

21.05 MT BULLER STRATEGIC STATEMENT19/01/2006
VC37**21.05-1 RESORT PROFILE**24/08/2006
C15**Location**

Mt Buller Alpine Resort (the Resort), with a summit elevation of 1,804 m, is one of the largest of Victoria's six alpine resorts. It is a unique asset and provides access to a scarce resource – the alpine environment. The Resort is located approximately 250 kilometres (about three and a half hours drive) north east of Melbourne with access to the Resort via the township of Mansfield. Mt Buller is situated on the Great Dividing Range.

The Mt Buller Alpine Resort forms part of the upper catchment of the Delatite and Howqua Rivers. The Alpine National Park abuts the Resort boundary to the southeast, south, southwest and west. A common boundary to the north is shared with the Mt Stirling Alpine Resort in the upper Delatite River valley. Crown land on the southern side of the Delatite River at Mirimbah abuts the Resort to the northwest. The Resort has been excised from Mansfield Shire.

The Resort comprises an area of approximately 2,300 hectares of Crown land, which is managed by the Mt Buller and Mt Stirling Alpine Resort Management Board. Mt Buller village and ski infrastructure occupy 850 hectares of the Resort, including 180 hectares of ski trails and open space above the tree line. The Resort is predominantly a downhill ski resort with terrain ranging from relatively open, gently sloping ridge tops to steep valley sides.

Regional context

Mt Buller Alpine Resort is a key asset to the Victorian alpine region. It is a major visitor destination in the winter months, and increasingly in the summer months. The importance of the alpine resorts tourism to Victoria is recognised and promoted in the Alpine Resorts 2020 Strategy as well as by Tourism Victoria through inclusion of Mt Buller Alpine Resort in the 'Legends Wine and High Country' tourist region.

The Resort contributes significantly to the region's tourism identity. A key destination, with strong regional links, the Resort provides for active and passive alpine recreation experiences all year round.

Mt Buller Alpine Resort contributes significantly to the economy of the State and region as a seasonal employment generator in the growing tourism and service industry. Investment and development in tourism and recreation infrastructure at the Resort generates flow on benefits for the townships in the region.

The township of Mansfield, located in the Delatite Valley, is approximately 48 km from Mt Buller Village and has strong community and economic links with the Mt Buller Alpine Resort. It provides services and facilities for tourists and other visitors to the mountain as well as providing goods and services to the businesses within the Resort. Access to the Resort is gained via the Mt Buller Tourist Road from Mansfield.

The La Trobe University at Mt Buller Alpine Resort plays a role as a regional education and conference centre.

Environment*Climatic Conditions*

The Mt Buller snowline is approximately 1,400 metres elevation. The average total annual precipitation (including both snowfall and rain fall) is 1,580 millimetres. The average extent, duration and depth of snow cover vary throughout the year. Artificial snow making is used to augment natural snow falls during the ski season. Snow begins to fall in April, with the main falls occurring from June to September. Snow retention is greater on slopes with a southerly aspect. The mean daily summer temperature is 11.1°C and mean daily winter temperature is -0.6°C. The main precipitation bearing winds come from the west and southwest.

Flora, fauna and geological resources

The Resort is part of the unique alpine environment containing rare flora, fauna and geological resources.

The bedrock geology of the Resort primarily consists of Lower and Upper Ordovician siltstone, sandstone, carbonaceous shale and minor chert (marine). The Resort is characterised by steep sided peaks and hogback ridges. The main ridgelines of the Resort are Horse Hill Spur, Burnt Hut Spur and Little Buller Spur.

Soils vary widely throughout the Resort. Higher elevations carry shallow organic loams punctuated by deep peats along gently sloping drainage lines. The lower forested slopes carry gradational soils that vary from extensive granitic zones to friable brown soils in the sedimentary zones, with stony red soil at the lowest elevation.

The vegetation communities identified at Mt Buller Alpine Resort include sub-alpine woodland, treeless sub-alpine mosaic, riparian forest, shrubby dry forest, damp forest, wet forest, herb-rich foothill forest, montane dry woodland, montane damp forest and montane riparian thicket. Many of these communities are found on the lower slopes of the mountain.

The village and ski fields are within the sub-alpine woodland and treeless sub-alpine mosaic. Sub-alpine woodland occupies the high ridges and upper slopes of Mt Buller at elevations from about 1400 m to 1700 m. The overstorey consists of mostly Snow Gums (*Eucalyptus pauciflora*) with Alpine Ash or Woollybutt (*Eucalyptus delagatensis*) and Mountain Gum (*Eucalyptus Dalrympleana*) having a minor presence in the lower reaches of this altitudinal range. The understorey varies from a dense shrub layer to a layer dominated by a wide range of grasses and forbs with scattered shrubs.

The treeless sub-alpine mosaic community occupies the highest areas of the Resort, above 1650 metres, mostly on the tops of Baldy and Mt Buller. This mosaic includes a number of distinct plant communities including heathlands, herbfields, grasslands and mosslands. Short dense heathlands are located on moderately sloping north and south facing slopes around the summit and are dominated by Alpine Hovea (*Hovea montana*) and Snow Grasses (*Poa sp.*). The low shrublands, located on more exposed rocky ridges, are dominated by Alpine Grevillea (*Grevillea australis*).

Two specific vegetation communities are listed as threatened under Schedule 2 of the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*; they are Alpine Bog Communities and *Caltha introloba* Herbland Communities.

Mt Buller provides temporary habitat for a number of migratory animals, utilising habitat within the Resort boundary, though relatively few animals truly live in the alpine regions due to the harsh climates. Many dwell in the temperate climates of the valleys dividing the high country, migrating temporarily into the mountains in warmer weather. The Mountain Pygmy-possum (*Burramys parvus*) is the only mammal that permanently inhabits the alpine zone. It is listed as threatened under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* and *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999*.

Other listed threatened fauna under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* include:

- Alpine Bog Skink (*Pseudemoia cryodroma*),
- Alpine Stonefly (*Thaumatoperla flaveola*),
- Mt Stirling Stonefly (*Riekoperla isosceles*), and
- Planarian or flatworm (*Spathula tryssa*).

In June 1997, 8,050 hectares of the alpine area, including the Mt Buller Alpine Resort, were included on the Register of the National Estate. The area is considered to be significant by the Australian Heritage Commission as being part of the habitat of the Mt Stirling Stonefly.

Water Catchment

The Upper Delatite Valley is a proclaimed domestic water supply catchment catering for the needs of Mansfield, Merrijig and surrounding rural residential areas. The Goulburn Broken Regional Catchment Strategy is the overarching strategy for catchment management in this region. The majority of the catchment within the Resort area is forested. The skifields, roads, car parks and the Village occupy minimal areas, at the head of the catchment. Streams draining the slopes of the Resort feed the Delatite and Howqua Rivers and flow into Lake Eildon, which supplies irrigation water to the Goulburn Valley and generates hydroelectricity.

Tourism and recreation

Tourism and recreational activities

Mt Buller Alpine Resort provides an extensive range of facilities for overnight and day visitors. The Resort attracts an average of around 240,000 visitors during the snow season on an annual basis. However, significant fluctuations in the number of visitors can occur each year as a result of snowfall levels. Overall visitor numbers to Mt Buller have remained relatively static, which is consistent with other Alpine Resorts in Victoria. An opportunity exists to increase visitation levels to the Resort on a year round basis.

The increased use of Mt Buller during summer, autumn and spring months has highlighted the importance of providing a range of available activities and products. The La Trobe University Campus in Mt Buller Village, the Village Cinema, Museum, accommodation facilities, and the staging of specific summer events contribute to the Resort's attractions for year round tourists and also permanent residents. These major facilities and events have assisted to market the Resort as the location to host conferences and seminars for a range of business sectors and provide a visitor destination that has year round appeal.

Roads, tracks, ski trails and walking trails in the Resort are used as walking, equestrian and bicycle trails, and there are links to further trails on Mt Stirling and beyond. The use of motor vehicles including two-wheel drive vehicles, four-wheel drive vehicles and motorcycles is permitted on designated roads and tracks in the Resort in the non-winter months. Picnic facilities are available in the Village and at Mirimbah Park at the base of Mt Buller and include barbecue, seating and table facilities.

The Ski fields

Mt Buller Alpine Resort is predominantly a downhill ski resort with terrain varying between open, sloping ridge tops to steep valley sides. The Resort has 70 marked ski trails that cover an area of 180 ha, with additional open alpine areas for skiing available above the tree line. These trails are currently serviced by 25 skier lifts, capable of moving 40,000 people every hour.

Mt Buller offers skiing and snowboarding for all levels including beginner, novice, intermediate and advanced. The Resort provides opportunities for snow play including tobogganing and snow tubing.

Snow making facilities operate in the skifields to make snow for the most popular ski runs including the Summit, Baldy, the upper section of Federation, Skyline, the top and base of Wombat and Little Buller Spur, and Chamois that includes the World Cup Freestyle jump site. Snow making facilities are also located at Burnt Hut Spur.

There are 9 km of marked and groomed cross country ski trails at the Resort. These trails connect over 60 km of marked and maintained cross country ski trails at Mt Stirling Alpine Resort, via Corn Hill Road.

The Resort has a capacity to accommodate approximately 10,000 snow users per day on Mt Buller under consistently good snow conditions. The Resort currently attracts a maximum of about 8,000 snow users per day during the winter season.

Settlement

Population

There are approximately 200 permanent residents within Mt Buller Village. During the winter season the permanent and long stay population in the Resort rises to about 2000 residents. The Village has the capacity to accommodate up to 7500 people overnight.

Uses

The Village area of Mt Buller is characterised by a distinctive “hour glass” shape, formed by two residential areas at either end of a narrow central commercial area. The skifields at the western end and steep topography at the eastern end effectively contain the Village.

The Village has a well defined commercial precinct extending from the Village Square up Athletes Walk and along Summit Road. Cow Camp Plaza and Buller Sports Central complexes are located in the Village Square, providing retail shops, skier services and ticketing facilities, along with the Visitor Information Centre in the Clock Tower building. The Village Square is a central meeting place, which has been significantly upgraded with urban design, and landscape works to create an attractive focal point for the Village. The Village Square is also an important location for transport facilities and is a key access point for snow users to the mountain during winter. It is also an important passive recreation area for visitors to enjoy outside of the winter season and for community events in the Village.

La Trobe University Campus offers a wide range of facilities and activities that are available all year round catering for events, meetings and conferences. It also includes a well equipped sporting centre that is available for public usage. The campus also accommodates the Village Cinema that operates throughout the year.

Other commercial uses located throughout the residential areas include restaurants and bars (mostly contained within commercial accommodation facilities). Limited facilities including kiosks are located in the skifields and service the snow users during the day. Resort administration and post office facilities are located at the entrance to the Village on the Mt Buller Tourist Road, near the junction of Summit Road. A police station is located on Chamois Close.

The Village offers a variety of accommodation facilities including hotels, motels, commercial lodges/chalets, commercial flats/apartments, private flats and ski clubs. A variety of built form has evolved throughout the Village residential and commercial areas. Generally, higher density development has established in the western residential areas and around the centre of the Village.

Service industrial development is currently limited to a number of specific sites in the Resort, inside and outside of the Village area. Such uses are mainly associated with the maintenance of the skifields and transportation and service infrastructure.

Heritage

Aboriginal occupation of the south-eastern highlands has been documented to 17,000 years ago at Cloggs Cave near Buchan and 21,000 years ago at Birrigai. It is believed that Aboriginal people utilised the Mt Buller area to exploit the large accumulation of Bogong Moths found during the late spring and summer period. Four tribes were traditionally associated with Mt Buller including Taungurong in the west, Pangerand in the north, Jaitmathang in the east and Kurnai in the south.

Hume and Hovell recorded sighting the peak now known as Mt Buller (named by Major Thomas Mitchell 1836) in 1824. Leases were granted to graze cattle from 1873. Skiing began in 1926 at Mt Buller by the Ski Club of Victoria and by 1929 the Club had built a chalet large enough to accommodate 16 people at the summit. By 1948 the character of Mt Buller as a frontier for adventurous skiers began to change. The Mt Buller Alpine Reserve Committee of Management took over the running of the tourism aspect of Mt Buller and the emerging ski resort quickly developed. Clearance of the first down hill ski runs occurred in 1948, followed by the construction of the first ski tow by the Ski Club of Victoria in 1949.

Movement

Mt Buller is three and a half hours drive from Melbourne and very accessible compared to other major Victorian Alpine Resorts. Access to the Resort is critical to its operation during the declared snow season. Entry to the Resort during the declared snow season is controlled at the Mirimbah gate.

Visitors travelling by car can access the mountain during winter by one of two ways. The first is to park at the Mirimbah gate and be transported by bus to the Village. Alternatively visitors can drive to the short or long term car parks located along the Mt Buller Tourist Road. A transport system provides a shuttle service for day and overnight visitors between the car parks and the Village and a bus service is also available between Mansfield and the Resort during the ski season. Bus services to the Resort also operate from Melbourne during the ski season. Access to the ski fields is available from both the Village and Horse Hill lift station.

A limited amount of public car parking is available within the Village and private car parking is also available in association with accommodation. The Resort Management Board controls access and parking within the Village during the declared ski season through a permit access system.

Mt Buller is predominantly a pedestrian/skier dominated resort and this strongly influences the character and ambience of the Village. The completion of Summit Road along its new alignment has provided the opportunity to remove vehicle access from the old Summit Road alignment, and create a new pedestrian precinct along the north-eastern edge of Bourke Street ski run, now known as Athletes Walk.

Infrastructure

The infrastructure services, including water, sewerage, gas, refuse disposal, electricity and communications at Mt Buller Alpine Resort are currently able to service peak periods. Mt Buller is serviced by a reticulated water supply system that draws its offtake from the Delatite River catchment. To supply the needs of the village, water is reticulated from Burnt Hut Reservoir and the Baldy underground tank. In an average year water usage for the village is around 100 mega litres.

Water for snow making is pumped from the Boggy Creek catchment. In an average year 190 mega litres of water is required for this purpose. Sun Valley Reservoir holds 75 mega litres, which is about 3 to 4 days supply at full pumping capacity. The Resort Management Board is currently investigating the possibility of using treated waste water from the village for snow making.

Waste water from the Resort is treated at the Treatment Plant, located on the eastern fringe of the Village, using primary, secondary and tertiary treatment processes. This includes chemical dosing and manipulation of the aeration to maximise the denitrification by facultative bacteria. The EPA licence for discharge from the plant is limited to maximum output of 1 mega litre per day. In the peak snow season, a large amount of this output is from snowmelt. The plant currently enables servicing of the 9000 occupied beds and a peak daytime visitor population of up to 15,000. The licence conditions for the plant have direct implications in terms of accommodation population on the mountain during the peak

season periods. The Resort Management Board is investigating opportunities for increasing this output with the Environment Protection Authority.

The Resort is supplied with mains electricity from the State grid, serviced by a 22 kV overhead line from the Mansfield zone substation. The line generally follows the alignment of the Mt Buller Tourist Road from Mirimbah. There are future plans to upgrade the line between the Mansfield zone substation and Mirimbah to a 66kV line. The reticulation system within the Village has been progressively relocated from an above ground system to an underground system.