

Comments by HFNC on the SGSC Volcanic Trail Masterplan Sept. 2021

30 September 2021

General Comment

We found this plan for a geological trail informative and well executed. There are, however, a few points that we will argue over and a few matters of fact. While the latter are largely trivial, we mention them so you can amend the document and avoid attracting any distracting criticism later.

A significant weakness in this plan is the cursory mention (as a linkage, see p. 7) of the Hamilton-Coleraine Rail Trail. This trail, when it is properly developed, will provide an excellent opportunity as a corridor for walkers and cyclists to visit the Wannon Falls and to enjoy the remnant grasslands and woodlands along the way. This fits well with the intention of drawing visitors to the volcanic region and provides for off-road access to one of our major attractions, and one we consider as a worthy project to include in any tourist development within the Shire.

One major consideration that comes to mind regarding the costing of implementing the recommended developments is that this document does not include any provision for the ongoing cost to the Shire after the implementation of the **Volcanic Trail Masterplan**. These costs include the supervision of people in these reserves and the cost of repair and maintenance to the infrastructure that will be necessary with the anticipated increase in human use of the reserves. We know that the Shire and Parks Victoria are currently underfunded and understaffed with regards to maintaining the reserves and supervising people-behaviour in the reserves (e.g. preventing hoon behaviour and damage to the built and natural environment). We anticipate a much greater ongoing annual Shire budgetary investment will be needed to ensure the natural and developed features of these reserves are valued, respected and maintained to meet the expectations of residents and visitors alike.

Wannon Falls Scenic Reserve

- Removal of trees between car park and the falls (p. 63) – why? The Falls cannot be seen until one is almost upon them and the trees offer a ‘soft’ entrance to the Falls as well as providing shade along the path and habitat for native animals.
- Walk on south side of the river – the crossing of the river at the ‘swimming hole’ is only feasible in summer. There is a public road reserve almost opposite that does allow all-year access but that might require creating a parking area on the first part of that road reserve (no doubt most people would drive around to it).
- We are hesitant to endorse more disruption to the flora of this significant botanical reserve by installation of more trails. One that we think could be changed is that from the camping area to the Falls. This could be routed to pass along the pines boundary on the north side.
- The suggested construction of a trail from the Thomas Clark station across the river and back to the Falls is welcome but we think the route should go further south to take in the ascent along the narrow spur that begins at the far bend in the river. The passage along the spur gives great views across the Wannon Valley.
- The text suggests that the oval once was a native grassland used as a ceremonial meeting place by Aborigines. While it is possible that they did meet there, it was never a grassland. It was a Manna Gum woodland, the same as is now around on all sides. The site was cleared of trees a long time ago for the purposes of sport.
- There is no mention of the problem of woody weeds in the reserve – Sallow Wattle, Burgan (urgent action needed), Coastal Tea-tree, Gosford Wattle, Hedge Wattle (a bad pest there), Bridal Creeper, Ixia, Freesia etc. There is much more to this reserve than mere geology.

Nigretta Falls Scenic Reserve

- Again, we are happy with most of the recommendations for this reserve. One query is the need to provide a camping facility.
- Trail from Nigretta to Wannon Falls – we believe, on the basis of past flora surveys along the Wannon and dealings with the former Lands Department, that several sections fronting the Wannon are not Crown lands. How is it proposed to deal with that when a path is to be constructed? Our club did conduct such a walk many years ago and found some difficulties with the low-lying section a couple of km before the old railway bridge. Parts were under water and the course of the river was a little obscure.

Byaduk Caves

- These ‘caves’ are, in fact, in the Mt Napier State Park. That is not indicated anywhere in your document.
- Our main comment is in relation to the future site of a toilet, shelters and picnic area. We do NOT think it should be near the sink holes. We would prefer it to be on the northern area, not far from the present car park as one walks through the gate. The presence of buildings and other construction should not be allowed to intrude on the approach to the collapsed lava tubes.
- Access to Harmans No.1 cave could be made safe by the provision of a metal staircase, dropping to a platform that allows visitors to walk into the dark zone of the cave without disturbing the ferns that once flourished in the protected zone of gloom. Unfortunately most of the ferns have been lost from that zone as a consequence of trampling. That could be relieved by installation of a fairly narrow platform that allows cavers to reach beyond the ferns. Bats once inhabited this cave, which extends almost 100 m, but it is a popular caving place for visitors, including many children.
- We agree with the provision of a walking trail past Church Cave to The Great Barrier, steering clear of the Flower Pot and Fern Cave. Most of the caves once had Soft Treeferns but most of the ferns were taken out by home gardeners many years ago.

Harmans Valley Lookout

- We are surprised at the suggestion that the information is ‘dry’. We think it is factual and largely informative. We would NOT support the ‘dumbing down’ of the information. As you note (p. 3) visitors are interested in geology and earth history.
- There is at least one error in the information on one sign – the age of the lava flow is not 7,000 years.
- The question of ideal size and shape of the information ‘sheets’ is debatable.
- We agree that the plans for a re-modelled car park and viewing stage (p. 84) would be a great improvement. It would also allow a better view of the lava field below.

Wallacedale Tumuli

- Viewing place to pull off the road on the hillside on Old Crusher Rd above the tumuli – that is an excellent idea (and something that people do now).
- Aborigine stone houses are found on adjacent land, as are the remnants of old swamps.
- A case could be made for acquiring the land with tumuli on both sides of the present road reserve and Crown Land block. That would allow more than just geology to be inspected by visitors it would bring in more Aborigine content.
- The term ‘lave blister’ is used (p. 29) but should be replaced by lava mound.

Mt Napier State Park

- The age of eruption is thought now to be around 45,000 years, not 32,000 (see Prof. Ray Cass article), based on newer methods.[the article is on the HFNC website]
- The understorey in the Tapoc forest is NOT Blackwood, Black Wattle or Cherry Ballart (these are mid-level trees); it is Austral Bracken, Poa Tussock, Tree Violet, Sweet Bursaria, Goodia medicaginea, Sticky Boobiella, Cassinia, Tree Everlasting, etc. You will find mention of plants and animal species in *The Victorian Naturalist* (1997) Vol 114, p. 52-65 (‘Mammals and birds of the Mount Napier State Park’ – PR Bird. [The HFNC website has this publication] (the HFNC website also has the native species list of AC Beaglehole, Elmore and Bird])
- The birds you have listed on p.33 and p. 94 are NOT common! They are UNCOMMON there.
- Dogs are permitted in some State Parks as long as they are on lead and controlled at all times. Horses are allowed in some State Parks where they must keep to the roads (p.33). We have strong reservations about allowing dogs and horses into the park, particularly because there is currently no supervision of the activities of the animals or their animals. Impacts on flora and fauna must be considered (as noted on p.94).
- 2WD vehicles routinely travel on Menzels Tk, as far as Menzels Pit and the start of the walk to the summit. There are, however, a couple of ‘jump-ups’ where some engineering is needed to remove the rock bulges in the track. Menzels Tk around the mount is not currently suitable for 2WD vehicles.

- Rarely is there water on the Menzels Tk (or any other in the forest) – it is very well drained and never boggy. The photo depicts an aberration and should be removed because it suggests a difficulty that simply does not exist.
- If a camp site was to be developed at Menzels Pit – and it is an obvious place – the situation of an escape route arises, in the case of fire starting in the north or west. This would easily be resolved by upgrading the boundary fire trail on the north boundary of the former Mt Napier Reserve so that vehicles could leave by that route to Mt Napier Rd.
- We do NOT endorse the development of Mountain Bike trails on any slope of Tapoc. We are strongly opposed to the concept of opening up more tracks that will add to the weed problem and fragmentation of the reserve. There are many trails already present through the forest and around the boundaries that the bikes can use. Trail bikes would inevitably use any new trails and there would be no-one there to stop them.
- The proposed walking track from Menzels Pit to Byaduk Caves should run past Elmore's Cone and the Natural Bridge – 2 very significant volcanic features. These lie together about 200 m south of the E-W stone fence and old Fire Tk that runs from Tapoc to the Cole Tk, hitting that at the corner with private land.
- We strongly urge you to, wherever possible, utilise existing trails instead of making new ones.
- One area that you noted (p. 90) was the proximity of the Devils Hole to Menzels Pit parking area. This is a fantastic crater only 400 m north along the boundary fence. We note that half of the crater is actually on private land and the other half is now also fenced into the private land – we have drawn PV's attention to this over many years and it needs to be resolved. Your map (p. 91) is not correct.
- We believe that the Crown Land boundaries near the Boral quarries on the SE side (p.36) are not drawn in the correct place (one quarry in the 1970s encroached upon the reserve).

Mount Rouse (Kolor)

- The statement that the age of basalt in Mt Rouse is 1.8 m years is misleading. The age of the lava flow from the Mt has been variously determined to be from 280,000 years to (we think) about 350,000 years. That marks what we would consider to be the age of the volcano. What you are referring to is the older basalt upon which Mt Rouse sits. Flows like that occurred widely in the region at about 2 mya, overlying lava flows of around 4.5 mya (as at Lake Linlithgow).
- Mention is made, again, of the need for 'a simple explanation' in signage. Since this tour is intended for people interested in geology, we think one needs to be factual and not balk at being too complex. Visitors do not have to read everything!
- A quarry on the SE side has some interesting things to show (p. 98) – including layers of ash and volcanic 'bombs'. Why restrict that to special interest groups? Quarries are excellent educational sites for visual interpretation of the structure and formation of a volcano. Visitors are unlikely to cause significant damage to such areas.
- We support the majority of aims for the site, including a mountain bike trail because the floristic value of this area is relatively poor. A trail could also be run around the whole mountain side.

Other Issues

- Since it is on the general route from Kolor to Hamilton, why not consider Lake Linlithgow? This shows the impact of a 2 mya lava flow creating a terminal lake when it erupted through older basalt but leaving an area uncovered. There are cliffs on the northern side that display intricate weathering patterns. There is good access off North Lakes Rd and a potential parking area where that road diverts away from the lake. In addition, this lake is now one of Birdlife Australia's 6 priority site for important migratory birds in Victoria. It is now recognized in the National Directory of Important Migratory Shorebird Habitat. A relief from pure geology would not go amiss with most visitors!
- Again, why not include Mt Baimbridge, a mid-age volcano, on the tour. It is conveniently located on the run from Nigretta and has a parking area and excellent views to the Red Gum landscape in the west.

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