

COMMUNITY UPDATE

Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing

Spring 2021

Welcome to the first edition of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing Community Update. In this initial edition we are providing an update on where the project is at, as well as answering some key questions around the project.

The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will be one of Australia's outstanding alpine walking experiences that captures the essence of the Australian Alps – the solitude, the seasons, the breathtaking beauty and the stories of the High Country.

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

Since the finalisation of the Master Plan Parks Victoria received money in 2018 to start doing the detailed planning and business case. In 2020 further funding was received to build the first stage of the walk. These are the two pieces of work we are providing an update for here.

Project update

In 2018 Parks Victoria was given \$2 million to undertake detailed assessments and planning for the Falls to Alpine Crossing. Despite delays due to the current health situation a range of work has been done over the past 18 months including, a preliminary Environmental Values Assessment, better defining the scope of the project and mapping out the planning and legislative considerations required.

The piece of work we are currently focused on completing is the Environmental Values Assessment. We will share a summary of this report with the community when it is completed so you can better understand how the project will be designed to minimise impact on the environment.

We are also developing a Business Case and research into operating models, as well as undertaking the scoping stage of a Visual Landscape Assessment.

These assessments will assist with refining:

- The placement/Location of camping and accommodation sites
- Accommodation details and design
- Trail alignment, surface and grading

As a result, the final proposed trail, overnight sites and accommodation could differ from those shown in the original Master Plan to ensure all environmental and landscape aspects have been appropriately considered. This planning work is expected to be completed in early 2022.

In addition to the original \$2 million announced in 2018, a further \$15 million was allocated by the Victorian Government late last year for implementing Stage 1 of the project. Stage 1 includes doing track upgrades and creating up to two overnight campgrounds including roofed accommodation options.

The planning and assessment work from the first \$2 million will guide what is delivered for Stage 1 of the project, including which parts of the proposed 57 -kilometre track will

be upgraded. This stage of the project is expected to be completed by the end of 2023.

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

Answering key questions

We have been hearing several key concerns during recent months. To ensure everyone shares the same understanding of the project we have answered these common questions. You can get in contact with us at FHAC@parks.vic.gov.au if you have further questions.

Why is the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing being developed?

The existing walk between Falls Creek and Mount Hotham follows a 37-kilometre, three-day and two-night route as part of the 655-kilometre long Australian Alps Walking Track, which takes hikers through the alpine areas of Victoria, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory. The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing Master Plan outlines an improved 57-kilometre, five-day and four-night route which will take in the Diamantina Spur and Razorback with an optional ascent of Mount Feathertop.

A crucial element to the success of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing is that different experience options should be available to walkers. These include a choice of tented or roofed accommodation, experiences both guided and independent, and having access to high quality information and interpretation.

This longer route is planned to support more walkers but avoid new facilities from being established within a designated 'remote and natural area' of the national park, which the current route passes through.



Environmental surveying

What are the benefits of the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing?

The project will bring multiple benefits to the local communities and all of Victoria. It will:

- Create a walking icon that draws walking visitors from Victoria and beyond.
- Increase the accessibility of walking in the alps for more walkers by providing facilities such as roofed

accommodation for people who may not be able to, or may not wish to, carry a full pack with tent, sleeping and cooking equipment.

- Enhance the walking trail network in the region by providing more walking and overnight options people can use for a variety of walks.
- Support local communities by drawing a range of visitors to the area in all seasons.

Will there be significant environmental impacts because of the project?

Protecting the environment is a guiding principle of all the work that will be done as part of this project. An independent Environmental Values Assessment is currently underway to ensure potential impacts are identified and that the appropriate avoidance and mitigation measures are put in place. The planning process is aimed at reducing current and future impacts on the values of the national park. Once this is complete the results will be shared with the community.

Will people be able to stay in luxury accommodation on the Crossing?

No. The accommodation planned for the Crossing is small huts only. They will provide protection from the elements to allow sleeping, cooking, toileting and appreciating the landscape. The Master Plan outlines the two overnight elements of the walk experience - camping or sleeping in a purpose-built hut. It is important to note that independent hikers can continue to self-select places to camp along the route for free (dispersed camping).

The specific designs of the huts are not yet decided. They will be small and designed to blend into the environments they are placed in, with the aim being that they will be as unobtrusive as possible.

Will helicopters regularly fly in to service the huts?

Any increase in helicopter flights will be minimal.

Helicopters already fly into Alpine campgrounds to service them on an infrequent basis.

Three of the four new proposed campgrounds on the Crossing will be accessible via management vehicles. The one proposed campground not accessible by road will need to be serviced by helicopter. This may require a small number of flights per year to remove wastewater and service any other elements of the overnight site.

Will people be able to fly into the overnight sites without walking to them?

No, flying into the overnight sites will not be possible. Bookings will only be accessible for people who walk to them.

Is the walking track going to be turned into a wide smooth 'superhighway'?

This is not the case. The upgrades planned to the track are minor and are aimed at making the track clear and defined to improve safety and reduce off-track impacts. In some areas,

upgrades will incorporate design features that manage drainage and erosion.

How are Aboriginal cultural heritage values being considered?

Traditional Owner groups have been involved in the development of the Master Plan and will be engaged throughout the next stages. The planning process will also seek to further understand the cultural landscape, which values need protection, and what aspects of culture may be shared with people undertaking the walk.

Want to know more? Come to an information session

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

We will soon be running community information sessions to give people an update on where the project is currently at. During these sessions you will be able to learn more about progress on the project, next steps, and ask any questions you may have.

Date – Evening online information session

Wednesday 27 October

Register your attendance [here](#)

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

Stay up to date

Parks Victoria will provide updates and information as the project progresses. To stay up to date please register your interest to receive community updates via this link -

<https://confirmsubscription.com/h/r/460212F5DB37E78C2540EF23F30FEDED>. You can also email us at

FHAC@park.vic.gov.au.

To learn more about the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing visit www.parks.vic.gov.au/projects. As the project progresses this information will be updated regularly. You can also contact us on 13 1963.



Mt Feathertop during Winter 2021