

Conservation and repairs to huts along the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing

Alpine National Park (Bogong High Plains to Mount Hotham)

1. Situation

Funding has been allocated to support conservation works and repairs of huts along the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing (FHAC). The purpose of this document is to inform this restoration planning by providing clear, site-specific information on the historical context, physical condition, and recommended works for each hut. The High Country Huts included highlight some of the area's unique history: from pastoral activity to early ski touring, and the Kiewa Valley hydro-electric scheme. They reflect a remote and earlier way of life and provide insight into the resilience and adaptability of those who worked, travelled, and lived in the Victorian Alps.

The huts included in the proposed works are:

Wallaces Hut

Built in 1889 by the Wallace brothers, Wallaces Hut is the oldest surviving High Country Hut in the Victorian Alps. It was originally used by cattlemen and later repurposed by the State Electricity Commission (SEC). It is a registered heritage site with high cultural heritage value. It is not intended for overnight shelter, but remains a popular historical landmark.

Cope Hut

Constructed in 1929 for the Ski Club of Victoria, Cope Hut was one of the first huts designed specifically for ski touring. Its architectural heritage and intact form make it an important early recreational hut. Although still functional as an emergency shelter, minor works are needed to ensure it remains weatherproof and accessible.

Cope Saddle Hut

Built around 1958 by the SEC, Cope Saddle Hut served as a patrol hut for the Cope water races. It was recently rebuilt to reflect its original form and is now in excellent condition, requiring only reinstatement of the fireplace to enhance its use as a weather refuge.

Langford Gap Hut

Erected in 1960 by the SEC as a patrol shelter for the Langford aqueducts, the hut was relocated slightly in the early 1990s. It is now in poor condition, with rotting weatherboards, aged framing, and a poor interior. It requires significant restoration work to ensure ongoing safety and shelter functionality.

Westons Hut

Originally built in 1932 by the Weston family, Westons Hut has been rebuilt multiple times following fire damage, most recently in 2010 by volunteers and Parks Victoria. It is currently in good condition, with regular maintenance activities helping to keep the structure sound and true to its traditional design.

Blairs Hut

First built in the early 1920s and reconstructed after a fire in 1932, Blairs Hut is a traditional log hut located near the Kiewa River. Its design closely resembles that of Dibbins Hut. It is in poor condition with deteriorating logs and roof, and requires significant restoration in order to remain viable as a shelter and historical asset.

Dibbins Hut

Located on the Cobungra River, Dibbins Hut dates back to the late 1890s. It has been rebuilt several times through its history, with the most recent restoration work occurring in 1999. It has great historical significance and popularity among hikers, but now it is deteriorating and requires restoration works to ensure its structural integrity and ongoing use.

Pretty Valley Hut

A former SEC patrol refuge, Pretty Valley Hut is situated near a popular camping and horse yard area. Originally built in the early 1930s and reconstructed in 1984, it is now in deteriorating condition. The hut requires restoration works to address structural issues while preserving its simple alpine character.

It should be noted, while Dibbins and Pretty Valley huts are not located directly along the FHAC route, they have been included in this proposal due to their close proximity to the trail. It is timely to undertake works on these huts at this time, as the current condition of both presents a clear opportunity to deliver meaningful and urgent restoration works.

Tawonga Huts

Tawonga Huts is a group of four historic huts located on the Bogong High Plains, about 4 km from Pretty Valley Pondage. Originally built by cattlemen in the late 1800s, the current huts date mostly from the 1950s and include structures relocated from nearby areas. The site has long been associated with high country grazing and remains a popular stop for walkers and riders. While these huts are simple and rustic, they are in relatively good condition considering their age. Minor repair works will help to conserve the huts for the future.

Ryders Yards

Ryders Yards, also known as Campbells Yards, is located on the Bogong High Plains, approximately 1.5 km from the FHAC from Cope Saddle Hut. The area was originally used for sheep grazing in the late 1800s by the Campbell brothers. There are four huts in total, with varying designs, and they were used for accommodation and storage. The huts require minor restoration works to their interiors in order to remain safe for public use.

2. Mission

To undertake conservation and repair works on key High Country Huts along and near the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing (FHAC), with the aim of preserving cultural heritage significance, improving visitor safety, and ensuring the long-term structural integrity, and functionality of each site. To undertake conservation and repair works on key High Country Huts along and near the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing (FHAC), with the aim of preserving cultural heritage, improving visitor safety, and ensuring the long-term conservation, structural integrity, and functionality of each site.

3. Execution

Timing

The timing of these conservation repair and maintenance tasks will depend on the constraints of the weather. Due to the inundation of snow, it is unsuitable to schedule these works during the winter months. Therefore, works should be planned from mid-spring to mid-autumn.

Personnel: Parks Victoria and the Victoria High Country Huts Association

Whilst Parks Victoria carries out routine maintenance as resources allow, the task of conserving alpine huts across the Alpine area generally far exceeds available capacity. In this context, the Victorian High Country Huts Association (VHCHA) plays a critical role in safeguarding the future of these structures. Parks Victoria works in close partnership with the VHCHA to support the ongoing maintenance and conservation of huts across the Alpine National Park. This collaboration is long-standing and highly effective, with VHCHA volunteers regularly coordinating working bees in consultation with Parks Victoria to deliver priority maintenance works on public land.

Established in the aftermath of the 2003 alpine bushfires, the VHCHA is a volunteer-based organisation committed to the conservation, maintenance, and rebuilding of huts in Victoria's high country. Their members comprise of skilled volunteers who are passionate about alpine heritage. The association has been instrumental in restoring and maintaining huts since its founding, contributing to the successful rebuild of nearly 20 huts and regular maintenance and care of many more. The long-standing partnership of Parks Victoria with the VHCHA, formalised through agreements, has ensured that traditional bushcraft techniques, bush carpentry and hut building skills are not being lost but instead are being transmitted through generations.

Importantly, all works carried out by the VHCHA are guided by the principles of the *Burra Charter*—Australia's nationally accepted framework for heritage conservation. The Burra Charter outlines a best-practice approach to understanding, protecting, and managing culturally significant places. Its core philosophy is one of minimal intervention, ensuring that changes are only made to repair, secure, or appropriately adapt a place so that its significance is retained over time.

In line with the Burra Charter, the VHCHA:

- Undertakes detailed assessments to understand the cultural significance of each hut before planning works;
- Involves communities connected to each site
- Prioritises the use of traditional building methods and materials
- Avoids unnecessary changes to a structure's original form and setting
- Keeps clear records of all conservation decisions and physical works
- Supports educational interpretation that reflects the hut's historical context.

By adhering to these principles, the VHCHA ensures that conservation maintenance and restoration works not only prolong the functional life of each hut but also protect its cultural, architectural, and historical integrity.

Furthermore, hut conservation repair and maintenance is undertaken in accordance with the Greater Alpine National Parks Hut Maintenance Manual (Parks Victoria 2022) and the Letter of Cooperation between Parks Victoria and the VHCHA (see below).

Funding through the FHAC project will support the delivery of some of the identified conservation and repairs program outlined in this document and the accompanying Overview of Huts document. It is intended that VHCHA will play a central role in delivering many of the works. Their established volunteer network, with its deep knowledge of traditional High Country Hut construction, and demonstrated commitment to heritage conservation make the VHCHA an ideal delivery partner. This continued partnership ensures that works are not only completed effectively but in a way that honours the historical and cultural significance of these unique high country places.

Access to hut sites

Access to the huts is by Management Vehicle Only (MVO) tracks and walking tracks. Gate keys have been provided to the VHCHA by Parks Victoria to allow access. 4WD vehicles are required to access these sites due to challenging conditions, but are also necessary to tow trailers carrying essential tools and equipment for the restoration activities where tracks exist. All vehicles remain on existing tracks to avoid damage to vegetation.

Of all the huts in question, all are vehicle accessible except for Westons and Dibbins Hut. While vehicles can get in close proximity to the huts, a walk of approximately 2km is required. In recent times, PV has worked in collaboration with the VHCHA to fly tools and materials into Westons Hut via helicopter to ensure everything was on site for the working bee. It is expected that Dibbins Hut will also require loads to be sling-loaded into the site for the same reasons. District staff will inform helicopter crews of the most appropriate location to place loads, and this is usually close to the hut in camping areas; however, it should be noted that this is up to the pilot's discretion and can vary due to weather and site visitation. To avoid laydown areas, the flights are conducted close to working bees to ensure volunteers or staff can unpack a load immediately after sling loading. All loads will be relocated with the existing footprint on the building.

Laydown areas

During conservation and repair works, materials and tools will be stored in or directly beneath the hut structure, making full use of the existing building footprint. This includes storing items on the hut floor, under overhangs, or in sheltered areas beneath the structure where it is safe and practical to do so. If storing materials within or under the hut is not possible, they will be placed on nearby roads or access tracks, ensuring that no equipment is stored on undisturbed ground or in surrounding vegetation.

Accommodation and/or camping

Many of the huts have camping areas available on site, so the VHCHA has simply camped on site for the duration of the working bee (usually 2-3 days). If camping on site is not an option, the volunteers move to the closest available campsite.

Tools and equipment

The VHCHA employs a broad range of tools and equipment to support efficient and effective delivery of hut maintenance and restoration works. While they remain committed to using traditional building methods and materials, volunteers also make use of modern tools and equipment to improve safety, precision, and productivity during working bees. This includes the use of portable power tools, chainsaws, generators, safety gear, and hand tools tailored to timber and roofing work. These resources allow the team to complete complex tasks in remote locations while still ensuring that all construction practices align with heritage guidelines and the Burra Charter principles. This balance between historical integrity and practical efficiency ensures high-quality outcomes that respect both the past and the future of Victoria's alpine huts.

Materials

The restoration works will aim to use traditional materials that closely reflect the original construction to preserve the historical integrity and character of each hut. While traditional materials will be used where possible, this may not always be feasible due to limited availability, transport challenges to remote sites, or the need to replace hazardous materials, such as asbestos, with safe, modern alternatives. In such cases, modern materials that are durable, safe, and visually compatible will be used to maintain the look and function of the original structure. All material selections will align with the principles of the Burra Charter, ensuring heritage values are upheld while delivering practical, long-lasting outcomes.

Proposed Conservation and Repair Works

Please refer to the accompanying document - *Overview of High Country Huts (August 2025)* for specific information on each of the huts and conservation and repair works identified.

4. Administration

The Burra Charter

As previously mentioned, the Burra Charter (officially known as *The Australia ICOMOS Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance*) is a nationally recognised set of principles that guide heritage conservation practice in Australia. Rather than prescribing specific techniques, the Burra Charter outlines core principles and procedures to ensure conservation is respectful, informed, and appropriate. These include understanding a place's cultural significance before making changes, involving the communities connected to the site, retaining significant features and settings, using suitable expertise, and carefully recording any alterations. The Charter promotes a cautious, minimal-intervention approach, where only the work necessary to repair, secure, and ensure ongoing use is undertaken—so that the heritage and history of the place remain evident and meaningful into the future. This approach is central to the restoration philosophy of the VHCHA and underpins the methods used in all proposed works.

Parks Victoria and its project partners ensure that all works or activities to hut sites maximise protection and retention of early or original fabric associated with the huts and the conservation of existing details and elements. This philosophy has been captured in the *Greater Alpine National Parks Hut Maintenance Manual* (2022), the reference document used by Parks Victoria and the VHCHA for guiding conservation, repair and maintenance works to High Country Huts.

Heritage assessment

The National Heritage List for the Australian Alps National Parks and Reserves (Place ID 105891) includes the Alpine National Park. The Summary Statement of Significance (2008) for this National Heritage listed place includes mountain huts and stockman huts. Wallaces and Cope Huts are specifically referenced.

Wallaces Hut is also on the State Heritage Register (VHR H1616) and is listed and mapped as HO226 under the Heritage Overlay of the East Gippsland Planning Scheme.

Wallaces Hut has a Heritage Action Plan (2002) and a Conservation Plan (*McDougal & Vines, Heritage Architects* 2011). Being on the Victorian Heritage Register the Heritage Act General Exemptions (2022) allow repairs and maintenance including refixing, patching and/or the replacement of missing, damaged or deteriorated fabric that is beyond further maintenance.

The Alpine Planning Scheme lists Blair, Cleve Cole, Cope, Fitzgerald & Tawonga Huts as having local significance under its Heritage Overlays Schedule as HO2. While these are detailed in the heritage schedule, they are not mapped. As noted above, Cope Hut is located within the East Gippsland municipality and as such its' HO2 listing in the Alpine Planning Scheme has no effect. The East Gippsland Planning Scheme does not list or map Cope Hut as a heritage place under the Heritage Overlay.

For the other huts under Alpine's HO2 (i.e. Blair and Tawonga) the Heritage Overlay clause requires no planning permit for the carrying out of works, repairs and routine maintenance that do not change the appearance of the place or which is undertaken to the same details, specifications and materials.

Aboriginal cultural heritage or environmental impact assessments

It is anticipated that no Aboriginal Cultural Heritage or Environmental Impact Assessments will be required for the proposed works. All conservation and repair activities will occur within the existing footprint of each hut, with no excavations or ground disturbance. Laydown areas have been identified for all and are located in existing disturbed areas (i.e. building footprints or MVO track).

These huts were originally constructed using techniques, where the frame was typically placed directly on the ground without formal foundations. Wallaces, Blairs and Dibbins are examples of this. All are 'log cabin' style huts, and the foundation logs sit directly on the ground. Some huts do have building foundations in place, such as Cope Hut. For these huts the same foundation holes will be utilised for any stump replacement.

Confirmation that a cultural heritage assessment is not required will be determined through a submission through Parks Victoria's Aboriginal Heritage Assessment System (AHAS) prior to any works commencing.

Since the Victorian High Country Huts Association (VHCHA) was founded in 2003, similar restoration works have been delivered across numerous sites, and if any ground disturbance has been required, an Aboriginal Heritage Assessment System submission has been made. There have never been any Aboriginal cultural heritage or environmental impact issues in the past, and given this precedent, aligned with the low-impact nature of the proposed works that remain within the existing footprint of the buildings, it is highly unlikely that any of these works would trigger the need for more thorough assessments to be made.

Hut Maintenance Manual for the Greater Alpine National Park

Greater Alpine National Parks Hut Maintenance Manual (2022), is a comprehensive guide developed by Parks Victoria in collaboration with the VHCHA. It outlines policies, procedures, and best practices for the conservation, maintenance, and strategic management of high country huts within the Greater Alpine National Park.

The manual is divided into two parts: Operational Management and Strategic Planning. It covers maintenance procedures, safety requirements, and environmental considerations to heritage planning frameworks, legislative obligations, and partnership models. Notably, the manual reinforces the application of Burra Charter principles in heritage conservation and acknowledges the VHCHA as a key delivery partner. It also provides detailed guidance on working with volunteers, planning for bushfire preparedness, and managing cultural and natural values around huts.

This document is a great reference for any hut restoration or maintenance project in the Victorian high country and supports a consistent, values-based approach to caring for these culturally significant assets.

Letter of Collaboration between VHCHA and Parks Victoria

The Letter of Collaboration (LOC) between Parks Victoria and the Victorian High Country Huts Association (VHCHA) is a formal agreement outlining the collaborative working relationship between the two organisations in relation to the maintenance, conservation, and restoration of huts located on Parks Victoria managed land across the Victorian High Country.

The LOC acknowledges the VHCHA's vital role in delivering heritage sensitive works through its volunteer programs and affirms Parks Victoria's support for ongoing cooperation. It establishes shared expectations around project planning, work standards, communication, and the alignment of activities with conservation best practice—including principles from the Burra Charter. The document reflects the strong, long-standing partnership that enables successful joint management of historic alpine huts and supports the delivery of projects like those proposed in the current FHAC hut maintenance and restoration plan.

5. Communications

Clear and consistent communication will be essential to the successful delivery of this hut conservation and repair program. Parks Victoria and the VHCHA will maintain regular contact throughout all phases of planning, coordination, and delivery to ensure alignment on priorities, timelines, and responsibilities. This will include pre-project briefings, regular check-ins during working bees, and post-project debriefs to capture learnings and outcomes.

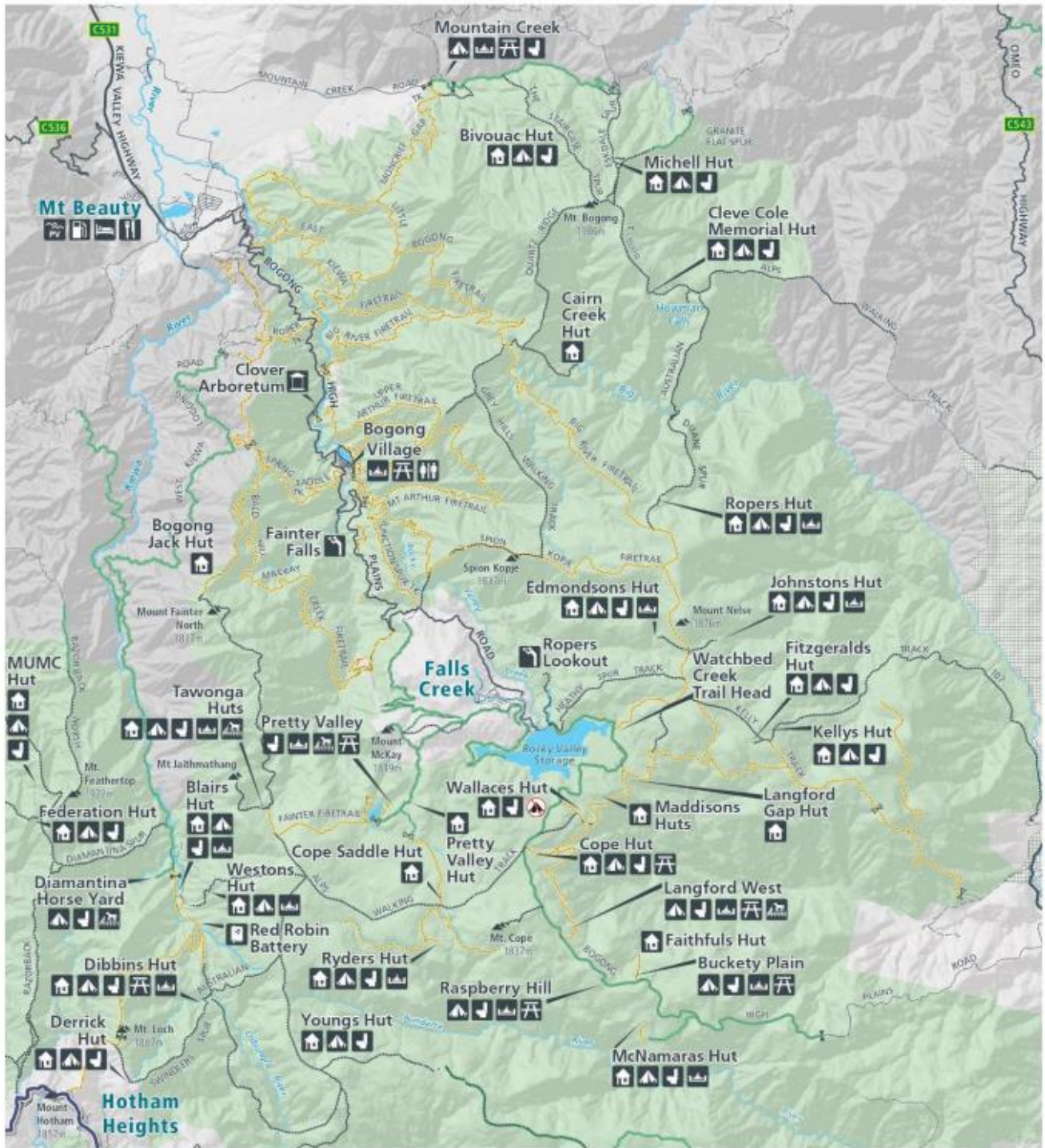
Any planned works will be communicated to relevant stakeholders, including local staff, Traditional Owners (where appropriate), and other land users, to minimise disruption and ensure awareness of activities on site. Updates may also be provided to the public, either through Parks Victoria communication channels or in partnership with VHCHA, to build awareness of the restoration efforts and promote the cultural and historical value of the huts.

6. Safety

All works undertaken as part of this hut conservation and repair program will prioritise safety for both volunteers and the public. Activities will be planned and conducted in accordance with Parks Victoria's safety procedures and relevant occupational health and safety (OHS) regulations. Risk assessments will be completed prior to the commencement of any on-ground works, and appropriate controls will be put in place to manage hazards such as manual handling, use of power tools, working in remote environments, and exposure to weather.

Volunteers and contractors will be required to use personal protective equipment (PPE) appropriate to the tasks being performed, and all participants will be briefed on site-specific risks and emergency protocols. Where required, qualified professionals will be engaged to carry out specialised or high-risk tasks, such as the safe removal of hazardous materials. The VHCHA has significant experience working safely in remote and rugged conditions, and will continue to follow established protocols to ensure all works are completed without incident.

Appendix 1 – Map of Hut sites



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Overview of High Country Huts (August 2025)



Conservation and repairs proposed for huts along the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing

Alpine National Park (Bogong High Plains to Mount Hotham)

Wallaces Hut

Location: Situated approximately 700m from the Bogong High Plains Road, near Falls Creek

Current condition: Average

Priority: Low

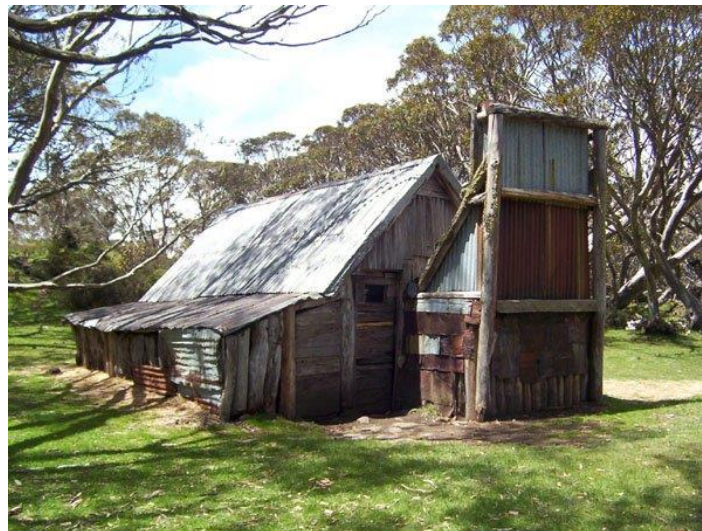
Recommendation: Conservation and maintenance

AHAS Submission required: Yes

Laydown area: Not required

Summary:

Conservation and maintenance works, as required to preserve the hut's heritage significance. All works will be undertaken consistent with the Heritage Act (2017) General Exemptions policy and will use traditional methods and materials to maintain its original appearance.



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Cope Hut

Location: On the Bogong High Plains, approximately 400m from the Bogong High Plains Road, near Mount Cope

Current condition: Average

Priority: Low

Recommendation: Conservation and repairs

AHAS Submission required: Yes

Laydown area: Not required

Summary of works required:

Very minor works required. The door handle and latch need replacement, and a thorough inspection should be undertaken to identify and block drafts throughout the structure, ensuring the hut remains warm and weatherproof when needed most.



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Langford Gap Hut

Location: Langford East Aqueduct Track on the Bogong High Plains

Current condition: Poor

Priority: High

Recommendation: Conservation and repairs

AHAS Submission required: Yes

Laydown area: Within the hut, on MVO track next to the site location, or in nearby trailhead carpark at Langford West Gap.

Summary of works required:

Langford Gap Hut requires urgent restoration and repairs. Many of the weatherboards should be replaced and painted. The internal lining, which includes asbestos, must be removed and safely replaced with a suitable non-hazardous alternative. The roof, while still intact, is showing signs of age and should be repaired or replaced to ensure long-term weatherproofing. The internal timber frame may also need restoration or replacement in parts. The floorboards will also need replacement. The hut was designed on skids to be portable, so no excavation for foundation work is expected. Cope Saddle Hut, which is to the same design, recently received similar works in 2024. The project scope will be almost identical for this hut.



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Cope Saddle Hut

Location: Cope West Aqueduct Track at Cope Saddle on the Bogong High Plains, within the Alpine National Park.

Current condition: Excellent

Priority: Low

Recommendation: Reinstatement of fireplace

AHAS Submission required: Yes

Laydown area: Not required

Summary:

Cope Saddle Hut was the same design and condition as Langfords Gap Hut, but it was recently rebuilt by the Victorian High Country Huts Association. It requires only routine maintenance to preserve its condition and ensure it continues to serve as a reliable shelter. The next priority will be the reinstatement of the fireplace, which would greatly enhance its functionality as a refuge in poor weather.



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Westons Hut

Location: Westons Spur, between the West Kiewa Valley and the Bogong High Plains

Current condition: Good

Priority: Low

Recommendation: Conservation and repairs

AHAS Submission required: Yes

Laydown area: Within the building footprint.

Summary of works required:

Westons Hut, rebuilt in 2010, is in good condition. Recently, the VHCHA undertook the task of replacing the veranda posts, which had rotted at the base. An additional working bee is scheduled for later this year, with plans to replace the cladding on the north side of the hut to improve its weatherproofing. Once this essential work is complete, the hut only requires routine maintenance.



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Blairs Hut

Location: West Kiewa Valley

Current condition: Average

Priority: Medium

Recommendation: Conservation and repairs

AHAS Submission required: Yes

Laydown area: Within the hut or on an MVO track close to the site location.

Summary of works required:

A number of the structural logs are showing signs of significant deterioration and will need to be replaced to maintain the integrity of the building. This process will necessitate the careful use of building jacks to ensure that the structure remains safe and stable throughout the repair. Additionally, chinking will be required to effectively fill the gaps and holes that have developed between the logs, providing insulation and improving weatherproofing. Furthermore, some sheets of corrugated iron on the roof may also require replacement, to adequately protect the interior from the elements.



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Dibbins Hut:

Location: Cobungra River

Current condition: Poor

Priority: High

Recommendation: Conservation and repairs

AHAS Submission required: Yes

Laydown area: Within the hut, underneath eaves, or on existing picnic tables

Summary of works required:

Dibbins Hut, much like its counterpart at Blairs, stands in urgent need of restoration to safeguard its structural integrity and ensure the safety of those who visit. The aging logs that comprise its framework must be replaced, requiring the careful application of building jacks on-site to support the structure during the process. The hut's weatherproofing needs to be addressed. To achieve this, the existing roofing sheets will need to be replaced, accompanied by the installation of new insulation, which will act as a moisture barrier.

The window requires new fixings to guarantee it can remain securely closed, preventing drafts and moisture from infiltrating the interior. Finally, a thorough inspection of all interior framing is essential, as any damaged components will be replaced.



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Pretty Valley Hut:

Location: Pretty Valley, Bogong High Plains

Current condition: Poor

Priority: High

Recommendation: Conservation and repairs

AHAS Submission required: Yes

Laydown area: Within the hut or on an MVO track close to the site location.

Summary of works required:

Pretty Valley Hut, much like Langford Gap Hut, is in poor condition and requires restoration works. The weatherboards are deteriorating, the framing likely needs repair, and the roof is reaching the end of its serviceable life. The interior lining also requires replacement. Any hazardous materials, such as asbestos, must be safely removed and replaced. The window will need restoration or replacement. While many parts need replacement, it should be noted that the foundations and framing of the hut are solid and will not require replacement. Therefore, no excavation is required.



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Ryders Yards:

Location: Cope West Aqueduct, Bogong High Plains

Current condition: Average

Priority: Medium

Recommendation: Conservation and repairs

AHAS Submission required: Yes

Laydown area: Within the huts or on an MVO track close to the site location.

Summary of works required:

Ryders Yard is in good condition but needs interior materials replaced on two of the four huts. One of the huts needs the door refurbished or replaced, and the floor replaced. The main hut used for cooking/shelter needs the floor replaced in parts, the door replaced, and the fireplace flue needs a new cowl to stop snow from entering the hut.



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Tawonga Huts:

Location: Fainter Fire Trail, Bogong High Plains

Current condition: average

Priority: Medium

Recommendation: Conservation and repairs

AHAS Submission required: Yes

Laydown area: Within the huts or on an MVO track close to the site location.

Summary of works required:

Tawonga Huts is a series of four huts, and all are in different states of condition. The main hut visitors use (on the right in the picture below) is in good condition and needs little work. The other three have solid foundations, but need restoration work on the huts' interior. This will include replacing floorboards, the door, interior lining and windows. One of the huts (formally used for storing feed) most likely will need asbestos removed and replaced with modern materials.



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