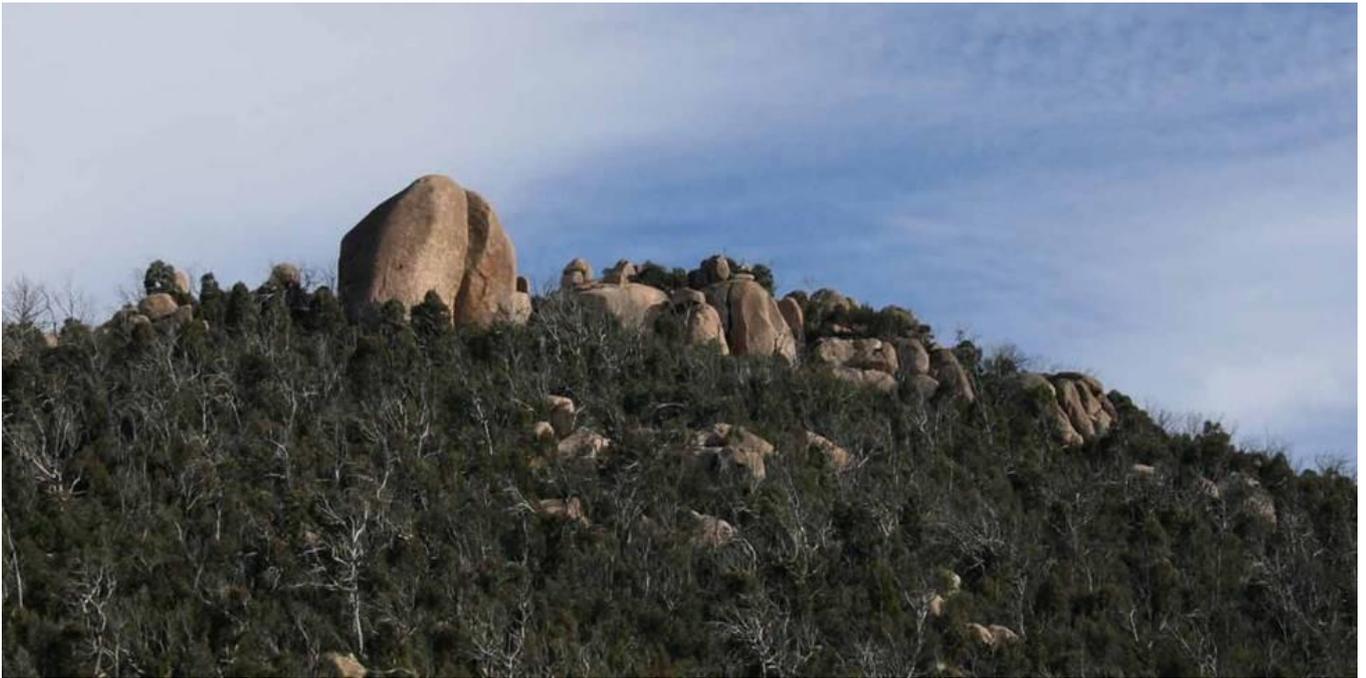


NEWS FROM THE ALPS

NEWSLETTER

THE ALPS PROGRAM. WORKING TOGETHER BEYOND BORDERS.

ISSUE #49, April 2015



All along the Track there are extraordinary moments, like this view of Split Rock located in the Bimberi Wilderness in the section of the Track between Orroral Valley and Cotter Hut.

THE TRACK

The Australian Alps Walking Track exists thanks to a shared appreciation and passion for the landscape it sits within. The [Track](#) meets at various borders – park, state and territory all rub shoulders along the way - the entire 650 kilometres being managed co-operatively by staff from a collection of agencies. The Track is epic but also accommodating. It offers what you seek: from a day excursion in an extraordinary setting, to a month-and-a-half long journey of self-discovery. Whether you walk it, or work along it, the Track is special and it exists thanks to some brilliant co-operation...

EPIC WALKERS

Jakob Anderhandt and Sonja Beckerhoff, both German, began walking in Australia in response to living in densely-populated Beijing. One thing lead to another and some years later they came to live here permanently to study and work. Jakob had previously walked, then authored a guide to, the European Alps, so when Sonja returned from completing the 100 kilometre Fred Hollows charity walk looking for a fresh challenge, the Australian Alps Walking Track became the obvious choice for them both.

What's interesting is that their combined perspectives helped to create a walk with a twist. It's a walk that is not just their own walk, but it's produced something that lives on long after and it's for everyone.

“It's the opposite of what happens in Europe; to do the Australian Alps Walking Track you have to organise everything yourself. It was also recommended that you do the walk in groups of at least three people for safety reasons.” For Jakob and Sonja to do the walk, and do it alone, they realised they would need to do their research and their own logistical organisation. The model they came up with, trialled and then tested – in real time and space over 52 days along the Track – is bushwalking gold.

“We began with selecting quality equipment as we knew it could be dangerous to do the walk without it. We familiarised ourselves with the GPS then did two short test walks in the Snowy Mountains.” These walks were predominantly about the equipment choices, but they were deliberately timed at the end of October and then again over Christmas to establish when there would be the most water available and the least snow. Mid-October to early December won hands down and it proved to be a time of year with enough water, not too much snow and many beautiful wildflowers.

Having walked for charity previously, Sonja was keen to add a fund-raising component to this walk as well. She identified The Foundation for National Parks & Wildlife as an ideal partner: working with them, it was possible to gather donations to be pooled towards the maintenance of the many huts along the Track. Both she and Jakob recognise these huts' cultural significance and as walkers, they also value them as points of refuge if-and-when things get very tough – which can happen. Their walk raised a healthy chunk of funds, and the [web site](#) they established continues the good work.

It's this web site that forms part of the twist. It helps to make it possible for anyone who is seriously thinking about doing the walk, or even sections of it, to do it in twos. Here you'll find equipment details, advice on nutrition and a meticulously kept log of the condition of the Track as Jakob experienced it (a boon to both walkers and parks agency staff).

As for why anyone would be keen to follow in Jakob and Sonja's footsteps, the answer is easy to spot amongst the words and images of Sonja's diary. Beauty and experiences aside, Jakob also points out the value of being somewhere that's in stark, magnificent contrast to what we have in our everyday, civilised lives. Enough said.



Jakob Anderhandt on the Track. He and his partner Sonja Beckerhoff tackled it in its entirety.

VOLUNTEERS

Maintaining the Track is almost more than can be covered by the combined efforts of the paid agency staff. Understandably, volunteer support is welcomed wholeheartedly – much is achieved with freely given time and effort and the benefits go well beyond a cleared section of Track.

Deb Cross, a ranger in the Lakes & Eastern Alps area of Parks Victoria regularly helps co-ordinate agency-volunteer works. “With Bushwalking Victoria, since 2011 it has been an annual event, weather permitting. They give us two full days’ work – which is fantastic. We set the priorities and the tasks, working with them to suit the skills and experience of whoever is coming along.”

This Labour Day weekend just past, Deb and fellow ranger Matt Parma camped with the Bushwalking Victoria volunteers but also members of the Midweek 4WD Club at Buenba Flat. From the flat, treed base camp, the volunteer work crews and their work gear were ferried out by the volunteer drivers to work along a four kilometre stretch of the Track between Buckwong and Misery Trail.

“The teams cleared the track – cross cutting logs and brushcutting to clear a one person wide footpad – then replaced the markers burnt in past fires leaving the Track marked both from north to south and south to north.”

The work was steady but also tough going in places, so why do people volunteer? “I think it’s satisfaction. Getting results. These people use the Track so they appreciate what they are achieving and they do the job well. They like giving something back and it’s also social, not just within each group, but between different groups.”



Volunteering to maintain the Track means a good day’s work, but the compensations on the side include fireside friendships in a wonderful environment.

MANAGING IT – WORKING TOGETHER

Looking at the Track as a whole, it’s managed with a co-operative approach by the agencies whose parks it crosses. It’s a case of looking after what’s in your patch, but doing that while staying in touch with other agency staff who are doing the same thing. Not that this takes place in a casual ad-hoc fashion. The system has structure and it’s built upon every two years.

Kevin Cosgriff, a ranger with Parks Victoria based at Mt Beauty, is the person who, for more than ten years has been co-ordinating this process. “There are two groups, the Track’s Operational Group and its Stakeholder Group. The Operational Group meets to review the operations plan for the Track, to work out where we’re at, what we’re doing and how we can work together to do it consistently along the length of the Track.” The agency staff in the room come from across the Alps and each is, in Kevin’s words, “pretty switched on with what goes on” in their own section. These people stay in loose contact in the months between the face-to-face meetings, sharing information and skills, working towards the agreed objectives.

At that same meeting – which takes place in a new Alps-setting each time – the Track’s stakeholders are welcomed. Various clubs, associations, lobby groups and those with tourism links are brought into the space. As the agency staff go through recent projects, discuss strategies and make plans for the next two years, there is a shared perspective in the room. “It creates a better understanding between managers and stakeholders. The stakeholders appreciate the challenges we face to maintain the Track and staff understand better what the stakeholders are looking for. It’s a chance to reflect and understand what we’re doing and why.”

Each year, relatively few walkers take on the whole Track in one bite, but thousands make good use of the most popular sections. Balancing resources to manage this will always be a challenge, as is balancing the level at which the Track is offered. No-one wants a class two track along the entire 650 kilometres: the sparsely marked wilderness sections are precious for being what they are. What is important is that it exists in its entirety and is maintained as such. However it is used – and even if it is not – it’s important that it is there.

snippets

ARBORETUM’S AUTUMN DISPLAY: This is the time of year to make the trip to the ACT’s alpine country to see the Bendora Arboretum in its Autumn maturity. The display offers a complimentary example to the recently established National Arboretum Canberra (NAC) in the lowlands of the ACT and a glimpse of what it will one day look like. A well admired specimen has been the Clanwilliam Cypress *Widdringtonia Wallichii* endemic to southern Africa. The remaining specimen at the Bendora arboretum is now supplying seed for the establishment of more examples of this fine species.

HORRIBLE HAWKWEED: This summer 102 volunteers donated their time to search for hawkweed in Victoria’s Bogong High Plains area of the Alpine National Park. They contributed a total of 1,415 person hours to search seventy hectares and discovered nine hawkweed infestations. The combined effort of Parks Victoria staff contractors and volunteers totalled more than 2,200 hours to search approximately 200 hectares. There were only eight Orange and thirteen King Devil Hawkweed infestations found this season. However, more Mouse-ear Hawkweed infestations, a recently discovered species in the Alps, were found.

FERAL HORSE CAPTURE: The trapping of feral horses in the Bogong High Plains is well underway. There have been 15 horses trapped in the past three weeks over three sites. A ‘supertrap’ is under construction, enabling the catching of multiple groups or individuals arriving at different times. Some horses have been rehomed with the Victorian Brumby Association and the rest are heading to a private landowner for rehoming. Rudi Pleschutschnig is leading the project from Mt Beauty with two staff on ground with the project running up until June. To feed information into the control program, the three yearly (local) aerial survey is about to take place in order to estimate horse population numbers.

LOGO POWER: The Alps Program funds a wide range of projects inclusive of natural values, research, cultural heritage, visitor services, and more. To keep the Program foremost in peoples' minds we've some marketing materials available. The Alps logo is a key tool to do this. Contact Andrew Nixon, Alps Program Manager for your lapel pin and a transfer (200 x 110) for your vehicle.



WELCOME PHILLIP PERRAM: Having recently taken over as Executive Director, Parks and Territory Services, Phillip has also joined the Alps' Heads of Agency team. The Australian Alps Program looks forward to having Phillip's input representing the ACT's Parks and Environment businesses.

RANGER GUIDED ACTIVITIES: Popular for many years in the ACT, the most recent of these sessions held in late April (as part of the Canberra and region Heritage Festival) booked out early. Ranger Guided Activities are collaboratively run with Friends of ACT Trees.

VALLEJO GANTNER HUT: This hut had some TLC in past weeks when the iconic glass loft window was removed, reframed and replaced on a sunny March day. This is part of a maintenance program that has recently seen safety railing and timber drying racks installed within the hut and fixing of pesky roof leaks. A big thank-you goes out to the Vallejo Gantner Hut Committee and their ongoing support of the Macalister Springs site.

FINDING WILLOWS IN UNUSUAL PLACES: Using a cooperative approach with funding through West Gippsland CMA and the Federal Government, Parks Victoria contractors have mapped and removed around 60 Grey Sallow Willow from the Howitt Plains this year. Unusually, the willows were not in wet areas on the plains, but found under snowgum canopy. With some mature trees up to 4m high, they were posing a serious threat of infesting adjacent alpine peatlands.

GREAT NEWS FOR GALAXID: The entire global population of the native fish, Shaw Galaxid *Galaxias gunaikurnai* occur in small tributaries of the upper reaches of Shaws Creek north of Licola. Parks Victoria staff from Foothills & Southern Alps have supported Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning staff from Arthur Rylah Research Institute as they undergo monitoring of the Shaw Galaxid upstream of the barrier which was installed in 2013 to protect the remaining small population from predation by introduced trout.

FRONTLINE FORUM: Twenty-six participants, travelling from as far as Falls Creek, attended the most recent Frontline Forum held at Namadgi National Park in the ACT. The main theme, the ‘visitor experience’, was explored through an over-full program by a range of excellent presenters who enthused, inspired and informed participants. Among the highlights, Martin Darcy from Parks Australia helped participants to understand, analyse and assess Alps experiences from the perspective of the visitor. Developed by Parks Canada, this model considers the entire visitor cycle from the initial wishing and planning, to travelling, arriving, visiting, departing and lastly remembering. Aligning visitors’ experiences with the stages in the experience cycle can help to better understand the information needs and expectations of the visitor. Frontline staff can actively contribute to making Alps natural areas relevant to visitors and enable them to connect with the natural or cultural environment in which they are visiting. This hopefully results in a more satisfying experience for the Alps visitor. To wind down on Thursday afternoon, participants enjoyed a short walk to Gudgenby-in-a-box interpretive display, then a fabulous dinner outside amongst the Yellow Box trees. Historian Matthew Higgins later set the scene with his whirlwind presentation on the natural and cultural history in this part of the world from Mt Ainslie in the Canberra burbs to Kossie in the Alps. On Friday, ANU lecturer Geoff Cary gave us new perspectives on the post-2003 wildfire landscape using the idea of ‘grey is the new green’ and how to explain to visitors the naturally occurring cycles of fire and regeneration. Roger Good reminded us the Alps are a precious and valuable asset in terms of water and biodiversity. The field trip to the Orroral Valley highlighted the unique attractions Namadgi has, including a former space tracking station right next to a significant European heritage site. Former Tracking Station employee Phil Clark shared his passion and experiences at the base from the 1960s to 1980s and author and historian Jenny Horsfield told some ripping yarns about Andy Cunningham (former owner of Orroral property) and his wild escapades in his plane the ‘Orroral Dingo’. Back at the Visitor Centre, Rangers shared some of their daily interactions with visitors. Then it was lunch and everyone headed home with new contacts, invigorated enthusiasm, new insights into the unique nature of the Alps in general, Namadgi in particular and plans to work diligently on their visitor experience assessment when they got home. For me it also reinforced how lucky we all are to live and work in such a special place as the Australian Alps and what a gem we have in the Alps program. The rewards of being involved in the Alps program are huge. (Thanks to Lois Padgham for this review.)

SEND IN YOUR NEWS: If you have a new member who has recently joined your Alps workplace team, or an Alps related project or program that other Alps-minded people would like to hear about, contact Andrew Nixon, Australian Alps Program Manager.

News from the Alps (in magazine and newsletter format) is published by the Australian Alps national parks. Program Manager and Editor: Andrew Nixon: Parks Victoria office, 46 Bakers Gully Rd, BRIGHT Vic 3741. Andrew.Nixon@parks.vic.gov.au For more information about the Alps, including information about the Parks, other publications and news, visit the Australian Alps Web Page: www.australianalps.environment.gov.au Thankyou to those who have made time to be interviewed; and to the photographers for their images. Without this support, *News from the Aps* would not be possible.

