Operated Huts.

Larger groups, such as school groups or outdoor educational groups, are invited to use the

bookable accommodation options. These groups would still have the opportunity for dispersed camping if they prefer.

To ensure full utilisation of the accommodation and improve access to the product by the identified market, a range of services will be required:

- Efficient and accessible booking systems;
- Options to book via a central online platform or private operator websites; and
- A broad range of experience-based packages provided by private operators.

Packages offered by the private sector may include:

- Guided tours with interpretation, nature appreciation and assisted walking;
- Fully catered packages including a range of accommodation options both on-trail and off;
- Working with Park rangers to provide opportunities for walkers to engage with their knowledge of the park face to face; and
- Opportunities for extra experiences such as mountain biking, horse riding, and fishing.



The summit of Mt Feathertop

Visitor management

Pre-Trail

To manage visitation and trail usage, an easy to use, comprehensive booking system will be utilised. The means by which bookings may be administered can be as follows:

- People who walk the prescribed itinerary of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing would preference for accommodation bookings;
- Other independent hikers would have access to remaining accommodation at Hiker Camps subject to availability;
- Operated Huts would be bookable through the provider only;
- It may be required to manage the booking of the Hiker camps so that larger [school or youth] groups, wanting to book the Hiker Camps, may be given exclusive timeframes. This is to avoid clashes of interests caused by bringing together large groups and individual hikers;
- Bookings may be made online, through agents or potentially at the trailheads. All bookings access the same database; and
- Once a booking has been made, each hiker would receive detailed trail information and confirmation of walking dates and accommodation bookings.



Walker passes take many forms and give walkers a meaningful memento. Photo credit: papoipapiyo.blogspot.com

The walker demand forecasts can be accommodated within this capacity for most of the 10 years in the forecast period. After this time, the capacity limit will most likely be reached. However, it will take some years for the forecast walker numbers to build up, and in this time usage of the trail can be monitored and the carrying capacity reviewed, and bookings policy refined accordingly.

On-trail

Trailheads

Trailheads will play an important role in orienting and welcoming visitors to the walk. Due to the number of potential non-walk visitors to the trailheads, it is important to have clear signage which should:

- indicate the need to pre-book accommodation at Hiker Camps and Operated Huts along the trail; and
- be a marketing and branding tool to attract potential walkers who may have unknowingly happened upon the trailheads from the Alpine Resorts and surrounding towns.

Walker passes

Walking passes in the form of bracelets or waterproof tickets are an effective way to manage and monitor walker numbers. Passes should be issued prior to departure, mailed to walkers or obtained at the Falls Creek trailhead. Passes should be carried throughout the duration of the walk, clearly identifying start and finish dates and accommodation bookings. The pass design will be a branding opportunity, with the potential to become an important memento of the walk.

Transport

The establishment of an efficient and regular shuttle service (walker drop off and pick up) by licensed tour operators or accommodation providers will improve access, increase the attractiveness of the single direction trail, and reduce the demand for car-parking facilities at trailheads.





Chapter 07
**Who will use the Falls to
Hotham Alpine Crossing?**

07 Who will use the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing?

The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will provide an appealing walking experience for a broad spectrum of people seeking a range of experiences and accommodation types and improved access to the natural and cultural values of the High Country.

Tourism in Victoria

Trends

Growing trends in tourism have led to State and regional initiatives to attract a changing demographic and demand in recreation and travel. Nature-based tourism is one of the fastest growing tourism sectors internationally. Victoria is well placed to meet visitor demands because it can offer diverse, intimate and authentic experiences in natural settings.

Recent research undertaken and brought forward in 'Victoria's Nature-Based Tourism Strategy' 2008–2012, shows shifts in consumer preferences from traditional independent multi-day bushwalking trips to a greater demand for soft adventure, comfort and security offered by commercial operators. There is a strong need to conserve national parks while enhancing the visitor experience within them to increase yield for local and regional economies.

Access to quality travel information online and through social media has drastically improved visitors' ability to pick and choose the best travel experience for themselves. The increasingly cluttered market, however, has only heightened the need for destinations to play to their strengths by providing immersive and authentic destinations, offering products that enhance the experience of the natural environment and marketing themselves in a clear and attractive manner.

Victoria's Trail Strategy 2014–2024 was developed by the Victorian government to provide a whole-of-government approach and clear vision regarding the planning, management and promotion of trails in Victoria. The strategy aims to position Victoria as a leader in trail-based destinations that can provide a diverse range of quality experiences for visitors while strengthening the Victorian economy and improving the wellbeing of the community. Today's walkers, more informed and more discerning, are increasingly looking for unique walking and nature-based experiences. The strategy has identified the need for trail development to go beyond simply building the trail to encompassing improved trail infrastructure, related products and services, consumer information and marketing.

This widened scope of trail development is aimed at improving Victoria's position in the national and global tourism market, where there has been an increase in the development of multi-day walks.

The offering

Successful examples of outstanding walking experiences and fully catered packages are seen in places like Tasmania and New Zealand. The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing, and the High Country at large, are in a position to leverage the unique seasonal changes of the region and better facilitate year-round visitation and economic



Enjoying the setting of the accommodation nodes along the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing

growth. This will be achieved through improved tourism services, high-quality accommodation and infrastructure that can support a range of experience-driven products for walkers.

Comparable iconic walks that deliver successfully on the shift of sought-after walking experience are exemplarily listed below. Lessons learnt can be summarised as follows:

- There is a strong demand for roofed accommodation at a medium quality level;
- Mid-distance walks of 3-6 days are preferred;

- Preferred distances are around 10 km per day;
- Price points around \$50 per day for unsupported experiences;
- Walker numbers are regulated in most cases;
- Private operators conduct tours for fees, with instances of contributions to track maintenance; and
- Walkers are often from outside the region in question.

Comparable walks

	Overland Track	Larapinta Trail	Great Ocean Walk	Milford Track	Three Capes Walk
Location recommended itinerary distance	Tasmania 6 days / 5 nights 60 km	Northern Territory 6 days / 5 nights or 3 days / 2 nights Average 120 km	Victoria 6–8 days / 5–7 nights 100 km total walk [LTO offers for shorter options]	New Zealand 5 days / 4 nights 54 km	Tasmania 4 days / 3 nights 46 km
Public accommodation	Bookable tent platforms at most overnight nodes. Toilet facilities. Non-bookable basic hut facilities [i.e. no mattress or cooking facilities].	Camp grounds, some with toilets.	Camp grounds with toilets.	Cabins with co-share, bunk rooms of 4 and 8 beds with mattress. Cooking equipment and utensils, lighting. Host Ranger at each night. Toilet facilities.	Cabins with co-share, bunk rooms of 4 and 8 beds with mattress. Cooking equipment and utensils, lighting. Host Ranger at each night. Toilet facilities.
Cost	\$150pp total	No park entry fees. Camping fees at large visitor nodes	No park entry fees. \$31.60 for hiker platform (3pp platform)	\$70NZD per night in hiker season. \$15NZD per night outside walk season (limited facilities available)	\$495pp
Guest capacity per day	47 walkers	N/A	24 walkers	40 walkers	48 walkers
Private accommodation	Roofed accommodation with twin share, bedding and all meals included	Semi-permanent campsites and heritage listed house	Off-walk lodges [step-on step-off]	Lodges	N/A
Cost (min advertised)	\$3,050pp	\$2,250pp	\$1,995pp [for 55 km walk]	\$2,095NZDpp	N/A
Guest capacity per day	13 walkers per night	N/A	Groups of no more than 12 walkers	50 walkers	N/A

Source: GHD (January 2015) Great Ocean Walk Accommodation Study
 Note: Costs fluctuate and may not be current at time of reading

The market

Current users

Unlike many comparable trails, such as the Overland Track in Tasmania and Milford Track in New Zealand, the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing is part of a trail network with established trail connections to Harrietville and Dinner Plain.

Limited surveys have indicated that current users are of a diverse mix of day walkers, with overnight users tending to seek an adventurous, self-sufficient experience. The nature of the solely tent-based accommodation dictates the current profile of users, with overnight users consisting predominantly of 'adventure seekers' and outdoor educational groups such as scouts and school groups.

Adventure seekers

The 'adventure seekers' are a market which has been described as valuing the 'wild' experience and being self-sufficient. This group consists mainly of experienced to very experienced walkers who are fully independent in terms of drop-off and pick-up and for all equipment. They value solitude and wish to pit themselves against nature while being fully immersed in it, and wish to 'tread lightly'. This user profile is dictated by the relatively high level of difficulty of trail segments, together with the nature of the solely tent-based accommodation.

School groups and outdoor education

It is known that there is extensive use of the Alpine National Park trails by schools, scouts and other education groups.

Many schools take advantage of outdoor education programs, which provide a 'rite of passage' for thousands of students each year. These programs are based on an experiential model of an extended journey removed from the influences of the modern world. Courses are designed to challenge and inspire the upcoming generation.

Outdoor education programs are a large market for the trail and surrounding network. These organisations may offer expedition/journey-based programs, activity-based programs or a mixture of the two, ranging from three-day on-site leadership programs to twelve-day expeditions.

Curious casuals [day walkers]

'Curious casuals' are predominately visitors to the alpine resorts or perhaps to Harrietville or Dinner

Plain. Many are day-trippers and many of these are families. They are often visiting in the green season and seek a short sojourn to 'check out the scenery'. They tend to embark on a 20 minute to 2 hour walk from their point of departure.

Other users

On various neighbouring trails mountain biking is popular, with horse riders also having a presence, for example on Westons Spur and at Tawonga Huts. Cross-country skiing is popular in winter often increasing demand for huts and toilets within 5 km of Falls Creek. Four-wheel drive campers use the roads that are open for access to vehicles.

Latent market demand

Recent research, as outlined in the 'Victoria's Nature-Based Tourism Strategy' 2008–2012 and feasibility studies for equivalent walks such as the Three Capes Track, has shown shifts in consumer preferences from traditional independent multi-day bushwalking trips to a greater demand for soft adventure, comfort and security offered by commercial operators. This shift indicates a trend toward small group-based activities, annual and repeated events and easy to book, seamless travel experiences.

Experience seekers

The 'experience seeker' market group range from the independent, experienced walker to those seeking creature comforts within a natural setting (the 'comfort in nature market'). Experience seekers generally seek a challenging but not over-taxing walk, although some may seek more challenging options such as ascending Mount Feathertop. Their primary purpose is to enjoy scenery and to immerse themselves in nature. Many have an interest in flora and fauna and seek to be educated in cultural history. Experience seekers look for:

- Active, immersive engagement with a place;
- Personally compelling experiences;
- Diversity of environment;
- A choice of accommodation options;
- A choice of independent and guided walks;
- High-quality pre-trip information; and
- A desire to combine other complementary experiences or activities.

The types of walks sought by experience seekers can include:

- Walking independently carrying own food and equipment — similar to adventure seekers but on a less demanding trails. Accommodation can be camping platforms or huts;
- Walking independently but with drop-off and pick-up services and with gear, food and water dropped off at campsites. Accommodation can be independent camping, platforms or huts; and
- Group-based escorted walking tours with drop-off and pick-up services and with gear, food and water dropped off at campsites, or a fully catered service. Accommodation can be through camping platforms (with pre-erected tents) or huts.

This indicates a gap in the market for the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing, and the potential for a wider range of visitors with potential increase in yield for the region. The levels of usage will largely be dictated by the supply: that is, the design of the trail itself and the nature of the accommodation and walking products provided.

Catering to current Users and the latent market

Current users, including the independent overnight walkers, day walkers and educational groups, will continue to use the trail, retaining the ability to camp independently in the National Park in accordance with the Greater Alpine National Parks Management Plan August 2016.

How will school and education groups engage with the new trail?

The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing is perfectly suited to support and improve the use by educational and school groups. These groups have a specific set of requirements which the proposal fully caters for:

- Easy to medium grade short and day trails easily accessible from camp locations that offer physical and intellectual challenges;
- Services (accommodation, food, equipment) provided by adventure/school camp or other operators;
- Other adventure activities that can be tapped into from the camp sites (excursions, fishing, climbing etc); and
- Environmental and cultural education through interpretation and access to information

(personal guiding, handouts, signage, interpretation centres).

Large groups may interfere with the quality of experiences of independent seekers who often prefer a more serene, quiet social environment. Should larger educational groups wish to book, for example, platforms at the Hiker Camps, it is suggested to limit the use of the entire camp to only one group or user group (e.g. multiple school groups) in order to reduce clashes of interests arising by mixing various walker types. Parks Victoria offer a discount for educational groups for other assets, and a similar approach should be explored for the Falls To Hotham Alpine Crossing.

How will the trail cater to the latent market?

In order to increase the appeal for walkers that currently do not visit the region, the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will cater for the walker profile specified as 'experience seekers' with all facets ranging from the independent, experienced walker to those seeking a level of comfort within a natural setting.

There is a substantial supply gap to fill for the 'comfort in nature' market, interested in booking fully catered and guided walking experiences. This is a major opportunity for Licensed Tour Operators utilising the Hiker Camps and private licensees of the Operated Huts.

With this in mind, the degree of difficulty along the trail needs to be addressed, with all of the experience seeker segments preferably being Grade 2 / Grade 3 trails with Grade 4 options. Diamantina Spur, for example, with its steep grades and rock outcrops that can be hazardous, particularly in wet weather, discourages the majority of potential new walkers.

The following elements are proposed to cater to the experience seeker and will be important factors in widening the appeal of the trail:

- Distinct trailheads that mark the point of departure to the iconic trail;
- High quality track and information near trailheads;
- Roofed accommodation options; and
- A range of walking products and activities that link to the site and regional offerings.

Estimating walker numbers

The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will continue to cater for day-trippers and adventure seekers who prefer bush camping, and this market will likely increase in parallel with tourist visitation growth.

The study of existing established iconic walks has shown a shift in consumer preferences from traditional independent multi-day bushwalking trips to a greater demand for 'soft adventure', comfort, services and in many cases the security offered by commercial operators. This shift indicates a trend toward activities based on small groups, annual and repeated events and easy to book, seamless travel experiences.

How big is the market for facilitated walking?

The High Country is one of the premier nature-based tourism product areas in Victoria. The key statistics (year ending June 2016) in regards to visitation for this region are drawn from the two documents, 'Tourism North East High Country Snapshot Visitation Year Ending March 2017' and 'Nature Based Tourism to Victoria Year Ending December 2016'.

According to the visitation numbers outlined in these reports it can be assumed that groups that will take up the opportunity for facilitated walking will be drawn from the following areas:

- Bushwalkers in the High Country
 - 7,000 pa international visitors.
 - 193,000 pa domestic overnight visitors.
 - 93,000 pa day-trippers.
 - Total 293,000 bushwalkers.
- The pool of 'nature-based experience seeker' tourists who are engaged in bushwalking in Australia and in particular in Victoria.

The success of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing facilitated walk offer will be a function of its competitive advantage; that is, the attractiveness of the offering compared to others in the market. However, it is known that the target group does not necessarily switch from one walking experience to another. Many have undertaken other walks on offer in Australasia, and many are

repeat users. On this basis it may be assumed that competitive 'equivalence' should be sufficient to generate a high level of take-up of the product on offer.

Competitive advantage (or at least equivalence) may be demonstrated by the following considerations:

- The walk provides access to a unique and captivating Australian alpine environment and stories of the High Country;
- The distances involved in accessing the walk are modest compared to many comparable walks. Walkers endure very high costs travelling to other parts of Australia, including Tasmania, and to New Zealand;
- The High Country is in reasonable proximity to the major capitals of Sydney and Melbourne;
- The resorts at each end of the walk provide opportunities for additional experiences including luxury accommodation, fine wine and dining;
- Feeder tracks provide opportunities for a range of walk durations and degrees of difficulty appealing to a wider market; and
- The wider region provides opportunities for an extended stay to access a wide range of visitor experiences on offer.

Against this, aspects of competitive 'disadvantage' must be considered. Issues to consider include:

- The environment has been somewhat degraded by weed infestation, grazing, feral animals and bushfires; and
- Unlike many comparable walks, the 'free access' aspect will reduce the feeling of exclusivity and isolation sought by some walkers.

These constraints will need to be addressed by careful management of the environment and levels of use. On balance however, the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages.

Estimating visitation

With lack of accurate base data information to inform current demand of walking offers in the region, the master plan team has assessed alternative ways to estimate walker numbers for the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing.

Occupancy rate modelling

One way to model occupancy rates is to compare the final vision with existing walks in Australia and New Zealand. Occupancy rates for iconic walks such as the Overland track and the Milford Track are very high, both for public hiking as well as guided and operated tours.

The information below outlines the methodology that provides an estimate of expected walkers based on business standard occupancy rates. Three models have been evaluated comparing three different scenarios in occupancy:

	Occupancy in Peak	White Season Increase
Low Estimate	50%	Nil–1% in July
Medium Estimate	70%	Moderate–2% in July
High Estimate	90%	High–3% in July

The modelling then proceeded as follows:

- A percentage distribution of booking nights is assumed based on data on existing platform bookings;
- An occupancy rate is applied to the number of Hiker Camp platforms and Operated Huts bed nights. A rate is assumed for the summer peak and then reduced for the balance of the year to the above bookings profile. The assumed occupancy rate is selected on the basis of what is achieved on comparable walks. It is also assumed it will take around 10 years, to 2027, to achieve the peak occupancy rates;

- From the bed numbers available and the estimated occupancy rates the number of walker nights is calculated;
- On the basis that the average stay in the four accommodation nodes will be three nights, the walker nights are divided by three to calculate the number of walkers; and
- Sensitivity analysis is carried out as per the table below.

The resulting walker numbers of each scenario are estimated as:

	Total Nights	Total Walkers
Low Estimate	15,526	5,175
Medium Estimate	23,331	7,777
High Estimate	32,007	10,669

It can be seen that the potential number of walkers sits in a range from about 5,200 to 10,700 per annum with the informed estimate at about 7,800 per annum.

As an example, the distribution of demand over the year is shown in the figure below for the medium scenario of occupancy of 70% in peak time.

Medium Scenario Estimate	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total	Sources
Current Platform Bookings (Smoothed)	20	18	18	6	2	2	2	2	4	8	15	20	117	1
Percent Distribution	16%	14%	11%	5%	2%	2%	2%	2%	5%	11%	14%	16%	100%	
Hiker Camps	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12		
Beds Available / Day	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	24		
Operated Huts	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10		
Beds Available / Day	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20	20		
Occupancy	70%	61%	48%	22%	9%	9%	9%	9%	22%	48%	61%	70%	36%	
Walkers Commencing per Day (Av 3 Night Stay)	41	36	28	13	5	5	5	5	13	28	36	41	21	
Walkers Commencing per Month (Av 3 Night Stay)	1,273	1,042	875	385	159	154	159	159	385	875	1,078	1,232	7,777	

Walker number estimate across the year based on the 70% occupancy scenario [for walkers utilising the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing accommodation offer].

Sources : 1 Platforms booking data 2015 and 2016 from Parks Victoria for existing FHAC platforms

Share of high country bushwalkers

One approach to estimating the number of walkers who may take up the opportunity for facilitated walks on the proposed trail is to estimate the market share of the number of current bushwalkers in the High Country. As outlined above the estimate is 293,000 per annum. This is increased by the official visitation forecasts to estimate that the number of bushwalkers will increase to 427,000 per annum by 2027.

In a report [SGS Economics and Planning 2010 Development of Alpine (Mount Hotham — Falls Creek) Wild Walk, Board for Alpine Resorts Tourism] based on an extensive survey of people who were interested in such walks, it was estimated that around 2% of walkers might take up the product. This estimate is necessarily based on a range of assumptions, therefore it must be taken as being indicative only and sensitivity analysis must be applied.

This has been done in the table 'Projection of growth in bushwalker numbers in the region' on page 93, where market shares of 1.5%, 2.0% and 2.5% have been tested.

Price points and demand sensitivity

It is assumed in this analysis that licensed tour operators pitch their product on a comparable basis with other walks in Australasia, obviating the need to account for this in estimating market shares. It is acknowledged that if prices exceed the average for the industry occupancy rates, walker number will be at the lower end of the estimated range.

A survey of twelve comparable walks in Australasia reveals a consistency in pricing for facilitated walks, with the main variables being the number of days and the season. For example, four-day walks with catered hut accommodation can be around \$200 per day dearer than six-day walks, and summer walks can be between \$200 and \$400 dearer per day than winter walks. On average walks vary from around \$750 per day in winter to \$900 per day in summer. The weighted average over a given year is \$870. This will be adopted for testing the proposed Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing.

Validation

The results of the occupancy rate modelling reasonably align reasonably with the global figures based on estimated market shares. Both approaches taken together estimate the number of walkers to be in the range 5,000 pa to 10,500 pa in 2027. The mid-range estimate is around 7,800 walkers per annum in 2027.



Hiker Camper Platform

Usage patterns and trail capacity

It is widely recognised that a large part of the walking experience is the opportunity to engage with nature in a peaceful environment. To this end, similar walks impose limits on the number of walkers embarking daily. The Overland Track has a limit of 60 and Three Capes 48. The Milford Track has a limit of 90 per day.

In the event that the new FHAC attracts an additional 7,800 walkers per annum, this will equate to around 1,270 in the peak month or around 40 per day. It can be expected that peak times within the month may see the number increase to around 60 per day.

All of the trails mentioned above are one-way only. The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will be marketed and managed as a one-way walking experience, although some walkers will inevitably enter the trails from other origins such as Harrietville and Dinner Plain, as well as from the Mt Loch trail head. With a potential diversity of origins, walkers will meet on the trail network over an extended period in the middle of the day.

The level of use of the trail will be influenced by other factors, including increased usage at the trailheads, including horse riders, vehicles, and bike riders. The key to managing walker numbers within the environmental limits of the trail will be to monitor the situation over time and to develop

demand management strategies for the Hiker Camps and Operated Huts. For example, if it is desired to limit the number of walkers to 60 on each of the five segments of the trail, the number of camping permits at each of the bookable overnight nodes may be limited to this number.

	Bushwalkers			FHAC Market Share		
	2017	AAGR	2027	1.5%	2.0%	2.5%
International Overnight	7,000	6.3%	12,895	193	258	322
Domestic Overnight	193,000	3.5%	272,246	4,084	5,445	6,806
Domestic Day Trip	93,000	4.3%	141,686	2,125	2,834	3,542
Totals	293,000		426,827	6,402	8,537	10,671

Projection of growth of bushwalker numbers in the region

[Sources: 'Tourism North East High Country Snapshot Visitation Year Ending March 2017' and 'Nature Based Tourism to Victoria Year Ending December 2016']





Chapter 08
**How will the Falls to
Hotham Alpine Crossing
be realised?**

08 How will the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing be realised?

The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will bring benefits to the local, regional and state economies through the construction of new infrastructure, provision of complementary trail services and tourism investment opportunities.

Implementation

The success of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will rely on the collaboration between the public and private sectors to provide the walking trail and infrastructure along with a full suite of complementary products and services to support the walking experience.

Preferred implementation strategy

Various business models have been assessed in terms of their ability to deliver on the vision for the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing. These consisted of different options of co-investment undertaken by the public and private sectors to deliver the core offering, such as track work, trailheads and markers, information and interpretation, and accommodation options.

Key delivery objectives for the core infrastructure of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing are to:

- Be of highest built quality to endure time and harsh weather conditions;
- Be of best possible construction delivery methods to ensure minimal site disturbance and environmental impact; and
- Be adaptable and accessible to multiple users (such as a LTOs providing different packages).

The above objectives can be best ensured when all built infrastructure is delivered by the public sector, enabling design and quality control to be managed by public stakeholders.

Private investment opportunities

Services

The predominant role of the private sector will be in the operation of huts, potentially the hiker camps and provision of walking experiences. Under current legislation, private investment and development within national parks, for services of tourism packages, are capped to a 21-year lease. This encourages investment opportunities with lower start up investment, such as service packages comprising walking tours, shuttle services, guiding services and operation services. An investment model for the Operated Huts looks at public sector delivery of all infrastructure, providing an attractive opportunity for private leasing which has significantly lower up front costs for investors than private delivery of infrastructure. Liaising with private operators during the planning, design and construction of the Operated Huts will be pertinent to their success.

Trailheads

A significant opportunity for the private sector is to tap into the delivery of infrastructure associated with the trailhead locations. These are the Lakeside trailhead at Falls Creek and the Mt Loch trailhead in Mt Hotham. These trailheads would include not only components of the trail infrastructure, such as information boards and maps, trailhead sculpture for photo opportunities and some seating for preparation works, and could also be enriched by the following:

- Cafe/ Restaurant to celebrate 'last and first meals of quality';
- Merchandising (books, posters, hiking gear, local produce, artwork); and
- Exhibitions (art, heritage).

Off-park accommodation and services

There are multiple opportunities to provide accommodation offers that can align with and complement the proposed overnight nodes within the national park.

These opportunities, unrestrained by the delivery objectives for building within national parks, can provide higher-quality, higher-yielding accommodation offer such as bed and breakfast, eco lodges and farm stays. Benefits of off-park stays include better access to services (water, electricity), supplies (fully catered services), and larger and more luxurious accommodation types.

In particular, the resorts are well placed to deliver on this segment services: for overnight node 1 and 2 supported by Falls Creek, and overnight node 4 supported by Mt Hotham. Drive-out and drop-in options using the West Kiewa Logging Road enable overnight node 3 to be serviced by off-park accommodation providers. Access to the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing could also be provided by 4WD tours or horse riding tour operators.

Delivery

The vision outlined in this master plan will require a number of further steps, including planning and economic modelling to determine in detail the full costs and environmental implications of the delivery of the vision for the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing Master Plan. These further studies can then identify any additional funding required for the implementation.

Business case

Further business planning will need to be undertaken to refine the estimates of market demand, in particular for the Operated Huts offer but also to determine the interest of private operators in the management of the hiker camps or parts of these. This comprises the exact numbers and type of roofed accommodation. Expressions of Interests encouraging the private sector to provide ideas and proposals for the provision of supported walking packages will be able to inform the site planning component.

Site planning and design

Further site investigation, such as site surveys, arborist assessments, and the detailed design and documentation of all built elements will be crucial for developing a design that is sympathetic to all the specific constraints and opportunities of each site.

Environmental planning

Further investigation of master plan ideas will form the development of a detailed and updated Environmental Risk Assessment developed by specialist consultants, the provision of vegetation off-sets for the works undertaken in the national park, and all associated planning and management frameworks such as the Bushfire Management Plan.

Staging

The construction of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will be staged over a number of years,

subject to the availability of capital works funding and the level of private sector investment. It is proposed that the trail be staged by first providing the basic trail infrastructure, and with additional investment over time this offer will be augmented with complementary facilities and services.

The level of initial public sector investment should be sufficient to implement significant upgrades to the trail and develop the core iconic walking experience and Hiker Camps. Private sector investment then can tap into the infrastructure such as accommodation types to provide services.

Stage 1 — Core Trail Infrastructure

- High-quality upgrades to trail.
- Upgrades to campsites and provision of new associated infrastructure.
- Construction of trail markers, interpretation and rest stops.
- Sufficient marketing, iconic trail branding, website and booking system in place.
- High-quality trailheads provided in collaboration with Falls Creek Alpine Resort and Mt Hotham Alpine resort.
- Other key projects to support connection to Alpine Resorts and local communities.

Stage 2 — Operated huts

- Market involvement in investment in roofed accommodation, and complementary and supporting services.



Walking offers social engagement and personally enriching experiences.

Engagement

Traditional Owners

The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing offers a unique opportunity to explore with Traditional Owners their involvement in the design, interpretation and management of this landscape, and the benefits that could accrue to their communities as ongoing custodians, and potentially future landowners and managers.

Parks Victoria is committed to working together with Victoria’s Traditional Owners to facilitate these communities in reaching their aspirations in managing protected areas in the Alps and throughout Victoria.

The benefits of involving Traditional Owners in this project and the management of the broader landscape would include:

- Improved planning by better understanding how this landscape was traditionally used; the Aboriginal cultural values associated with this landscape and the threats to these values; and the management objectives Traditional Owners have for this area;
- Improving cultural and eco-tourism initiatives and visitor experiences by strongly incorporating Aboriginal cultural significance and stories;
- Increasingly basing management actions on Aboriginal knowledge; and

- Enabling traditional use of resources on Country for cultural and other outcomes.

If the area’s Traditional Owners decide to pursue a settlement agreement under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* in future, there may also be an opportunity to have alpine parks handed back as Aboriginal title land, to be managed jointly with the State through a Traditional Owner Land Management Board. This would enable Traditional Owners to set the strategic direction for management and help facilitate new commercial arrangements for providing a range of visitor, land and cultural heritage management services; and designing and participating in a wide range of existing and potentially new cultural, social and economic activities.

Parks Victoria and other relevant organisations can encourage and support commercial opportunities and work together to facilitate training and business planning with Traditional Owners and Indigenous communities to build capacity for private business, to undertake commercial partnerships and commercial operations with the parks and partnerships.

Parks Victoria will continue to engage with Traditional Owners throughout the planning and implementation process of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing.



Riparian Forest surrounding Diamantina River

Communities and volunteering

Friends groups, volunteers and students make a valuable contribution to park management and extend the scale and involvement of the community in particular projects. Volunteering groups and community stakeholders form an important role in maintaining existing natural and cultural assets such as maintenance of existing tracks, weed and pest control and through the development of local interpretation strategies. Such strategies are, for example, developed by the Harrietville Community Forum and can inform and enrich the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing Interpretation Strategy.

To ensure that the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing aligns with the interests of the local communities and provides a fertile platform for local service providers to tap into, it is recommended that further consultation and engagement throughout all following project phases is provided to ensure a strong sense of pride and community ownership.



Descending into the valleys of the Alpine National Park

Costs

The total project cost for the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will need to account for not only design and construction costs but also consider additional cost factors. The overall project cost will comprise of the following:

- Construction Costs including all overhead/contingencies and price escalations;
- Foundation Costs to support the project [detailed list provided in Cost Summary Overview leaf];
- Staffing and Management [both during planning and operation]; and
- Operation and Maintenance costs [occurring on an annual basis].

Capital costs

A high-level cost plan has been prepared to evaluate potential costs for the construction of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing. Detailed site planning and further investigation of the actual product offer will inform further cost planning to more accurately identify the exact volume of works and associated costs.

Operational costs

At this stage no information can be provided on the recurrent costs for maintenance and operation. Additional staffing will be required to support the new assets. These costs may be shared with the private sector that provide services under a lease of these assets, such as the Operated Huts or the Hiker camps.

High level construction rates

Upgrade Existing Track	Very Light	Level 1.1: general make good of existing track	\$20/m
	Light	Level 1.2: track widths vary between 600 and 1200 mm, minor re-gravelling and stone steps	\$50/m
	Medium	Level 2: track widths vary between 600 and 1200 mm, re-gravelling with stone steps and water channels	\$120/m
	Heavy	Level 3: track widths vary between 600 and 900 mm, stone steps and water bars, re-gravelling	\$250/m
New Track	Medium	Level 2: track width between 600 and 900 mm, rock paving or rock steps, some gravel	\$120/m
	Elevated Track — Boardwalk	Level 3.1: track width 600 mm, timber boardwalks either on light frame, resting on ground or steel grate	\$250/m
	Elevated Track — Bridge Over River	Level 3.2: track width 600 mm, suspended timber bridge	\$2,000/m
	Steps	Level 4: track width 600 mm, timber stepping logs, stone steps or steel/ timber steps to very steep or rocky terrain	\$550/m
Interpretation / Wayfinding including Refurbishment of Existing huts	Trail Marker And Rest Stop	Wayfinding, interpretative sign, basic seating	\$20,000/unit
	Iconic Trail Marker	Wayfinding, seating, paved area bump out, iconic sign	\$50,000/unit
	Interpretation	Interpretative signage, basic seating	\$15,000/unit
	Refurbished Heritage Huts - Langford Gap Hut, Wallace Hut and Cope Hut, Cope Saddle Hut, Tawonga Huts, Westons Hut, Blairs Hut, Federation Hut, Diamantina Hut	Clean and basic refurbishment, interpretative display	\$25,000 /hut
	Refurbishment of heritage huts: Bogong Rover chalet and Red Robin Battery	Allowance made to upgrade - this requires further coordination and design	\$1,200,000 and \$2,000,000
Accommodation	Overnight Node - Hiker Camps	12 tent platforms, 2 toilets, communal shelter, water harvesting	\$600,000/ site
	Overnight Node - Operated Huts	10 Operated Huts consisting of communal hut with decking, operator hut, 2 toilets and water harvesting	\$1,200,000/ site

Breakdown of high level construction costs for track and infrastructure

Benefits

Societal benefits

Surveys of walkers highlight the benefits of walking experiences such as the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing. Walkers report increased self-confidence and other enduring changes which enhance well-being. By fostering engagement with people, natural environments and the mastering of challenging tasks, long-distance walking is found to facilitate relationships, self-fulfilment and a sense of achievement. (Survey source: Saunders, R. et al. (2013) Personal Transformation Through Long Distance Walking, Southern Cross University).

Environmental benefits

The master plan aims to promote a higher environmental sensitivity within the broader community by providing information and education to an increased number of visitors. Highest possible standards of environmentally sensitive design solutions protect and enhance the habitat of existing flora and fauna. A curated weed and pest control and management strategy will be applied utilising funding and volunteering support.

Economic benefits

The development of the trail will provide Victoria with a major nature-based tourism icon. The track will attract significantly more visitation to the region, generating demand for services that include the direct offer within the trailhead resorts and adjacent mountain villages such as Harrietville and Dinner plain, but also extend further out into the region. A number of walkers will extend their stay in the region by one or two additional nights, pre and post trail.

Job creation

The capital expenditure and construction employment associated with building the trail infrastructure is another important benefit.

This capital expenditure will provide business opportunities for construction companies in the region (as well as from further afield), and can be expected to generate 80 direct full-time jobs.

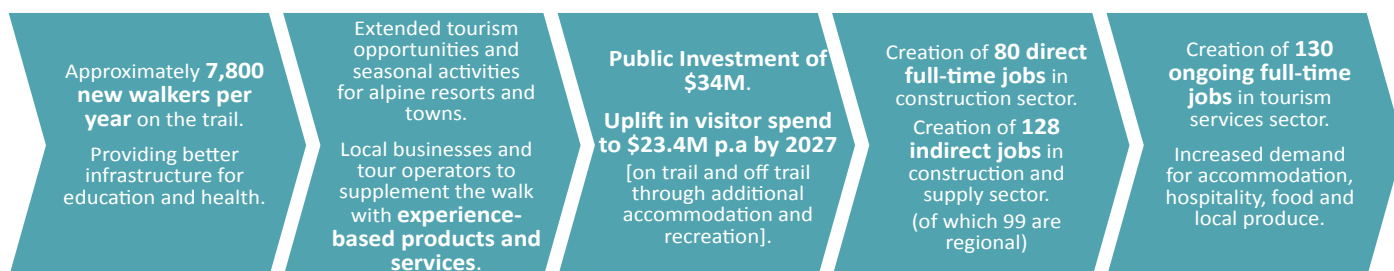
A further 128 indirect (flow-on) full-time jobs will be generated elsewhere in the economy. This includes a wide range of sectors and services such as building supplies, equipment manufacturers, financial services, and other activities that support the construction industry. Of these construction costs it is estimated that 99 will be local.

In addition to the construction jobs there will be on-going employment in the service sector in the region. This includes tour operator employees and jobs in the business providing services to visitors. It is estimated that after approximately ten years there will be a total of 130 jobs created in the service sector.

Visitor spending

Visitor spending supports employment in the region and in the State of Victoria more widely. The trail will give impetus to economic activity at the trailheads and in towns in the region as accommodation and service providing businesses take advantage of new custom. Off-trail services will include accommodation, catering for walkers, tent drop-off and shuttle services.

It is estimated that there will be an uplift in visitor spending, both regionally and by means of travel. It is assumed walkers spend an average of three nights on the track and an average of one night off-track either in the resorts or elsewhere in the region. The on-track spending rate is estimated from the average of fees paid for tours based on comparable walks and the off-track spend per night is based on TRA data. On this basis it is estimated that the potential total spend will be in the order of \$23.4M by 2027 when the trail is fully operational.



Project benefits
[It is assumed it will take 10 years to achieve the above Job estimates]

Estimated cost summary table

Capital costs

Segment			Track Works Existing			Track Works New				
Day	Total Length		Track Light Upgrade Level 1.1	Track Light Upgrade Level 1.2	Track Upgrade Medium Level 2	Track New Medium Level 2	Track New Medium Level 3.1	Track New Medium Level 3.2	Track New heavy [steps] Level 4	
1	Trailhead Falls Creek Carpark									
	Day 1	Falls Creek to Cope Hut	15.8 km	\$320,000						
	Night 1	Cope Hut								
2	Day 2	Cope Hut to Tawonga Huts	10.3 km		\$1,092,000		\$250,000	\$80,000		
	Night 2	Tawonga Huts								
3	Day 3	Tawonga Huts to Diamantina Creek	10.9 km		\$115,000	\$225,000	\$324,000	\$20,000	\$200,000	\$825,000
	Night 3	Diamantina Creek								
4	Day 4	Diamantina Creek to High Knob	6,9 km	\$365,000			\$144,000	\$10,000	\$100,000	\$825,000
	Night 4	High Knob								
5	Day 5	High Knob to Mt Hotham Loch Carpark	13,2 km	\$660,000						
	Trailhead Mt Hotham Loch Carpark									
Subtotals									[all track works combined] \$5,555,000	

Project Design/ Management Fees

	Project Core Design Team	Parks Victoria Management and Project Governance	Escalation	Subtotal Design and Management Fees
	11.00% [3]	8.00% [4]	5.00% [5]	
Total Track	\$2,874,077	\$2,090,238	\$248,216	\$5,212,531

[1] Contingencies for Construction Costs consist of: 5% ESD Extra, 5% Locality Allowance, 10% Design Contingency, 10%Contract Contingency; 6% of 2 years CPI

[2] Compounding Costs for over 2 years

[3] 11% of total end cost. These fees comprise of the following core design team consultants: Landscape Architect, Architect, Structural Engineer, Building Services, Civil/ Traffic Engineer, Building Surveyor, Statutory Planning/ Permits, Surveyor, Arborist, Geotechnical Engineer

	Interpretation	Existing asset upgrade	Accommodation		Subtotal	Contingencies [1] 36.00%	Compounding Factor [2] 5.50%	Total End Cost	Total End Cost per Segment
	Interpretation/ Wayfinding		Hiker Camp	Operated Huts					
	\$500,000				\$500,000	\$180,000	\$27,500	\$707,500	
	\$330,000	\$1,200,000			\$1,850,000	\$666,000	\$101,750	\$2,617,750	
			\$600,000	\$1,200,000	\$1,800,000	\$648,000	\$99,000	\$2,547,000	\$5,872,250
	\$155,000				\$1,577,000	\$567,720	\$86,735	\$2,231,455	
			\$600,000	\$1,200,000	\$1,800,000	\$648,000	\$99,000	\$2,547,000	\$4,778,455
	\$635,000	\$2,000,000			\$4,344,000	\$1,563,840	\$238,920	\$6,146,760	
			\$600,000	\$1,200,000	\$1,800,000	\$648,000	\$99,000	\$2,547,000	\$8,693,760
	\$255,000				\$1,699,000	\$611,640	\$93,445	\$2,404,085	
			\$600,000	\$1,200,000	\$1,800,000	\$648,000	\$99,000	\$2,547,000	\$4,951,085
	\$135,000				\$795,000	\$286,200	\$43,725	\$1,124,925	
	\$500,000				\$500,000	\$180,000	\$27,500	\$707,500	\$1,832,425
	\$2,510,000	\$3,200,000	\$2,400,000	\$4,800,000	\$18,465,000.00	\$6,647,400.00	\$1,015,575.00		
								Capital Costs subtotal	\$26,127,975

Project Enabling Costs

Business Plan	Native Vegetation Offsets	Bushfire Management Overlay	Marketing and Branding	Risk Management / Probity	IT Solutions [Website, Online Booking Platform]	Subtotal Project Enabling Costs	Project Design/ Management Fees and Project Enabling Costs subtotal
\$250,000	\$2,000,000	\$50,000	\$200,000	\$50,000	\$200,000	\$2,750,000	

PROJECT TOTAL COSTS \$34,090,506

[4] These fees cover Parks Victoria staffing, general project management and the following specialist consultants/ report production: Trail Planner, Environmental Engineer, Cultural Heritage Advisor, Community Engagement, Interpretation/ Wayfinding, Planner
 [5] Extra 5% over project fees to cover unexpected escalations

NOTE: The cost table above is based on preliminary information and therefore is indicative only of the possible order of cost. All components of the cost table will require confirmation once the design has developed further.





Chapter 09
**How will the Falls to Hotham
Alpine Crossing be managed?**

09 How will the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing be managed?

Management goals

The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will require significant initial and ongoing management from both the public and private sectors to ensure the success of the walking experience and provide regional economic benefits.

Visitor management goals

- Improve and maintain the trail as a world-class destination and walking experience;
- Provide appropriate risk management and visitor safety strategies;
- Provide a high-quality and easy to use website including booking system and digital information platform;
- Minimise the overlap between Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing walkers and other park users; and
- Manage trail usage and walker impacts through regular monitoring of visitation patterns.

Environmental management goals

- Achieve best practice environmental standards in design and management of the trail and surrounding park;

- Provide clear and engaging interpretation and visitor information techniques to promote understanding and stewardship of the environment; and
- Undertake regular and ongoing maintenance of trail infrastructure and assets to minimise improper use and encourage sustainable engagement with the trail.

Operational management goals

- Ensure Parks Victoria retains oversight over all management responsibilities;
- Work closely with the private sector to develop suitable walking products, accommodation and services;
- Encourage private sector investment in a range of supportive walking experiences and tourism opportunities;
- Encourage the private sector to contribute to maintenance and operations of park assets and values; and
- Undertake regular monitoring to assess track, asset and environmental condition, identify weaknesses and provide opportunities for improvement.



Parks Victoria Junior Ranger program providing opportunities to learn about the parks' natural and cultural values

Managing accommodation

The management of on-trail accommodation will largely regulate trail usage and the number of walkers on the trail at any given time. In order to successfully do so, the following strategies will be deployed:

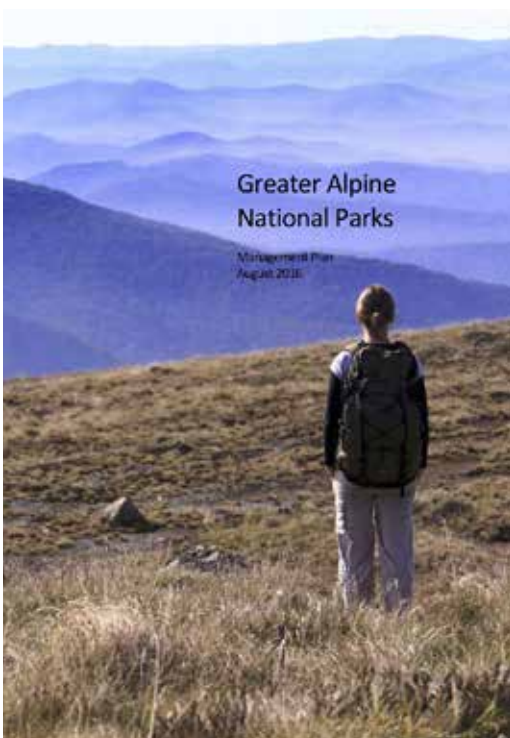
- Parks Victoria rangers will regularly patrol the overnight nodes to check bookings and trail passes;
- Signage at campsites will clearly state the requirement to pre-book hiker platforms associated with Hiker Camps;
- The booking process will provide detailed allocation of camping platforms to walkers; and
- Operated Huts will be leased and managed by the private sector. License agreements over the huts may extend to management models including the hiker camps.

Risk management

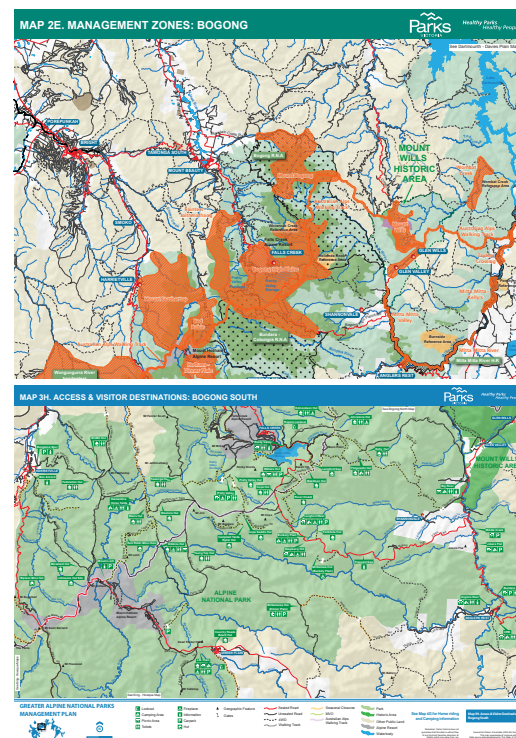
The Alpine National Park's rugged topography, changeable weather conditions and remote locations present inherent dangers and risks to walkers along the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing.

The trail will need to be integrated into an Emergency Management Plan to ensure the safety of all visitors along the trail. An appropriate plan may involve:

- Implementation of a booking system that provides real-time information on walker numbers and overnight locations;
- Emergency evacuation plans in the event of extreme weather or bushfire;
- Emergency medical evacuation;
- Provision of adequate visitor safety information and signage to increase visitor awareness of risks along the trail;
- Continual monitoring of trail infrastructure to identify and eliminate hazards; and
- Communication techniques that encourage visitors to be fully aware and prepared before walking the trail.



Parks Victoria management collateral



Legislative context

Victoria's parks and reserves system has been established over the past 120 years through the efforts and commitment of a wide range of organisations and individuals. Parks are reserved for a variety of purposes, and managed within the context of state and Commonwealth legislation, international treaties, government policies, best-practice principles, strategies and guidelines.

Key state legislation in relation to parks and reserves includes, but is not limited to:

- National Parks Act 1975 and Regulations;
- Crown Lands (Reserves) Act 1978 and Regulations; and
- Parks Victoria Act 1998.

Other important state legislation includes, but is not limited to:

- Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006;
- Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988;
- Forests Act 1958 and Regulations;
- Heritage Act 1995;
- Land Conservation (Vehicle Control) Act 1972 and Regulations; and
- Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010.

Commonwealth legislation which has direct, or major, implications for the management of Victorian parks and reserves includes, but is not limited to;

- Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999;
- Native Title Act 1993; and
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984.

Protection status

International status

The Alpine National Park is assigned to the IUCN World Conservation Union Category II National Park in the United Nations list of Protected Areas. Category II areas are managed to protect natural biodiversity along with its underlying ecological structure and supporting environmental processes, and to promote education and recreation.

National heritage listing

The National Heritage List is Australia's list of natural, historic and indigenous places of outstanding significance to the nation. In 2008, the Australian Alps National Parks and Reserves

were included on the National Heritage List of Australia, providing protection under the *Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC)* for their natural environment, indigenous and historic values as well as their scientific importance.

Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006

The main purpose of this Act is to provide protection and promotion for the respect of Aboriginal cultural heritage, to empower Traditional Owners as protectors of their cultural heritage and promote the recognition of Aboriginal people as the primary guardians, keepers and knowledge holders of Aboriginal cultural heritage.

Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010

The purposes of this Act are to advance reconciliation and promote good relations between the State and traditional owners and to recognise traditional owner groups based on their traditional and cultural associations to certain land in Victoria. Parks Victoria has and will continue to engage with Traditional Owners of the alpine region throughout the life of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing project.

Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999

This Act was established with the objective to provide protection of the environment and heritage, conserve and promote biodiversity and promote co-operative methods for protection and management, recognising the role of indigenous people in the conservation and ecologically sustainable use of Australia's biodiversity.

Native vegetation permitted clearing regulations

In Victoria, a permit is required to remove, destroy or lop native vegetation. The objective of the Native Vegetation Management Framework 2002 is a reversal across the entire landscape, of the long-term decline in the extent and quality of native vegetation leading to a net gain. Net gain is an important principle in the implementation of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing where clearing may be required for trail infrastructure and accommodation settings.

On 20 December 2013 a planning scheme amendment was passed to implement reforms to Victoria's Native Vegetation Permitted Clearing

Regulations. A native vegetation offset is required when a permit is granted to remove native vegetation in accordance with these guidelines. In the development of accommodation and trail upgrades, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning DELWP will determine the need and requirements for a native vegetation removal permits and offsets.

Bushfire management overlay

The Bushfire Management Overlay (BMO) is a planning control which identifies areas where bushfire hazard requires protection measures in the location, design and construction of any development, to ensure that risk to life and property is managed to an acceptable level. The overlay covers the entire length of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing, which may trigger the need for a planning permit to undertake construction and appropriate bushfire protection measures.

Parks Victoria is exploring options for addressing the requirements of the Bushfire Management Overlay through the development of an Emergency Management Plan.

Alpine Shire Planning Scheme

Under the current Alpine Shire Planning Scheme issued on 9 June 2016, the Alpine National Park falls within the Public Conservation and Resource Zone. In order to enable accommodation development within this zone, an amendment to the current planning scheme may be required. The introduction of an incorporated plan into the schedule of the zone may be needed to allow this use. A planning scheme amendment would be required for a third party to lease huts within the Alpine National Park.

East Gippsland Planning Scheme

Parts of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing, including the track at Bogong Rover Chalet and Mt Cope, are within the East Gippsland Shire, and here the planning scheme applies.

Greater Alpine National Parks Management Plan

The Greater Alpine National Parks Management Plan 2016 is a strategic guide for managing and protecting the five National Parks, other parks and five Historic Areas in the planning area of Eastern Victoria over the next fifteen years.

Key management opportunities are outlined in the plan including the following:

- Environmental management programs that minimise threats and maximise ecosystem resilience;
- Response to climate change;
- Control of exotic species, including feral horses, deer, foxes and targeted weed containment;
- Increased planned burns and fire and fuel management programs;
- Respect for people’s connection to the land and conservation of historic areas through interpretation, integrated work with Traditional Owners and compatible land uses; and
- Promotion and maintenance of a wide range of recreational and tourism experiences.

The plan provides management zones and overlays which inform the uses and strategies that apply within the park and provide important guidance for the development of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing.

Conservation zones

- Areas of high natural value where the emphasis is on protection of the environment.
- Recreation and tourism are permitted subject to close management to ensure minimal impact to values and minimal interference to natural processes.

Conservation and recreation zones

- Areas where the management emphasis is on protection of environmental and cultural values while allowing for recreation.
- Dispersed recreation and tourism activities are encouraged.

Remote and natural areas

- Proclaimed under Schedule Six of the National Parks Act, and managed to protect the area’s remote and natural attributes.
- Prevent new and incremental developments, including the construction of vehicular tracks and new structures.

Detailed site planning will require the overlay of the above planning zones to ensure compliance with the management plan and alignment with recommendations from the Environmental Risk Assessment and a comprehensive Cultural Heritage Management Plan for the entire trail length and all overnight nodes.

Roles and responsibilities

There are a range of roles and responsibilities for both public and private sector agencies and businesses in the implementation and management of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing.

Parks Victoria

Parks Victoria will initially undertake the delivery and day to day management of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing core infrastructure, including the trail, the Hiker Camps and the Operated Huts. Management of both accommodation options can be with Parks Victoria. Pending viability and interest from the private sector, management roles may be shared between the public and private sector.

The trail will require staff and contractors to service and manage the walk, including operation managers, visitor information officers, rangers, administration, and support staff for work such as maintenance and repair, cleaning (toilets) and rubbish collection.

Parks Victoria will be responsible for:

- Ensuring the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing remains a high-quality and memorable experience for all users;
- Providing appropriate risk management and visitor safety strategies; and
- Managing the overlap between the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing and other user groups in Alpine National Park.

The master plan adopts the *Healthy Parks Healthy People* philosophy, which seeks to reinforce and encourage the connections between a healthy environment and a healthy society. The approach encourages those from the health, environment, parks, tourism, recreation, community development and education sectors to work together to provide a better outcome for all.

Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP)

DELWP is a State government department responsible for the management of Victoria's parks and reserves in partnership with Parks Victoria. The department will have the primary role in administering how any private sector investment is to occur within the National Park.

In 2015, DELWP issued a guidance note — Tourism Leases in National Parks — that provides

an overview of the principles and procedures that the government will apply when considering a proposal for private investment for appropriate, small scale development inside a National Park under a lease of up to 21 years. It accompanies changes to the National Parks Act 1975 to reduce the maximum term of a lease under the general leasing power (section 19G) to 21 years from the previous 99-year lease duration.

Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources (DEDJTR)

DEDJTR is a state government agency that promotes rural and regional development, with a focus on investment attraction, job creation, exports, creating stronger economies, communities and infrastructure. DEDJTR will evaluate and provide the means for trail implementation through the provision of government investment infrastructure.

Tourism North East

Tourism North East in partnership with Parks Victoria will lead cooperative marketing and promotion of the trail as one of Victoria's iconic multi-day bushwalks. Tourism North East, in collaboration with licensed tour operators and private businesses, will also assist in the development of appropriate walking products, value-add business opportunities and links between the trail and existing and future tourism ventures in the region.

Visit Victoria

Visit Victoria in partnership with Tourism North East and Parks Victoria will market and promote the trail as one of Victoria's iconic multi-day bushwalks.

Local Government Authorities (LGA)

LGAs will be responsible for regional services and planning. In many cases, planning applications will need to be submitted through LGAs for approval.

Alpine resorts

The Falls Creek and Mt Hotham alpine resorts will play a major role in the promotion of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing as well as the provision of complementary tourism offers for the trail, particularly in the extension of a usable season. Opportunities for servicing arrival and departures at or near trailheads include retail, food and beverage, trail information amenities and tour

operations.

The Falls Creek Alpine Resort Management Board will be a crucial partner in the management of Crown Land licenses in the Alpine Resort and will have responsibilities as a public land manager under the Falls Creek Alpine Resorts Planning Scheme. The Mt Hotham Alpine Resort Management Board will be a crucial partner in the development of the trail. While not having direct control over land use planning regulations, the board will have a role in the management of Crown land licenses in the Alpine Resort, responsibilities as public land manager under the Alpine Resorts Planning Scheme, and promoting the recreation opportunity in accordance with its tourism promotion requirements under the Act.

Licensed tour operators

The success of the trail is reliant on the development of a full range of guided walking and accommodation packages. Tour operators will play a vital role in developing suitable walking products for the market that will meet demand and expand the quantity and diversity of people walking the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing.

Private sector investors

The success of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing is reliant on the provision of a wide range of accommodation options, as well as support services, to be provided by the private sector. This includes provision of on trail and off trail services, guided or supported walking experiences, the operation and management of the Huts under a license through Parks Victoria, or the partial or full management of the Hiker camps.

Community groups and volunteers

Friends groups, volunteers and students make a valuable contribution to park management and extend the scale and involvement of the community in particular projects. There is an important opportunity to involve community groups within the planning and implementation of the trail to ensure a strong sense of pride and community ownership.



The grandeur of the Alpine National Park

