

21.06 MT HOTHAM STRATEGIC STATEMENT

21.06-1 RESORT PROFILE

Location

Mt Hotham Alpine Resort (the Resort) is one of Victoria's premier alpine recreation destinations. It holds the unique position of being the highest alpine village in Australia, with a summit elevation of 1861 metres. The Resort is located towards the southern end of the Great Dividing Range, approximately 365 km north-east of Melbourne and 520 km south-west of Canberra.

Access from Melbourne to the Resort is generally by the Great Alpine Road, either from the west via Wangaratta and Harrietville or from the east via Bairnsdale and Omeo. The recent completion of a commercial airport at Horsehair Plain, approximately 20 km south-east of Mt Hotham, provides an alternative to road travel. The airport has greatly increased the accessibility of the Resort to Victorian, interstate and overseas visitors as it provides commuter jet links with major Australian capital cities.

Mt Hotham is located at the headwaters of four major rivers. Terrain in the Resort area ranges in elevation from 1060 to 1861 metres. The area comprises sharp and slightly rounded peaks connected by ridgelines that are incised by steep watercourses and gullies. The Resort is constructed along the main ridgeline, which provides visitors with outstanding views of the surrounding region.

The Resort covers an area of approximately 3450 hectares, the majority of which is Crown Land, and is bounded on all sides by the Alpine National Park. The ski field comprises 245 hectares, or 7% of the total Resort area.

Regional Context

The Resort is a key focus for tourism in north-eastern Victoria. It is a fundamental part of Tourism Victoria's 'Legends, Wine and the High Country' and 'Lakes and Wilderness' tourist regions. The Resort is also a central focus of the Great Alpine Road tourist route and has strong links with nearby towns along the route, including Bright (56 km north-west of the Resort), Harrietville (38 km north-west), Dinner Plain (12 km south-east) and Omeo (56 km south-east). The Resort is an important asset not only to the surrounding region but also to Victoria as a whole. It provides recreational opportunities and environmental values to both the local and wider community. The Resort generates significant seasonal employment for residents of nearby towns, particularly Bright and Harrietville. Nearby towns also gain economic benefit through the provision of goods, services and facilities to businesses operating on the mountain. The Resort generates investment opportunities in hotels, infrastructure and visitor facilities, resulting in both direct and indirect benefits in terms of construction and employment.

Natural Environment

Climatic conditions

The snowline for Mt Hotham is approximately 1400 metres. Average total annual precipitation at Mt Hotham, including both snowfall and rainfall, is 1494 mm. Snowfalls occur on an average of 75.4 days annually. The average maximum snow depth is 1500 mm at an elevation of 1845 metres. Snowfalls that create and maintain a persistent snow cover usually begin in mid June and continue intermittently until early September. South facing slopes are capable of retaining snow for an extended period.

Mt Hotham has a summer daily mean temperature of 11.1°C whilst in winter it is -1.0°C.

The prevailing wind across the Bogong High Plains and Mt Hotham is from the north-west. South-easterly winds, often associated with fog and mist, are also quite common.

Flora, fauna and geological resources

The Resort is an integral part of a unique environment that contains a variety of rare fauna, flora and alpine communities.

The sedimentary rock and shallow organic loams that generally comprise the rock and soil types at Mt Hotham are susceptible to erosion if vegetation is removed. The exceptions are the small mounds of basalt and areas of basalt boulder scree scattered throughout the Resort area. This scree forms an important foundation of the Mountain Pygmy-possum (*Burramys parvus*) habitat.

Snow Gum woodlands, found sometimes in association with small areas of sub-alpine heathlands, mosslands and grasslands, are widely distributed throughout the Resort at elevations of between 1400 m and 1700 m. Herbfields, heathlands and grasslands are generally found on the most exposed areas of the Resort (peaks and ridge lines), with wet heathlands, mosslands (bogs) and sedge lands being usually located in drainage lines or wet depressions. Areas of snowpatch communities are also present where snow remains the longest. Communities of *Podocarpus* heathland, located near the summit of Mt Higginbotham, Mt Loch and Spargos Spur, form a significant element of the Mountain Pygmy-possum habitat.

The *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* caters for the preservation of rare or endangered species through a process of listing flora and fauna which are in a demonstrable state of decline likely to lead to extinction, or which are significantly prone to future threats which are likely to result in extinction.

The Resort contains species that are listed as threatened on Schedule 2 of the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*, including:

Fauna

- Mountain Pygmy-possum (*Burramys parvus*)
- Alpine She-oak Skink (*Cyclodomorphus praealtus*)
- Alpine Bog Skink (*Pseudemoia cryodroma*)

Flora

- Mountain Daisy (*Brachyscome tenuiscapa*)
- Wire-head Sedge (*Carex cephalotes*)
- Dwarf Sedge (*Carex paupera*)
- Silky Daisy (*Celmisia sericophylla*)
- Rock Tussock-grass (*Poa saxicola*)
- Fairy Bluebell (*Wahlenbergia densifolia*)

Communities

- Alpine Bog Community
- Alpine Snowpatch Community
- Herbland Community
- Fen (Bog pool) Community

The Mountain Pygmy-possum (*Burramys parvus*) is also listed as a threatened species under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

Tourism & Recreation

Resort visitors

The Resort has experienced consistent growth in winter visitation over the past two decades, from 180,000 visitor days in 1981 to 348,000 in 2000. The introduction of large scale snowmaking at the Resort in 1998 has greatly increased the quality and length of the snow season. A variety of other factors have also contributed to the steady increase in visitor numbers. These include the construction of new quad lifts, which has opened up a greater variety of terrain for skiers of all abilities; a decrease in road travel time to the Resort, due to the sealing of the Great Alpine Road; and the development of Mt Hotham Airport. The visitor experience is further enhanced by the provision of direct access to the ski slopes of Falls Creek, which is provided via a helicopter link.

In 2000 the majority of visitors to the Resort were from Melbourne (76% of all visitors). Twenty four percent of visitors were day trippers, whilst the remaining 76% stayed overnight on the mountain. Overnight visitors stayed an average of 5.04 nights.

Tourism and recreation activities

The primary attraction of Mt Hotham is as a tourist destination during winter months. The Resort has developed historically as a resort for “serious” skiers. The steep topography means that the majority of downhill runs cater for intermediate to advanced skiers and snowboarders. The ski field area was doubled in 1997 to 245 hectares, with the opening of the Mary’s Slide/Orchard area. A total of 13 ski lifts are provided.

In addition to downhill skiing facilities, the Resort provides approximately 35 kilometres of marked and groomed cross-country ski trails. Cross-country skiers can also access additional marked and maintained trails outside of the Resort boundaries. These trails connect with Dinner Plain and the surrounding Alpine National Park. The Resort contains a number of walking tracks that are used by hikers during the summer months. These walking tracks extend beyond the Resort boundaries into the adjoining Alpine National Park.

Access trails and cross country tracks double as walking and mountain bike tracks during summer months. Some of these tracks also form part of essential access routes for fire management and ski field infrastructure maintenance. Other outdoor recreational activities include fishing and horse riding. Outdoor facilities are limited to picnic and BBQ facilities. The range of entertainment and shopping facilities available during summer months is restricted, as many businesses close over this period. The current lack of choice in facilities and activities means that the majority of summer visitors are day trippers, rather than overnight or long term visitors.

Settlement

The Resort is home to approximately 20 permanent residents. The existing developed area of the Resort provides accommodation for approximately 4600 people in a range of public and private facilities. These include, lodges, serviced apartments and ski clubs. Accommodation is currently provided in two distinct and physically separate areas: Hotham Village and Davenport. Private accommodation, particularly club based, is generally concentrated in the Davenport area, whilst commercial accommodation is concentrated at Hotham Village.

Hotham Village comprises primarily commercial style accommodation that has developed at a relatively high density (up to 6 stories). The majority of buildings have all weather road access as they are constructed directly adjoining the Great Alpine Road.

Development within the Davenport area is less intensive than Hotham Village. Buildings are generally between 2 and 3 storeys in height. They are generously spaced and are well articulated in both plan and elevation. This gives the area an “informal” character, where the landscape, trees and views dominate over the built form. Sites adjoining the Great Alpine Road have all weather road access but those behind the road do not.

A range of visitor services are provided on the mountain, including a Resort Management administration centre, restaurants and cafes, supermarkets and service facilities such as a medical centre, police station and fire station. Hotham Village is the centre for retail and entertainment activities, with the exception of some secondary service and retail facilities which are located at Davenport. The facilities at Davenport primarily serve the local needs of the precinct, rather than the wider Hotham community.

Dinner Plain

The village of Dinner Plain is located on the Great Alpine Road approximately 11 km south-east of the Resort boundary. It is integrally linked with the Resort as it provides additional permanent and visitor accommodation, as well as a range of complementary recreational activities and commercial services. It is expected to ultimately have a capacity of 3500 - 4000 beds. The Alpine School was established in May 2000 at Dinner Plain for Year 9 students from across the state. The residential school provides programs focusing on enterprise and leadership. During winter months the majority of visitors to Dinner Plain commute to Mt Hotham for the day by either car or bus.

Dinner Plain is also a focus during the summer months for visitors. It has hotels and restaurants that stay open all year round, as well as a range of outdoor recreation activities. These facilities attract corporate and convention customers, as well as overnight/weekly visitors.

Heritage

A study of aboriginal occupation in Australia's south-east highlands found that the major highland exploitation zone for indigenous people involved land located between 700m and 1,100m above sea level. Occupation within the zone was characterised by the presence of upper altitude base camps, smaller 'satellite' camps and single use or specific camps. No Aboriginal sites have been recorded within the Resort.

The Resort has a rich European heritage dating back to 1843, when John Mitchell first visited the Bogong High Plains. Movement of stock was the most common use of area for some time until gold was discovered in the river valleys surrounding Hotham. Skiers have used the Mt Hotham snowfields since about 1925, with accommodation available at Mt St Bernard and Hotham Heights. Subsequent developments continued around Hotham Heights and cattlemen's huts were used for refuge and overnight accommodation. Later, the Cleve Cole huts and Summit huts were built for cross country skiers and bushwalkers.

A Hut constructed in 1928-1929 by prospector William Spargo (Spargo's Hut) in the Golden Point area east of Swindlers Creek still stands. Spargo and others prospected in the area, and there is a small filled mine shaft 150m west of Spargo's Hut. Snow pole lines, originally established by mining prospectors, were renewed by ski tourers.

The *Heritage Act 1995* provides for the declaration of historic buildings and places. Spargo's Hut is the only building within the Mt Hotham Alpine Resort listed on the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR Number H1609).

Movement

Vehicular access to the Resort is via the Great Alpine Road from the west via Harrietteville and the east via Omeo. The road is open throughout the year, with snow clearing as required during the declared snow season. In severe weather conditions the through road may be closed on the Harrietteville side for short periods. Access roads within the Resort are unsealed and cannot be accessed during the snow season, other than by oversnow vehicles.

The majority of visitors to the Resort currently travel by either car or bus. Car parking is at a premium on peak days, when the number of visitors may exceed 6,500. Bus services are provided from Melbourne to the Resort during the ski season. The Resort currently provides approximately 1550 car spaces and parking for 30 buses.

Recent transport initiatives have improved access to the Resort and resulted in a more efficient "mass" transport system. The introduction of air services at the Mount Hotham Airport, 20 km south-east of the Resort, has greatly increased the accessibility of the Resort to Victorian, interstate and overseas visitors. A shuttle bus provides direct access from the airport to the Resort. Improvements have also been made to bus services that link the Resort with the nearby towns of Harrietteville and Dinner Plain.

The majority of car spaces are provided in four car parks located at the eastern end of the Resort: Whitey's Car Park, Slatey Car Park, Corner Car Park and Wire Plain Car Park. Further car parking is available directly adjoining the Great Alpine Road, particularly between Hotham Village and Davenport. A shuttle bus service provides a connection between the car parks, Hotham Village, Davenport, the ski fields, the cross-country trailheads and the Biathlon Range located at Whisky Flat.

Infrastructure

Water supply for the Mt Hotham Alpine Resort and for snowmaking is obtained from Swindlers Creek. Water is currently pumped to four storage tanks at Mt Higginbotham and reticulated throughout the Resort. Two weirs have been constructed at Swindlers Creek. One weir provides temporary storage for potable water, which is transferred via a pumping system to the permanent storage tanks at Mt Higginbotham. The second weir is designed to provide for extensive snow

making, which is planned for the Loch car park. A self-contained snow making system, which draws water from the potable water supply trails on Mt Higginbotham, has been constructed in the Davenport area. Water supply is the primary limiting factor that determines resort size.

Mt Hotham is serviced by a sewerage treatment plant that discharges secondary wastewater to the Dargo River catchment. Three accommodation sites below the Great Alpine Road are not connected to the sewer. The reticulation system is predominantly gravity fed. The Resort gas supply is located in the service node. All sites have the ability to be connected to gas. The Resort is also well provided for in terms of electricity, (since the installation of a second electricity cable from Springs Saddle), fibre optics and telecommunications infrastructure.