



## Self Guided Eco Walk

This self guided walk visits areas of environmental significance for flora and fauna within the resort. Pick up a wild-flower guide book and spot different species along the way.

The Australian Alps are characterized by vegetation communities with distinct altitudinal zones. Montane zones, between 600m-1350m are characterized by tall open forests, steep slopes, rainforests and dry open forests. Sub-alpine zones sit 1350m-1750m with sub-alpine woodlands, scattered snow gums, grassland or heathland understoreys. Above 1750m sit alpine zones, where snow persists for more than four months a year. Vegetation communities include herbfields, grasslands, bogs and heathlands. Mount Hotham Resort ranges in elevation from 1060m-1861m and covers all three altitudinal zones. Hotham is home to a number of threatened species such as the Mountain pygmy possum, Alpine she-oak skink and Alpine bog skink, and endangered flora such as the Mountain daisy, Dwarf sedge and Rock tussock-grass.

### 1. Set off from the Big D and up Higgi Drive

Ascend the Vehicle track to the right of the Big D passing Higgi Drive Apartments and under the Big D chairlift. You are now heading toward Mountain pygmy-possum (*Burrhamys parvus*) territory. This species is endemic to Australia and was discovered in 1966 at the University Ski Club, Mt Hotham. It is the only Australian mammal that lives solely in sub-alpine and alpine environments. The Mountain pygmy possum is endangered with the national population estimated at 3500. Mount Hotham is lucky to have the highest density, and largest population recorded in the world. Mountain pygmy-possums live on a diet of nuts, berries and Bogong Moths, which are in abundance at Mount Hotham.



Mountain Pygmy Possum

### 2. Rock along Higgi Drive

The Victorian Alps basalt cappings date back between 23 and 65 million years, when lava flow passed through the area. Molten Extrusive igneous burst through the mountains existing rock, before cooling and solidifying on the surface. Whilst the location of the original eruption points or volcanoes is unknown, it is clear there were multiple eruptions. Spot these basalt cappings on Mt Higginbotham and Mt Loch. Notice the areas of basalt boulder scree on the slopes of Mt Higginbotham, formed through the erosion of surface soils and accumulation of rocks at its base.

### 3. Top of the 'Tunnel of Love'

As you pass the UV filtration shed on your left you will notice a rocky terrain underfoot. This is known as the 'Tunnel of Love' and was constructed by resort management to assist male Mountain pygmy possums accessing female possums. The basalt boulder filled tunnel runs from the slopes of Mt Higginbotham, under Higgi Drive and below the Great Alpine Road. The rocks provide a protective and thermally stable environment for males to travel up to breeding females, who tend to occupy higher altitudinal zones.

### 4. Spot a swale (on your left, off of Corral day car park)

Mount Hotham is located at the headwaters of four major river systems, the Kiewa, Mitta Mitta, Dargo (Mitchell) and Ovens River, with the latter two owning Heritage River status. Mount Hotham Resort carefully manages its water quality, control runoff and effective catchment management to ensure downstream quality. Stormwater runoff and snow clearing from car parks could contaminate downstream environments, and for this reason vegetated swales are used to treat the runoff, trap pollutants and provide meltwater infiltration.



Snowgum Forest

### 5. Venture into the Basin

Cross over the Great Alpine Road and begin your descent down the Basin Ski Slope. Alpine plants are able to withstand a harsh environment and will flatten out beneath the snow, bouncing back to form after the spring thaw. The resort also uses recycled village water for snowmaking.

### 6. Head towards the Playground Chairlift

Turning left onto the track at the base of the ski run you will enter sub-alpine woodland. Woodlands and low open-forests of the sub alpine zone are dominated by snowgum (*Eucalyptus pauciflora*), the only tree species to survive at this altitude.

### 7. Pass Road Runner Chairlift and up Mother Johnson's Track

Sub-alpine environments have a higher diversity of fauna than alpine environments. Records at Mount Hotham Resort show 27 mammal and 63 bird species, including nine rare or threatened fauna species such as the Broad-tooth rat, the Eastern bent-wing bat and the more well know Mountain pygmy possum. Other species include Brown antechinus, Dusky antechinus, Bush rat, Wedge-tailed eagle, Brown falcon and Flame robin. While most birds tend to migrate to lower areas in winter, some seek refuge in the foliage of the trees, in the hollow of trunks or among branches. Smaller mammals live in sub-nivean areas (between the snow and ground) where temperatures tend to remain between 0-2°C.

### 8. Ascend to Heavenly Valley Chairlift

At the top of Mother Johnson's track veer right past Heavenly Valley Chairlift. On your right you will see Loch Reservoir at the base of Mt Loch. Introduced in 2006, the Resort's water recycling scheme reduces water usage from Swindlers Creek by over 90 million litres per year. Enjoy the spectacular views along the Loch Ridge. This ridge began its life some 600 million years ago when sedimentary rocks were intruded by granites, overlain by lava flows, folding and lifting many times to reach their present height. The Australian Alps have been subjected to millions of years of weathering, thus achieving their gentle rounded look. As the snow starts to thaw in early spring Mountain marsh marigold can be seen flowering beneath the ice on the Diamantina River beds.

## 9. Continue along the Loch Ridge track

In 2003 bushfires spread throughout the ACT, NSW and Victoria burning over 1.87 million hectares. While Hotham Village was spared, unfortunately, much of the Orchard ski area was not. Snow gums have swellings at the base of the trunk called lignotubers which are stimulated to grow when the tree above ground dies. Snow gum re-growth is visible throughout the area, however it is estimated to take ten years or more to recover a full canopy. Grasslands affected by the fires have now fully recovered.



Alpine she-oak skink

## 10. Carry on towards the Orchard Chairlift station and the Australian Alps Walking Track (AAWT)

A comprehensive study of fauna was conducted in the Orchard area in 1993 which identified 28 families, representing 49 genera and 85 species. Deep in the valley lies Swindlers Creek where Mountain galaxia, a native fish, has been recorded in large numbers above the water supply reservoir and weir. Mountain galaxia appear to act as a barrier to the introduced Brown trout migrating up the creek.

## 11. Follow the AAWT along the pole line towards Derricks Hut

Along the way you can see over to Loch Bog. Bog and fen communities are of particular significance in alpine areas for regulating water flow. Bogs usually sit at the head of a spring and are dominated by Sphagnum moss. Sphagnum is bright yellowy-green and retains up to twenty times its own weight in water, therefore acting as a natural reservoir which slowly discharges water into catchment areas. Your final stop on the eco-trail will be Derrick's Hut, which was constructed in 1967 in memorial of skier Charles Derrick.

Return to Hotham Village along the same route to Loch Reservoir and via the Great Alpine Road.



### Self Guided Eco Walk

Grade of Walk:	Grade 3, as per <i>The Australian Walking Track Grading System</i>
Distance:	16km return 8km one way
Time	3-4 hrs one way
Gradient	Mostly level with some gradual steep sections
Quality of Path:	Mostly formed track, some obstacles
Steps:	Occasional steps
Experience required:	Some bushwalking experience recommended

### Public Facilities & Car Parking

Car Parking is available adjacent to the Great Alpine Road in the vicinity of the Big D and the General. No toilet facilities are available along the track. Public toilets and shelter are available in the Transit Lounge at the Corral Car Park in the Hotham Village.

For more information on Mt Hotham's Iconic Tracks & Trails, visit [www.mthotham.com.au](http://www.mthotham.com.au). For Resort track & trail conditions, email [mhar@mthotham.com.au](mailto:mhar@mthotham.com.au), or telephone 03 5759 3550 during business hours.

We hope you enjoy the walk.

### Be Prepared

The best months for doing the Self Guided Eco Walk are from November through to April, however, weather conditions can change rapidly, and snowfalls and blizzards can occur at any time of the year. (*Mt Hotham's Bushwalking Season is from the November Melbourne Cup Weekend to mid May.*)

Be prepared with:

- Wind and waterproof jackets
- Warm clothing – hat, gloves, sunglasses, and strong footwear
- Food and water
- First aid kit and sunscreen
- Map and compass
- Check the weather forecast before departing
- Let someone know where you are going
- Mobile phone (reception in some areas)

### Caution

The 2003 bushfires have damaged snowgums which are now regenerating, but dead branches are shedding with the new growth. High wind days may result in falling limbs and branches. It is not recommended to use the track on windy days. During the warmer months snakes can be found along the track.

See also 'Mt Hotham Track Notes - Bushwalker Code'

