



Spectacular mountains, rocky trails, snow gums, and High Country heritage. If that gets your heart beating then the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing is for you.

It is **one of Victoria's iconic walks**, according to Parks Victoria.

### How far is it from Melbourne?

The trailhead at the Rocky Valley Dam, near Falls Creek, is approximately 389km from Melbourne - about a 5-hour drive. It's around 376km from Hotham Heights back to Melbourne, or a 4.5-hour drive. There are also several public transport options available to both Falls Creek and Hotham ex Melbourne and Sydney.

### Where to buy supplies

Falls Creek is a ski town. It's at its peak during the winter months. There is a small Foodworks supermarket in the village that is open limited hours between October and February, as well as several cafes and restaurants. You're better off buying supplies in Myrtleford or Bright - both have large supermarkets. Hotham has a small supermarket, general store, and a few summer dining options. Again, operating hours are limited.

### Falls-Hotham Alpine Crossing in summer

We completed this 37km hike over 4 days in February 2016. After a scenic drive up from Mt Beauty and passing Falls Creek Resort, we camped the first chilly night alongside our vehicles near to Rocky Valley Reservoir, inside the Alpine National Park.

The trailhead is an information board at the end of the causeway crossing Rocky Valley Reservoir. Ages, abilities and hiking styles varied in our group, with rucksack weights ranging from 10kg to well over 30kg for the gourmet eaters! After stuffing every last space in the rucksacks with packets of nuts (free, courtesy of a local supermarket), we saddled up and began the four-day hike to Hotham.

### Day 1

The trail initially ascends a scrubby knoll, providing a panoramic view of the deep blue reservoir surrounded by stark white snow gums. Lunch was taken alongside Langford Gap Hut. Hopes of eating the trout seen swimming in a nearby aqueduct were quickly dampened when we realised nobody had brought fishing line!



*The start. Only 37km/4-days to go!*

A visit to Wallace's Hut, the oldest cattleman's hut in the High Country, is accessible 500m off the track, about 2km past Langford Gap. The hut is surrounded by gnarly snow gums. Dark but warm inside, and with a separate room for the cattle!

## Staying overnight at Cope Hut

The weather was sunny and pleasant the whole day, only becoming muggy in the late afternoon. We covered 14km on the first day to stay overnight at Cope Hut. The alpine huts themselves are actually for emergency use only, so Parks Victoria has provided camping platforms nearby, as well as a water tank, and a long-drop toilet.

Evening entertainment was several games of Uno next to the tents and then eating dinner. Choice of cooking stove was split evenly between Trangia spirit stoves and MSR Pocket Rocket-style gas cookers. Both methods performed well, with gas being slightly quicker to boil water, and the Trangia being bulky but negating the need for additional pots or pans.

## Day 2

The weather closed in the following morning, with light rain and fog surrounding us as we departed Cope Hut. Thunderstorms were predicted for later that day. Those with store-bought rucksack rain covers were quick to depart while the rest of us fashioned covers from a roll of black garbage bags! The morning's walk was true Bogong High Plains: flat, grassy and just enough rain to wet the ends of your raincoat sleeves.





As we ascended Mt Jim to stop for lunch, a pack of wild brumbies was spotted, only to find upon them getting nearer they were, in fact, being ridden by a horse-touring group. All this contributed to the scene feeling very 'The Man From Snowy River'!



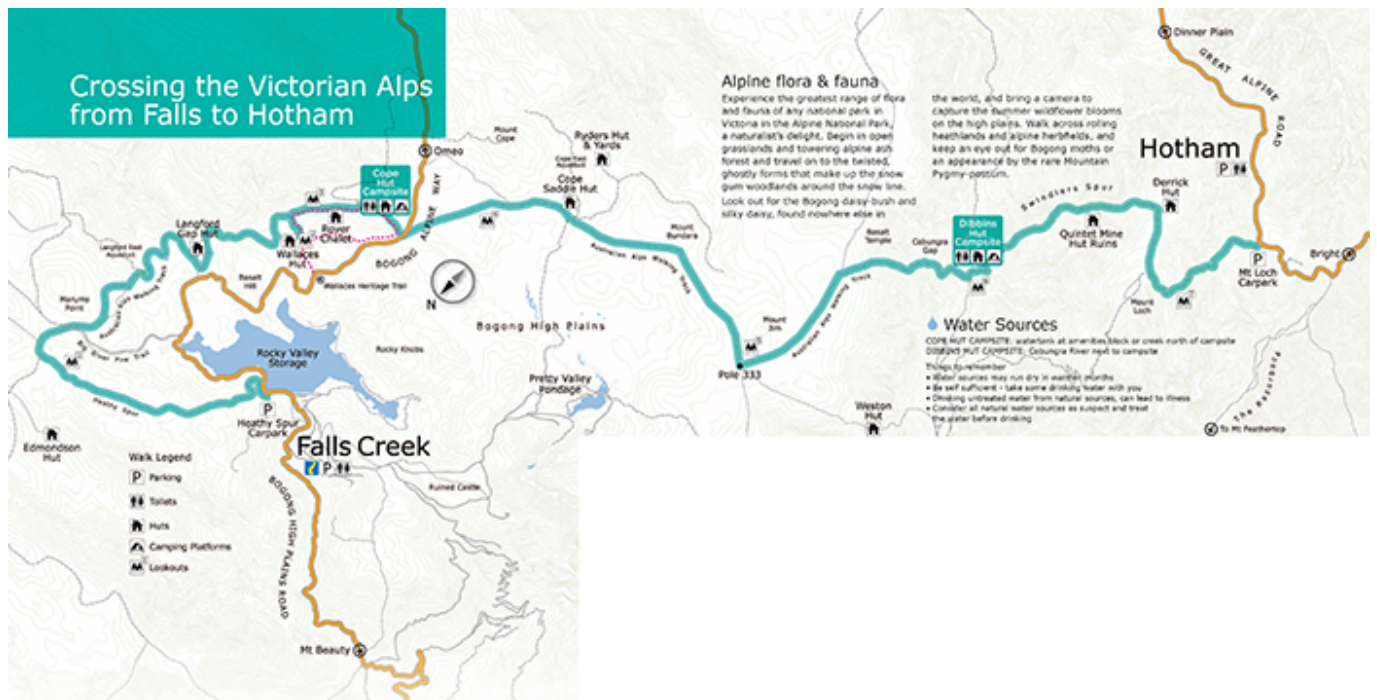
*A beautiful, big snow gum.*

## **Dibbins Hut**

The flat Bogong High Plains terrain continued for an hour or so after lunch. A long ridge descent through thick forest then brought us to charming Dibbins Hut, nestled in the bottom of a valley. The headwaters of Cobungra creek run alongside, providing crystal clear drinking water (I boiled it to be safe) and the enticement of another fresh trout! Thankfully the storm forecast had been pushed back to the next day's evening, so we kept out of the tents and huddled around the campfire.

Firewood collection is permitted around these campsites but is increasingly difficult to find – we had to walk about 300m to collect ours. Always be aware of your environmental impacts. The night's camp was enjoyed with more raucous (within reason) card games, and several rounds of coffee and teas to keep us warm as the dew descended.

Parks Victoria has done an excellent job to install a drop toilet nearby, considering machine/equipment access to the site looked fairly impossible.



This is the route the crossing takes. Note the map is upside down. It's facing south. Falls Creek is actually east of Hotham. Image Credit: **Tourism North East.**

## Day 3

The third day began with a gruelling ascent up Swindlers Spur. Coffee perkiness from the night before soon wore off so we took frequent rest stops, giving us time to face away from the spur and observe the impressive views of snow-gum covered mountains to the east! Once the spur flattened out a bit, we stopped for lunch. This was an assortment of wraps, tuna, carrots and of course scroggin or trail mix.

The quality of your chosen scroggin has a big impact on morale. Ours consisted of chocolate bullets, skittles, liquorice allsorts, peanuts, almonds, and pepitas. Might as well forget about your waistline on hikes like this - you'll probably lose weight anyway!

## Arriving at Derrick's Hut

Expecting thunderstorms, we covered only 6km from Dibbins Hut to arrive at Derrick's Hut - the interior 'luxuriously' appointed compared to the previous huts, plus a sensational toilet-with-a-view! We again used the fire pit and sat around to watch the sunset - deep orange against the backdrop of mountains and valleys.





*One of the many ski fields in the region. Interesting landscape, eh?*

## Day 4

The next morning three of us set off at 8 am through bleary eyes and groaning muscles to initiate the car shuffle, via a short 4km hike into Hotham. Looking back along the trail, layer-after-layer of blue mountains could be seen toward the north. It was simply spectacular and well worth the early start! We met our transport and returned to the cars at Falls Creek trailhead. Then we went back to Hotham to pick up the rest of the group.

Having external support for car shuffles was very convenient for this point-to-point hike, especially during summer as the ski resorts are quiet and may not be able to provide transport for hikers.

The storm we expected at the start of the hike had its forecast pushed back every day! Finally, it rolled in, literally the minute we were hopping into cars at Hotham! Dense fog (<10m visibility) and heavy rains blanketed us, making a sketchy descent down the windy alpine roads to Harrietville. How lucky we were not to be hiking in that deluge!

The charming town of Bright was our stop for a late lunch. The scene was reminiscent of winter Germany. We sat in a warm bakery with coffee and the smell of delicious pastries, while it poured with rain outside.

On the drive back to Adelaide, we were rewarded with a spectacular lightning storm across the vast plains around Swan Hill. What an ending to an excellent hiking trip with a legendary crew of people.

***Have you done any hikes in the Victorian High Country?***