

21.05 MT BULLER STRATEGIC STATEMENT

21.05-1 RESORT PROFILE

Location

Mt Buller Alpine Resort (the Resort), with a summit elevation of 1,804 m, is one of the most significant resources for intensive alpine recreation in Victoria. 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 south east, south, south-west and west. A common boundary to the north is shared with the Mt Stirling Alpine Resort in the upper Delatite River valley. Freehold land on the southern side of the Delatite River at Mirimbah abuts the Resort to the north west. The Resort has been excised from Delatite Shire.

The Resort occupies an area of approximately 2,300 hectares. The skiable area of the Resort is 400 hectares (17% of the Resort) which includes a snow-groomed area of 280 hectares. 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 tourism asset to the Victorian alpine region. It is a major visitor destination in the winter months, and increasingly in the summer months. It is included in Tourism Victoria's 'Legends Wine and High Country' tourist region.

The Resort significantly contributes to the region's tourism identity. A key destination, with strong regional links, the Resort provides for active or 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 approximately 48 km from Mt Buller Village, 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 Access Road from Mansfield.

Mt Buller Alpine Resort also plays a role as a regional education and conference centre with the establishment of a Latrobe University campus within the Village.

Environment

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 and Burnt Hut Spur.

There is a wide range of vegetation communities within the Resort comprising open forests, subalpine woodlands, shrubland and grassland environments. At elevations above the treeline, ranging between 1,680 metres to 1,800 metres, herbfields dominate with grasslands and heathland. Snow Gum open forests and subalpine woodlands occupy the high ridges and upper slopes of Mt Buller at elevations between 1,460 m and 1,680 m. Alpine Ash forests are located below the Snow Gum forests at altitudes of about 850 m and on sheltered sites up to 1,460 m. Narrow leaf Peppermint – Manna Gum – Mountain Gum open forests occupy most of the valleys below the Alpine Ash. On medium slopes to the north and south around the summit is short, dense heathland and grassy heath dominated by Rusty-pods (*Hovea longifolia*). Snow grass also occurs in these locations. On the exposed rocky ridges, low shrubland is dominated by Alpine Grevillea (*Grevillea australis*) with taller mixed species shrublands occupying sheltered areas closer to the treeline.

There are five fauna species listed as threatened on Schedule 2 of the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*:

- The Mountain Pygmy-possum (*Burramys parvus*),
- The Alpine Bog Skink (*Pseudemoia cryodroma*),
- The Alpine Stonefly (*Thaumatoperla flaveola*),
- The Mt Stirling Stonefly (*Riekoperla isosceles*), and
- The Caddisfly (*Archaeophylax canarus*).

In June 1997, 8,050 hectares, 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.

Climatic Conditions

The snowline for Mt Buller is approximately 1,400 metres. The average total annual precipitation (including both snowfall and rain fall) is 1,580 millimetres. The average extent, duration and depth of snow cover varies throughout the year. Slopes with a southerly aspect are more capable of retaining snow. The daily mean summer temperature is 11.1°C and the daily mean winter temperature is -0.6°C. The main precipitation bearing winds come from the west and south-west.

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 bulk of the catchment within the Resort area is forested. A minimal area, at the head of the catchment, is occupied by skifields, roads, carparks and the Village. The runoff from the Village flows through to the Delatite and Howqua Rivers.

Tourism and recreation

Tourism and recreational activities

Mt Buller is Victoria's largest ski resort with 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 at the Resort. Overall visitor numbers to Mt Buller have remained relatively static and this trend 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. The Australian Alpine Institute, Latrobe Campus on Mt Buller, the Chalet Hotel, and the staging of special summer events attract year round tourists and also permanent residents. These major venues have marketed the Resort as the location to host conferences and seminars for a range of business sectors.

In the Resort, walking, equestrian and bicycle trails are based on roads, tracks, ski trails and walking trails, with 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 summer months. Picnic facilities including barbecue, seating and table facilities are currently available at the Alpine Village and at Mirimbah Park at the base of Mt Buller.

The skifields

Mt Buller Alpine Resort is predominantly a downhill ski resort with terrain varying between open, sloping ridge tops and steep valley sides. The Resort has 70 marked ski trails that cover an area of 161.7 ha, with additional open alpine areas for skiing available above the tree line. These trails are currently serviced by 25 skier lifts. Figure 1 shows the extent of skifield facilities in the Resort.

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 on the skifields to make snow for the most popular ski runs including the Summit area, Baldy, the upper section of Federation, Skyline, the top and base of Wombat and Little Buller Spur, and Chamois which 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 the 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.

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 7000 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 ski fields at the western end and steep topography at the eastern end effectively contain the Village.

The Village Centre has a well defined commercial precinct comprising Cow Camp Plaza, retail shops and skier services along Summit Road, and New Summit Road that accommodates the LaTrobe University campus. Cow Camp Plaza is a central location for transport, administration and ticketing activities for snow users accessing the skifields. It is also a point where pedestrians and skiers congregate. The Village is well consolidated and identifiable.

Other commercial uses located throughout the residential areas include restaurants and bars (mostly contained within commercial accommodation facilities). Limited facilities including kiosks and ski hire are located in the skifields. Resort administration, police and post office facilities are located at the entrance to the Village on the Mt Buller Tourist Road, near the junction of New Summit Road.

The construction of the Mt Buller Chalet and the Latrobe University Campus has enhanced the facilities of the Village Centre with educational, entertainment, indoor sporting and conference rooms available. Additional commercial sites in the Village Centre, particularly on sites along the northern side of New Summit Road, are available for development.

The Village offers a variety of accommodation facilities including hotels, motels, commercial lodges/chalets, commercial flats/apartments, private flats and ski clubs.

The residential precincts of the Village have a strong residential character. A variety of built form is present and residential buildings range in height from single to three storey. Generally, higher density development has established in the western 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 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 traditionally had attachment to 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 half hours drive from Melbourne and very accessible compared to other major Victorian Alpine Resorts. Entry to the Resort is controlled by an entry point (operational in winter) at Mirrimbah. A major car parking station is located at Horsehill with a shuttle, taxi and lifting capacity to the Village and skifields.

It is possible to park vehicles at the Mirrimbah gate, and 4-wheel drive transport up the Mt Buller Access Road. Alternatively it is possible to drive to the short or long term car parks located along the Mt Buller Access 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 Resort is critical to its operation during the ski season. The current transport network to and within the Resort caters for the arrival of visitors during peak periods over approximately a three hour arrival time.

The changing market for accommodation has created a desire to increase the provision of parking spaces within the Resort. This has created pressure to allow an increasing number of vehicles into the Village during the snow season.

Mt Buller is predominantly a pedestrian/skier dominated resort and this strongly influences the character and ambience of the Village. The completion of New Summit Road has provided the opportunity to remove vehicle access from the existing Summit Road alignment and create a new pedestrian precinct.

Vehicle movement can cause conflict with pedestrians and skiers on the road system, compromising safety for pedestrians and skiers, particularly in adverse weather conditions.

Infrastructure

The water, sewerage, gas, refuse disposal, electricity and communications infrastructure of Mt Buller Alpine Resort is currently able to service peak periods. The existing sewerage treatment plant is located on the eastern fringe of the Village. It is, however, operating at capacity. An upgrade is planned to enable servicing of 8,000 occupied beds and a peak day time visitor population of 15,000.

The Mt Buller Resort is serviced by a reticulated water system. Water supply for the Village and for snow making is obtained from Boggy Creek that flows into the Delatite River. Increased development within the Village and ski fields will place greater demands on the water supply to the Resort. Additional demands are also likely to result from the needs of the snow making facilities to have ski fields at their optimum capacity.

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 Mirrimbah. There are future plans to upgrade the line between the Mansfield zone substation and Mirrimbah to 66kV. The reticulation system within the Village is being progressively relocated from an above ground system to an underground system.