

Mountain Journal



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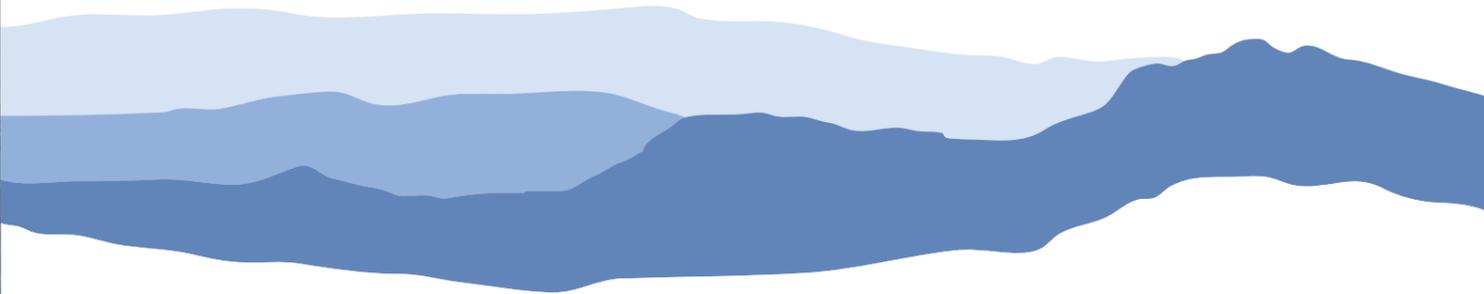
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If you would like to contribute a story or images for the website or next year's print edition, please get in touch.

All of Australia is indigenous land, and Mountain Journal acknowledges this fact.

The Australian Alps covers the traditional Country of the Bidawal, Monero-Ngarigo, Gunaikurnai, Jaithmathang, Taungurung, Mitambuta, Ngarigu-Currawong, Dhudhuroa, Waywurru, Wurundjeri and other peoples.



Introduction

Although we are well past the covid lock downs, the years still seem long, and time seems more malleable. Life feels different but familiar. 2022 seemed to go forever – perhaps because we had a whole year for unbridled exploring and adventures.

Thankfully we had another mild summer, with no large fires in the mountains.

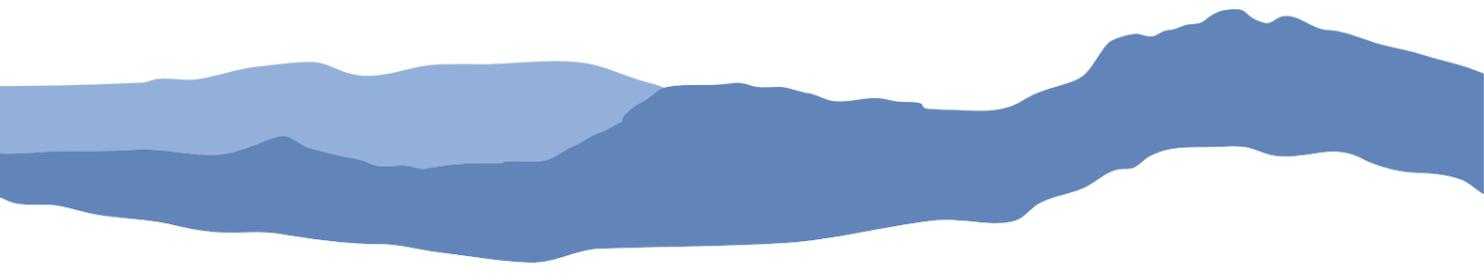
There were incredible early snow falls, making Opening Weekends fun across the mountains, and resulting powder frenzy madness in the resorts – overcrowding, car parks full, record numbers of people, and the continual growth of the ‘snow play’ visitors. Businesses are (finally) making some money, and there was plenty of work for those who wanted it. There were, of course, the same old staff accommodation pressures. The backcountry was great, with quite a bit of avalanche activity at times. And then, mid season, there was that depressing, massive rain event followed by wet snow (hello, climate change). Although snow was lost at lower elevations, we saw the season out with decent snowpack.

As Weatherzone noted at the end of the season: ‘high elevations of Australia’s mainland snow country saw the third-best peak snow depth of the 21st century, but at lower elevations it was a dismal year, while Tasmania barely saw any consistent snow cover at all.’

Then we had a wet spring, which created fantastic conditions for paddling, including many rivers that are not normally viable (check the ‘Offtrack’ section for more on that).

And then we experienced a third mild summer, as floods and fire caused mayhem in many other parts of the continent. The mountains felt like a cool, green refuge through the wild weather extremes of 2022. Of course, El Nino is back on the horizon, so next summer may be very different.

I hope you have been enjoying the year, and getting out into some wonderful and wild landscapes.



News from Home

Environmental news from around Iutruwita/ Tasmania and the Australian Alps

A recovery plan for the snow gums

Across the mountains of south eastern Australia, the higher elevation forests of Alpine Ash (*Eucalyptus delegatensis*) and Snow Gum (*Eucalyptus pauciflora*) are facing an existential threat. Much of the ash is in ecological collapse because of the increase in frequency and intensity of fires: parent trees are often killed by fire, and seedlings are often burnt before they can produce seed. The situation is so dire that the Victorian government has an aerial seeding program to try and keep ash populations viable.

Meanwhile, at higher elevations in the snow gum country, a double threat is charging through the forests: dieback, caused by a native beetle is killing individual trees, while climate change driven fire regimes are devastating vast areas of the high country.

Once you see these changes, you can't unsee them. The endless stands of grey dead trunks. The loss of the old trees. The thickets of flammable regrowth. Every trip to the mountains reminds you that we are seeing ecological collapse in real time.

Climate change, drought, insects and soil microbes are all thought to contribute to dieback. The spread and impacts of the beetle appear to be super charged by climate change (more beetles surviving because of milder winters and more mortality of water stressed trees in summer).

I know that we can solve these problems. Humanity has the ability to respond to the global threat of climate change. We can increase our capacity to protect recovering forests from destructive fires. But sometimes I feel despair as I watch the spread of dieback. At this point we have no landscape wide solution to the beetle infestations.

There are good people doing excellent work to find the answers. Check the *Save our Snowgums* campaign for further information. The High Country Dieback Network is working to bring together the various organisations concerned about dieback. It aims to develop a management action plan that will 'enable a cost-effective solution to maintain trees in the high country'.

What researchers are yet to fully grasp is why these insects have been able to take hold in such numbers and do so much damage, and what underlying stressors have left eucalyptus trees vulnerable to attack. At this point we have no way of stopping the mass dieback of snow gums.

I have found myself reading and re-reading a report titled 'How to save the Whitebark Pine' by **Kylie Mohr** in **High Country News**. It details the scale of the threat posed to a particular pine (the Whitebark) in the west of the USA. In a similar way that the snow gum faces multiple threats, the Whitebark pine is being hammered by an invasive blister rust fungus, mountain pine beetle infestations, changing wildfire patterns and climate change.

The story describes efforts and approaches aimed at protecting the Whitebark that seem relevant to us as we consider how to act to ensure the survival of snow gum communities.

Faced with a massive threat to the Whitebark populations, a national restoration plan has been created by nonprofits, working with the federal government and tribal nations. It spells out a series of integrated measures that are designed to halt the decline of this iconic species.

An important development is that it was officially listed as threatened by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in December 2022. Once a species is listed, there is a greater focus on the need to develop strategies that will slow loss and assist recovery of populations.

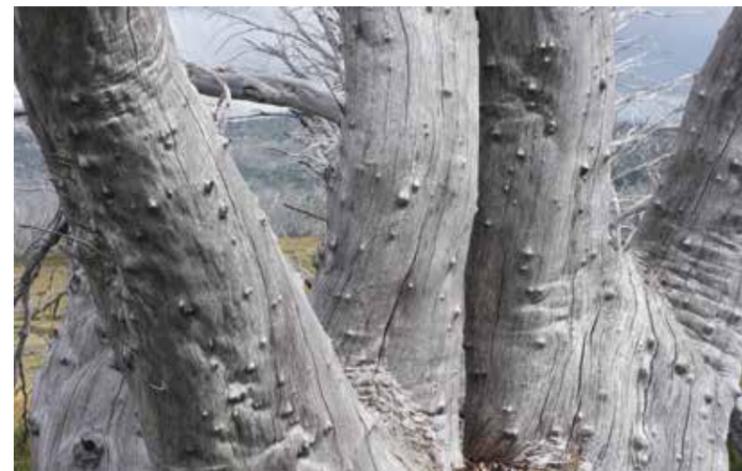
As Kylie notes in the article,

'Listing means new money and formalized safeguards. Fish and Wildlife Service funding for listed species can be used to boost new and ongoing research into things like blister rust resilience. The listing allows management and restoration activities in places where they might otherwise be prohibited, such as wilderness areas, and makes it illegal to remove or damage the tree on federal lands.'

The restoration plan proposes a range of measures to make an impact at a landscape level (Whitebark pines span a range of more than 32 million hectares in seven Western states of the USA, as well as sections of Canada).

Kylie describes some of the measures designed to protect Whitebark populations:

- Growing disease-resistant trees – Identifying trees that appear resistant to Whitebark pine blister rust, then growing their offspring in nurseries and replanting them in the wild, is one way to create tougher forests
- Collecting seeds and genetic material – the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes have identified areas with resistant trees, planted seedlings and caged ripening cones to safeguard them from hungry animals
- Building seed orchards – these are meant to speed up and simplify the seed sourcing process
- Protecting trees from mountain pine beetle. An interesting project here is the use of Beetle pheromones, which 'can trick the bugs at their own game, according to the Forest Service: An early 2000s study in north Idaho found



that an artificially made mountain pine beetle attractant pheromone, verbenone, protected individual whitebark pines from mass beetle attacks. Beetles produce verbenone when they've attacked a tree and there are too many beetles, signalling to their colleagues: This tree is occupied. Go somewhere else. Humans want to mimic this signal to keep beetles away altogether'

- Designating priority restoration areas
- Keeping surrounding forests healthy. Kylie notes that 'forestry techniques like prescribed fire and thinning can help whitebark pines, too. Clearing out brush and limiting excess fuel reduces the likelihood of high-severity fires. Fires can benefit the pines, but they can also harm them'.

Protecting the snow gums

I think there is a lot we can learn from the North American experience with the Whitebark pine. While there is good local research being done to understand the threats posed by beetles, we need to develop a plan for across the Australian high country, covering Victoria, NSW and the ACT.

We will clearly need additional funding for the research work being carried out by people like Dr Matthew Brookhouse at the Australian National University.





Following the release of the *Icon at Risk* report in 2021, Friends of the Earth lobbied the Victorian government to do an assessment of the state of snow gum communities and whether specific intervention is needed, as has happened with alpine ash. The ash need aerial seeding to keep fire affected communities viable. The solution for snow gums will be exclusion of wild fire as communities recover.



In Victoria, a meaningful response will require:

- A rapid ecological assessment of the threats posed by fire and dieback to Snow Gum communities
- Ongoing funding for Forest Fire Management Victoria, including additional funding for remote area firefighting teams
- Continued support for air capacity to fight fires, including establishing a publicly owned air fleet, as was recommended by the Bushfire Royal Commission. This is the responsibility of the federal government
- Creation of volunteer remote area firefighting teams in Victoria, as NSW, the ACT and Tasmania have done
- A commitment to ensure we have sufficient fire fighting resources to protect fire sensitive communities like Alpine Ash, Snow Gums, Alpine Peatlands and Rainforest even during summers like 2019/20.

Further information:

- https://www.melbournefoe.org.au/an_icon_at_risk
- https://www.melbournefoe.org.au/snow_gum_petition
- www.saveoursnowgum.org/
- <https://www.hcn.org/articles/north-endangered-species-how-to-save-the-whitebark-pine>
- <https://themountainjournal.com/2023/02/03/a-rescue-plan-for-the-snow-gums/>

The Kunanyi cable car saga is over! Or is it?

For many years now, a developer has been attempting to build a cable car up the main face of Kunanyi/ Mt Wellington, above nipaluna/ Hobart.

The latest attempt to have a cable car built up to the summit is over after the company decided not to appeal against its defeat in Tasmania’s planning tribunal in late 2022.

It brings an end to almost a decade of planning, lobbying and debate for the proposal, which was the eighth in a century but the first to be formally lodged and tested on planning grounds.

Residents Opposed to the Cable Car spokesperson Vica Bayley said “this is the end of this cable car proposal and should be the end of the cable car pipe dream on a mountain with extensive natural and cultural values and a huge place in Hobartians’ hearts.”

“Unless this proposal is substantially changed or Government steps in to take over assessment under its Major Projects process, this cable car development cannot

be reassessed for two years. The concept of a cable car and the proponent who championed it have lost all credibility through this long, sorry saga and it should be the end of a cable car on kunanyi for good.”

“Now this cable car proposal is behind us we look forward to seeing a strategic and consultative approach to infrastructure and access, with the protection of natural, cultural and amenity values always prioritised.”

However, in February 2023, the Premier of Tasmania, Jeremy Rockliff, said that the cable car proposal could ‘still be going ahead’.

“I am committed not only to the Cradle Valley Cableway, but also a cableway on Kunanyi/Mt Wellington, and I have sought advice on developing a pathway to support this to happen”.

While this is terribly disappointing news for the many people in Hobart who have been opposing the proposal for years, it is certain that the community campaign will be as determined as ever to see the mountain remain cable car free.





Falls Creek development

Cross Country Skiing Association Victoria

The cross country ski community is still actively fighting the controversial plan by Alpine Resorts Victoria (ARV) to allow for winter time usage of the planned development of the ANARE shed and a carpark by the shore of Rocky Valley Dam at Falls Creek.

Currently during winter the Bogong High Plains Road from Windy Corner to the shores of the Rocky Valley Dam is closed to road traffic and is the main arterial cross country (XC) trail and offers one of the few easy sheltered trails for beginners, families and school groups to cross country ski at Falls Creek. The clearing of the road to access the ANARE shed and carpark will result in the loss of the trail, the decimation of the trail system, and push beginner skiing into more exposed areas.

This section of road during summer has also recorded three serious accidents - one of which resulted in a school bus rollover down the steep slope towards Rocky Valley Creek. When contacted for comment, ARV staff said the safety of the road was a matter for Regional Roads Victoria and ARV did not accept liability for operationally clearing the road. An independent safety audit commissioned by a member of the public rated the risk of clearing the road as 'High' and likely to cause a serious injury to members of the public. It appears that ARV has not budgeted any funds for upgrading the road as part of the development.

Community consultation by ARV has been widely criticised by members of the XC community prior to negotiating the Local Economic Recovery grant (2019/20 bushfires) for the development of the ANARE shed and associated car parking.

The proposal is in direct conflict with the Falls Creek Master Plan of 2016, which identifies the foreshore area in the resort as 'summer activated' only and does not include a hazardous wintertime car park. The degradation of XC skiing in the alpine region will impact on the affordable alternative that XC skiing offers members of the public. With the increasing costs of alpine skiing and snowboarding, XC skiing offers a safe and healthy activity within the confines of the supported alpine resort areas.

In response to the proposal, members of the XC community founded the Cross Country Skiing Association Victoria (XCSAV) to actively oppose the project. Inaugural XCSAV president, Ben Derrick, has been strong in condemning the project:

"The contempt ARV have shown for XC skiing and the access to the alpine resorts for all Victorians is a disgrace and sets an unprecedented low for professional conduct in the alpine resorts. Our alpine areas are not just for the wealthy. It is public land and should be managed accordingly. I can only hope that the senior resort management staff reflect on what they are contracted to manage and who they are managing it for. Combined with a disregard for safety and blindness for strategic alignment, this project just panders to the continued and illogical encroaching development on public land".

XCSAV have started a petition to oppose clearing the road during winter and have also lodged objections to the planning permits associated with the development. If you would like to find out more about the proposal and why the cross country ski community is up in arms visit the sites below.

www.savefallscreekxc.org

<https://www.change.org/p/save-falls-creek-xc-ski-trails>

What's happening with the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing?

The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing is a proposed 57 kilometre walk through the Alpine region of Victoria, combining and upgrading an existing track network. The updated walk will be a 5-day, 4-night hiking trip from Falls Creek to Mount Hotham. It has been strongly opposed by many environmentalists and outdoor enthusiasts because the campsites will be privately operated and many people oppose further development within national parks.

There was a feedback process on the draft designs. More than 6,000 people visited the Engage Victoria page on the project, more than 60 people joined conversations at 'pop-up' sessions in local towns, and more than 640 responses were contributed via survey, submissions and email. As expected, the majority of respondents expressed serious concerns about the proposal and many want it cancelled.

In late 2022, Parks Victoria (PV) released a report summarising the feedback received. PV says 'through consultation we heard: project concerns, what people liked about the designs and ways they would improve them'. There was widespread vocal opposition to the whole proposal.

Following feedback received, Parks Victoria is:

- Reducing the number of huts and tent platforms proposed at each site
- Reducing the size of the communal shelters proposed
- Considering an operational model that invites Licensed Tour Operators as well as private bookings to keep cost options for hikers as low as possible.

Parks Victoria says it will continue to:

- Undertake relevant environmental studies and approvals
- Work together with Traditional Owners on the project, and undertake relevant Cultural Heritage Management Plans.

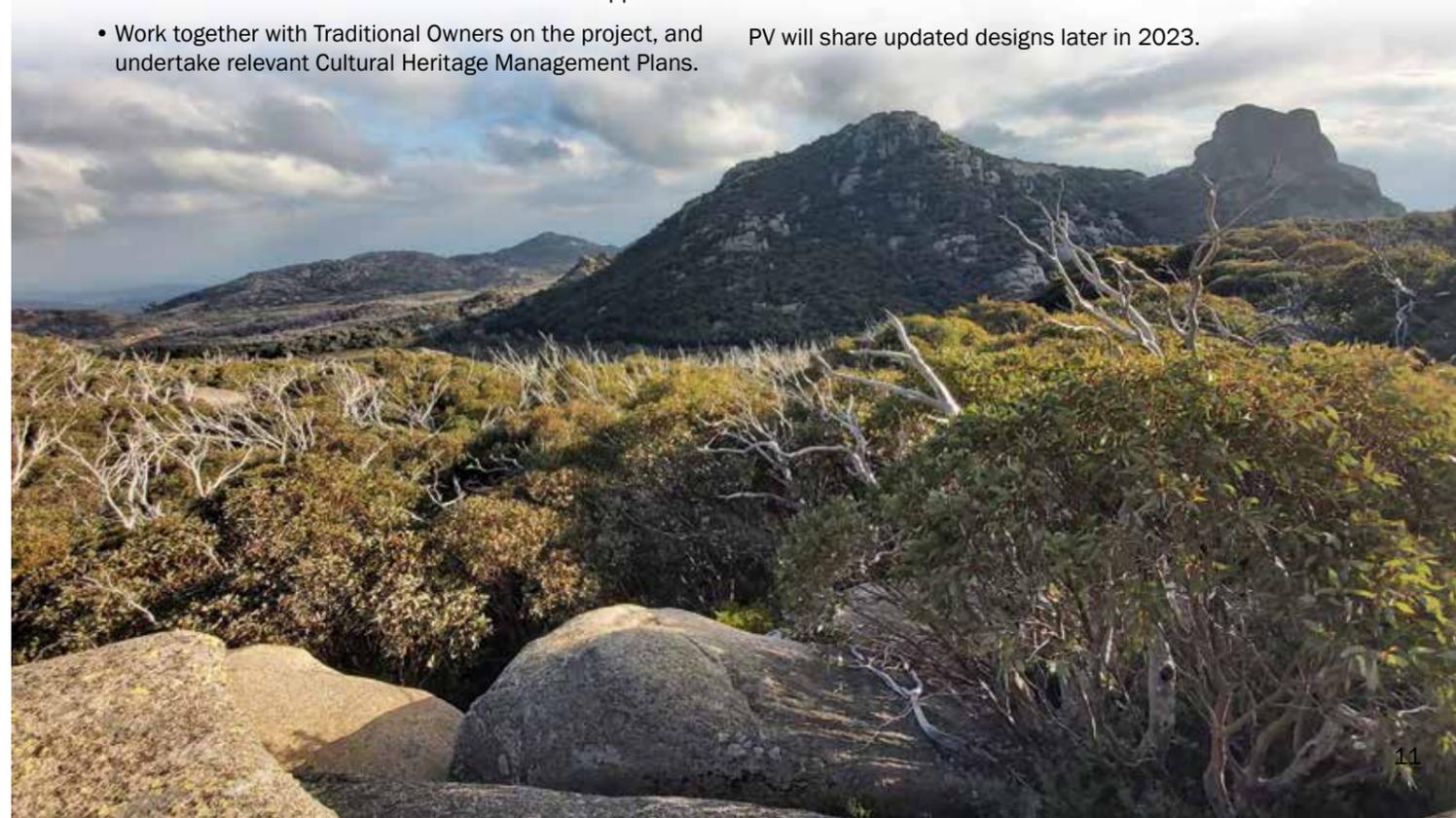
As noted in the report,

'Many participants used the opportunity to comment on draft designs to express their opposition to the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing project overall.

There were high levels of concern raised from participants about the project. These concerns related to potential impacts on the environment, the project not aligning with the purpose of national parks, over-visitation, concerns about the community consultation process, the potential cost to stay in the huts, the accuracy of economic information in the Business Case, and safety concerns of attracting less experienced hikers to the area.

'Participants shared feedback on what they thought should be improved about the draft design for Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing. In order of most to least frequently raised, people's suggested improvements were: reduce the number of huts, condense them closer together or into less buildings, reduce the size of the communal shelter, remove huts from the project altogether, improve the trail alignment, and provide more information as part of the community engagement process'.

PV will share updated designs later in 2023.





The time has come to create a truly magnificent Alpine National Park in Victoria

Peter Jacobs

The Victorian alps is a complex region of lofty peaks, extensive high plains, vast forests and mighty rivers. It is a place of immense importance to the many Traditional Owners of the First Peoples. It has extraordinary and unique biodiversity associated with wide altitudinal variations and is a treasured place for those that love exploring the alps in its diverse seasons.

It would be expected that such an area would have a long history of protection but not so: protected areas in the Victorian alps are a relatively recent occurrence and the reserves are largely disconnected.

Apart from Mount Buffalo, where a small area was set aside for a future national park back in 1898, national parks weren't created in the Victorian alps until 1981 when Bogong, Cobberas-Tingaringy and Wonnangatta-Moroka National Parks were declared. This was followed in 1989 when they were joined up with Wabonga Plateau State Park to finally create one Alpine National Park.

So why did it take so long to protect the precious Victorian Alps? This is all well documented in the *Alps at the Crossroads*, published by the Victorian National Parks Association back in 1974.

In essence it was due to land management policy being driven by conservative and exploitive interests and industries, well established in the Victorian alps. These included native timber harvesting where the Forest Commission was all powerful, cattle grazing, driven by the then influential Mountain Cattleman's Association and local communities and recreationalists that saw national parks as restrictive and as a negative rather than a positive.

Even now, the Alpine National Park is a compromise to these interests. The park was created by establishing narrow corridors linking existing parks and adding areas that are of little interest to commercial forestry. Alpine peaks such as Mt Pinnibar are outliers and surrounded by logging areas (as is Baw Baw National Park). Even then, adding insult to injury,

these future protected areas contained "once only logging areas" meaning that before they were added to the park they would be logged; which they were!

So along with cattle grazing, deer hunting and mining, the Alpine National Park was hardly an exemplar of protected area management but at least it was there.

The park is currently surrounded by State forest that breaks the link with other protected areas in the Victorian alps bioregion and is in direct contrast to the important global principle of connectivity conservation. The State Forests contain extensive areas of old growth forest with ironically, special and immediate protection zones due to high biodiversity values. Disturbingly though, amongst these zones are scattered many hundreds of mapped logging coupes approved for harvesting under Vic Forest's Timber Release Plans (TRP). These include logging an area of both known and highly likely occurrence of the threatened Long-footed Potoroo in the Barry Mountains.

Refreshingly, the public land use scene in the alps has changed somewhat in the last 30 years. Cattle grazing was finally removed from the park in 2006, mining is finished, and native forest logging is to be phased out in Victoria by 2030, (although there will be a lot of damage in the next 7 years under current plans). In addition, Australia has joined the rest of the world by recently signing up to protecting 30% of our land and sea areas by 2030 in recognition that nature-based solutions are vital to address the global challenges of climate change.

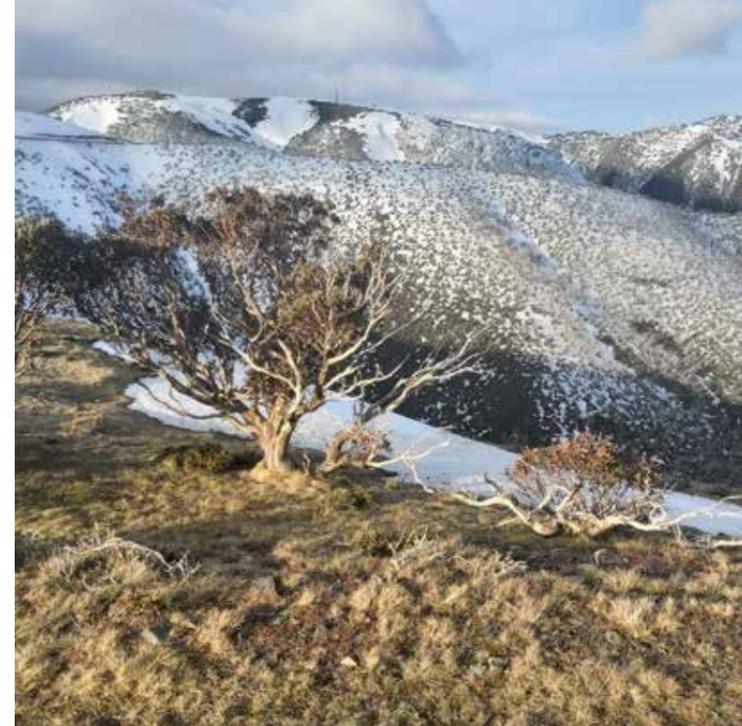
With the native forest logging industry on the way out, the time is right to take a fresh look at creating a large and truly magnificent national park across the Victorian alps and eastern highlands. This can be achieved by linking the Alpine National Park with the satellites of Baw Baw, Yarra Ranges, Mt Buffalo, Snowy River, Errinundra, Mitchell River and Lake Eildon national parks, along with other reserves, to create one contiguous protected area of over 2 million hectares.

This will protect and build the resilience of the montane, sub-alpine and Mountain Ash forest ecosystems that have been identified by scientists from the University of Wollongong in 2021 as one of 19 Australian ecosystems at risk of collapse.

It will also protect the upper and largely unprotected catchments of some of our great river systems. In the Murray Darling system, this includes the Goulburn, Ovens and Mitta catchments and to the south the Thompson, Macalister, Mitchell and Tambo catchments.

The park would span from Melbourne's water catchments in the central highlands to the border with Kosciuszko National Park and the rest of the national heritage listed Australian Alps national parks. The entire Victorian section of the Australian Alps Walking Track will be entirely in the national park and managed as the true icon it is rather than navigating through logging areas. Iconic areas such as the Mt Wills Massif, Mount Gibbo and the Nunniong plateau would become part of this great park.

This outstanding park deserves to emerge from one of fragmented management to a dedicated whole of alps

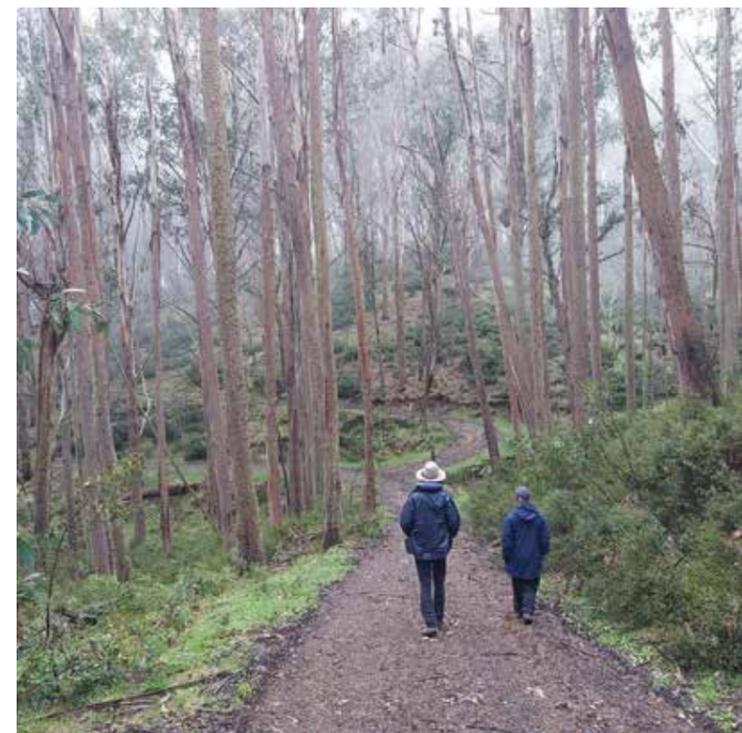


management and administration with excellence in interpretation centres to support visitors and the tourism industry, as is the case globally for iconic national parks. The existing parks demonstrate that visitors need not fear unnecessary restriction to access in the alps but indeed welcome the profile and investment that brings.

Victoria currently reserves about 18% of the State's land area in protected areas. For Victoria to meet the challenge of protecting 30% of the State's land area, it will need to lift the protected area terrestrial estate from currently just over 4 million hectares to over 6.8 million hectares in the next 7 years. This park could add more than 1 million hectares to Victoria's protected area estate and be a very worthy initiative towards reaching the 30% target.

Let's start that conversation.

Peter Jacobs has had a long career in protected area management and was formally Chief Ranger for the Alps with Parks Victoria.



Forests at risk in the Victorian mountains

Environmental campaigners in Victoria have been focusing on a range of highly significant areas in the Victorian high country which could be logged soon:

Well known ski resort and mountain bike mecca Mt Stirling, where up to 11 coupes are planned. This will devastate and fragment the high elevation forests and impact directly on some MTB trails, including the Alpine Epic.

the headwaters of the Little Dargo, to the south of Mt Hotham. Mountain cattle family, the Treasures, have joined forces with environmental groups like Friends of the Earth to gain protection of the high conversation value forests of

the Little Dargo. This area contains older, only lightly burnt forests, and a pristine mountain stream

Mt Wills, near the state's highest mountain where planned logging coupes will cut right across the Australian Alps Walking Track and put old growth snow gum forests on Mt Wills at risk from fire

More recently, logging in the upper Jamieson River, just south of Mt Lovick, a well known mountain between The Bluff and Mt Howitt.

https://www.melbournefoe.org.au/mountain_forests_miss_out_on_protection



Alpine Islands

Scott Jukes

Walking through Hell Gap on Mt Bogong, shoulder to the wind, crampons struggling to hold onto the ice, you can't blame me for being a little self-centred in my pursuits. I was doing all I could to hold on and survive! It is these kinds of days – these kinds of activities – that have brought me to the mountains and helped me develop a care, love and appreciation for them. Over the years I've paddled the rivers, wandered the mountains, ridden the trails and skied the slopes. I've done this for fun and done this for work as an outdoor educator and ski instructor. But as I held on for dear life, in the middle of Hell Gap, with winds higher than I cared to imagine trying to rip me off my feet, I wondered what the heck I was doing here.

It had been a couple of years since I'd been up Bogong in winter, and a lot had happened since the last time. COVID happened, I'd had a son and I'd completed a PhD. Those things lingered in the back of my mind as I tried not to be

swept off the mountain. As I later sat in Cleve Cole hut, laughing off my perilous position, my absence from the mountains in winter, my son and my research came back to my thoughts. The things we do, the precariousness of life and the idea of purpose combined in my thoughts as I sat on those cold hard rickety bench seats, vying for a closer seat to the fire.

I've always found purpose in coming to the mountains. They have shaped me in so many ways. For much of my life it was about the activity. Finding the line; that run at Hotham, that boof off the waterfall on the Mitta, that feeling of acceleration coming out of a berm. Finding that moment of being in the moment. This was my drive, the hedonistic pursuit of pleasure. But as I've got a little older it has also been about the quiet moments, the slow moments. Watching the sun set over Buffalo from Spion Kopje. Cooling off in the Cobungra down near Dibbin's Hut. It is almost like the slower moments matter as much, if not more, than the faster ones.

Often people say that it is the people they are with that matters too. Yes, I agree. I think that matters. But I've also started to consider the other things, the other species, the other beings. The native critters, fragile ones, the forgotten ones. Through my doctoral research I explored ecological precarity and the exposed position many of our native species and fragile landscapes sit within contemporary times. With the already felt impacts of climate change and the looming figure of the 6th mass extinction, I pondered what this might mean for me as an outdoor educator, and importantly, what I can do. These places I love, in a sense, are not really mine. They belong to the at times forgotten inhabitants, the native species of flora and fauna. They make these places what they are, whether we acknowledge them or not.

Aside from all the theory and academic language, at the heart of my doctoral research was a desire to bear witness to what we have and acknowledge what we might lose. When we go to the mountains and float down the rivers, we can fall into the self-centred trap of thinking only about the adventure and our need for an escape. And yes, granted, if you are stuck in Hell Gap in a blizzard you do need to think about yourself. But when you get that moment (maybe you are reading this in a hut after a hard day?), take the time to look beyond yourself, your adventure, and your companions, and attune to where you are. The alpine areas of Australia make up 0.15% of Australia's landmass – they are alpine

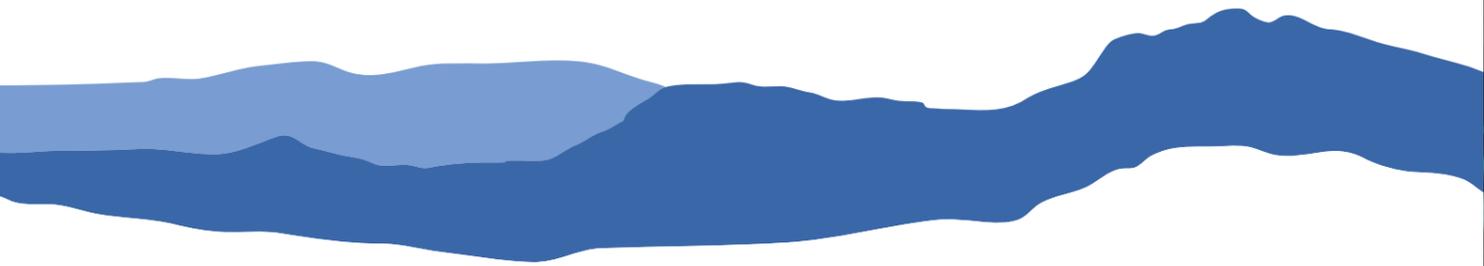
islands in a dry land. Much of the flora and fauna that inhabit these places can be found nowhere else, and many are endangered or under threat.

Threats come in many forms, from climate change, to invasive species, to our own actions in the mountains. Even our iconic snow gums are at threat from climate change and longicorn beetle larvae ringbarking them. Look around at the next snow gum you encounter. Are its limbs dead? Are there markings on the bark from wood borers? If so, head to saveoursnowgum.org to report it to scientists. But don't just dwell on what is being lost, look to what endures. Is that rat you saw scurrying past actually a native Broad-toothed Rat? The name of rat is unfortunate for this friendly fellow, chubby and wide faced with a gentle demeanour. These introductions are obviously just scratching the surface. There is much more you can notice when you slow down and shift your attention.

The message I wish to share is that we are lucky to have these beautiful places, but we have a lot to lose. When you get that rare quiet moment, take the time to appreciate the mountains and the critters that live there. Just like I was struggling to hold on to the side of the mountain, many of our native species face a similar challenge in their day to day lives. The least we can do is look their way, acknowledge, appreciate, and consider what we might do to help in the face of such challenges.



Image: Scott Jukes



End to an End - Running to Save the Great Forest

In 2022 **Majell Backhausen**, ran 273 kilometres, across the proposed Great Forest National Park in Victoria's Central Highlands. Traveling from west to east and encountering a punchy 9,115m of elevation gain, the traverse is documented in Patagonia's latest film series, 'End to an End - Running to Save the Great Forest'.

The premise of this run was to experience and celebrate the immense ecological and cultural value of this unique land. This area is home to mountain ash (*Eucalyptus regnans*), the tallest flowering plant on Earth and some of the planet's most carbon dense forest forest that replenishes our oxygen supplies. It is also home to pristine water catchments that supply most of Melbourne/ Naarm with high quality drinking water. And it is the last remaining habitat of Victoria's state fauna emblem, the critically endangered Wollert/ Leadbeater's possum.

Even just one of the above factors is reason enough to protect this area, which incorporates the lands of the Taungurung, Wurundjeri, and Gunnaikurnai people. Under the Great Forest National Park proposal, existing reserves in this

region would be expanded dramatically, and incorporated into a single, contiguous National Park totalling 536,755 ha.

There are a number of dedicated and passionate individuals and organisations working tirelessly to protect the biodiversity which exists, under threat, on this precious country. Its natural assets are found nowhere else on Earth and the wide reaches of this land can be enjoyed by the public in a myriad way, from running to hiking, mountain biking, bird watching, or even the art of rock appreciation!

Logging these forests for wood chip, pulp and paper products is "taking diamonds and turning them into coal", as forest ecologist Professor David Lindenmayer puts it in Episode 4. We must end the outdated practice of native forest logging to help protect critical habitat for endangered species, increase fire resilience, safeguard Melbourne's water supply, and lay the foundations for more economically viable uses of this region, such as in the tourism, recreation, education, and carbon sectors.

To find out more and lend your support visit Patagonia.com.au/notchopping

All images courtesy of Know Studio/Cam Suttie



Above: Majell navigating over clear streams of water filtered by the mountain ash eco systems. Wet feet avoidance is a common technique of trail runners aiming to evade the painful process of developing (and living with) blisters.

Most of the high-quality water which Melbournians rely on is captured in this Great Forest area. Further, studies show old growth forests are better for water capture and storage than young forests.

Below: Currently, Victoria's Central Highlands has 184,000ha of protected

lands, spread across many small, fragmented reserves located around towns including Healesville, Kinglake, Toolangi, Warburton, Marysville, and Wood's Point. Under the Great Forest National Park proposal, these reserves would be expanded dramatically, incorporated into a single, contiguous reserve system totalling 536,755ha.

Hard things are hard, yet the way ahead is clear end native forest logging





in Victoria's Central Highlands and save this area for good, right now. The Great Forest National Park is a proposal that would see large, remnant pockets of old growth forest reconnected and protected for future generations, becoming a rich, ecological asset in Melbourne's backyard.

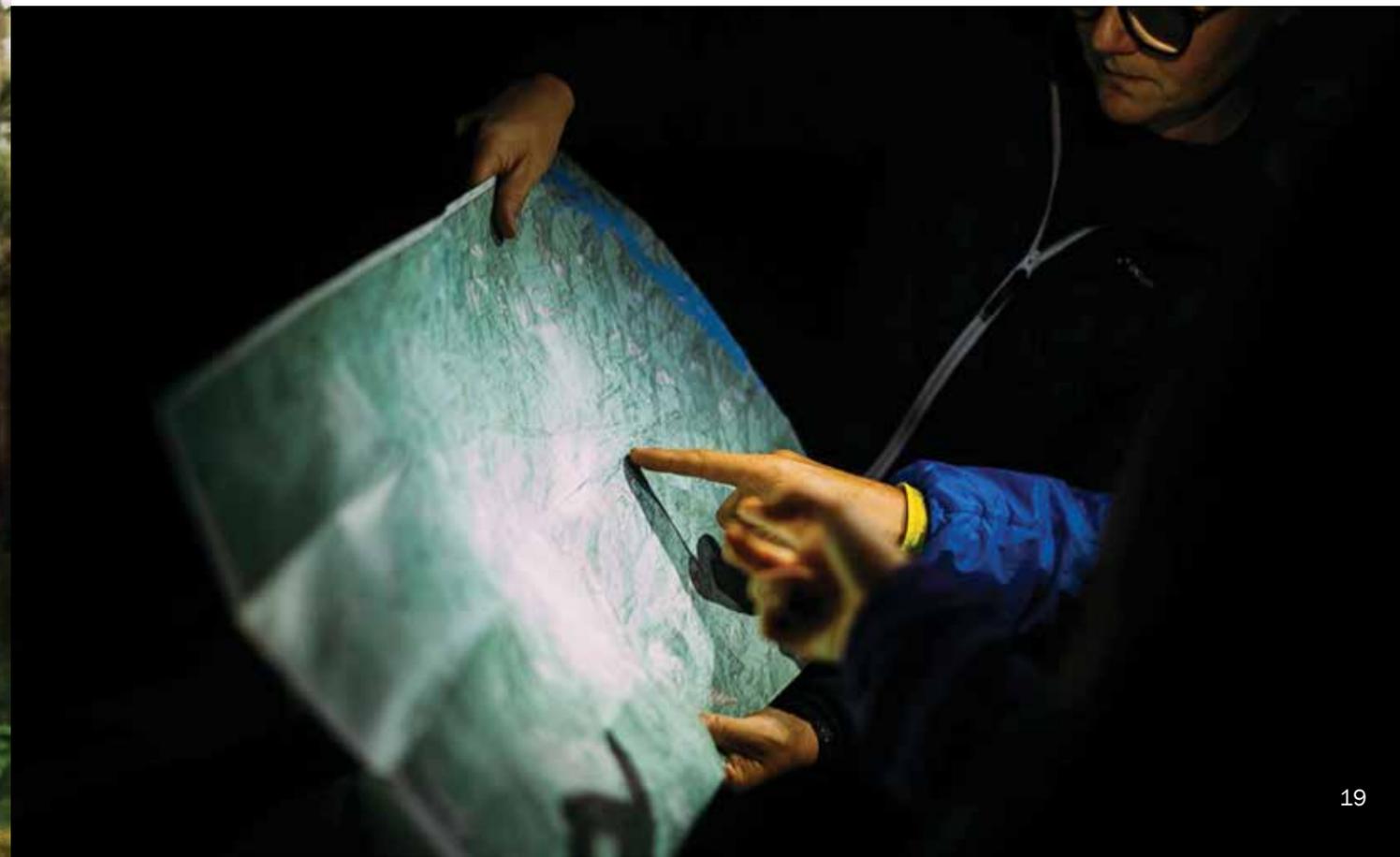
Above: Beau Miles and Majell stand on the edge of a logging coup, pausing



for a moment to reflect on "the mentality of brutal destruction", as Beau describes it.

Beau is a Gippsland local and joined for 55km of the traverse. Setting off from the town of Warburton together, the duo passed through single track goodness, visited the infamous Ada tree, and saw a snake which made both scream.

Below: The Crew (Jodi, Simone and Majell) consult the topo map pre-dawn on the 4th and final day of the traverse. Starting just north of Noojee this day saw the team venture into the most remote and untouched areas of their Great Forest crossing.





Moments after finishing the 273km traverse of the proposed park. Majell takes a moment to take in the achievement, knowing full well that “this is only the beginning of the work”. Specifically, the campaign to end native forest logging in Victoria’s Central Highlands.



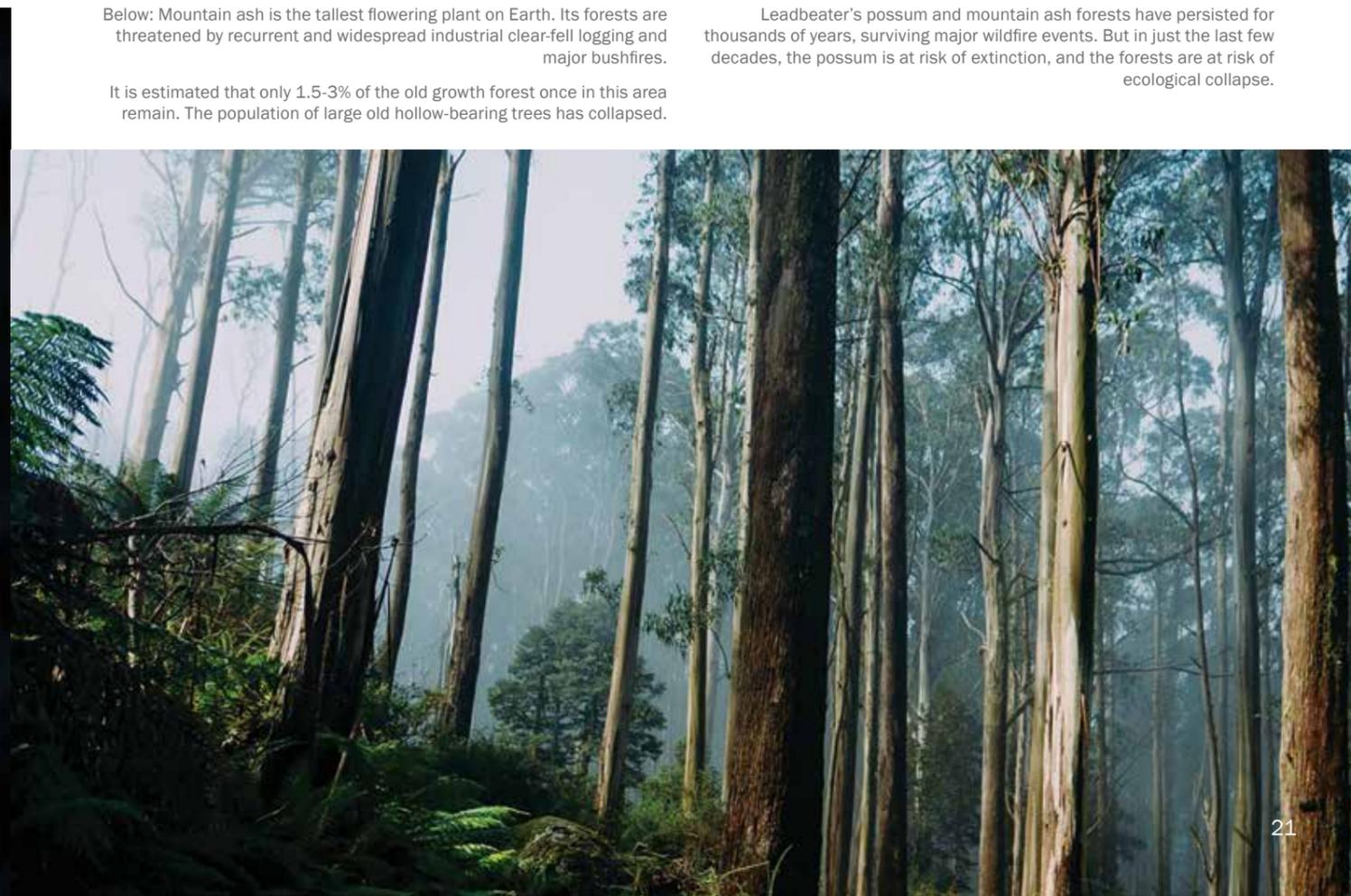
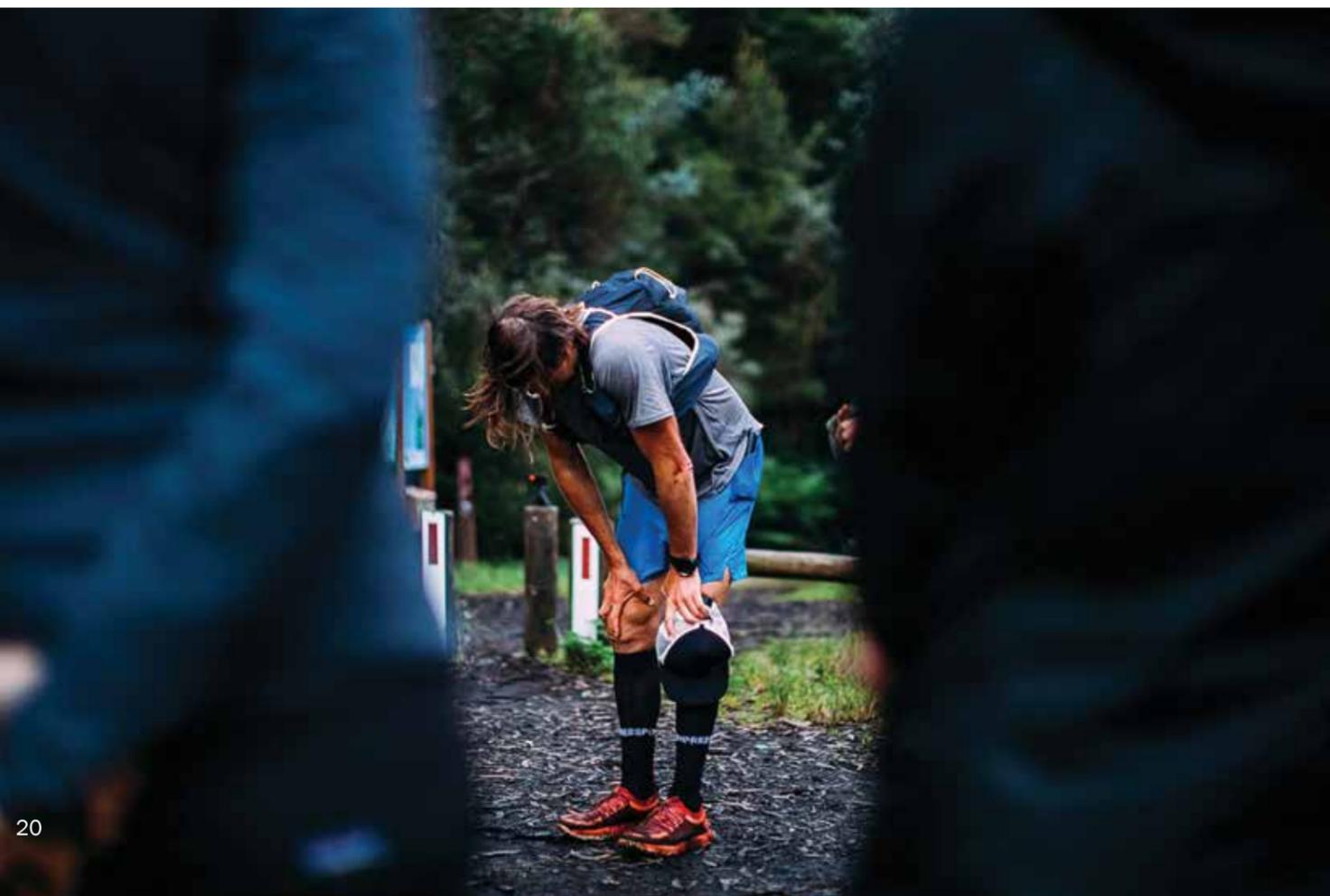
Above: Mid-March 2022, Majell Backhausen ran 273km across the proposed Great Forest National Park in Victoria’s Central Highlands. A journey with a punchy 9,115m of elevation gain is captured in Patagonia’s latest film series ‘End to an End – Running to Save the Great Forest’.

These are a critical habitat for the animals that use them, including the Leadbeater’s possum. There is a high risk that these possums will become extinct in the next 20-40 years. Further, as forests regrow after being logged they are at increased risk of re-burning at high severity.

Below: Mountain ash is the tallest flowering plant on Earth. Its forests are threatened by recurrent and widespread industrial clear-fell logging and major bushfires.

Leadbeater’s possum and mountain ash forests have persisted for thousands of years, surviving major wildfire events. But in just the last few decades, the possum is at risk of extinction, and the forests are at risk of ecological collapse.

It is estimated that only 1.5-3% of the old growth forest once in this area remain. The population of large old hollow-bearing trees has collapsed.



The Cleve Cole Hut and the 'Bogong Diaries'

Warkwoolowler / Mt Bogong is the highest mountain in Victoria and sits far above the Kiewa valley. It has been loved by generations of walkers, skiers and adventurers. Laurence McDonald reflects on his connection with the mountain.

Mt. Bogong is in Jaithmathang country and is where Aboriginal people from several nations collected Bogong moths to feast on in the summer months.

Cleve Cole hut sits in a majestic position, overlooking a gentle valley, not far from the open plain that leads to the summit of Mt. Bogong (1,986m above sea level). The hut was built in 1938 to commemorate Cleve Cole, an alpine pioneer, who not only attempted the first winter crossing of the Bogong High Plains, but was also the first victim to perish there of hypothermia after a blizzard in 1936. This

hut was built by the people and is maintained by the people and has served as a hub to support back country skiers and adventurers ever since.

Cleve Cole hut is very different from many refuge huts. It's well-equipped with all the necessities to survive there in harsh conditions. As it is run by dedicated members of the Mt. Bogong Club, it's constantly maintained and the atmosphere is lovely and warm and full of history. The internal stone walls of the hut are covered in photos and memorabilia. When the hut fills with willing volunteers for a working bee it feels like an old country pub transplanted into the middle of an alpine bushland. There is always a wonderful atmosphere in the evenings; the fire is crackling, everyone is having a few drinks and singing along to out of tune guitars. The crazy stories that are shared with the people that pass through are always very entertaining.

Connection to the Mountain

My connection to the ever majestic and unforgiving Mt. Bogong starts with a little town called Tawonga that sits within the Kiewa Valley that runs along the eastern side of the Bogong High Plains. My father's family lived in this cute little town until they moved to Frankston, Victoria when he was a teenager. During his youth, my father would hike the Bogong High Plains and the surrounding mountains. His Grandmother continued to live in Tawonga for years and the whole family would visit her. Unfortunately I have no memory of her as I was too young.

From Tawonga you could see Mt. Bogong, always there, forever overlooking us. During the winter months it would always have white capped peaks. Once my Great Grandmother passed and her house was sold we would then travel from the Mornington Peninsula and camp at Tawonga Caravan Park. It was on the Kiewa River and this was where I started to develop some amazing memories of the area. We would canoe down the river, float on tyres from Mt. Beauty to Red Bank for hours and build epic rock walls to redirect the river. They were such great times and now we continue this with our own children.

My Grandmother died when I was 12 years old and it was decided we would scatter her ashes around the area, including some at the summit of Mt. Bogong. For some of us, including myself, this was the first time we had ever climbed

it. We did it in a day via the Staircase and it was exhilarating and exhausting. Once we came out of the tree line it opens up to the Saddle which is an area where it drops down into a valley either side. From there it is the last arduous climb to the summit. We all placed a rock on top of the pile at the highest point and scattered the last of our Grandmother's ashes. It was all worth it. The view was spectacular, with endless mountain peaks as far as the eye can see.

Years later, my wife and I started going up with my brother and his friend during the warmer months and we would stay at the Cleve Cole Hut. My brother had already been hiking Mt. Bogong in the winter for a few years and claimed it to be the ultimate in Australia for back-country snowboarding. 'The Bogong Diaries', an ongoing photography project began in the spring of 2012 when we hiked to Cleve Cole Hut. Once I had captured it in the warmer season's the time came when I was able to capture it in the winter which made it truly an otherworldly experience. Snowboarding added a new dimension to my photography, the winter landscape was so vast, treacherous but rewarding and so much fun. Every time we hiked up the mountain I captured landscapes and portraits in winter and spring. With the help of my lens, my connection to this beautiful place has increased.

It is such a peaceful part of this country, so wild and free.

We must continue the conservation of this unique alpine ecosystem for our future generations.

Photo credit: Laurence McDonald

Photo credit: Laurence McDonald



Photo credit: Laurence McDonald

Tali Karng – a jewel in a changing landscape

Tali Karng is a magical lake, tucked away in the mountains north east of Licola in the Victorian high country.

According to Parks Victoria, Tali Karng is the only natural lake within the Victorian Alps. 'Held behind a rock barrier created thousands of years ago, the underground stream it feeds emerges as the infant Wellington River 150m below in the Valley of Destruction'. It is about 14 hectares in size and sits in a deep valley. It has been a hugely popular walking destination for decades, especially with scout and school groups, and 'doing the Tali Karng' walk is a rite of passage for many as they transition from weekend to longer walking trips. It is also a place that reflects the changing way we view, manage and visit our wild natural places.

The lake is on the traditional lands of the Gunaikurnai people, most likely members of the Brayakaulung clan. When I first visited Tali Karng at 15 years of age, I had no idea of the First Nation connection and we often camped by the lake. There was no signage or acknowledgement of the traditional owners. At that point I had no awareness of Aboriginal people in the mountains and I assume that was the same for most people who loved bushwalking.

That started to change after the Gunaikurnai won a Native Title determination in 2010.

This resulted from many years of hard work by a great many people, and was legal recognition of connection to Country and Gunaikurnai rights as Traditional Owners. This led to another stage in the journey, where Gunaikurnai developed a Whole-of-Country Plan which outlines how they wish to manage their traditional lands, including the Alpine national park, which is where Tali Karng is located.

There are three key routes leading into the lake, and the most popular one is from Macfarlane Saddle and across the Wellington Plains, past Spion Kopje and Mt Wellington before dropping to the lake via Gillios or Riggall tracks.

Often we think of wild places as being unchanging, locked in time and protected from threats like logging or mining. The lake remains a magical place. But now that Gunaikurnai have Native Title, its place in the surrounding landscape is changing. Camping is no longer allowed near the lake itself, and walkers are encouraged to stay at Nyimba Camp if coming from the north across the Wellington Plains or below the lake in the Valley of Destruction if walking upriver.

In its walking notes, Parks Victoria says 'Aboriginal people do not oppose non-indigenous people visiting Tali Karng as long as they treat the area with respect. Camping at the lake is disrespectful, so please treat the area with care as you pass by the lake and camp elsewhere'.

'Tali Karng is a sacred place to the Gunaikurnai and in keeping with their law, Aboriginal people are forbidden to go there'.

There is now also signage as you head towards the lake, so no one can pretend they don't know that it's a significant area. We often go into the higher mountains to experience a sense of freedom. How do we temper that desire with the

responsibility to respect the very reasonable request that we care for the place, knowing it is sacred to traditional owners?

Judging by the condition of the access tracks, it appears that Parks Vic is encouraging the area to revert to a wilder landscape, allowing tracks to revegetate from 4WD tracks to foot pads, with limited signage and limited facilities and apart from signs at key junctions, there are no track markers.

Much of the Wellington Plains and other areas have been badly burnt in recent years, including the Caledonia River fires of 1998, and during the summers of 2002/3 and 2006/7. The devastation of the snow gum woodlands on the Wellington Plains is heartbreaking, as is the slow rate of recovery. It can feel sad and forlorn as you trek across the Plains, although there is a beauty to the landscape as well. The slow rate of recovery is a stark reminder of the threats posed by climate change and fire in the high country, which is pushing some vegetation communities including Alpine Ash and Snow Gums towards ecological collapse.

A changing story

First Nations people have traditionally been excluded from the histories of the high country. And they are largely absent from the narratives of environmentalists, who often see the high country as a wilderness or unpeopled landscape. That is slowly changing as traditional owner groups reassert their connection to country and now, as a result of the Native Title claims by Gunaikurnai and the Taungurung, First Nations communities are increasingly involved in directly managing land. Other groups, who have not pursued Native Title are also asserting their connections and rights to country.

This is a heartening development and a testament to decades of hard work by First Nations people. As climate change bears down on the places we love, we will need to accept that we need more management of 'wild' places, not less. How First Nations people assert themselves in this management, and how the settler walking/ skiing/ outdoor/ 4WD cultures respond to that will influence how well natural places survive the impacts of climate change that are already underway.



Around the campfire

Chats with mountain people

Studying the Alps

Clare Brownridge

Pioneering mountain researchers helped shape our understanding of the Australian alpine environment. The Alps remain a hive of research, with studies focusing on weed detection, insects, snow gums, soil nutrient cycling, and understanding long-term change. It all contributes to our understanding of how to better manage the delicate mountain ecosystems. Here are snapshots of two different and equally fascinating projects in Victoria.

Detection dogs hunting for hawkweed

Some lucky people's job description involves hanging out in the mountains with dedicated dogs, all in the name of research and conservation. Is there anything better?

Hawkweed is the focus of intense control efforts, including searching by contractors, volunteers, dogs and drones. It's a massively successful spreader and outcompetes native vegetation. Vast swathes of alpine grasslands in New Zealand have fallen to this fate. To avoid a similar situation in Australia,

Sally awaiting instructions
Credit: Emma Bennett

managers are throwing all they've got at the weed. Knowing where each method is most effective is an important piece of the puzzle to maximise the chance of success.

In the search for the hawkweed daisies, detection dogs have been trained to sniff out even a small plant amongst a grassland of similar-looking species. Their reward is a chance to play with their favourite toy before the search begins again.

Dogs are relatively new to the hawkweed hunt, but human searchers have been scouring the Bogong High Plains since it was first discovered in Victoria in 1999.

Dogs rely on their powerful noses to detect hawkweed, while humans rely on their eyes. Their success varies in different conditions and terrain. How can we decide where to send dogs or humans to have the best chance of finding every last plant?

This is the question PhD candidate Emma Bennett is investigating - how to get the best return on the time and money spent in searching for hawkweed.

She's found that dogs are much quicker at finding hawkweed than humans. For the same success rate, 4-5 hours of dog searching are equivalent to about 25-30 hours of human searching. "Dogs have the advantage when things are hard to see", says Emma, which is important given the sometimes scrubby terrain.

Emma's experiment sent dogs and humans searching a set area with hidden hawkweed. To avoid accidentally spreading the weed further, the dogs searched for teabags filled with dry hawkweed leaves that carried the scent of the plant. The humans were tasked with finding lifelike models of the plants.

To further prove their worth, the dogs found actual hawkweed growing during each test. Emma explains that "the experiments were set up in areas that Parks Victoria had targeted for searching anyway," making the project a win-win for managers and researchers.

It's not all bad news for the human searchers. Dogs need at least a bit of a breeze to trace the scent; humans perform better on still days. They are also important back up to the dogs, Emma explains. "Large infestations can confuse the dog and make it difficult for them to isolate each plant, so typically once a dog has detected a plant or patch, the area is thoroughly searched by humans to find each individual plant."

Emma has worked with dogs in conservation since 2005, using them to find bat and bird carcasses at windfarms. But using dogs to find live plants in the field was new.

Emma hopes to see her research, funded through Monash University and Parks Victoria, be another step in the journey towards eradicating hawkweed.

Connor hard at work hunting hawkweed
Credit: Emma Bennett

Maisie's plots - long-term records of change

What Maisie's plots lack in canine co-researchers, they make up for in longevity. There are so many elements of the story of Maisie's plots that are worth telling.

Ecological pioneer Maisie Fawcett is remembered for her ground breaking work in the Victorian high country.

There is a continuing legacy of her research. Monitoring in early 2023 will mark the experiment's 75th anniversary. Earlier this year, Maisie's plots were included on the Victorian Heritage Register. The listing recognises their significance to the field of ecology, "ecological fieldwork which was ahead of its time", and the continuing connection that today's ecologists have with the sites and experiment.

Maisie's plots at Rocky Valley and Pretty Valley on the Bogong High Plains are 'exclusion' plots - fenced experimental sites set up to keep out herbivores like cattle. These are next to unfenced plots so the vegetation in grazed and ungrazed areas can be compared.

These days the story of Maisie's plots is changing. She established the experiment in 1947 when Bing Crosby was topping the charts and cattle were the main introduced herbivore roaming the high plains. Sheep and horse grazing had been banned the previous year. Cattle were banned from the Alpine National Park in 2015. Now deer and feral horses are a bigger threat.

Unfortunately, a fence designed to keep cows out doesn't have much effect on deer. To keep herbivores out of the plots, the scientists have added a taller deer-proof fence to the Rocky Valley plot. It's put up at the start of summer, and taken down before it's damaged by snow. Associate Professor John Morgan, from the Department of Environment & Genetics, La Trobe University, is one of the ecologists involved in monitoring Maisie's plots. For him, the new fence represents "the value of responding to changes that are going on in the landscape." Maisie's original fence remains, but more importantly, the scientific integrity of the experiment is preserved.

This means the plots can continue to demonstrate the impacts of hard-hooved animals in the Alps. Scientists are also gathering valuable information about the impacts of fire, invasive plants and climate change, thanks to the long-term records of vegetation change at the sites.

John will be revisiting the plots next year. The longevity of the experiment is testament to the "passion of the people involved in the Alps", with generations of ecologists carrying on Maisie's legacy. A celebration is planned for the summer monitoring to celebrate her legacy and its continuation.

Clare's love of the Victorian Alps spans the summer months - hiking, running and botanising.

Maisie Fawcett (1912-1988)

From September 1941, Maisie, a post graduate Botanist moved to the remote town of Omeo to work with soil erosion.

Between 1944 to 1947, Maisie established four now-famous research plots on the Bogong High Plains:

Rocky Valley Plots (Established 1944-45).

- One large fenced enclosure in Rocky Valley (a peatland area with various vegetation types) which excluded cattle
- One an unfenced control area in which cattle could graze

Pretty Valley Plots (Established in 1946).

- One enclosure on the edge of Pretty Valley (grassland area) which was fenced in 1947 to exclude cattle
- One unfenced control area in which cattle could graze

These plots are thought by many in the scientific community to be one of the foundations of non-Aboriginal Australian ecology and were among the first such enclosure plots in Australia.

The botanical changes recorded after a decade of monitoring, would provide scientific evidence of the destructive effects of cattle grazing on the vegetation and soils of Victoria's high country.

Source: Parks Victoria

Vale Peter Hull

Anyone who knew Peter Hull knows that he lived life to the fullest with passion and energy. A fantastic telemark skier, fisher, keen bike rider, and proud dad, Pete was generous of spirit and endlessly interested in the people and issues around him. He was a much loved character at Falls Creek and in the upper Kiewa, and deeply involved in his community. His passing leaves a big hole in the lives of those who knew him.

Peter died in early 2023, after a long battle with cancer.

Vale Alec Costin AM

30.9.1925 - 22.8.2022

Judy Thomson

The Snowy Mountains area lost a great champion with the death of Dr Alec Costin in August 2022. His Sydney University Honours research project on the ecology of the Australian Alps and the Monaro region was not only a first for the area but also one of the world's first comprehensive studies of an entire ecosystem.

Alec Costin grew up on a dairy farm on the northern outskirts of Sydney where he learned to love the bush, especially the flannel flowers, Christmas bush and Christmas bells of the area.

From North Sydney Boys High he won a cadetship with the Soil Conservation Board to study agricultural science at Sydney University. In 1946, he began his research on the soils and vegetation in the Snowy Mountains and Monaro, a monumental project that took 5 years and resulted in the 860-page book, *A Study of the Ecosystems of the Monaro Region of NSW - with special reference to soil erosion*, published in 1954.

In 1952-53, Costin travelled to Europe, studying with leading alpine ecologists and realising that Australian mountains needed to be understood on their own terms. From 1952 to 1954, he worked with the Victorian Soil Conservation authority on overgrazed catchments in the alpine and subalpine Bogong High Plains.

In 1955, Costin joined the CSIRO Division of Plant Industry and was based at Island Bend in the Snowy Mountains, where he set up long-term study sites. Costin's ecological work led to a clash with the Snowy Mountains Authority (SMA) when his advocacy saved Spencers Creek and sensitive alpine areas from inundation by an SMA dam. His work was also instrumental in the 1958 decision to withdraw grazing from above 1350 m.

Costin relocated to CSIRO's Black Mountain site in the late '60s and was integral in developing systems ecology. He also assisted the Academy of Science in identifying the main plant communities in Australia in need of urgent conservation.

Costin played a key role in helping to form the Australian Conservation Foundation and in the listing of the Australian Alps as a World Heritage area. When the National Parks and Wildlife Service was established in 1967, Costin influenced the selection of high-priority areas for inclusion in the new national parks.

After leaving CSIRO in 1974, Costin focussed on researching healthy landscape management in the upper Shoalhaven and Canberra catchment areas. As a Visiting Fellow at ANU, he was able to complete several important publications, including the definitive *Kosciusko Alpine Flora* (with Wimbush, Totterdell and Gray), which was published in 1979.

In the next stage of his life, Costin bought a farm near Braidwood, where he applied an early form of ecologically based farm planning. He later won the prestigious McKell Medal for outstanding work in land and water conservation in Australia. In 1980 he was elected a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Science and later was made a member of the Order of Australia (AM) for his outstanding service and exceptional achievements.

Costin retired from farming aged 90, having spent 20 years on his next farm at Bodalla on the south coast of NSW.

Deirdre Slattery's tribute in the *Canberra Times* sums up Costin's great legacy:

"Alec was the first to thoroughly explore and document the unique and remarkable qualities of Australia's small but precious mountains, the source of our rivers. He worked tirelessly to educate farmers, politicians, teachers, fellow scientists, journalists and writers, engineers, tourists - anyone who wanted to ask - about the simple point that wise and informed treatment of natural resources is essential to the quality of life on this continent."

Sources: Obituary by Charles Massy in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (30 October 22) and *Kosciuszko: A Great National Park* (2020) by G. L. Worboys and D. Slattery.

We all have a passion for the snow, and we want to give back, and protect our mountain community

Across the Alpine areas, volunteer and career firefighters protect the mountains from fire. There are volunteer brigades in resort towns like Hotham, Falls Creek and Mt Buller. Crews employed through Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMV) manage fires on public lands. Firefighting in alpine environments can bring particular challenges, where summer landscape scale fires alternate with fighting fire in snow covered villages of often closely packed buildings.

This story is from **Bec Roberts**, who is the 2nd lieutenant of the Mount Hotham – Dinner Plain Fire Brigade.

I joined the brigade in April of 2018, at that time I was living year round at Mount Hotham and was looking to gain new skills and new opportunities to give back to the community.

It's a very small community (especially at Mount Hotham!) during summer so, I put in an expression of interest and before I knew it, I was completing my minimum skills course.

Fast forward to 2022 and I am now the 2nd lieutenant of the Mount Hotham – Dinner Plain Fire Brigade and what I enjoy most about being in the brigade is the sense of community and working with people who I wouldn't usually work with

in my day to day life. The people in our brigade have such diverse backgrounds but there is a couple of strong themes that stick out.

One, we all have a passion for the snow and two, we want to give back and protect our mountain community. Some of my fondest memories come from the most challenging of times because that is where I was able to see the members in our brigade go above and beyond every day to protect life and property. This was especially evident throughout the 2019/20 fire season and something I look back on with pride.

I have made friends for a lifetime within this brigade and look forward to continuing learning, growing and doing what I can to give back to the community that has given me so much since arriving for my first season back in 2005. There is a reason I kept coming back to this resort and will do for the rest of my life, the community up here is nothing like I have experienced anywhere else in the world and I feel so blessed to be able to call it home. Bring on the next season!

There are further stories on members of the Mount Hotham – Dinner Plain Fire Brigade available in the second edition of MJ magazine.

<https://themountainjournal.com/mountain-journal-magazine/>



Photo credit: Damien Frawley



Photo credit: Bec Roberts



Henry Wajswelner - the Hotham Physio (and Venison Guy)

Henry is a passionate advocate for Mt Hotham and owns and operates Hotham Physio, the continuation of the on-mountain Physio services that operated for many years out of the Medical Centre. In this role, he keeps people's bodies going so they can enjoy their winter experience.

But in 2020, with the COVID-19 restrictions plus the need to expand Physio on Hotham, Henry and his dedicated team relocated to new larger premises at The Last Run Bar.

The restaurant, bar and café reopened with a simple locally sourced menu. At the same time Henry discovered wild Venison (feral deer are a major invasive species in the high country) and started using this as a resource and delicious ingredient in his now-famous Boris Burgers, Venison Bratwursts, Backstrap and Rump fillets and even Venison Lasagna.

"We all know there are way too many of this pest in the Alpine environment, they do tremendous damage to the source of our waterways, but the good news is the meat is beautiful with a sweet, nutty flavour. So if you eat meat, this is the best for you being, 100% natural and very lean protein."

The game meat industry in Australia is tiny and highly regulated. Ironically, with literally millions of feral deer out there, wild Venison is difficult to get for sale to the public, but that won't stop Henry.

"It's my way of using a business approach to help the alpine environment. We got it at Last Run Bar in winter and the BBQ Brats at local Maker's Markets all through the green season. I'm on a campaign to cook up and serve as much wild Venison as I can."

lastrunbar.com.au



The First Hike project

What is it like to arrive in a new country as a refugee, without connection to the landscape? The barriers to 'going bush' can be enormous. Enter The First Hike Project.

First Hike Project is a Not-For-Profit organisation operating out of Perth, Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Canberra.

'First Hike Project takes youth from refugee background on all-expenses-paid and all-equipment-provided overnight hiking and camping experience in the Australian bush. Our goal is to offer safe, no-cost hiking experiences to people new to our country, with the hope they will feel more at home in Australia once they step outside the suburbs and discover nature'.

First Hike Project believes that hiking is a great way to break down imaginary barriers between groups of people and allow greater connections between participants, volunteers and this country. This experience allows participants to strengthen their connection to Australia and ultimately to feel more at home in their new country.

<https://firsthikeproject.org.au/>

Chasing the Mountain Light

All landscapes have appeal. Some are easier to love than others. Many Australians love the beach and coastlines. Some love the desert, or wetlands, rainforests or the tall Ash forests. Some people have more obscure tastes – mangroves or mulga or gibber plains. But many of us love the mountains. And some of us express this love through writing, film, poetry, photography or other forms of communication. A new book called *Chasing the Mountain Light* delves deep into love of the mountains through the medium of images and writing.

The subtitle of the book explains it perfectly: it is about 'a life photographing wild places'. The work of David Neilson, it is a glorious coffee table sized book featuring wonderful black and white images from south western lutruwita/ Tasmania, Patagonia, Karakoram and the Alps of Australia, New Zealand and Europe and other ranges such as the Andes.

<http://www.snowgumpress.com.au/index.html>

Mountain Culture

Backcountry festival is on in 2023!

The festival is back this year, hosted at Mt Hotham and surrounding areas. Held over three full days (September 1 – 3) it will be similar to last year, with a guided tour program (hopefully with more telemark and cross country offerings), workshops, the demo village, speakers program, the famous ski in outdoor bar at Village Lookout, and a communal snow camping hub. This volunteer run community event will offer something for all backcountry tourers, skiers and mountain enthusiasts.

<https://backcountryfestival.com.au/>

Backcountry Companion

The Backcountry Companion is the brainchild of Simon Murray. Simon is an absolute dynamo of energy, who established Mountain Sports Collective – now Mountain Safety Collective (MSC), the Slay Academy, which is a backcountry skills course, and more recently he ran the tours program for the Victorian backcountry festival.

Last winter he launched the backcountry companion – a fantastic resource for anyone wanting to get into backcountry touring. It features a guide to a range of half day, full day and extended tours in the Australian mountains.

Nicely put together, with great images, and links to MSC, the BC companion is a great online resource for new tourers.

<https://www.victorianbackcountry.com/home>



Josh Kynaston and Evie Nowicka from Life Dreamers, VIC backcountry festival, 2022



Sharing our wild places:

a little reflection, by anonymous.

Like skiing through fresh Alps powder or perched on a surfboard on a gentle ocean roller, balance is the sweet spot. Not enough or too much poise and we fall off. Nature is no different when this applies to our visits to special wild places. Too much visitation and how we share our experiences by way of social media can lead to places ‘falling off’ and into disrepair.

Back in the 1990s, as part of the editorial team at Wild and Rock magazines, we were instructed by Tasmania National Parks & Wildlife Service to abide by World Heritage Publicity guidelines that protected the truly special, ecologically-vulnerable, wild places and parts of Nature throughout Tassie’s World Heritage Area. For example, rather than reveal the exact location of such sites in words, photos and maps in published articles, we would keep the description general such as South-West Tasmania. We did this to protect wild places; it worked.

Why? Such places would and could be ‘loved to death’. Encouraging people to love and visit wild places is important. So too protecting the very nature of such places which can serve important ecological functions. For example, repeated foot traffic trampling of alpine peatlands, the birthplace of river systems—let alone the cultural significance to First Peoples—rings alarm bells for catchment health.

This is not a point-the-finger and blame conversation. This is a reminder of what can work long-term. Just like Nature and balance.

A solution? Keep your sharing of such places in general terms. Avoid specific details. Please visit Leave No Trace—Social Media Guidance for more information.

<https://lnt.org/social-media-guidance/>

Alpine Resorts Victoria takes on managing resorts

In October 2022, amendments to the Alpine Resorts (Management) Act 1997 came into effect in Victoria.

Those amendments include the abolition of the Mount Hotham, Falls Creek, Mount Buller Mount Stirling and Southern alpine resort management boards and the Alpine Resorts Co-ordinating Council and the establishment of Alpine Resorts Victoria (ARV) as a single entity to manage Victoria’s six alpine resorts. This has been long planned and with winter over, ARV is now starting the job of managing the resorts.

ARV is now in the process of establishing stakeholder consultative committees at each of the six resorts. Current stakeholder forums at each resort are expected to continue until the stakeholder consultative committees are established by Alpine Resorts Victoria.

Daveys Hut

Pauline Downing

With more regular fires destroying more of the European cultural heritage of the mountains, there are efforts by a range of groups to rebuild many individual structures. But a lot of the history isn’t obvious. Here is one story of one place as told by Pauline Downing.

Daveys Hut is the lone reminder of over a century of settlement and toil in a bygone age on Snowy Plain. The area is now encompassed by the Kosciuszko National Park.

Snowy Plain had several dwellings – it would be remiss of me not to say it was a village.

There was even a tennis court at one time and on the other side of the Gungarlin River is the huge bulk of a fascinating piece of machinery called a gold dredge. A confidence trickster by the name of McAllister relieved many investors of their money by convincing them of the gold that this dredge would recover; the locals knew there was none.

This is a fascinating story of huts burnt by the owners, huts taken down, a hut/homestead sold and rebuilt in another area of the Snowy Mountains and even Dick Eames, who was reputedly ‘on the run’ from some scurrilous happenings in Sydney. Another story was that he was an old English sailor who had retired to a small piece of land along the creek who taught English to Millie Adams (nee Hedger) and played the violin for John (Jnr), Jack Bolton and his mother. Dick apparently lived quite comfortably, in a smoky burrow in a tributary of Diggers Creek. There were Chinese miners and

just prior to WW2 Italian miners who lived in Con Bolton’s shed ... and Naphthalis sawmill from the late 1800s and Ned Hull’s small hut and Charlie Carters.

Daveys Hut, the only building still standing on Snowy Plain, has a history of over a century. Its owner Tom Bolton was the son of John Bolton (Snr) a gold miner who came to Snowy Plain after the gold at Kiandra ran out.

But to start at the beginning. There was finite gold at Kiandra so miners spread across the high country searching for the riches they were sure would be found in the mountain streams and hillsides. It was this premise that brought some of them to Snowy Plain. Con Bolton was known to say, ‘There is more gold still here than was ever got ...’

In the 1860s men started to fossick for gold on the plain. During the next decade there were many miners working the area, yet there are no records of payable gold being found. However, there are distinctive signs on Diggers Creek of the diggers’ efforts. The creek bed has been turned inside out in a series of mullock heaps, dams and races. They disembowelled the earth, leaving its entrails piled high and forever exposed.

John Bolton married Rachael Broadhead in Cooma in April 1872. They left Kiandra and around 1877 settled his small family on Snowy Plain and built a homestead. Rachael died of malnutrition in 1891, as did many, many of the women in those circumstances. John Snr had become a drunk, squandering his gold finds and leaving his children to care for each other with the assistance of Sarah Naphthali, his sister, to tend to the younger ones and their often drunken father, each day by walking across the plain (from Naphthali’s Snowy Plain House) in all weather.





got to do things for yourself. You've got to be tough. She had to do the things a man would have done. I went with them one time. Ossie was two years older than me and they were bringing the sheep out. It was snowing. I was walking in the snow; I think Auntie Mary might have had the sulky. We got them all out."

The name of the homestead has stayed in the name of its longest owner, Davey Williamson. A local born at Kalkite in 1878, Davey purchased the land and hut that had been Tom and Mary Bolton's from Les Wallace around 1935. Stock was brought over the Eucumbene River for summer grazing. Davey was known as Boss of the Bobundra Run. He oversaw mobs of around 10,000 sheep on the summer grazing in the mountains each year. The phase-out of grazing in high-altitude areas commenced after the 1944 declaration of Kosciusko State Park. The Snowy Mountains Hydro Electric Scheme meant grazing ceased in 1958 in all areas above 4,500 feet (1,370 metres) as a result of the 1957 recommendation by the Australian Academy of Science to do so. The end of grazing, the declaration of the Kosciusko (previous spelling) National Park in 1967 and The Snowy Mountains Hydro Electric Scheme changed the lives, people and usage of the buildings remaining, until bushwalkers and skiers inaugurated the Kosciuszko Huts Association (KHA), a voluntary association formed in 1971 to assist with the conservation, management and reconstruction of huts, homesteads and surrounds within Kosciuszko National Park (KNP) in southern NSW.

In 2009 the centenary of Daveys Hut was celebrated with a gathering of family and locals on the Gungahlin Rive. KHA caretakers along with Ranger Andrew Miller and support from NPWS celebrated the history and stories of the Boltons, gold mining and the rescue by KHA and NPWS of the homestead that was close to collapse in the 1980s.

Since that time when the restoration was started many smaller jobs needed to be undertaken by the caretakers, constant since the early 1990s. Daveys has stood out on Snowy Plain, the remnants of a community. It has been cosseted by the local Rural Fire Service and NPWS as they do with all the huts remaining to protect and save them from devastating bushfires over the last 20+ years.

Daveys is the last reminder of a community that lived in extreme conditions, mountain storms and metre deep snows. They worked hard and lived hard. If you hear someone in today's society say "Life's hard..." they don't know what hard is compared to the lives these men and women pioneers of agriculture lived in these remote areas.

Tom and Harry Bolton, sons of John Snr and Rachael (Broadhead), worked the plain for gold. Eventually realising they were working while their father took their gold, they decided to keep what they found and it wasn't long before Tom was able to buy land at Snowy Plain while working for the Post Office, as well as cropping his land. Mary Crowe was also working for the post office where he was a mailman. He married Mary in September 1908. Together they cropped the 600 or so acres, with a reaper and binder to cut the hay. Mary stacked it in a bark roofed hayshed which had been built up beyond the stockyards.

In January 1909 it was recorded by the nearest neighbour, Hedger, that the timber for Tom and Mary's house on Snowy Plain was delivered.

Tom and Mary only lived in the homestead a brief time and moved to Adaminaby where their children were born and Tom became the skiing postman at Kiandra. Sadly, a few months before his 49th birthday in 1929 Tom died in a car accident. Mary and her sons Ossie and Dudley bent to the task of running the farm with determination.

Jean (Hedger) Adams reminisced. "Auntie Mary, she was a good woman but a hard woman, a hardworking woman. She was left a widow quite early so she had to keep things going. Kept the farm going and used to show horses, to cater at the Adaminaby Show. When there's no man around you've



Alex Entwistle.
Photo: Stephen Curtain

Offtrack

The upside of a wet spring

Spring 2022. The rains and flooding just keep on going. It was snowing in the high country. Many public events had to be cancelled or were rained out, and Falls Creek has been isolated from Mt Beauty for many months due to the major landslide near Bogong village. Many dirt roads were impassable and there is widespread damage to the high country road network as a result of rain and thoughtless

drivers. On the plus side we won't be facing fires in the high country any time soon, but it certainly wasn't the best walking, riding or camping weather.

But there is one group who was happy with last spring: the paddling community. With epic conditions in our river valleys, even smaller streams were in condition and able to be paddled.



Photo: Rolf Schonfeld

The West Tanjil

Check this lovely short film. 'A descent of the Tanjil River West Branch during winter 2022, Sean and Leigh explore the mountainous river on the southern slopes of Mt Baw Baw. This mossy, granite boulder river winds its way through lush temperate rainforest making it an exciting and beautiful paddle.'

<https://themountainjournal.com/2022/11/22/the-upside-of-a-wet-spring-lots-of-river-running/>

Find out more: Packfest

This is an annual get together for people interested in pack rafting for a weekend of paddling, fun and sharing skills. It generally happens each October.



Top photo: Stephen Curtain. Bottom photo: Rolf Schonfeld



