

COMMUNITY UPDATE

Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing

Autumn 2022

Welcome to the Autumn 2022 edition of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing Community Update.

The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will be one of Australia's outstanding alpine walking experiences 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 Master Plan outlines the proposed 57-kilometre, multi-day route, combining and upgrading an existing track network. It will take in the Diamantina Spur and Razorback with an optional ascent of Mount Feathertop, Victoria's second-highest peak. The facilities created as part of the five-day, four-night route may also provide options for shorter overnight walks.

Since the finalisation of the Master Plan Parks Victoria received money in 2018 to start doing the detailed planning and business case. In 2020 further funding was received to build the first stage of the walk.

A Visual Landscape Assessment for the project is close to complete and the Business Case is well progressed.

Project update

Since our last update in late 2021, work has been continuing on the Visual Landscape Assessment, which is now close to complete. This will be a detailed independent assessment of the visual impacts of the project on the landscape. In particular, it considers impacts of roofed accommodation and possible sections of raised walkways. We expect this report to be completed by April.



Visual impact assessment from Mt Feathertop

A Business Case and research into operating models is also being developed. The Business Case is an independent in-depth analysis of a project and investigates its viability, implementation and operating costs, impacts and benefits.

The structure of a business case document is dictated by the Department of Treasury and Finance Victoria and is required for all projects with an investment greater than \$10 million. These documents provide the State Government with evidence that money it is investing is going towards viable projects. The business case is not an environmental assessment, although it does of course mention environmental aspects as they are key considerations of this project.

We expect the Business Case to be ready by May and we will share a summary of that with the community once we have it.

The project will be delivered in stages. Further planning, as well as environmental and cultural assessments are ongoing and, are helping to define what is delivered for Stage 1 of the project. Stage 1 will likely include track upgrades and up to

two overnight campgrounds including roofed accommodation options. That work is expected to be completed during 2024.

Completing the final parts of the crossing will be subject to future government investment.

As promised in our previous update and community session in late 2021, we shared the full Preliminary Environmental Values Assessment with the community. If you haven't had a chance to look at this yet and wish to, you can access it [here](#).

Learning from experience

Since our last update, the Grampians Peaks Trail has opened. Some of you may be interested in what we have learnt from that experience and how those learnings will be taken into consideration when creating the Falls to Hotham experience. Although the landscapes are very different, especially in terms of the climate and visitation, there are ways we can learn from the Grampians experience to improve the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing.

The 160km trail connects Grampians (Gariwerd) National Park's spectacular peaks, from the massive sandstone outcrops around Mount Zero in the north to Mount Abrupt in the south. It features 11 sustainably designed hike-in campsites with raised tent pads, a main shelter for gathering and meal preparation, toilets, gathering spaces, boardwalks, and internal tracks to minimise environmental impacts.

To cater for a wide range of visitors looking for new experiences, including those who may be unable or prefer not to carry provisions for a multi-day hike, Parks Victoria has engaged tour operators to provide facilitated walks on the trail's northern section. The facilitated walking experience makes use of three demountable huts at two of the hike-in campgrounds. Built and owned by Parks Victoria, the four-bed huts have a minimalist design developed for the Gariwerd landscape.

A project of this scale in a national park is complex and takes time. Although in a very different landscape, it offered us many opportunities to learn about minimising environmental impacts, track design and campsite and hut designs and construction.

Some of the lessons learnt from that project that will benefit how we proceed with the Alpine Crossing include construction, approvals processes and engagement with stakeholders like Licenced Tour Operators.

Feedback from visitors on issues such as water availability on the track, clear and consistent information on maps, signs and our website, and booking processes are some of the things we have and will continue to modify and learn from as a result.



Inside a Grampians Peaks Trail hut

From the field

In December, prior to an increase in COVID-19 cases, local Parks Victoria staff were seeing very strong demand for the walking experience along the Razorback to Mt Feathertop. Track counters showed that we had more than 400 people a day setting off from Hotham, to walk along the Razorback. The perfect summer weather and stunning views from this section of trail continue to draw significant number of walkers.

High visitor numbers illustrate the demand for walking in the region, leading to increased need for walking trail and supporting infrastructure.

Community information session

We are committed to regularly updating the community as planning and work on the project progresses.

We will soon be running a community information session to give people an update on the project, and the opportunity to ask questions. The session will cover:

- Landscape and visual assessment – findings presentation
- Business case progress update
- General updates
- Question and answer

Online information session

Wednesday 13 April 2022

6:30pm-8:00pm

Register your attendance [here](#)

We would like to thank those community members that have provided feedback to date, this has enabled us to take concerns into consideration, provide clarification and shape the project.

Stay up to date

Parks Victoria will provide updates and information as the project progresses. To stay updated you can:

- [Subscribe](#) for email updates
- Phone 13 19 63 or email FHAC@park.vic.gov.au
- Visit www.parks.vic.gov.au/projects
- Attend community information session