

Project Team,  
Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing  
Preliminary Concept  
FHAC@parks.vic.gov.au

Tony Walker  
President,  
Bushwalking Victoria (BWV)  
PO Box 1007  
Templestowe Vic 3106

10 December 2015

Dear Sir/Madam,

### **FALLS TO HOTHAM ALPINE CROSSING PRELIMINARY CONCEPT**

BWV thanks you for the opportunity to comment on this proposal.

BWV represents the common interests of over 70 Victorian bushwalking clubs, with in excess of 8,000 members. BWV also aims to proactively represent the interests of all recreational walkers in Victoria as well as walkers visiting from interstate and overseas. One of the common interests of BWV clubs and their members is the conservation of the ecosystems and natural landscapes through which they walk, so that they can enjoy the maximum variety of native flora and fauna and unspoilt scenery and ensure their preservation for future generations. Founded in 1934, BWV has a long history of active interest in conservation, including being one of a group of like-minded organisations pressing for legislation to create a comprehensive system of national parks in Victoria as early as the 1940s.

Having viewed the background papers provided online seeking feedback regarding this concept, and with input from a briefing by Parks Victoria (PV) staff, BWV submits the following comments.

BWV does not have a blanket objection to the creation of infrastructure to support walking in National Parks but certain clear provisos must be met. In particular, BWV believes that any huts or other accommodation constructed must be visually unobtrusive – preferably invisible from the walking track – and must be strictly controlled and managed so as to minimise their impact on the sensitive local environment.

We must therefore emphasise that BWV does not support the construction of visually obtrusive infrastructure or any other inappropriate infrastructure along the route proposed for the Alpine Crossing.

It is unclear at this time, exactly what accommodation facilities are envisaged at the various sites described along the proposed route. However we have particular concerns about proposed facilities in the High Knob (top of Diamantina Spur) and/or Federation huts area. Without knowing exactly what is proposed, it is impossible to make specific comments, but we point out that the very natural and sensitive qualities of the area would be very easily compromised by any substantial infrastructure unless very carefully designed and managed.

Considering the entire route, we would note that while former cattlemen's huts and related infrastructure are typically unobtrusive (while preserving elements of our history, unlike new structures), any large lodge would be more visually intrusive and detract from the beauty of the magnificent, sweeping wilderness-like landscapes this environmentally fragile area features. We do not wish to crest a ridge and be confronted by a structure that dominates our view: we want this area to remain as unspoilt as humanly possible.

BWV opposes any future expansion of commercial activities in the area that could cause detriment to free walkers' enjoyment of a truly iconic area. We strongly support the view that National parks are primarily intended for conservation and public enjoyment, and that commercial activities and supporting infrastructure must respect this intent.

We would, however, like to see local off-walk towns like Harrietville receive some benefit from the walk; a walkout to that town down the Bungalow Spur could be considered.

We were provided with a briefing by Parks Victoria on 5<sup>th</sup> December, at which we raised many of these concerns. We were reassured to a large degree by the responses given, and we believe that Parks Victoria is sensitive to the need for unobtrusive and carefully managed infrastructure. We endorse this approach which is generally consistent with the principles we have stated above.

We were also reassured that free access for walkers will not be affected and that existing free camping areas will be maintained.

We trust that the points made verbally at the briefing by Parks Victoria in response to our questions will be carried forward into the final proposal and execution of this project.

In terms of the proposed walk route, we offer the following observations.

Given the development of the Falls to Hotham trail in the last year or two, including the provision of camping platforms at Cope and Dibbins Huts, and all the new signposts, it is difficult to understand why the route is now being changed. In particular, the omission of the section between AAWT poles 333 and 267 means that walkers will miss some of the best views and the big, empty plains experience. We would also point out that by having the route go along the Razorback *to* Hotham rather than *from* Hotham walkers miss the best of the views which are best seen when travelling in an easterly direction.

The map of the proposed route is confusing in showing overwater access across Rocky Valley Storage. This needs to be further elucidated.

The walk is high on grazing and mining relics, but low on peak ascents. We note the integration of Mt Feathertop into the walk and side trips to Mts Jim and Jaitmathang. However, Mts Bundara and Cope are close to the trail and could also be brought into the concept as side trips. Many walkers are keen on peak-bagging, and larger numbers will be attracted if their aspirations are catered for.

We would suggest that the trip to Mt Feathertop should be added to the Day 3 activities to bolster the meagre amount of walking set down for that day (3.85km). The Crossing averages 9.725km per day without the Mt Feathertop diversion, but would be closer to the Grampians Peaks Trail's (GPT) average of 11.25km per day if the walk to Mount Feathertop is included. In that context, it should be noted that the GPT offers some concession to the time people take to join and leave a track, so that there are shorter walks on the first and last days (8.63km and 6.875km respectively), whereas the Crossing's first and last days are the

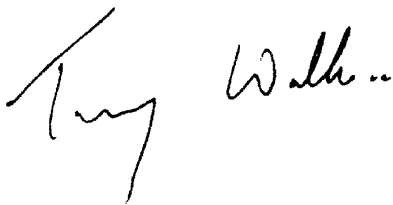
longest (13.7km and 11.7-14.5km respectively). Perhaps the daily walk distance allocations should be reconsidered in this light.

The Alpine Crossing starts on the Falls Creek-Omeo Road in the vicinity of Wallace's Gap, which is in the middle of nowhere, and, if walkers are only attempting the "iconic" Alpine Crossing rather than, say, the whole of the AAWT, that is presumably where they would park their car to begin the walk. They would end up four days later at Hotham Heights, with their car some 40km behind them and on a different highway. If the party is large enough to have two or more cars, a lengthy (over 100km through Bright or Omeo) car shuffle can be arranged (weather permitting) within the group, but with one-car parties (and many international visitors will fit into this category) there is a problem, and it seems to us that as a matter of convenience and safety, PV, or some other body, will need to provide a shuttle to get small parties back to their cars after the Crossing, or to take parties to the start point to begin with.

Effective fire management is, of course, of paramount importance in the preservation of the cultural and ecological values the Alpine Crossing area contains, and we would urge Parks Victoria to ensure that all appropriate measures are put in place to prevent the occurrence of wildfire within it.

We trust that you will carefully take into account our comments regarding this preliminary concept and we expect you to include BWV in ongoing and timely consultation throughout the development of a Master Plan for the track.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tony Walker". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tony" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Walker".

Tony Walker  
President