

TRC

Swifts Creek

Nature Based Tourism Study

Report

April 2025



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the Indigenous peoples of the lands, waters and communities we work together with. We pay our respects to their cultures; and to their Elders – past, present and emerging.

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Executive Summary

Swifts Creek is undergoing a significant economic transition following the Victorian Government's decision to end native timber harvesting, a move that has impacted local employment and industry reliance on forestry.

The Forestry Transition Program has provided funding for Local Development Strategies (LDS) to help towns like Swifts Creek and surrounding villages of Ensay, Tambo Crossing and Cassilis identify viable industries to support long-term economic resilience.

Nature-based tourism has been identified as one of the key focus areas, offering a pathway to leverage the region's environmental assets, history, and outdoor recreation potential that may drive new employment and business opportunities.

Positioned as a gateway to the Victorian High Country, the region is strategically placed to diversify its tourism offerings, particularly in outdoor adventure, cultural heritage, creative communities and eco-tourism experiences.

Highlights for Swifts Creek and surrounds

Swifts Creek is located along the Great Alpine Road, making it a natural stop for visitors traveling through the Victorian High Country. While many currently bypass the town enroute to larger tourism hubs, there is a strong opportunity to position Swifts Creek as a destination that welcomes and supports stopover visitation.

With careful investment in infrastructure and experience development, the town can enhance its appeal to adventure travellers, eco-tourists, and cultural explorers.

The recent surge in sectional opening of Omeo's mountain biking trails presents a particularly strong opportunity for Swifts Creek to leverage regional cycling tourism by offering complementary experiences, from backcountry adventure riding to immersive cultural and historical journeys.

The region boasts an extensive network of scenic backcountry roads, creating an ideal landscape for **adventure cycling and bikepacking**. Unlike the high-adrenaline experience of mountain biking, gravel grinding and bikepacking offer a "journey through nature" experience, allowing visitors to explore rolling farmland, forestry, and remote wilderness at their own pace.

With its quiet roads, varied elevation, and multiple camping options, Swifts Creek is well-positioned to establish itself as a premier destination for this growing tourism segment. The development of cycle-friendly town infrastructure, such as bike wash stations, repair hubs, and signage, will further enhance Swifts Creek's ability to attract and retain visitors.

The surrounding landscapes also feature a limited number of **walking opportunities**, with existing trails that could be formalised and expanded to include historical walking routes and new waterfall discovery walks. The opportunity to integrate **interactive storytelling, digital interpretation, and guided experiences** would add further value to the town's tourism offering.

Swifts Creek also possesses **a rich historical and cultural heritage**, particularly in gold mining and forestry. Sites such as the **Cassilis Mines, Jirnkee Water Race, and Tambo Trenches** provide compelling opportunities for historical tourism, with strong potential for immersive and interactive storytelling.

The development of a **History in Motion experience**, bringing local stories to life through interpretation, digital content, and site activations, would enhance Swifts Creek's appeal to heritage travellers.

Additionally, the town's **creative community offers a foundation for cultural tourism**, with potential for art installations, artist residencies, and **public art trails** that blend storytelling with the natural environment.

Sustainability is a core principle in Swifts Creek's tourism future. The region's tourism strategy aligns with Victoria's nature-based tourism policies and Gippsland's eco-destination certification, reinforcing the commitment to sustainable growth.

A **low-impact, eco-conscious approach to infrastructure and tourism development** will ensure that Swifts Creek retains its unique character while benefiting from increased visitation.

Investments in small-scale, sustainable accommodation options, such as **eco-cabins, Tiny Houses, and enhanced camping facilities**, will allow the region to **accommodate more visitors without over-commercialisation**.

Swifts Creek and surround region stands at an exciting turning point, with significant potential to carve out a **niche in adventure cycling, heritage tourism, and creative eco-experiences**. By focusing on sustainable growth, community-driven initiatives, and **authentic tourism offerings that reflect the region's natural and cultural assets**, Swifts Creek has the capacity to become a popular nature-based destination in East Gippsland.



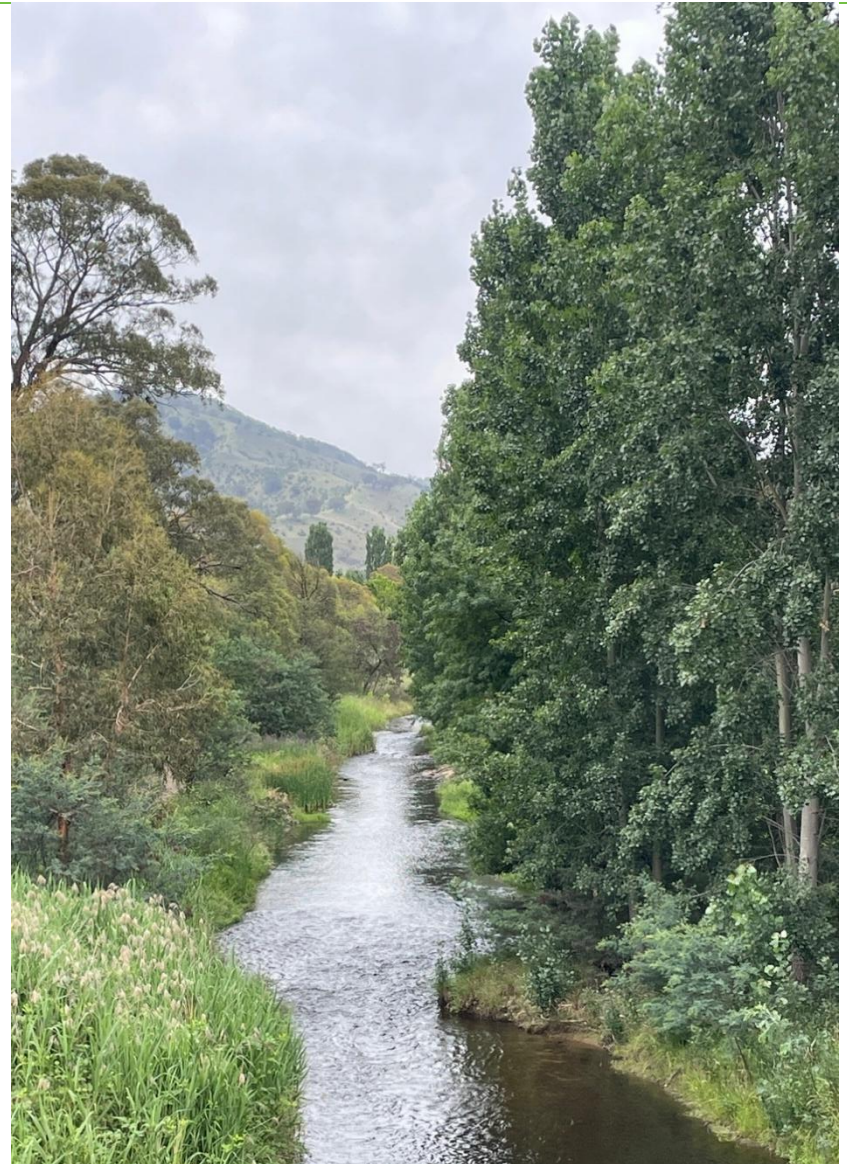
1 Vision

Swifts Creek and its surrounding valley landscapes stand as a welcoming gateway to the majestic Victorian High Country, where bespoke outdoor adventures and a rich and storied history comes to life.

Every journey is an immersive exploration of Alpine landscapes, meandering waterways, historical remnants and village life.

Our communities welcome visitors with a busy calendar of events and attractions that showcase culture, creativity and a relaxed rural lifestyle.

We respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land, the Gunaikurnai people, whose enduring connection enriches every experience



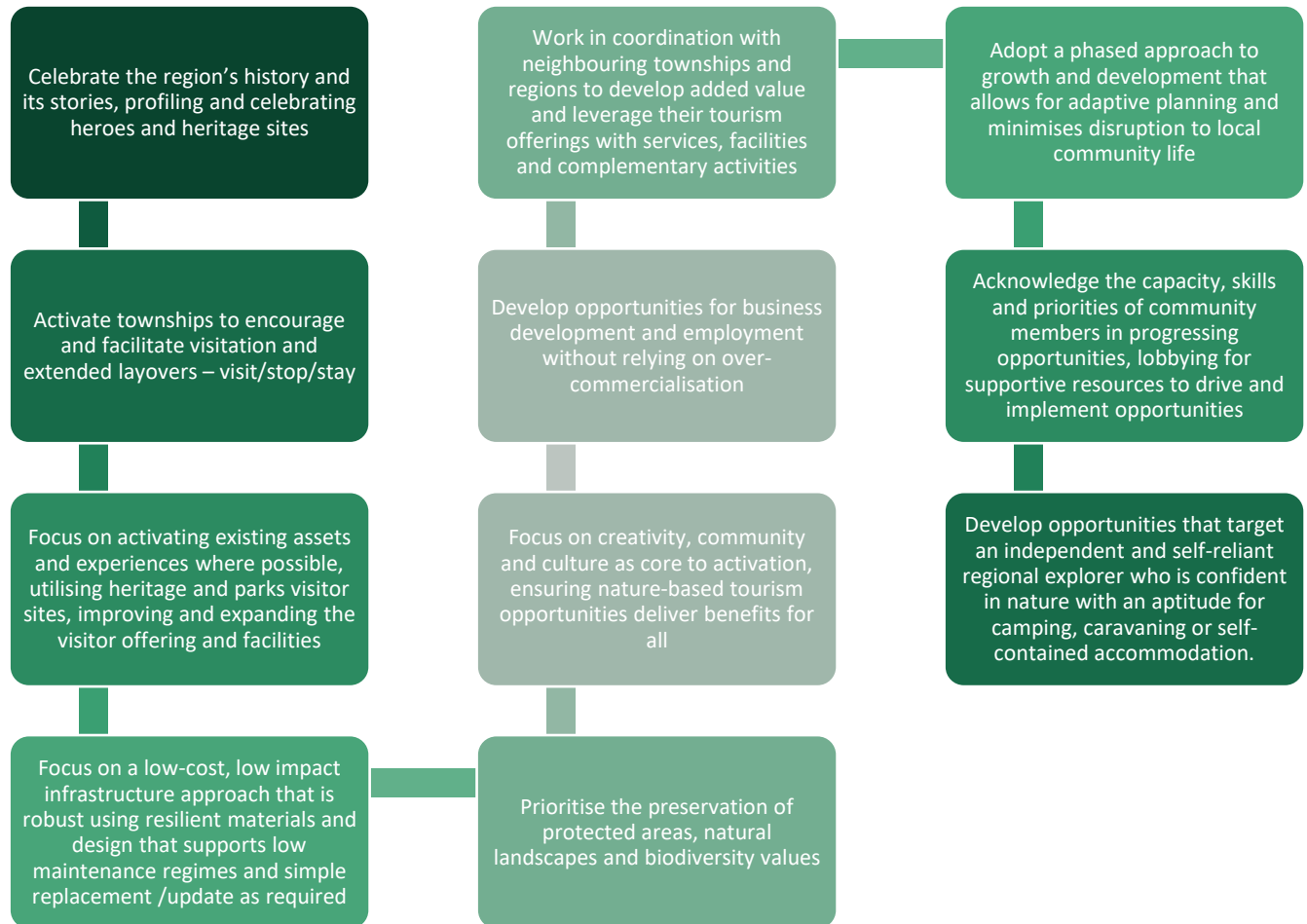
2 Principles

When developing nature-based tourism opportunities for Swifts Creek and surrounds it is important to adopt a considered and balanced approach that both respects the environment as well as the community.

By focusing on principles such as sustainable and eco-conscious practices, community involvement and authentic experiences, we seek to ensure that tourism opportunities align with the region's natural and cultural values. This approach guarantees that growth remains manageable while preserving the area's unique character.

We apply this focus lens to ensure that tourism developments remain sustainable, respectful of the natural environment and aligned with community values. This approach safeguards the unique character of Swifts Creek and surrounds while fostering long term growth and cultural integrity.

The strategic development of the Swifts Creek region's nature-based tourism will:



3 Focus Study Areas

The following Focus Areas reflect community feedback and provide a framework that guides and supports the opportunity determination and recommendations:

1. **Cycle Tourism** - focused on adventure (backroad) cycle touring (Gravel Grind and Bike Packing), leveraging extensive backcountry track network, attractive landscapes, camping and remote features.
 2. **Walking Tourism and Trail Infrastructure** - upgrading and/or developing suite of short walks based on historical narrative routes (Cassius and Water Race,) appealing environments and township activation.
 3. **Historical Assets Activation** including narratives through an Interpretation Plan and multiple delivery options and activations. These will seek to attract visitors via strong, character-led storytelling while serving to capture and archive the region's and community's important history through tourism experiences.
 4. **Art In Nature** - potential for a Grants program, trail head project, significant art sculpture trail destination, events, Artists in Residence program
 5. **Dark Skies** -tapping into growing interest in Dark Sky Tourism by providing information, suggested sites and activity specific infrastructure – 'Sky Lounges' – in the Swifts Creek Study Area with an eye to potential for initiation of hosted dark sky experiences.
 6. **Marketing, Digital and Business Skills Development Communities Activation**
 7. **Township Visitor** EV charging station, Changing Places toilet, Pump Track/Skateboard, playground, Signage (maps, information)
 8. **Accommodation** – opportunities for growing the number and variety of accommodation including a focus on the in-town Caravan Park, RV locations, As mall private offerings and investor attraction strategies for medium size family and group accommodation solutions.
 9. **Events** – consideration of existing and potential events as drivers of nature-based visitation.
- Recommended strategies and activations will be drawn from these areas, with many cross-referencing to progress multiple focus areas simultaneously.

A note on Traditional Owner & Indigenous Tourism

The Aboriginal name for Swifts Creek was *Bun Jirrah Gingee Munjie*, which means "big kangaroos go to that place".

The Brabrulung tribe's territory included the area, but numbers declined after pastoralists arrived in the late 1830s.

The Gunaikurnai people are the Traditional Custodians of the land that includes Swifts Creek.

At present there is no formal representation of First Nations' storytelling or history relevant to the Swifts Creek Region that is tourist-facing.

No specific First Nation sites of significance for tourism purposes were identified during this study, however further and ongoing investigations are recommended to begin a journey of discovery and better representation of the original inhabitants of the area, their traditions, stories, and culture both past and present.

This requires further and close consultation with First Nation communities and traditional custodians to capture their will and desire in this regard, relevant to tourism.

4 Recommendations Summary

OPPORTUNITY		DESCRIPTION
Opportunity ❶: Adventure Cycling	Opportunity 1.1: Gravel Grind & Bike Packing	Develop and curate a suite of adventure riding routes leveraging the spectacular landscapes, quiet back country roads and historical sites of the Swifts Creek study area.
	Opportunity 1.2: Adventure Cycling Events	Support growth of adventure cycling events such as Tour de Tambo and potential realignment of the Cattlemen 100 event to Swifts Creek.
	Opportunity 1.3: Cycle Friendly Village	Positioning Swifts Creek as a "Cycle-Friendly Village" to attract riders through improved infrastructure and tourism services.
Opportunity ❷: Regional & Historical Walking Trails	Opportunity 2.1: Cassilis Historical Area	Create a connected walking trail network focused on mining heritage combining Cassilis Mines, Jirnkee Water Race and Cassilis Recreation Reserve/Cemetery into a connected hub attraction with experience quality, site protection and visitor safety outcomes. Overlay with appropriate mining history interpretation.
	Opportunity 2.2: Bentley Plains Walks	Create a connected walking trail network that better identifies Bentley Plains as a walking experience target, with potential waterfall walk extension and appropriate timber heritage interpretation overlays. Bentley Plains walking trail attraction development magnetises general visitation to region and townships (services, accommodation, other attractions).
	Opportunity 2.3: Tambo Trenches	Further development of Tambo Trenches historical site including formalising walking trail and interpretation on site.
Opportunity ❸: Township Trails	Opportunity 3.1: Swifts Creek	Extension of Poet’s Walk connecting to form a loop trail with expansion of artistic installations to further strengthen visitor attraction.
	Opportunity 3.2: Ensay Township Trail	Connect Ensay Recreation Reserve (and RV camp) with Ensay Township and attractions to facilitate on foot and cycling traffic.
	Opportunity 3.3: Aquatic River Play Activations	Development of a wild swimming ‘trail’ (set of locations). Activation of ‘river sled’ / lilo paddle course and facilitation matched to an and event activation. Development of a river play zone within the Swifts Creek Caravan and Holiday Park. Creation of visitor-friendly townships, with improved signage, public amenities, and tourism services.

OPPORTUNITY		DESCRIPTION
Opportunity 4: History in Motion	Opportunity 4.1: Engaging Visitors Through Immersive Storytelling and Historical Narratives	Development of “History in Motion”, an immersive storytelling experience bringing historical narratives to life through digital and physical interpretation. Enhanced storytelling and branding of Swifts Creek’s goldmining, High Country life and forestry heritage for visitors Promotion of Indigenous cultural experiences through deeper engagement with the Gunaikurnai people. Leveraging of existing and new events and festivals focused on creativity, storytelling, and Swifts Creek’s unique local culture.
Opportunity 5: Star Gazing Lounge Experience	Opportunity 5.1: Positioning Swifts Creek as a Star Gazing Destination	Establishment of one or multiple Star Gazing Lounges to attract astrophotographers, interested tourists and school and family groups. Potential to introduce hosted night sky experiences and events around celestial events.
Opportunity 6: Marketing, Digital and Business Skills Development Community Activation	Opportunity 6.1: Community and Business Activation	Enhancing digital marketing, business skills, and community tourism engagement to support local entrepreneurs. Investment and creating enabling environment for eco-accommodation and boutique lodging options to diversify visitor stays.
Opportunity 7: Art in Nature	Opportunity 7.1: Implementation of "Art in Nature" program	Including outdoor sculptures, public art trails, and artist-in-residence programs. Leveraging of existing and new events and festivals focused on creativity, storytelling, and Swifts Creek’s unique local culture.

5 Background

TRC Tourism was commissioned by Nature-based Recreation & Tourism Innovation Working Group (IWG) to investigate the feasibility of nature-based tourism initiatives as part of Swifts Creek Future project

The Swifts Creek Futures Project was commissioned under the Forestry Transition Program to support workers, businesses and communities transitioning away from native timber harvesting. The Local Development Strategy Project works with the community, inviting participation from all members of the community, to identify strengths and innovations for the region to diversify and grow to support economic and social benefits for a sustainable future.

The project brief called for an evaluation of nature-based tourism in the Swifts Creek region investigating tourism and outdoor active recreation opportunities that will leverage Swifts Creek's significant natural and heritage-based assets.

The project specifically seeks to enhance eco-conscious tourism experiences in the region, ensuring both economic growth and the preservation of local ecosystems.

Objectives of Study

The project brief 'Analysis and evaluation of nature-based tourism in Swifts Creek' seeks delivery of a comprehensive analysis of existing nature-based tourism and outdoor active recreation opportunities, specifically those that leverage Swifts Creek's significant natural assets.

The broad objective is to identify and establish appropriate and viable projects that enhance eco-conscious tourism experiences in the region, ensuring both economic growth and the preservation of local ecosystems. A focus on leveraging East Gippsland's existing Eco Destination Certification reinforces the importance of sustainability of identified project opportunities.

The scope of work applies a structured methodology that includes stakeholder engagement, an audit of current trail and nature-based experience assets, along with visitation and activity-based market analysis.

Transition from Timber Harvesting to Tourism

The Victorian Government has developed the Victorian Forestry Transition Program to assist the timber industry as it manages its transition away from native forest harvesting to a plantation-based timber supply.

The Victorian Government had initially proposed to close the native timber forestry industry by 2030. An announcement was made on 23 May 2023 regarding a revised timeline for this transition.

Native timber harvesting in Victoria's state forests has ended with existing Government supports being brought forward and scaled up.

As part of this community transition work, 11 communities were identified for funding for the preparation of Local Development Strategies (LDS).

The LDS grants program assists communities to undertake diversification planning to support their transition to new, sustainable industries. Swifts Creek is one of these towns.

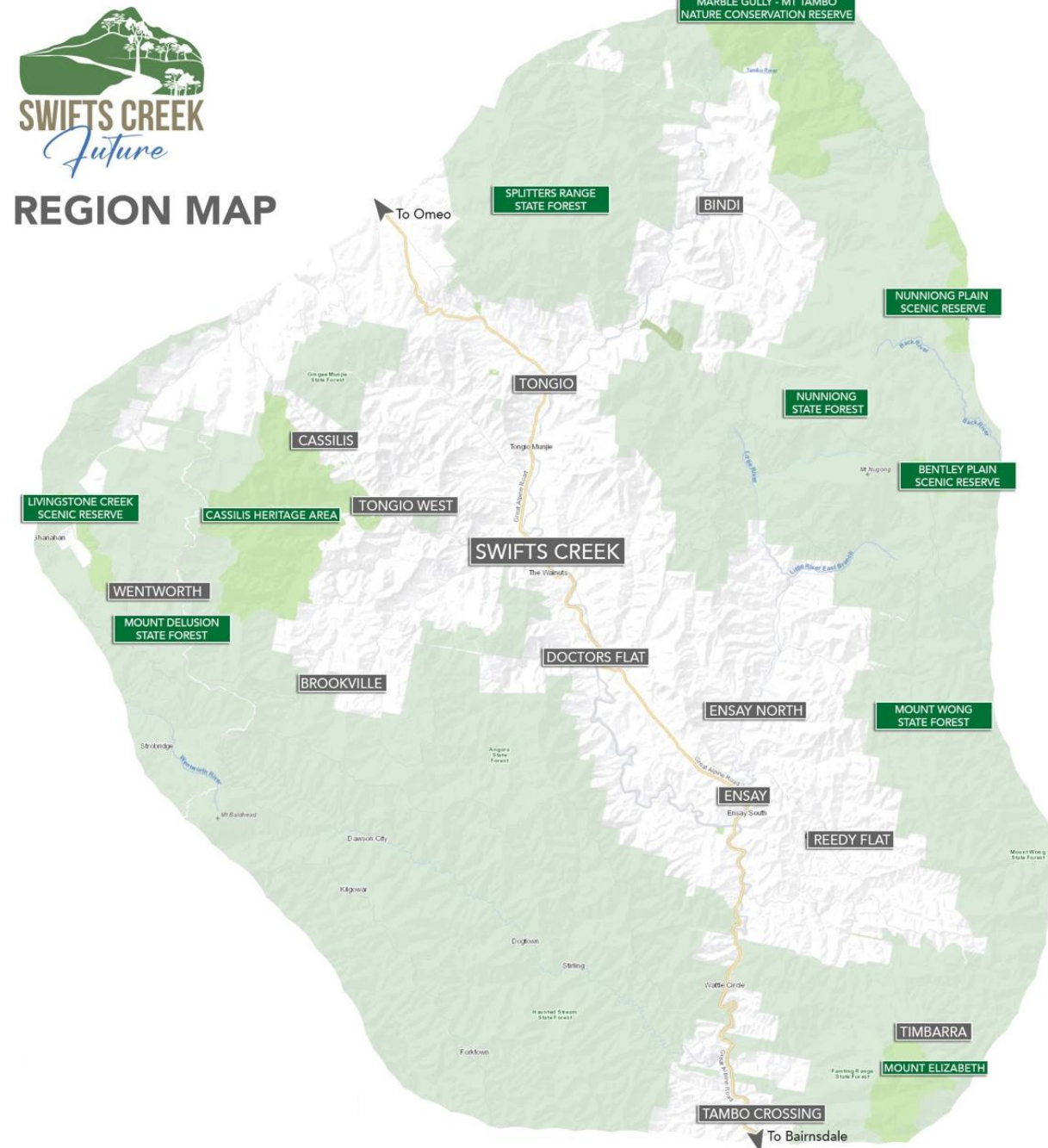
While the Pentarch Mill in Swifts Creek remains operational (using hardwood clear-fell sources from NSW), the community recognises a need to identify other industry sectors to transition to for community growth and ongoing employment.

This report seeks to identify and review such opportunities within the nature-based tourism sector

Study Area Overview

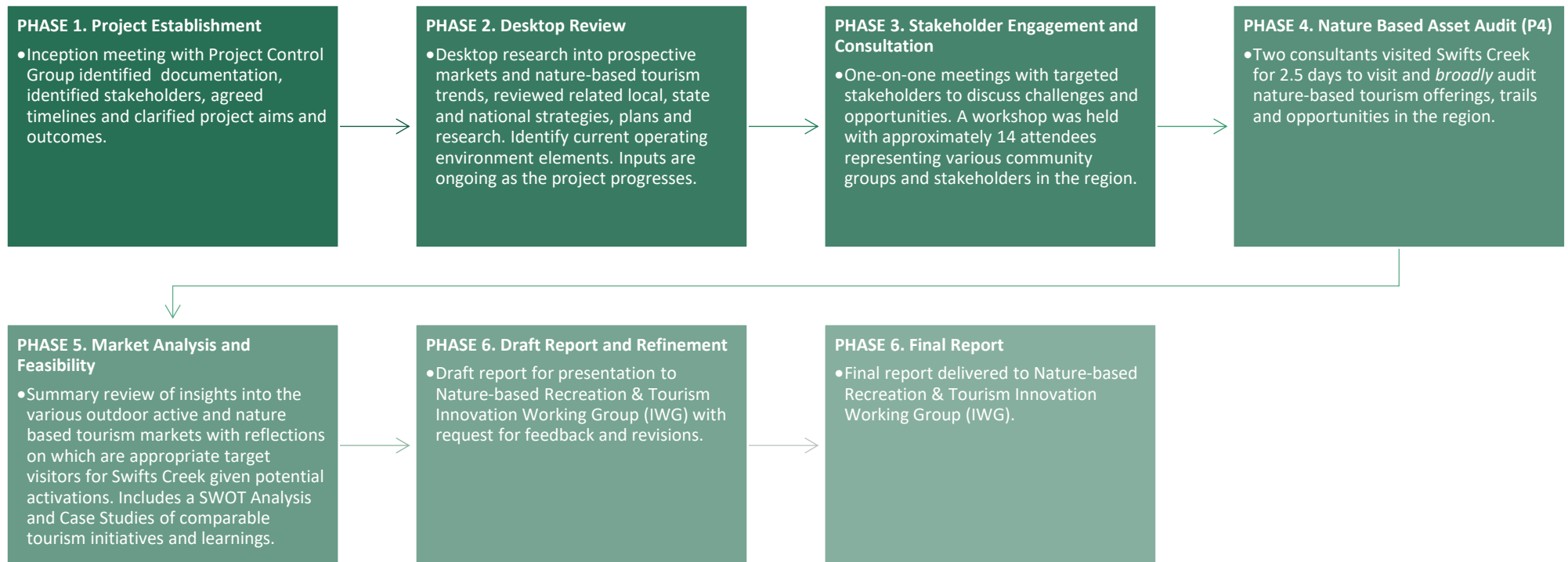
The project area of study includes the localities of:

- Swifts Creek
- Tongio
- Ensay
- Ensay North
- Bindi
- Cassilis
- Doctors Flat
- Reedy Flat
- Wentworth
- Brookville
- Tambo Crossing
- Timbarra



6 Methodology

PHASE 5. In delivering its findings, TRC Tourism progressed through an agreed methodology of study including:



7 SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- **Australian Alpine Landscapes** – Attractive and varied landscapes and vegetation types including parks, forests, mountains and significant water courses
- **Australian Wildlife** - Accessible native wildlife viewing including hero bird and animal species
- **Remoteness** – sense of isolation, clean air/water/produce a positive element for the immersive nature based target market
- **Dark Sky** – no light pollution and ‘big skies’ attractive to ‘dark sky’ astronomical viewing
- **Back County Tracks** – low traffic backcountry road network is vast and untapped for adventure cycling market
- **Arts** – strong resident arts community that has activated with a focus to the visitor for retail and experiences
- **Community** – active and resilient townships with existing networks of representative entities and bodies, key leaders that drive activations and good experience in community event production
- **Remnant Heritage** – existing heritage fabric and artifacts that provide a visual opportunity for storytelling and tours both onsite and via technology, strong repository for content including themes, aides, personalities, dramatic stories, historical milestones
- **Adjacent Strengths** – investment in Omeo MTB Track, access to snow destinations, on the Great Alpine Road touring route

Weaknesses

- **Distance and Access** – road/driving conditions, real or perceived distance from key markets in Melbourne, little or no public transport options,
- **Lack of Destination Awareness** – confusion with the East Gippsland naming, no hero image/experience elevating name, no recall on what is on offer for new visitor(s)
- **Lack of Accommodation** – very low number and variety of accommodation offerings. Lack of online access to booking. Lack of centralised information for camping options (apart from WikiCamp).
- **Lack of Trail Assets** – very few formalised and identifiable trails of significance, lack of risk, regulatory and directional signage, mapping and brand marketing
- **Lack of Interpretation Content** – little formalised and/or modernised interpretation, lack of an overarching Interpretation Plan to connect the narrative and story-led elements, guide/encourage visitation and dispersal and facilitate embedded tourism experiences
- **Township Welcome** – degraded, invisible or non-existent visitor facilities (i.e. toilets, EV charging station, playground), lack of signage, lack of activities and retail options to encourage stopping and then holding visitors
- **No (Ongoing) Tourism Lead** – specific to Swifts Creek with guaranteed funding and succession plan to pilot tourism projects and drive community efforts ongoing
- **Events** – low level of current marquee events to attract broader visitation and position as destination

Opportunities

- **Adventure Cycling** – gravel grind, bikepacking markets (and non-technical MTB),
- **History and Heritage** – goldmining and forestry heritage interpretation, including sustainably activating Cassius and Water Race historical remnants
- **Trails Development** – upgrading and establishing short walk (1-10km) trail tourism; including opportunity to formalise non-formal routes, establishing themed routes for exploration (county pubs, sculpture trails); ‘Signature lookout’ development
- **Omeo MTB** – leverage points targeting influx of MTB visitors with Swifts creek as add-on value proposition, especially for non-cycle partner, friends, family visitors
- **Hero Experience** – develop a hero experience (or set of) with innovative but sustainable infrastructure that drives visitation and encourages user generated content
- **Enabling Outdoor Recreation** – create supportive structures to enable and grow recreational adventure (passive and active) including riding (horse, motorcycle, off road), rafting, fishing, hunting, birdwatching,
- **Niche and bespoke experiences** – story-led narratives, exclusive access to areas/products/experiences, food/wine/arts led events, health and wellbeing initiatives,
- **Increase Awareness** – develop and increase marketing and promotions targeting the online and social media platforms
- **Strengthening Resilient Communities** – industry and professional development programs and training to increase skills, capacity and activities

Threats

- **Distance** – reluctance to travel without clearly defined Signature activities and attractions for multiday stay visitation
- **Investment in Strategic Marketing and Pre-Trip Content** – continued lack of accessible, rich online content to inspire, inform, and facilitate
- **Staffing** – lack of local skilled staff and (current) financial viability
- **Climate Change Impacts** – fire and storm impact on landscapes, sites and infrastructure
- **Regional Structures** – size of local government area, local community rivalry for focus and funds
- **Market Positioning** – anchor to East Gippsland messaging while situated in High Country / sub Alpine location creates destination confusion in market perceptions
- **Changing Demographics** – changing demographics of target populations may mean a lack of confidence to visit and stay in remote regional locations
- **Lack of Suitable Infrastructure** – inability to develop appropriate viable range of accommodation
- **Regulatory and Planning Barriers** – threat to developing appropriate accommodation (i.e. restrictive Tiny Homes / AirBnB regulations)
- **Capacity and Growing Pains** – ability for community to deliver high quality experiences and accommodation should visitor numbers increase quickly
- **Funding** – Funding streams for development and ongoing maintenance
- **Operational capacity for events** – organisations with capacity for event production; lack of funding and costs of event production including insurance
- **Land Manager Capacity** – capacity for land managers (i.e. Parks Victoria, DEECA) to cater to increased pressure on resources

8 Market Analysis

8.1 Trends in Nature-Based Tourism

Global Trends

Whilst the market analysis for the scope of this project is focussed primarily on the domestic and intrastate market it is prudent to note worldwide trends in eco, nature-based and recreational tourism that are taking place and are particularly relevant to Australia's international market position.

Growth of Ecotourism

The global ecotourism market was valued at approximately AUD 347.5 billion in 2023. The market is projected to grow to AUD 1.22 trillion by 2032, reflecting an annual growth rate of 14.31% during this period.

Adventure Tourism Surge

Adventure travel, encompassing activities like hiking, diving, and wildlife viewing encounters, is on the rise. This segment is anticipated to grow by 10%, driven by travellers seeking adrenaline-fuelled and unique experiences.

Sustainability and Conservation Focus

Travelers are increasingly aware of supporting local businesses, reducing community and environment impacts and sustainable activities.

Health and Wellness Integration

There's a growing demand for tourism experiences that combine nature with health and wellness activities, such as yoga retreats, spa treatments, and mindfulness workshops in natural settings.

Climate-Responsive Travel Decision Making

In response to an increased awareness of rising global temperatures and impacts of travel on the environment and the growing distrust of the implementation of carbon offset programs, travellers are favouring closer destinations to visit and/or using slow transport options like trains, ships, public transport systems, car sharing and avoiding flying at all.

Emergence of New Nature-Based Destinations

Destinations such as Portugal, Chile, Sri Lanka, and Finland are gaining popularity among travellers seeking new nature-based experiences.

These trends highlight a global shift towards more sustainable, health-conscious, and climate-aware travel preferences, aligning well with Australia's diverse natural offerings and its appeal to international tourists.

Domestic Trends

Nature-based Activities - Australia

From 2014 to 2023, nature-based activities among Australians see an overall growth of 47% in demand. Some activities grew by almost 85%, and around 50%

more people are enjoying Australia's stunning great outdoors (Source: Tourism Research Australia, TRA).

TRA's National Visitor Survey revealed growth in demand for the following activities since 2014:

- Visiting botanic or public gardens saw an incredible 85% growth.
- Bushwalking and rainforest walks grew significantly in popularity by 81%.
- Visiting national or state parks grew by 73%, highlighting the importance of these protected areas.
- Caravanning or camping saw 40% growth.
- Cycling grew by 53%.
- Visiting wildlife parks, zoos, and aquariums saw 46% growth, highlighting a love for our native wildlife.
- Visiting farms increased by 12%.
- Fishing grew by 8%.

Nature-based and Recreational Activities – Victoria

Data and reports from Outdoors Victoria's Annual Report for the 2023–2024 period published in December 2024 provide the following insights on outdoor recreational activities:

Economic Contribution

- Nature-based outdoor activities contribute approximately \$6.2b annually to Victoria's economy.
- This sector supports around 71,000 full-time equivalent jobs, encompassing both direct and indirect employment.

Participation Rates

- Annually, there are about 46m instances of nature-based outdoor activities in Victoria.
- Victorians aged over 15 account for approximately 43.5m of these activities, while Victorian school children contribute around 2.5m.

Health and Wellbeing Benefits

- Engagement in nature-based outdoor activities leads to avoided healthcare costs estimated at \$265m per annum in Victoria.
- These activities also provide recreational benefits valued at \$455 million annually.

Popular Activities

- Walking, running, and cycling within Victorian parks are among the most popular activities, contributing significantly to participation hours and economic expenditure.
- Other favoured activities include fishing, beach and water-related activities, and snow sports.

Regional Impact

- Nature-based outdoor activities significantly bolster regional economies by directing spending from urban centres to regional towns, cities, and rural areas.

Youth Engagement

- Outdoor education programs play a crucial role in enhancing resilience, learning, and wellbeing among young people.

Accessible Tourism

Planning for any tourism development should reflect and support the need to accommodate and facilitate activity in nature for a broad range of abilities and communities.

- It is estimated that 20% of Australian adults have a disability or long-term health condition which is predicted to grow with the ageing population
- Spend by travellers with a disability is estimated at \$13.5B annually (17% of all travellers)¹
- 75% of people with a disability already travel, however more would travel if there were available products, services or technologies to support them
- The Federal Government and Australian Regional Tourism have made Accessible Tourism one of Thrive 2030's priorities. They aim to grow the accessible tourism market to \$230B by 2030. This includes an action to develop assets, infrastructure and experiences that are accessible to all people, regardless of physical limitations, disability or age; and an action to specifically market our accessible and inclusive tourism offering globally
- By 2025, 1 in 8 international travellers will be 60+ years of age, this will double by 2035.

These insights underscore the substantial economic, health, and social benefits that outdoor recreation activities provide to the Victorian community.

8.2 Visitor Market Segment Analysis

Visitor Market Profiles

Tourism Australia created a suite of 22 domestic visitor profiles that analyse visitor segments, based on demographic information and what activities they undertake.

The **Target Market Profiles** chosen that align to Victorian regional visitation to nature focussed destinations like Swifts Creek include:

- Older non-working visitors
- Adult couples
- Camping and Caravaning
- Solo Travellers
- Long stay visitors

Destination Profiles are based on popular activities and types of locations and for the purpose of this report for Swifts Creek activities identified the following have been chosen:

- National Parks
- Cycling including MTB
- Arts and Culture
- Fishing and Golf
- Festivals and Events

Based on that available data from Tourism Research Australia and from Victorian tourism sources with a focus on regional research there are several persona profiles that are relevant to consider for Swifts Creek to recognise.

Developing personas for market segments provides a simple way of identifying visitors and understanding their preferences, motivations and expectations.

¹ Accessible Tourism for All: An Opportunity within Our Reach, UNTWO

8.3 Market Segment Personas

PERSONAS	DEMOGRAPHICS	TRAVEL BEHAVIOR	MOTIVATIONS
<p>THE NATURE SEEKER</p> <p>This traveller is drawn to Victoria’s national and state parks for the serenity, scenic landscapes, and outdoor activities like camping, hiking and wildlife spotting.</p> <p>They seek a deep connection with nature and often travel with family, friends, or solo for relaxation and adventure.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Age: 35-54 years old• Gender: Evenly split between male and female• Residence: Predominantly from Melbourne and regional Victoria.• Family Status: Often part of a family group, including children	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trip Duration: Typically 2-3 nights• Accommodation: Prefers camping or cabin stays within or near national parks• Activities: Engages in bushwalking, wildlife observation, and photography• Transportation: Travels by private vehicle	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Seeks to connect with nature and enjoy outdoor recreational activities• Desires educational experiences for children• Aims to escape urban environments and relax.
<p>THE TRAIL ADVENTURER</p> <p>This visitor thrives on challenging and scenic off-road cycling experiences, from Gippsland’s mountain bike trails to its long gravel routes.</p> <p>They seek adventure, endurance challenges, and exploration, often pairing rides with local craft beer, great food, and regional hospitality.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Age: 25-45 years old• Gender: Predominantly male• Residence: Primarily from Melbourne, with some interstate visitors• Income Level: Middle to high income	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trip Duration: Weekend trips (1-2 nights)• Accommodation: Prefers local lodges, motels, or camping near trailheads• Activities: Focuses on mountain biking and gravel grinding; may also engage in local dining and craft beer tasting• Transportation: Travels by private vehicle, with bike racks and/or trailers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Seeks challenging and scenic trails• Desires to explore new and well-maintained trail networks• Enjoys the camaraderie of group rides and events <p>Recent developments, such as the opening of 50km of new mountain bike trails in Omeo, East Gippsland, have enhanced the region's appeal to mountain biking enthusiasts.</p>

PERSONAS	DEMOGRAPHICS	TRAVEL BEHAVIOR	MOTIVATIONS
<p>THE ADVENTURE-SEEKING FAMILY</p> <p>This family is all about exploring the great outdoors together, creating unforgettable memories while camping, hiking, and discovering regional Victoria.</p> <p>They seek fun, hands-on experiences that engage their children—whether it’s hiking on short walks, wildlife spotting, fishing, or nature play. They prioritise safe, family-friendly destinations with great facilities, balancing adventure with comfort.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age: Parents 30-50 years old, children typically 3-15 years old • Gender: Even mix of family groups (parents, single parents, multi-generational and extended family groups) • Residence: Mostly from Melbourne and regional Victoria, some interstate visitors • Income Level: Middle income 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trip Duration: 2-5 nights, often over weekends, school holidays, and long weekends • Accommodation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – National park campgrounds – Regional caravan parks with family-friendly facilities – Farm stays and eco-lodges – Cabins or glamping for added comfort • Activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Exploring national parks, hiking, and wildlife spotting – Visiting local attractions like heritage sites, farms, and adventure parks – Swimming, fishing, and water activities in rivers and lakes – BBQ/campfire cooking, exploring, playing games, and spotlight walks – Engaging in hands-on experiences like nature/water play, animal feeding, or guided tours, especially ranger talks • Transportation: Private vehicle (SUV or people mover/family car), often towing a caravan or camper trailer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeks quality family time away from screens and daily routines • Wants to introduce kids to nature, outdoor skills, and adventure activities • Prefers safe, family-friendly locations with good facilities (playgrounds, BBQ areas, toilets) • Enjoys discovering hidden gems in regional Victoria, including small towns, markets, and local produce • Values affordability and flexibility, balancing adventure with comfort <p>This profile captures the essence of a family road trip, blending adventure, education, and relaxation.</p>
<p>THE OUTDOOR RECREATIONALIST</p> <p>The Outdoor Recreationalist embraces freedom, self-sufficiency, and adventure, seeking remote locations for fishing, hunting, or off-grid camping.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age: 30-60 years old • Gender: Predominantly male, but also includes families and couples • Residence: Melbourne, regional Victoria, and some interstate visitors • Income Level: Middle income 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trip Duration: 2-5 nights, often over weekends, public holidays, or seasonal/specific events • Accommodation: Prefers remote campsites/cabins, camping spots near rivers or lakes, national park campgrounds, and small regional caravan parks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeks relaxation and adventure in nature • Enjoys the thrill and challenge of outdoor activities like 4WDing, fishing and hunting • Values bonding time with family or mates through shared outdoor experiences

PERSONAS	DEMOGRAPHICS	TRAVEL BEHAVIOR	MOTIVATIONS
<p>Whether casting a line in a quiet river, hunting game responsibly, or setting up camp in a national park, they are motivated by a love for nature, solitude, and hands-on outdoor skills. They often travel with mates, family, or solo, valuing connection with nature over luxury.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4WD/trail bike adventures Hiking and exploring national parks Fishing in lakes and rivers Seasonal hunting (e.g. deer, duck) following regulations Campfire cooking, stargazing, and wildlife spotting Boating, kayaking, or rafting Skiing/boarding in winter Transportation: Travels by private vehicle, often a 4WD, campervan, or SUV with trailers, boats, or bikes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wants to disconnect from daily life and embrace a simpler, slower pace Appreciates the self-sufficiency of camping, from setting up a fire to cooking fresh catch <p>This a persona profile for mature, experience-seeking travellers who enjoy extended trips in regional Victoria.</p>
<p>THE FREEDOM TRAVELLER</p> <p>With the open road ahead, the Freedom Traveller enjoys slow travel, extended stays, and discovering hidden gems across Victoria.</p> <p>Whether parked in a welcoming country town, staying in a scenic caravan park, or free camping by a river, they travel at their own pace and immerse themselves in local culture.</p> <p>They seek comfort, community, and meaningful experiences, often combining relaxation with light adventure such as e-biking, birdwatching, or visiting wineries.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Age: 55+ years old Gender: Couples and solo travellers, with some friend groups Residence: Mostly from Melbourne and regional Victoria, some interstate visitors Income Level: Middle to upper-middle income, often retired or semi-retired 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trip Duration: Extended stays (2+ weeks) or slow travelling through multiple regions Accommodation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Caravan parks with full amenities Free camping and self-sufficient stays in national parks or regional areas Farm stays and RV-friendly towns Occasional stays in motels or cabins for variety Activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scenic drives and exploring small towns Visiting historical sites, museums, and cultural attractions Enjoying nature-based experiences like bushwalking, birdwatching, and fishing Engaging with local communities through markets, wineries, and events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seeks freedom and flexibility to travel at their own pace Enjoys immersive experiences, preferring local stories, history, and culture over mass tourism Looks for social connection, often making friends on the road and joining travel networks Prioritizes comfort and self-sufficiency, favouring well-equipped caravan parks or remote camping with the right setup Wants to stay active and engaged, balancing relaxation with new experiences, enjoying local pubs, clubs and bakeries Are internet savvy and values connectivity to communicate and plan <p>This profile emphasizes experience, community, connectivity and flexibility rather than outdated stereotypes.</p>

PERSONAS	DEMOGRAPHICS	TRAVEL BEHAVIOR	MOTIVATIONS
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Low-impact adventure activities like kayaking, e-biking, or photography • Transportation: Travels in a caravan, campervan, or motorhome, often towing additional gear (boats, e-bikes, or off-road vehicles) 	
<p>THE CREATIVE EXPLORER</p> <p>For the Creative Explorer, travel is about learning, making, and connecting with local artisans.</p> <p>They actively seek hands-on workshops/classes, intimate arts events, and regional galleries, whether it's pottery in a small town, outdoor painting classes with local artists, or joining a writing retreat.</p> <p>Passionate about slow travel and community engagement, they love supporting small businesses, ethical tourism, and unique creative experiences over mainstream attractions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age: 40-70 years old • Gender: Predominantly female but includes creative-minded men and couples • Residence: Mostly from Melbourne and regional Victoria, some interstate visitors • Income Level: Middle income, often semi-retired, retirees, or professionals with a passion for the arts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trip Duration: 1-4 nights, often over weekends or during festival seasons • Accommodation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Small hosted boutique stays, farm stays, eco-lodges – Artist residencies or heritage cottages – Caravan park cabins or self-contained stays in regional areas • Activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Participating in arts and crafts workshops (pottery, painting, textile arts, sculpture, jewellery making) – Attending intimate community arts events, open studios, and creative retreats – Learning traditional or regional crafts (weaving, silversmithing, printmaking) – Visiting local artisan markets, galleries, and cultural hubs – Engaging in storytelling, writing classes, or musical performances • Transportation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Self-drive in a private vehicle, often solo or with a friend/partner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeks connection with local artists and makers, preferring interactive experiences over passive sightseeing • Values slow, meaningful travel, enjoying regional communities rather than rushing through tourist hotspots • Enjoys learning new skills, whether for personal fulfillment or a creative side project • Appreciates community engagement, supporting small businesses, local artists, and ethical tourism • Often shares experiences online, promoting artisans through blogs, social media, or word-of-mouth • Values traditional owner engagement and learnings <p>This persona taps into the learning + participation aspect of arts tourism while emphasizing the appeal of small, community-driven experiences.</p>

PERSONAS	DEMOGRAPHICS	TRAVEL BEHAVIOR	MOTIVATIONS
<p>THE HERITAGE ENTHUSIAST</p> <p>For the Heritage Enthusiast, the past is always worth exploring. They are drawn to historical sites, museums, and heritage towns, seeking to uncover stories of the land, its people, and its culture.</p> <p>Whether walking through a preserved gold-rush-era village, visiting an old homestead, or joining a guided history tour, they travel with a sense of curiosity and nostalgia. They value authenticity and storytelling, often staying in heritage-listed accommodations and engaging with local historians and artisans.</p> <p>There may be a personal connection including revisiting family locations, previous work sites, tracing family routes and special interest locations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age: 45-70 years old • Gender: Evenly split between male and female • Residence: Primarily from Melbourne and regional Victoria; includes interstate visitors • Income Level: Middle to upper-middle income; often retired or semi-retired 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Occasionally books small group tours for creative retreats • Trip Duration: Short stays (1-3 nights) • Accommodation: Prefers boutique hotels, bed and breakfasts, or heritage-listed accommodations • Activities: Visits to historical sites, museums, heritage buildings, and guided tours • Transportation: Private vehicle or organised tour groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desires to explore and learn about Victoria's rich history and cultural heritage • Seeks authentic experiences that provide insight into the past • Enjoys engaging with local historians, guides, and participating in historical themed events.

8.4 The Changing Melbourne Market

Since 2000, Melbourne has experienced significant demographic shifts, particularly in its eastern, northeastern, and southeastern suburbs which is a significant catchment area for visitation to East Gippsland and potentially to Swifts Creek area.

As of 2023, the city's population has reached about 5.2 million, making up 19% of Australia's population. This growth has led to significant suburban expansion, with many people relocating to outer suburbs and peri-urban areas for affordable housing and better lifestyles.

Increased Diversity

A significant aspect of this demographic change is the increasing diversity due to migration. Melbourne has residents from over 200 countries, speaking more than 233 languages and dialects. In the city's inner-east, migrants have accounted for all of the population growth, balancing the number of Australian-born residents arriving and leaving the area. (Shaping a Nation 2018 – Department of Home Affairs) This influx has added to the cultural variety in the eastern, northeastern, and southeastern suburbs, introducing different cultural practices and community dynamics.

The age profile of these suburban areas has also changed. While inner-city regions have experienced a decline in working-age families due to high property prices, outer suburbs have attracted younger families seeking affordable housing.

Changing Demographics

The retiree population (ages 65-74) is growing in suburbs like Casey, as retirees seek affordable living near family. In Melbourne's northeastern suburbs, median weekly personal income is \$807, above the state median, with a higher proportion of professionals (24.7%). Family structures are diverse, including nuclear, extended, and shared households, reflecting the area's multicultural makeup.

Implications

Demographic changes in Victoria affect regional tourism. The multicultural population may seek culturally resonant holiday destinations. Younger families and retirees from outer suburbs are drawn to affordable, family-friendly vacations in regional areas. Understanding these demographics helps tailor tourism offerings.

Migration from China, India, Sri Lanka, and the Middle East will increase interest in cultural experiences like heritage sites, indigenous culture, and diverse food trails. Historical destinations will attract these groups.

Younger, middle-income families moving to peri-urban areas will boost demand for outdoor activities. National parks, caravan parks, and adventure experiences in places like East Gippsland, the Grampians, and the Alpine High Country will become more popular.

Rising Markets

Camping, fishing, hiking, and cycling are key activities for these travellers who seek immersive, multi-day experiences that provide good value for money.

Increasing markets such as The Outdoor Recreationist and The Trail Adventurer will likely lead to greater interest in well-serviced holiday parks and eco-friendly accommodations.

For The Freedom Traveller, The Outdoor Recreationalist, and The Trail Adventurer—representing those seeking flexible and active outdoor pursuits—demographic shifts may result in increased engagement from younger retirees and independent travellers.

The growing population of active seniors in Melbourne's outer suburbs is expected to increase demand for long-stay travel options, scenic self-drive routes, and experiences that promote active activities, wellness, and relaxation. Destinations offering caravan-friendly infrastructure, nature-based wellness retreats, and slower-paced adventure experiences will be their focus.

Finally, Melbourne's increasing creative and multicultural population will contribute to the rise of The Creative Explorer. With more residents engaged in arts, crafts, and participatory cultural experiences, regional Victoria's arts festivals, craft workshops, and small-town creative hubs are anticipated to see a boost. Areas with active artistic communities will attract visitors interested in hands-on experiences, such as pottery classes, indigenous art tours, and food-related events. This trend will likely encourage regional towns to develop more immersive, small-scale events that combine culture, creativity, and community engagement.

8.5 Experience Trends

Walking / Hiking

Bushwalking / hiking has seen notable growth trends in participation within Victoria. Insights include:

Participation

3.7 million Australian adults participated in bushwalking during 2023–24, compared with 2.2 million during 2022–23. This represents an apparent 68% increase across Australia and brings the national participation rate to 17%².

Club Membership Increases

Bushwalking Victoria, the state's leading organisation, reported 6,493 members in 2022/23, up from 6,251 in 2021/22, recovering post-COVID-19.

Demographics

National data shows bushwalking ranks sixth in popularity for Australians 15 and over, with higher participation among females (59.1%) than males (40.8%).

Motivations

People bushwalk mainly for enjoyment (35%), experiencing nature (34%), and health/fitness (32%). A 2021 study on the proposed Sea to Summit Walk in East Gippsland showed 70% of Australians want at least an hour-long walk in natural settings, with strong support for expanding nature-based tourism and interest in shorter walks.

Limited funding and resources make managing and maintaining official trails, especially in rural areas, challenging. Digital mapping apps and online community groups have led to unsupported wilderness exploration, posing safety risks and environmental issues. Effective trail management, maintenance, and pre-trip information are crucial to guide walkers on approved trails.

Understanding the target market for potential trail projects is essential for proper development prioritization, ensuring appropriate trails are created.

Destination Trail Users

Experienced trail users who frequently travel for trails and have likely visited trails in Australia or internationally. They look for high-quality trails with good infrastructure in scenic locations.

Trail Users While on Holiday

Typically, less experienced trail users whose primary motivator for travel is not trails. While they view trail use as a secondary motivation for their visit, they will participate in trail activities and will likely hire or require equipment. They may place less emphasis on the trail and more on accessibility of the facility, the setting and nearby attractions and amenities.

Local Trail Users (Recreational)

Typically, residents within 50km radius of a trailhead use trails for fitness, recreation, and leisure, especially on weekends and holidays. Accessibility and setting are crucial. Those traveling longer distances (<100km) focus more on nearby attractions and amenities, often visiting on weekends.

Adventure Cycling

Gravel grinding and adventure riding (bike packing) tourism have experienced notable growth in Australia, particularly in regions with extensive natural landscapes and well-maintained, low-traffic gravel roads.

With the decline of traditional tourism in some regional areas, local councils and tourism boards have aimed to diversify their offerings. Adventure cycling, especially gravel grinding, has been identified as a potential growth area due to its increasing global and national popularity and minimal cost of implementation, as it does not require significant infrastructure compared to single track mountain biking.

State Governments, including NSW, have acknowledged this growth through reports such as *Adventure Cycling Trends, Supply and Demand Analysis* (2023) and strategic plans like the Adventure Cycling Strategy. Additionally, some councils have started developing specific experiences around gravel and adventure cycling.

It is important to note that while there are similarities between 'gravel grinder' and 'bike packers' markets, they use the same tracks and backcountry roads but seek slightly different experiences. Gravel grinders prefer more challenging and longer routes with greater elevation gain; they often record their achievements electronically via platforms like Strava and typically aim

² Ausplay 2024

for 40km-160km rides, sometimes more in a single day. When traveling for vacation, they stay in towns, utilize roofed accommodations, and dine at cafes and restaurants before and after rides. Their goal on a ride is generally to cover the distance within a set time, with fewer rest stops. Their added-value tourism activities occur post-ride, off bike.

Bike packers usually target 30km-60km per day depending on the route's ascent profile. They may carry their own food and camping gear, designing routes based on distances between towns and/or remote campsites. While some may free camp, sites with basic facilities such as toilets and water are preferred. Roofed accommodations are also targeted as a treat or for one-day routes. They seek 'slower' experiences during their trips, aiming for off-bike attractions like farm gates, wineries, breweries, distilleries, other food and produce locations, historical sites, and sightseeing spots such as lookouts and short walks.

eBikes

Electric and power-assisted bikes (e-bikes) are among the fastest-growing segments of the bicycle industry. They enable riders to extend their cycling distances, allowing more individuals to experience nature on two wheels. Planning for e-bike visitation requires specialized infrastructure considerations, including bike range, recharge capacity, and charging stations.

E-bikes provide solutions for overcoming hilly terrain or fitness limitations, assist in rehabilitation after injury or illness, and serve as a cost-effective and environmentally friendly transportation option. They also enhance trail accessibility for older riders, enabling them to access areas and trails that might otherwise be challenging.

Australian e-bike sales have been increasing rapidly. In the 2019–20 financial year, sales reached 48,000 units, nearly a 50% increase from the 32,500 units sold in 2018–19. Assuming an average retail sale price of \$3,000 per unit, this translates to approximately \$216 million in annual retail sales for the 2020–21 financial year—a remarkable growth for a product category that barely existed in Australia five years ago and is poised for further expansion.

E-bikes are particularly well-suited to hilly regions such as Swifts Creek and its surroundings because they extend the distance range while reducing the physical exertion and fitness required to navigate challenging terrain.

However, e-bikes do have a limited range, depending on the model, battery technology, and energy expenditure based on terrain profile. This necessitates additional investments in supplying charging stations, rental bikes, appropriate transport, and servicing facilities.

It is important to note that e-bikes are 'pedal-assisted' and limited in power, thus not comparable to the power or environmental impacts of motorbikes.

Adaptive cycling

The accessible tourism sector, which encompasses adaptive sports such as cycling, is increasingly recognised as an essential component of inclusive tourism. This sector strives to provide equitable travel experiences for all individuals, irrespective of their abilities.

Adaptive cycling, in particular, offers individuals with disabilities and limited mobility an excellent opportunity to engage in outdoor adventures across various challenging environments. In Australia, approximately

18% of the population, or about 4.4 million people, have a disability.

Several barriers can hinder individuals with disabilities from accessing remote and off-road cycling areas and connecting with nature. Nevertheless, the provision of adaptive adventure cycling opportunities presents an enjoyable and adventurous means for everyone to explore these regions. Back country road and gravel riding often serve as ideal mechanisms for delivering quality experiences due to the suitability of the tracks and minimal infrastructure requirements. However, safety provisions, considering the potential presence of motorised traffic, remain a fundamental aspect of planning.

Adventure Ride Case Study

High Country Gravel Adventure

The "Victoria High Country Gravel Adventure" campaign demonstrated how gravel grinding tourism can successfully drive economic growth and regional revitalisation. The program identified and mapped 1,000km of gravel riding roads and trails suited to a variety of skill and experience levels. Signage was installed at key points and rest stops with water refill stations.

A central online platform was developed containing route descriptors and pre-trip planning tools including downloadable GPX files for navigation using common GPS-enabled ride devices. Local businesses were approached to partner with the program and cycling clubs signed up in support.

A dedicated website was built with links to relevant tourism portals, while ride influencers were identified and targeted to help spread the word following hosted familiarisation trips. Adventure riding events were supported attracting both domestic and international visitors.

By investing in infrastructure, engaging local communities, and implementing strong marketing strategies, the program resulted in an indicative 25% increase in tourism revenue in the first two years and a 40% increase in adventure ride event registrations. Local businesses reported increased foot traffic, leading to new business opportunities such as facilitation services (food and camp drops, guiding, sales and servicing).

<https://www.victoriashighcountry.com.au/ride/gravel/>



Dark Sky/ Astronomy/ Stargazing Tourism

Dark sky tourism, centred around stargazing, has gained significant traction globally as travellers seek unpolluted night skies to observe celestial wonders. This niche tourism not only offers unique astronomical experiences but also promotes environmental awareness and supports local economies.

Destinations with minimal light pollution have become prime spots for enthusiasts aiming to witness phenomena like the Milky Way, meteor showers, eclipses and distant galaxies.

Australia is home to several officially accredited Dark Sky Places recognised by the International Dark-Sky Association (IDA):

- Warrumbungle National Park, New South Wales: Designated in 2016, it became Australia's first International Dark Sky Park.
- River Murray International Dark Sky Reserve, South Australia: Accredited in 2019, this reserve offers pristine night skies along the River Murray.
- Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary, South Australia: Recognized as an International Dark Sky Sanctuary.
- Jump-Up, Queensland: This site is designated as an International Dark Sky Sanctuary.

- Carrickalinga, South Australia: In 2023, Carrickalinga became Australia's first International Dark Sky Community, recognized for its efforts in preserving the night sky through responsible lighting and community engagement.
- Palm Beach Headland, New South Wales: In 2024, Palm Beach Headland was designated as Australia's first Urban Night Sky Place, highlighting its commitment to preserving dark skies within an urban setting.

These designations reflect Australia's commitment to preserving natural nightscapes and promoting astronomy tourism.

Currently Victoria does not have any officially accredited Dark Sky Places recognised by the International Dark-Sky Association (IDA). However, there are notable efforts and locations within the state that contribute to dark sky preservation and stargazing opportunities.

Destination Gippsland has developed a Gippsland Dark Skies Project Toolkit which seeks to connect 13 destinations in East Gippsland and Wellington Shires that offer exceptional stargazing opportunities due to minimal light pollution. The initiative aims to drive visitation by providing unique astro-tourism experiences, including Aboriginal interpretation and storytelling of the land and skies. Approximately 200 tourism businesses in surrounding towns stand to benefit from increased visitor expenditure, job creation, and business development opportunities.



IMAGE: Earth Sanctuary, Alice Springs, Northern Territory

Case Study

Earth Sanctuary, Alice Springs, Northern Territory

Located near Alice Springs, the Earth Sanctuary (pictured) offers eco-certified, carbon-neutral stargazing adventures conducting tours, dinner and stars tour, and an overnight experience known as the "Sunset 2 Sunrise" experience.

Visitors engage in intimate astronomy sessions, observing celestial bodies like Saturn, Mercury, and Mars through telescopes, guided by expert astronomers. The experience includes discussions around a campfire and culminates with sunrise observations. Available from April to September, the tour costs \$676 for adults and \$475 for children aged eight and over. While specific economic impact data isn't provided, the unique offering contributes to the local tourism economy and is an award winning experience that is world renowned. www.earth-sanctuary.com.au



Health in Nature

Growing Popularity of Yoga in Nature

The trend of practicing yoga outdoors is on the rise, with more people recognising the synergistic benefits of combining yoga with the calming influence of nature. As demand for wellness travel increases, yoga retreats in scenic, natural settings are booming. This growing interest presents an opportunity for destinations to tap into the market of individuals seeking to improve their physical and mental well-being in peaceful outdoor environments. With its proven ability to reduce stress, enhance flexibility, and boost overall mental clarity, nature-based yoga offers significant potential for tourism businesses to attract wellness-focused travellers. These travellers do not always look for a luxurious five star retreat but also value simple, design lead and place-based accommodation and facilities.

Forest Bathing: A Rising Trend for Mental Health

Forest bathing (Shinrin-Yoku) is gaining widespread attention, especially as more research underscores its profound health benefits. As people become increasingly aware of the therapeutic effects of immersing themselves in nature, the demand for forest bathing experiences is expanding. This practice, which promotes relaxation and a sense of connection with the environment, has been shown to reduce stress and enhance immune function. With growing interest in mindfulness and holistic health, this activity presents a prime opportunity for tourism destinations to create unique, health-focused experiences that attract eco-tourists and wellness seekers alike.

Expanding Horizons: Other Nature-Based Wellness Activities

In addition to yoga, forest bathing, and meditation, a growing number of nature-based wellness activities are gaining momentum, offering exciting opportunities for tourism businesses to diversify their offerings:

- **Wild Swimming:** A growing trend in wellness tourism, wild swimming is attracting individuals eager to experience the healing benefits of natural water sources. People are flocking to lakes, rivers, and the sea for its physical and mental health benefits, presenting an exciting opportunity for destinations to develop water-based wellness programs, particularly in colder months and with like-minded groups.
- **Active Practices of Nature Resilience:** There is a growing interest in more physically and mentally challenging nature-based activities, such as rafting, horse riding, climbing and overnight hiking, which push individuals outside their comfort zones and help build resilience. These adventurous activities allow travellers to not only experience the natural world in an active way but also enhance their mental and physical strength. This presents an opportunity for tourism businesses to offer experiences that foster personal growth and empowerment through immersive outdoor challenges.

With more people prioritising mental and physical health, the demand for nature-based wellness experiences is at an all-time high. This represents a growing sector in tourism, one with the potential to

expand as consumers seek meaningful ways to rejuvenate their bodies and minds.

For tourism providers, this is a perfect opportunity to capitalise on the growing trend and offer transformative experiences that connect travellers to the healing power of nature.

Tiny House Movement

Tiny House tourism is gaining momentum in regional Australia, particularly in Victoria, as a sustainable and unique accommodation option.

These compact, self-contained dwellings (100-400 square feet) maximise space and efficiency, often incorporating eco-friendly features like solar power, water conservation, and off-grid capabilities.

Their appeal lies in offering visitors a remote, immersive, nature-based experience that aligns with the growing demand for sustainable travel.

Ideal for regional settings, Tiny Houses seamlessly integrate into rural landscapes, enhancing the tourism appeal of destinations such as the Great Ocean Road, High Country, Gippsland, and Macedon Ranges.

Positioned as eco-tourism experiences, luxury glamping accommodations, or wellness retreats, they attract a broad market, from adventure seekers to wellness travellers.

Benefits for Regional Tourism and Economy:

- **Unique Accommodation Offering:** Provides an intimate, sustainable alternative to traditional motels and caravan parks huts, enhancing visitor experience and destination appeal.
- **Eco-Tourism Growth:** Supports sustainable travel by offering energy-efficient, low-impact stays in nature-focused locations.
- **Luxury and Glamping Appeal:** High-end tiny houses attract travellers seeking upscale yet nature-immersed accommodations.
- **Wellness and Retreat Tourism:** Ideal for secluded wellness retreats, yoga escapes, and relaxation-focused stays.
- **Diversification of Regional Offerings:** Expands available lodging options, making lesser-known areas more attractive to tourists.
- **Economic Boost for Rural Areas:** Encourages visitor spending in local businesses, including wineries, markets, and adventure operators.
- **Sustainable Development:** Promotes environmentally friendly tourism infrastructure with minimal land impact.
- **Year-Round Tourism Potential:** Attracts off-season travellers, supporting consistent economic activity in regional areas.

Agritourism

Agritourism in Australia has been experiencing significant growth, with the sector's annual opportunity projected to reach approximately \$18.6b by 2030, reflecting an annual growth rate of around 5%.

In recognition of this growth potential the Australian Regional Tourism Network (ART) spearheaded the development of a comprehensive national strategy which was launched in 2023. This strategy aims to integrate agricultural experiences with tourism, offering visitors authentic rural engagements while providing farmers with diversified income streams.

Key objectives include enhancing visitor experiences on farms, promoting regional produce, and fostering sustainable tourism practices that benefit both the agricultural and tourism sectors. By aligning with this strategy, regions across Australia can leverage their unique agricultural assets to attract tourists seeking genuine rural experiences.

Destination Gippsland has recognised the potential of agritourism as a key driver for regional development. To capitalise on this interest, they have developed a comprehensive Food, Drink & Agritourism Strategy aimed at establishing Gippsland as a premier epicurean destination. This strategy focuses on promoting farm stays, local produce markets, and agricultural events that showcase the region's rich farming heritage.

A significant component of this strategy is the development of agritourism trails that guide visitors through Gippsland's diverse agricultural landscapes. These trails connect tourists with farm gates, wineries, and artisanal producers, encouraging exploration of the region's rural areas. By providing curated routes and informative resources, Destination Gippsland aims to enhance the visitor experience while promoting sustainable tourism practices. This initiative aligns with broader goals of dispersing tourist activity across the region, reducing pressure on popular sites, and ensuring that the benefits of tourism are distributed throughout Gippsland's communities.

In the Swifts Creek, Benambra, and Ensay region, there is potential to develop agritourism offerings that capitalise on the area's unique agricultural landscape. Opportunities include establishing farm stay accommodations that allow visitors to experience daily farm life, farmgate trails, and hosting workshops on traditional skills. Additionally, developing and promoting local produce markets or farm-to-table dining experiences can showcase the region's fresh produce and culinary heritage. By leveraging these opportunities, the Swifts Creek, Benambra, and Ensay region can attract tourists seeking authentic rural experiences, thereby stimulating economic growth and fostering community development.

9 Economic & Environmental Considerations

Developing nature-based tourism experiences in regional Victoria requires a balanced approach that considers both economic and environmental factors to ensure sustainable growth.

9.1 Economic Considerations

- **Job Creation and Economic Diversification:** Nature-based tourism can generate employment opportunities and diversify rural economies, providing alternative income sources for regional communities.
- **Infrastructure Investment:** Investing in infrastructure such as trails, visitor centres, and accommodations enhances visitor experience and can lead to increased tourist spending and local job creation during and post build.
- **Market Demand for Sustainable Practices:** There is a growing demand for sustainable and eco-friendly tourism experiences, which can be leveraged to attract environmentally conscious travellers.
- **Seasonal Revenue Fluctuations:** Understanding and planning for seasonal variations in tourism can help in managing resources and maintaining economic stability.

- **Impact on Local Businesses:** Tourism can boost local businesses such as pubs/cafes, bakeries, retail shops, and tour operators, contributing to the overall economic vitality of the region.
- **Risk of Overdependence:** Relying heavily on tourism can make local economies vulnerable to external factors such as natural disasters or global pandemics, highlighting the need for economic diversification.

9.2 Remote locations

Being remote present additional challenges and opportunities when developing nature-based tourism.

- **Higher Infrastructure Costs:** Building and maintaining roads, tracks, accommodation and visitor facilities in remote areas can be expensive due to difficult landscapes, travel costs and lack of some services.
- **Limited Workforce Availability:** Small populations may struggle to provide a skilled workforce.
- **Supply Chain Challenges:** Transporting food, fuel, and tourism supplies to remote regional locations increases costs for businesses and visitors.

- **Seasonality and Revenue Stability:** Harsh weather or accessibility issues can lead to highly seasonal visitor numbers, making it hard to maintain year-round economic stability.
- **Higher Operational Costs:** Limited and/or unstable access to power, water, labour and telecommunications increases costs for accommodation and tour operators.
- **Visitor Price Sensitivity:** The high cost of reaching and staying in remote locations may limit the market to a smaller market pool and may not be attractive to some high-spending traveller segments, affecting overall visitor numbers and spend.
- **Dependence on Government Support:** Public investment in infrastructure, marketing, visitor servicing and conservation programs is often needed to sustain tourism in remote areas.
- **Community-Driven Business Models:** Remote destinations may benefit from community-owned tourism enterprises that ensure economic benefits stay local.

9.3 Environmental Considerations

- **Sustainable Resource Use**

Implementing practices that minimise resource consumption, such as water and energy, helps in reducing the environmental footprint of tourism activities.

- **Waste Management**

Effective waste management is crucial to prevent pollution and to maintain the natural beauty and the amenity of local townships.

- **Habitat Preservation**

Ensuring that tourism development and visitor behaviours do not encroach on critical habitats for the protection of biodiversity.

- **Climate Change Adaptation**

Developing strategies to mitigate and adapt to climate change impacts ensures the long-term viability of nature-based tourism. These impacts include fire, floods, storms and other natural and man-made disasters.

- **Environmental Education**

Educating visitors about the local ecosystem fosters appreciation and encourages responsible behaviour, contributing to conservation efforts.

- **Monitoring and Regulation**

Regular environmental impact assessments and strict enforcement of regulations help in maintaining ecological integrity.

- **Community Involvement**

Engaging local communities in tourism planning promotes stewardship and ensures that development aligns with environmental conservation goals.

- **Restricting Visitor Numbers**

Implementing carrying capacity limits prevents overuse of natural areas, reducing stress on ecosystems and preserving them for future generations.

Remote regional locations present additional economic and environmental challenges and opportunities when developing nature-based tourism experiences.

- **Higher Infrastructure Costs**

Building and maintaining roads, tracks, accommodation and visitor facilities in remote areas can be expensive due to difficult landscapes, travel costs and lack of some services.

- **Limited Workforce Availability**

Small populations may struggle to provide a skilled workforce.

- **Supply Chain Challenges**

Transporting food, fuel, and supplies to remote regional locations increases costs for businesses and visitors.

- **Seasonality and Revenue Stability**

Harsh weather or accessibility issues can lead to highly seasonal visitor numbers, making it hard to maintain year-round economic stability.

- **Higher Operational Costs**

Limited and/or unstable access to power, water, labour and telecommunications increases costs for accommodation, pubs/cafes and tourism operators.

- **Visitor Price Sensitivity**

- The high cost of reaching and staying in remote locations may limit the market to a smaller market pool and may not be attractive to some high-spending traveller segments, affecting overall visitor numbers and spend.

- **Dependence on Government Support**

Public investment in infrastructure, marketing, visitor servicing and conservation programs is often needed to sustain tourism in regional and remote areas.

- **Community-Driven Business Models**

Remote destinations may benefit from community-owned tourism enterprises that ensure economic benefits stay local.

- **Fragile Ecosystems**

Remote areas often contain pristine environments with limited resilience to human impact, requiring strict conservation measures.

- **Limited Emergency Response**

Distance from major cities makes it harder to respond to emergencies like accidents, bushfires, extreme weather, or pollution incidents.

- **Biodiversity Protection**

Many remote locations are home to endangered species and habitats, necessitating careful visitor management to avoid impacts.

- **Waste and Water Management**

Limited infrastructure and supply can make it challenging to handle waste and provide clean water without harming the environment.

- **Carbon Footprint of Access**

Long-distance travel to remote locations (often requiring flights, boats, or off-road vehicles) can increase the overall environmental footprint of tourism.

- **Energy Dependence**

Many remote destinations rely on diesel generators or off-grid solutions, putting pressure on fuel chains and challenges in implementing renewal energy options.

- **Climate Change Vulnerability**

Rising temperatures, extreme weather events, and sea-level rise can disproportionately impact remote destinations.

10 Risk and Mitigation Matrix for Nature-based Tourism

When developing nature-based tourism initiatives in regional Victoria and Swifts Creek, a range of risks must be considered to ensure long-term sustainability and success.

While numerous challenges exist, this framework highlights eight of the most significant risks that could impact regional tourism businesses, destinations, and ecosystems. These risks span environmental, economic, regulatory, and operational factors, each requiring strategic mitigation to enhance resilience. This framework is not exhaustive but serves as a foundation for identifying and addressing additional risks specific to individual opportunities and locations.

Table 1. Risk & Mitigation Matrix

NO	RISK CATEGORY	RISK DESCRIPTION	MITIGATION STRATEGIES
1	Climate change and natural disasters	Increased frequency and ferocity of bushfires, floods, and storms impacting tourism assets and visitor safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Implement fire-resistant and/or easily repairable/replaceable public infrastructure• Ensure clear emergency response plans• Develop year-round tourism strategies and experiences
2	Infrastructure limitations and accessibility	Poor road conditions, lack of public transport, and limited digital connectivity deter visitors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Advocate for improved roads, EV charging stations, and high-speed internet while promoting alternative transport options like shuttle services and bike-friendly infrastructure
3	Regulatory and planning barriers	Lengthy permit processes, zoning restrictions, and government red tape delaying or preventing development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engage early with local council, land managers and state agencies• Build advocacy and support with key influential voices• Leverage pilot projects for faster approvals• Create streamlined processes for eco-tourism developments
4	Workforce and business capability	Shortages of skilled workers in hospitality, guiding, and tourism services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Invest in local training programs Create seasonal workforce attraction strategies• Partner with educational institutions for skill-building initiatives
5	Seasonal demand and economic viability	Heavy reliance on peak-season visitors leading to off-season economic struggles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop year-round experiences (e.g., wellness retreats, cultural heritage tours)• Incentivise off-season travel• Diversify tourism offerings

NO	RISK CATEGORY	RISK DESCRIPTION	MITIGATION STRATEGIES
6	Environmental degradation and visitor impact	Over-tourism in sensitive areas leading to habitat damage, pollution, and community backlash.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Implement visitor caps, eco-certification programs, and sustainability guidelines• Invest in conservation projects alongside tourism growth
7	Market positioning and destination awareness	Low regional awareness and branding confusion affecting visitor numbers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strengthen destination marketing Develop clear branding strategies Integrate digital storytelling and influencer campaigns
8	Financial sustainability and funding challenges	Limited investment and inconsistent funding affecting long-term viability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Secure diverse funding sources, including grants, public-private partnerships, and local investment schemes• Ensure financial resilience through scalable business models
9	Distance from key markets and visitor access	The region's remote location (4+ hours from Melbourne) may deter visitors, limiting spontaneous travel and reducing accessibility for key markets.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop multi-day itineraries to encourage extended stays• Enhance roadside attractions to break up the journey• Improve transport options (e.g., shuttle services, ride-sharing partnerships)• Leverage digital marketing to highlight the unique value of a destination "worth the journey"

11 Opportunities: Nature Based Tourism

From 2014 to 2023, nature-based activities among Australians have seen an overall growth of 47% in demand.³

- Bushwalking and rainforest walks grew significantly in popularity by 81%
- Visiting national or state parks grew by 73%
- Caravanning or camping saw 40% growth
- Cycling grew by 53%

At the heart of most nature-based tourism are trails. Trails are often a physical pathway but as a concept can encompass a variety of activities and modalities of experience, including thematic:

- Walking trails (hike, run)
- Cycling trails (ride)
- Adaptive Trails (various adaptive modes)
- Aquatic trails (paddling, wild swimming)
- Historic Trails (various transport modes including vehicle or human powered)
- Cultural Trails (including First Nations, various transport modes including vehicle or human powered)

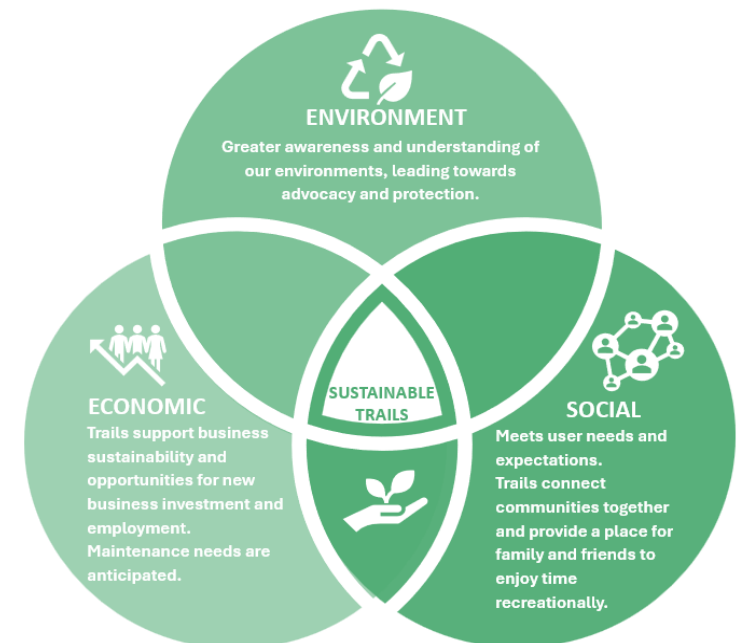
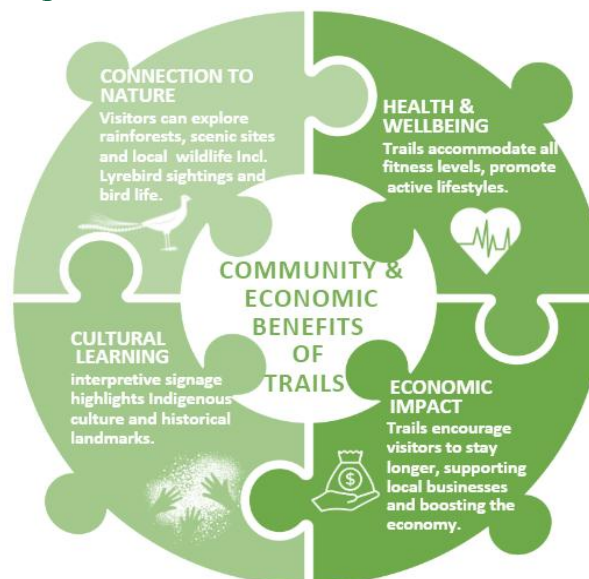
- Art Trails (including First Nations, various transport modes including vehicle or human powered)

Each form requires different levels of infrastructure and investment. Each form of trail lends itself to different forms of engagement from independent, to guided / hosted.

All forms of trail require careful planning, coordination and cooperation between government agencies, community organisations, land managers and individual stakeholders.

All forms of trail provide an anchor point for developing a critical mass of visitor attraction.

Figure 1. Benefits to users



³ Tourism Research Australia, TRA

Opportunity ①: Adventure Cycling

Opportunity 1.1: Gravel Grind & Bike Packing

Gravel grinding and bike packing (referred to here as ‘Adventure Cycling’) are two forms of cycle recreation that have surged in popularity over the past 5+ years.

Both forms of cycling are centred on using back country roads and tracks that offer a ‘journey through nature’ experience anchored to a ‘trailhead’ town or townships.

Both sub-groups seek immersive experiences that are equally challenging and rewarding in their completion, relying on mostly existing road and track infrastructure and digital navigation, with trips prompted by facilitative information and guidance such as online guides and GPS/GPX file navigation downloads used on personal electronic devices.

Adventure cycling is a ‘low hanging fruit’ opportunity as it utilises existing infrastructure (roads, public tracks, management vehicle tracks, rail trails, campsites, accommodation) and requires very low levels of investment, usually in the planning, curation and promotion phase of the experience.

Adventure cycling attracts a broad range (pending the suite of route difficulties on offer), and is undertaken in unsupported, semi-supported and fully-supported modes for recreation but also – in the case of gravel grinding – in competitive event formats. Bike packing if more exploratory in nature, while gravel grinding leans more to physical and mental endurance accomplishment.

Importantly, adventure cycling is a ‘destination travel’ activity, as riders seek unique environments and points of interest to visit during a ride.

Adventure cyclists engage with off-route attractions and facilities including accommodation, eateries, wineries, distilleries, and non-ride activities i.e. cultural events, art galleries as part of their experience and often undertake trips that are overnight and multiday.

It is important in any adventure riding experience curation to recognise the different engagement dynamics and needs of the two sub groups gravel grinder and bike packers. The former seek longer distance rides (80km-160km+) with a more challenging ride profile (ascents etc), while the latter engage in lesser distances (30-60km), with more stop offs and engagements with points of interest enroute, rather than just at the start and finish of a ride.

Objective

Visitor attraction – attracts increased visitation leveraged from a growth market at low investment, while encouraging overnight / multi-day layovers.

Economic Growth and Tourism Stimulation – expenditure by ride visitors on accommodation, catering and off ride activities (attractions). Some potential for tour operators to offer added value facilitation services – water/food drops, pre-set camps, guided excursions. Retail bike opportunities for servicing, spares, bike repairs and rental.

Dispersal – the wide catchment area required for (usually) loop rides that cover between 30km to 160km or more means ride visitors are dispersed across a region, delivering potential custom to more

remote townships, attractions, businesses and accommodation, and in the case of bike packers, leveraging more use from existing campsites which gives impetus for improved management and maintenance.

Passive surveillance – increase in general safety and community security in the region with more ‘eyes’ across larger rural areas with reporting (and response) outcomes across rubbish dumping, fire, trespass and property damage being reported to authorities, and a lower likelihood of incidents being committed.

Strategies and Actions

1. Planning

Strategy: Identify suitable stakeholders with regional knowledge of current and potential adventure riding routes. Research potential routes in collaboration with experience designers and regional stakeholders/champions. Set classification criteria for designing ride routes according to different target riding market/s. Identify likely infrastructure and partnering needs.

Actions: Complete a desktop ‘audit’ of potential adventure cycling routes according to set criteria of classification, ensuring both ‘gravel grind’ and bike packing’ markets are attended to.

2. Routes & Experience Design

Strategy: Field-test and confirm draft list of adventure ride routes.

Actions: Record all draft routes (can be done via car-based field audit), recording POIs, campsites, natural features, mobile phone coverage, risk assessments, infrastructure requirements (if any) etc to devise final mapping and facilitation data (GPX/KML files and waypoints. Develop photographic assets of routes and route descriptor write ups. Create digital and physical mapping collateral.

3. Infrastructure Upgrades

Strategy: Develop infrastructure, ‘trailhead’ and wayfinding as needed

Actions: Based on findings of route audit, implement any infrastructure requirements which may include development of a town centre ‘trailhead’ /map board / information, wayfinding signage at pertinent on route points, installation of water resources if practical, bike service stations and wash points in town and any route ‘gaps’ i.e. Bald Hills Creek Rd missing link for Swifts Creek-Omeo cycling route)..

4. Marketing & Promotion

Strategy: Digital Engagement & User-Generated

Actions: Create a ride brand (potentially can sit under Ride Omeo channel as a specific Swifts Creek-centric adventure ride brand, leveraging off but adding value to Omeo’s MTB offering). Confirm and create appropriate online ‘host’ site – may be own entity or sit under another umbrella (Ride Omeo, Visit East Gippsland etc). Research, engage and feed content through social media adventure ride community groups. Engage a local / regional ride ambassador/s to showcase and narrate the ride offering.

5. Partnerships & Stakeholder Engagement

Strategy: Community and Business Collaboration

Actions: Engage with relevant cycle specific and cycling-adjacent tourism businesses to develop ‘bike friendly’ facilitations including services and retail.

Outcomes

- Curated suite of adventure cycling routes (15-20+) that deliver pre and during trip information to facilitate self-sufficient cycle tourism across the region. Experiences should be aimed at a broad range of experience levels from easy/beginner to intermediate and advanced routes catering to a variety of experience demands (challenge levels, township nodes, water points, campsites, points of interest).
- Rich cache of pre-trip inspiration and information to facilitate visitation.
- Dispersal of visitation across the region delivering visitation to features and attractions including those more remote.
- Increased demand for accommodation and hospitality services.
- Safer cycling experiences.
- Opportunity for leveraging business growth in the tourism and adjacent industries in Swifts Creek.



Table 2. Adventure Cycling Costings

COMPONENT	ESTIMATED COST (AUD)	NOTES
1. Planning		
Consultancy Services	\$10,000 – \$15,000	Engaging experts in adventure cycle route planning and experience development to consult with key stakeholders, develop a comprehensive methodology and complete desktop planning
2. Routes & Experience Design		
Consultancy Services	\$25,000 – \$35,000	Engaging experts in adventure cycle route planning to complete field work, develop full trail audit report, confirm infrastructure requirements and costings, technical mapping and data edits, route write ups; work with land managers to confirm pathways for any managed land works and permissions required.
Mapping	\$5,000 – \$10,000	Complete user-facing mapping - online/digital and physical
Digital Portal	\$10,000 - \$20,000	Design and build of website portal or channel, costs vary depending on chosen solution (i.e. added content portal on existing website or dedicated website. Likely the former). In conjunction with Marketing & Promotion below.
3. Infrastructure Upgrades		
Infrastructure	\$50,000-\$100,000	<p>In town infrastructure – bike racks (3-4), bike service station (1), bike wash (1), e-Bike charging station/s, gateway information hub (1).</p> <p>On route infrastructure – water points, wayfinding / map boards</p> <p>Investigate route blockage identified on Bald Hills Creek Rd. Work with land manager (DEECA) to carry out grading and remedial roadworks (dirt road) to create thoroughfare suitable for adventure cycling. <i>NB: this also opens up the route for proposed re-routing of Cattlemen100 event – see Opportunity #2 .</i></p>
4. Marketing & Promotion		
Brand or sub-brand	\$10,000	Design of a brand or sub-brand for the adventure ride collection
Launch campaign	\$10,000 – \$30,000	Social media marketing initiatives encouraging user-generated content, including hashtag promotion and content curation. Content partnerships with leading adventure ride community channels and online media (i.e. WeAreExplorers)
Seasonal Marketing Activations	\$10,000 – \$15,000	Ongoing digital and social content pushes including updating marketing materials, advertising, and potential social ride event coordination and/or collaboration with adventure ride events based in Swifts Creek
ESTIMATED ACTIVATION TOTAL	\$130,000 - \$225,000	Ongoing digital and social content pushes including updating marketing materials, advertising, and potential social ride event coordination and/or collaboration with adventure ride events based in Swifts Creek

Opportunity 1.2: Adventure Cycling Events

There are two existing regional cycling events that represent excellent opportunities for supporting growth and visitor attraction to the Swifts Creek Region:

- **Cattlemen 100 /**
<https://www.velogrammont.com/ctlm100>
- **Tour de Tambo /**
<https://snowyrivermail.com.au/6438/the-first-tour-de-tambo/>

Initiation of local partnerships and collaboration, seed investments and program development for both events has the potential to position them as marquee state and regional events that magnetising visitation by showcasing adventure riding in the area.

Opportunity Objectives

- To encourage existing state-level gravel competitive grind event, the Cattlemen 100, to relocate its event base HQ to start and finish to Swifts Creek township, thereby positioning the township as an adventure cycling hub.
- To work with current operators of the family-friendly non-competitive Tour de Tambo, with a view to collaboration and partnering with a professional cycling event operator (to tender) to re-design and expand the ride offering with a view to achieving event viability and growing the event over time.

- Use both events as time-specific visitation showcases that bring awareness to and promote broadly the extended adventure cycling experiences on offer in the area positioning Swifts Creek as an adventure cycling destination and encouraging out-of-event return visitation.
- Deliver increased business economic opportunities for local businesses including accommodation and service providers.

Strategies and Actions

Strategy: Engage Vello Grammont, commercial owner of Cattlemen100, in a partnership proposal seeking to establish the event HQ in Swifts Creek.

Actions: Work with Vello Grammont to determine best event HQ sites and associated course logistics. Confirm in town business partnerships for event. Seek seed establishment sponsorship / grant funding for a 3-year term to establish viability pathway.

Investigate route blockage identified on Bald Hills Creek Rd. Work with land manager (DEECA) to carry out grading and remedial roadworks (dirt road) to create thoroughfare suitable for cycling. *NB: this also opens up the route for general adventure cycling recreation and would become a core route Swifts Creek to Omeo as per Opportunity #1.*

Strategy: Work with current volunteer operators of Tour de Tambo to develop a partnership model that seeks engagement of commercial professional cycling event operator. Develop event design to strategically target the ‘experiential’ non-competitive ride activity

market. Redesign event / add routes and activities to better target market.

Actions: Develop an Expressions of Interest calling for interested commercial cycling event operators willing to take partnership in Tour de Tambo. Revise event design including route/s considerations and off-bike added value event components. Develop event collateral for facilitation and promotion. Work through operational challenges including insurance costs / activation (potentially through AusCycling). Confirm seed funding agreement. Re-launch Tour de Tambo with a vision for growth as a major regional event

Outcomes

- Two financially viable and visitor attracting cycling events contributing to business outcomes and positioning of Swifts Creek as an adventure cycling destination.
- Event specific visitor influx and associated in region spend on services and facilitation
- Associated business stimulus
- Out of event return visitation
- Broader cycling community visibility and positioning of region as an adventure cycling destination.

COMPONENT	COST	NOTES
Investment in Cattlemen 100 (Sponsorship/Grant, 3 year Term)	\$5,000 / year for three years	Based on agreed benefits plus KPIs for growth per year.
Remedial trail / roadworks – Bald Hill Creek Road	1km \$20,000 - \$40,000	Enabling works for event but relevant to general adventure ride route development / year-round tourism. Potential to remain 'ride only' section non vehicular, keeping remedial costs low.
Investment in Tour de Tambo (Sponsorship/Grant, 3-year Term)	\$5,000 for three years	Based on agreed benefits plus KPIs for growth per year. Incentive for professional operator take on. Assistance from Council with tender process seeking event operator partnership.
TOTAL	\$20,000 - \$40,000 + \$15,000 over three years	Based on agreed benefits plus KPIs for growth per year. Incentive for professional operator take on or partner with organisers of Tour de Tambo. Assistance from Council with tender process seeking event operator partnership.

Opportunity 1.3: Cycle Friendly Village

As an adventure cycling hub, Swifts Creek has the potential to become a 'cycle-friendly village', offering safe and enjoyable cycling experiences while leveraging the increased visitation seeded by the Omeo Mountain Bike (MTB) asset .

By improving infrastructure, promoting cycling tourism, and integrating cycling into the town's culture, Swifts Creek can enhance its appeal as a sustainable and active community.

Cycle friendly towns feature well-maintained cycling routes that connect key township destinations and recreational areas.

Secure bike parking, repair/service stations, and clear signage enhance convenience, while local businesses and accommodations support cyclists with bike-friendly services.

Opportunity Objectives

- Create a welcoming cycling culture within the township
- Facilitate and support cycling visitation and community engagement in cycling as a mode of intra-town transport
- Create a safer cycling space
- Leverage Omeo MTB park visitation

Strategies and Actions

Install Bike-Friendly Infrastructure

- Create dedicated specialist cycle racks, that would suit professional bikes, in key locations including cafés, pubs, retail, and public spaces so cyclists have secure places to park.
- Install lockable secure bike racks at public accommodation spaces including the caravan park and other camping sites that cyclists may use.
- We would encourage a design element for racks that aligns to destination branding/themes
- Install bike repair stations with basic tools and air pumps to support cyclists in need of quick fixes in public spaces including main street, caravan park and trailheads
- Consider a water refill station and shaded seating areas in main street and near bike stops for rest and hydration

Promote Bike-Friendly Retail & Hospitality

- Encourage cafés, bakeries, and pubs to offer bike-friendly menus (quick, packaged, nutritious meals that suit active travellers). How about the Bike Cookie !!
- Work with local businesses to develop "Cyclist Specials", such as discounts for riders showing a helmet or bike-related loyalty programs
- Encourage early morning or late afternoon opening hours on weekends to cater to riders before or after their MTB sessions in Omeo.
-

Develop Cyclist-Focused Marketing & Wayfinding

- Design a local cycling map showing routes between Swifts Creek and Omeo, scenic detours, and key services for riders (food, accommodation, repairs) – consider display in town on Information Board to raise awareness
- Place clear signage highlighting Swifts Creek as a cyclist-friendly town, including distances to Omeo and other trails – consider creating symbol
- Promote the town's bike-friendly initiatives on social media, regional tourism websites, and Omeo MTB events

Outcomes

- Increased community engagement in cycling as a mode of transport
- Increased general cycle visitation and visitor satisfaction with amenity for cycling
- Facilitation of other activated opportunities - cycling experiences and events

Costs

Infrastructure costs included in Gravel Grind & Bike Packing Opportunity.

Investment in program initiation and coordination via Council or Swifts Creek Futures.

Opportunity ②: Regional & Historical Walking Trails

In the walking trail space, Swifts Creek currently offers a limited number of short walks.

Mining, forestry and High Country pioneers are pillars of existing trails which all remain in the sub-5km range of distances.

There are no currently viable mid- to long-distance walk experiences in the study area. There are, however, natural foundations for creating short walk network hubs, where collating a number of linked short walks with common trailheads, matched to a common historical narrative interpretation that creates a critical mass of attraction enough to generate targeted visitation.

Opportunity 2.1: Cassilis Historical Area

At present the Cassilis Historical Area – perhaps the most well-known local attraction for walkers and history enthusiasts – is an informal destination with no formal walking trails. It has no trailhead signboard at the primary (informal) car park, no wayfinding and no interpretation on site.

There is an interpretation signboard located nearby at the intersection of Cassilis Road and Powers Gully Track, commissioned and maintained by the Omeo Historical Society. It also features mapping of suggested walks around the Cassilis Heritage Area and the nearby Jirnkee Water Race.

Calcine sands, a type of mine tailings, have been identified in part of the heritage site area. These tailings were generated from former mining activities and contain elevated levels of contaminants, such as arsenic, which can be harmful to human health. Temporary signs are in place restricting access to some of the heritage remnants. This contamination presents challenges of public access feasibility and management for Parks Victoria.

Active visitor management is recommended as a medium to long term aim for the site in order to better direct public visitors navigating the site and maintain safety by defining permissible short walk routes and cordoning off sensitive, contaminated or vulnerable areas of the historical site.



Opportunity Objectives

- Establish a formal walk experience for the site with relevant infrastructure and wayfinding
- Restrict access (physically) to sensitive and contaminated areas of the site
- Provide better on-site historical interpretation and narrative, reflected to digital/online delivery for pre-trip facilitation
- Improve and extend overall walking experience via network linkages to adjacent historical attractions (Jirnkee Water Race and Cassilis Cemetery)

Strategies and Actions

- Masterplan Cassilis Historical Area site for visitation including mine areas, Jirnkee Water Race and Cassilis Recreation Ground / Cemetery and associated walking trail alignments and parking facilities.
- Seek funding for and activate heritage and environmental analyses as pre-development works for long term development of walking trail network, inclusive specific study to determine best approach for managing contaminated areas (likely restrict access formally to sensitive site areas with short walks and barriers controlling visitor movement on site).
- Cassilis mines loop walk (if retained) requires re-alignment to soften ascent/descent profiles that are currently unappealing / unsafe.

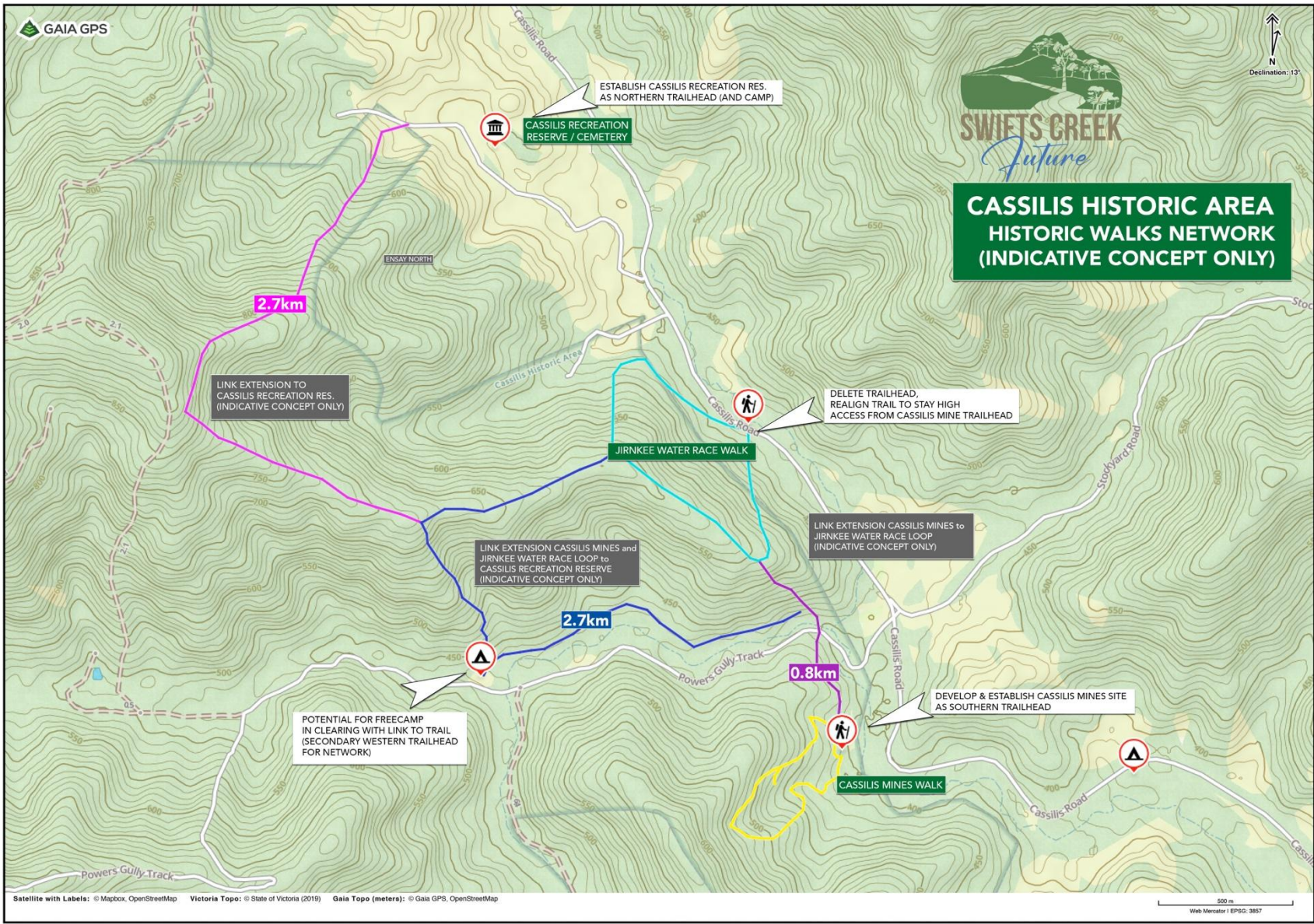
- Plan linking trail alignments from mine site to Jirnkee Water Race and Cassilis Recreation Ground / Cemetery.
- Develop interpretation activations digital and physical on site across all of site, including wayfinding, map boards (relocate current signage).
- Develop specific assisted site management approach in partnership with local organisations (i.e. Omeo Historical Society, regional bushwalking groups and/or seek agreements with likes of Bushtracks & Conservation for twice-yearly maintenance).

Outcomes

- More control of visitor movement on site
- Protection of sensitive archaeological sites
- Significantly improved visitor safety
- Reduced land manager risk of public liability
- Improved visitor experience
- Better public education via leverage of inherent storytelling strengths.

Costs

COMPONENT	COST	NOTES
Heritage and Environmental Site Investigations	\$80,000-\$160,0000	Requires specific quotations
Feasibility Study & Business Case	\$40,000-\$80,000	Assessment of Visitor Impacts and Economic impacts
Trails Master planning	\$60,000-\$80,000	Audit route, in field alignment investigations and confirmations
Trail build approx. 8km new and realigned trail	\$400,000 - \$640,000	Variable surface treatments pending investigations. \$50/m - \$80/m + infrastructure elements) rock stairs, bridge etc).
Trail infrastructure	\$200,000 allowance	Footbridge, trailhead signage, maps, wayfinding, basic car park treatments (formalisation at Mines trailhead)
Permitting, project management, allowances	\$100,000 allowance	
TOTAL	\$900,000 - \$1.2 million.	Indicative only for full site (Cassilis Mines, Jirnkee Water Race, Linking Trails, trailhead activation.



Opportunity 2.2: Bentley Plains Walks

The popular Bentley Plains recreation site includes Moscow Villa Hut, three formal short walks, a horse corral and camping site with some facilities (picnic shelter, toilet, parking, trailhead information board and horse corral). At present it consists of two sites separated by approximately 300 metres of road.

There are three short walks:

- Bentley Plain, 2.5km, Grade 2
- Douglas Reserve, 800m, Grade 2
- Bentley Creek, 1.7km, Grade 2

Bentley Plan and Douglas Reserve walks have trailheads nearby Moscow Villa Hut. Bentley Plan Walk has a trailhead nearby Bentley Plain Camping Area. Moscow Villa Hut has previously been a popular attraction bolstered by Winter Festival activation of a hosted picnic lunch.

A 'soft' development of this site to create a single trailhead linkage to all walks creates opportunity for longer continuous walking experiences. More cohesive communication of the walks promoted as a network may lend the overall destination more lure for walkers seeking a higher threshold of preferred walking distance (given the drive-in time investment required). This in turn prompts more visitation to the region and to/via townships in general, creating more impetus for in township stay and spend.

There are no interpretive installations along the trails with a lack of Point of Interest (POI) features. The Douglas Reserve Walk in particular hosts steel and wooden walkway infrastructure however it has no

identifiable 'feature' to encourage walkers barring 'a pleasant short forest journey'. Overlaying a Timber Heritage interpretation element and/or flora and fauna points of interest may lend the walk more gravitas in association with links to the other two walks.

Longer term development investigations could include a trail extension (out and back) to take in nearby Bentley Waterfall identified as a potential feature anchor. This proposition would require significant investigations, feasibility studies, land manager support and funding.

Opportunity Objectives

- Improve walk experience by linking trails into a single trailhead 'network', creating a 'walk cluster' that encourages visitation.
- Provide better on-site historical interpretation and narrative, reflected to digital/online delivery for pre-trip facilitation. Focus on Timber Heritage narrative given proximity to Washington Winch.
- Long term consideration of 1.6km (one way) trail extension to reach Bentley Falls waterfall feature anchor.

Strategies and Actions

- Masterplan Bentley Plain Walk network for short term and long-term developments, including creating a central trailhead (and required trail links)
- Overlay heritage interpretation elements (in conjunction with other Historical placemaking strategies suggested within this study)

- Seek funding for environmental and cultural analyses as pre-development works for long term development of walking trail network
- Develop interpretation activations digital and physical on site across all of site, including wayfinding, map boards

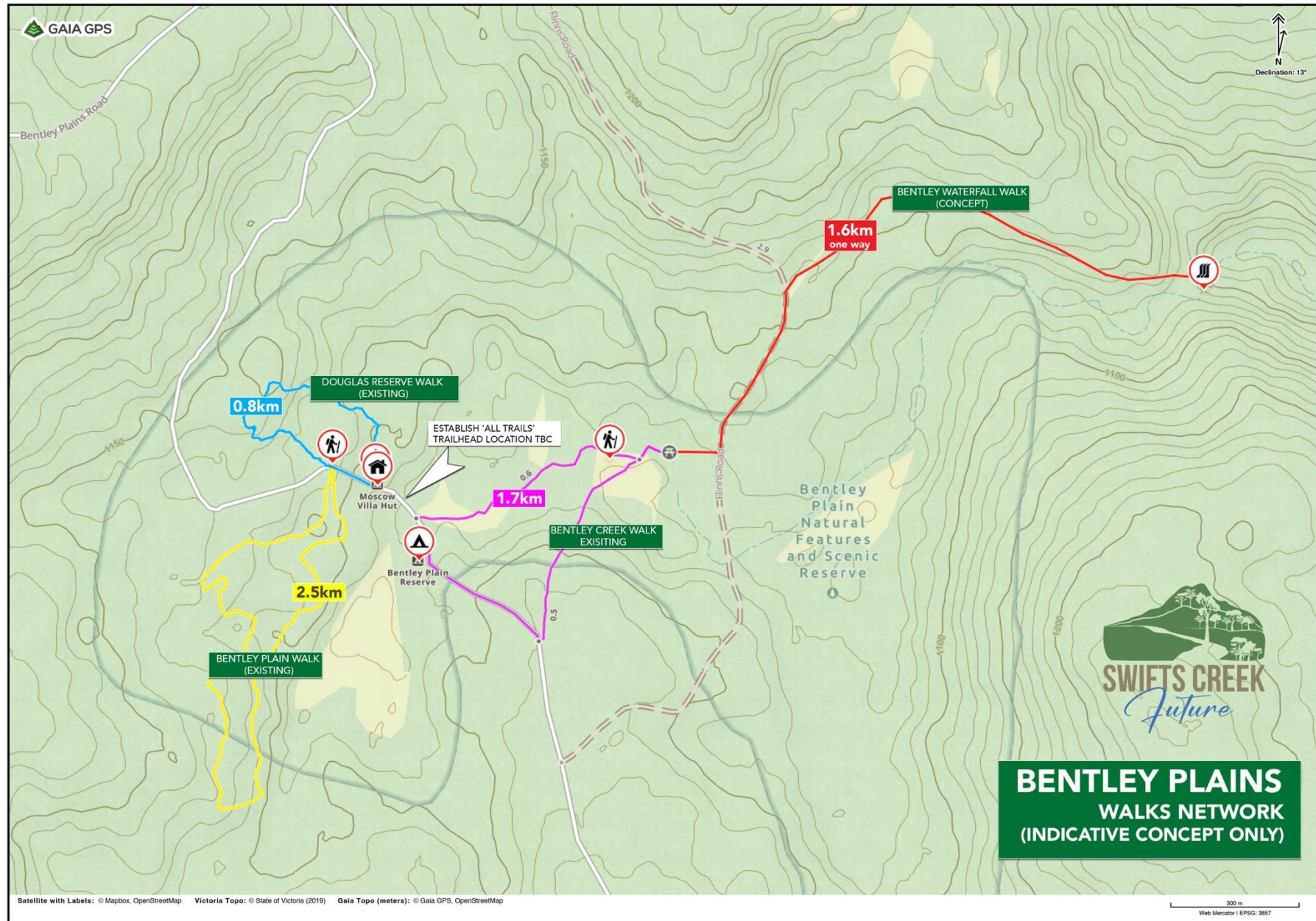
Outcomes

- More cohesive and higher quality visitor experience
- Creation of a walk cluster encouraging increased visitation
- Passive surveillance created by increased visitation of walking community (relevant to Moscow Villa Hut)
- Better public education via leverage of inherent storytelling strengths
- Addition of waterfall feature as a attraction anchor (long term)

Costs

COMPONENT	COST	NOTES
Heritage and Environmental Site Investigations	\$40,000-\$80,000	Requires specific quotations. Not as intensive as Cassilis Area.
Feasibility Study, Concept Planning & Business Case	\$30,000-\$40,000	Assessment of Visitor Impacts and Economic impacts. Site concept plan. And initial field audit.
Trails Master planning	\$60,000-\$80,000	Detailed design, final alignments and quantitative costings.
Trail build approx. 2km new and realigned trail	\$100,000-\$160,000	Variable surface treatments pending investigations. \$50/m - \$80/m + infrastructure elements unknown.
Trail infrastructure	\$100,000 allowance	Trailhead signage, maps, wayfinding, boardwalk sections, stairs (unknown)
Permitting, project management, allowances	\$100,000 allowance	
TOTAL	\$430,000 - \$560,000	Indicative only for full site





Opportunity 2.3: Tambo Trenches

The State Heritage Registered (State Heritage Register VHRH 2446) Tambo Trenches are a series of military trenches located adjacent to the Great Alpine Road, 2.5km south of Ensay in the Tambo Valley. Constructed by members of the 13th Battalion, Volunteer Defence Corps during World War Two, they serve as a memorial to the men and women from the surrounding communities who served in Australia's armed forces.

The site offers a place for reflection and remembrance, featuring commemorative information boards that honour individuals from the greater area who participated in various conflicts and explain the purpose and history of the trenches. The complex consists of fighting pits, sentry posts, communication trenches, a command post and storage area, physical remnants that tell the fascinating story of defensive preparations in World War Two. There are presently no other such sites known to exist in Victoria.

Efforts have already been made to preserve and enhance the Tambo Trenches site. The Ensay-Swifts Creek Returned and Services League (RSL) has been instrumental in these initiatives. Oversight of works includes that of a consulting archaeologist and the site has been LIDAR mapped. There is a likelihood that the site will attain the highest level of protection under Heritage Victoria's classifications.

Development plans are underway to ensure the site's longevity and accessibility. In May 2024, the Ensay-Swifts Creek RSL was awarded a \$25,000 grant from the East Gippsland Community Bushfire Disaster

Relief Fund. Another \$45,000 has been granted by Heritage Victoria. This funding will be used to help preserve the military trenches and enhance the memorial's infrastructure and visitor experience. It will support preservation efforts and improve visitor amenities as a contribution to maintaining the site's historical significance.

This Nature Based Tourism Study supports the primary recommendations of a report '*Tambo Trenches - Proposal for Site Interpretation and Presentation*' (2023), including:

- Development of historical information and interpretation / presentation
- Further Site Surveys as necessary
- Site works as deemed appropriate

The specific suggestion for the development of short 400m walking track exploring the site should be furthered. This will direct site visitors around the site safely without impacting any archaeological or historical sensitivities working to preserve the site, and provide a physical framework for more interpretive overlays.

At present there is an informal trail exploring the site.

Some aspects of development will be undertaken by volunteer, or in-kind contributions, whilst others will require funding.

Tambo Trenches - Proposal for Site Interpretation and Presentation



Walking track into site.



Main trench at centre of site. This large trench would have formed a main central defence area for the outlying small trenches.

IMAGE: from *Tambo Trenches - Proposal for Site Interpretation and Presentation*

Opportunity Objectives

- Further activation of recommendations detailed in 'Tambo Trenches - Proposal for Site Interpretation and Presentation' report and subsequent recommendations of the oversight committee.
- Lend weight to grant funding applications
- Curate on site interpretation activations physical and/or digital
- Develop messaging, communication and marketing activities

Strategies and Actions

- Review status of current report and ongoing activations
- Investigate alternative avenues of funding for site works and ongoing maintenance
- Engage with Tambo Valley Producers Group Inc. – overseeing grant application organisation – and Ensay/Swifts Creek RSL to assist with project development.

Outcomes

- Funding targets achieved
- Site works implemented
- Visitation and profile of historical attraction increased
- Tambo Trenches heritage narrative included in other historical placemaking initiatives as outlined in this document

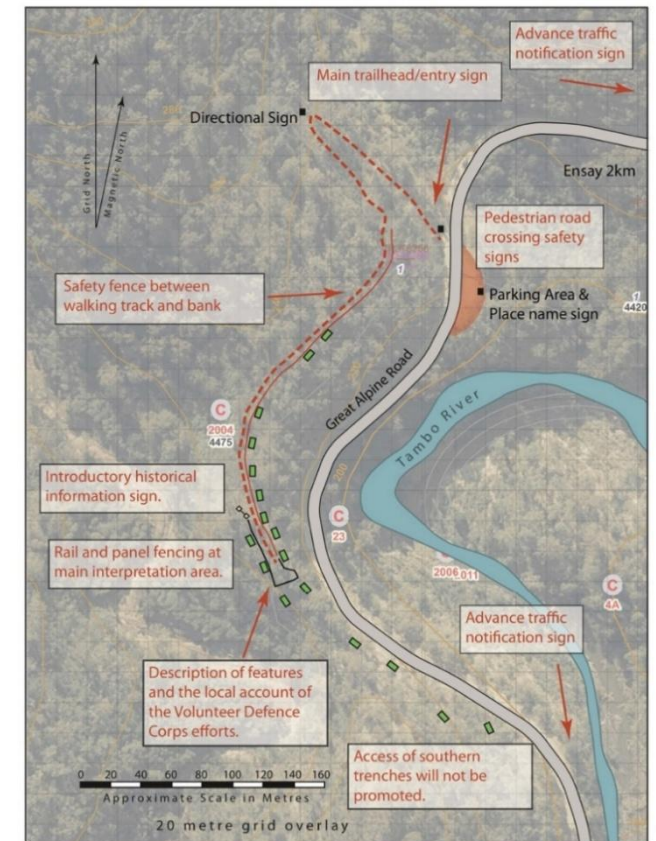
Costs

Tambo Trenches - Proposal for Site Interpretation and Presentation report estimates \$90,000 for Site Surveying & Planning, Site Works, Sign Fabrication & Installation and Contingency.

Suggested revision of likely costs to \$100,000 to encompass appropriate trail build quality, infrastructure and interpretation and account for inflation.

Further funding for ongoing maintenance and curation of interpretation and marketing materials.

Site Plan



Interpretation Proposal Tambo Trenches Devil's Backbone Great Alpine Road Ensay

LEGEND

- Historic trench position

Creation of a short walking track and historic visitor node at the historically significant Volunteer Defence Corps site. Highlighting the strategic importance of the site and the role of the local Volunteer Defence Corps.

IMAGE: from *Tambo Trenches - Proposal for Site Interpretation and Presentation*

Opportunity ③: Township Trails

Opportunity 3.1: Swifts Creek

There are three ‘Township Trails’ identified on Swifts Creek township map boards along with some online collateral:

- **Poet’s Walk**, 1km, Grade 2 - walk past six stanzas of a poem by John Butler inscribed on six cairns.
- **Town to Shelton’s Lane** – 1km, Grade 1 -follows a path running parallel to the Great Alpine Road from the McMillan St intersection to Shelton’s Lane through a stately avenue of Plane Trees.
- **Caravan Park to McLarty’s Lane**, 2km Grade 2- begins at the caravan park at the McMillan Street bridge over the Tambo River and continues for one kilometre to the farm gate across the road.

Opportunity Objectives

- Improve the user experience of Poets Walk
- Extend the collective distance of town walk network to include new features and vistas to create a stronger level of attraction
- Add to the ‘stock of features’ integrating art and other feature installation identified in Opportunity Seven: Art In Nature (following)

Strategies and Actions

- Feasibility study and detailed design to extend Poets Walk using Tambo River frontage (western side) to connect with southern end of Shelton’s Lane, creating an approximate 3.5km walk loop.
- Work in with Opportunity Seven; Art In Nature recommendations to increase number and variety of art installations along extended loop (including Town to Shelton’s Lane section) to improve overall attraction
- Redesign mapping and town boards to reflect extended and connected loop
- Work in with Township Streetscape / Outdoor Spaces planning underway to centre Poets Walk (extended), and potentially create a Trailhead Hub within town that is connected to all walk (and ride) trails with a core information board offering for all trail-related activities and other attractions in town.

Outcomes

- Extension and connection of Poet’s Walk with Shelton Lane to create a Loop
- Proliferation of artistic installations to improve overall attraction
- Positioning of Swifts Creek as an artistic hub.

Costs

COMPONENT	COST	NOTES
Environmental Study (riverfront)	\$40,000	Requires specific quotations.
Feasibility Study, Concept Planning & Business Case	\$30,000	Assessment of Visitor Impacts and Economic impacts. Site concept plan.
Trails Master planning	\$20,000-\$30,000	Detailed design, final alignments and quantitative costings.
Trail build approx. 1.5km	\$100,000-\$160,000	Variable surface treatments pending investigations. \$50/m + infrastructure elements unknown.
Trail infrastructure	\$50,000-\$80,000	Trailhead signage, maps, wayfinding, park benches, picnic tables
Permitting, allowances	\$50,000 allowance	
TOTAL	\$290,000 - \$390,000	Indicative only not including art work installations



Opportunity 3.2:
Ensay Township Trail

The report ‘*Ensay Trails Development Plan*’ (2022, East Gippsland Community Foundation) proposed a number of trail developments and activations anchored in the village of Ensay.

Identified projects included:

- The Tour de Tambo – a scenic on-road cycling route commencing at the Ensay Recreation reserve and travelling beside the Tambo River.
- The Ensay Township Trail – providing an off-road trail that links the recreation reserve with the Ensay township and the local businesses (i.e. Little River Inn, Ensay Winery, Community Hall Café).
- The Reedy Flat Loop – providing a scenic loop using an off-road trail and on-road route.

With adventure cycling identified as a major nature-based tourism opportunity for the Swifts Creek Study Area, the projects identified in the original report merit further consideration.

Based on existing roadways, the Tour de Tambo and Reedy Flat Loop (or versions of) - would potentially be included in the self-guided recreational cycling loops to be identified and developed as part of a broader Adventure Cycling route finding project (as detailed in Opportunity One).

The Ensay Township (Off Road) trail concept gains some momentum as integral to a safer, high-quality connection for both cyclists and foot traffic using regional ride loops and transiting from the Ensay

Recreational Reserve – now a dedicated RV camping facility – and Ensay township and winery.

This is a medium-to-long term opportunity as it is infrastructure intensive requiring approximately 1.5km of shared use compacted gravel trail, a bridge, flood plain studies, and other necessary environmental, engineering and cultural heritage studies and analysis.

Opportunity Objectives

- Connect Ensay Recreation Reserve (and RV camp) with Ensay Township and attractions (i.e. winery) to facilitate on foot and cycling traffic.
- Create a safe underpass of the Great Alpine Road.
- Facilitate better and safer ride experiences for adventure cyclists on longer regional ride loops that interact with Ensay township / Great Alpine Road.
- Invigorate visitation and opportunity for revival of businesses and service opportunities in Ensay.

Strategies and Actions

- Seek funding for and activate a focused feasibility study and concept plan for this specific, inclusive relevant pre-planning environmental and heritage studies.
- Develop a detailed design for trail and associated engineering, including signage and wayfinding.
- Integrate Ensay Township Trail into other relevant planning and routes i.e. Adventure Cycling

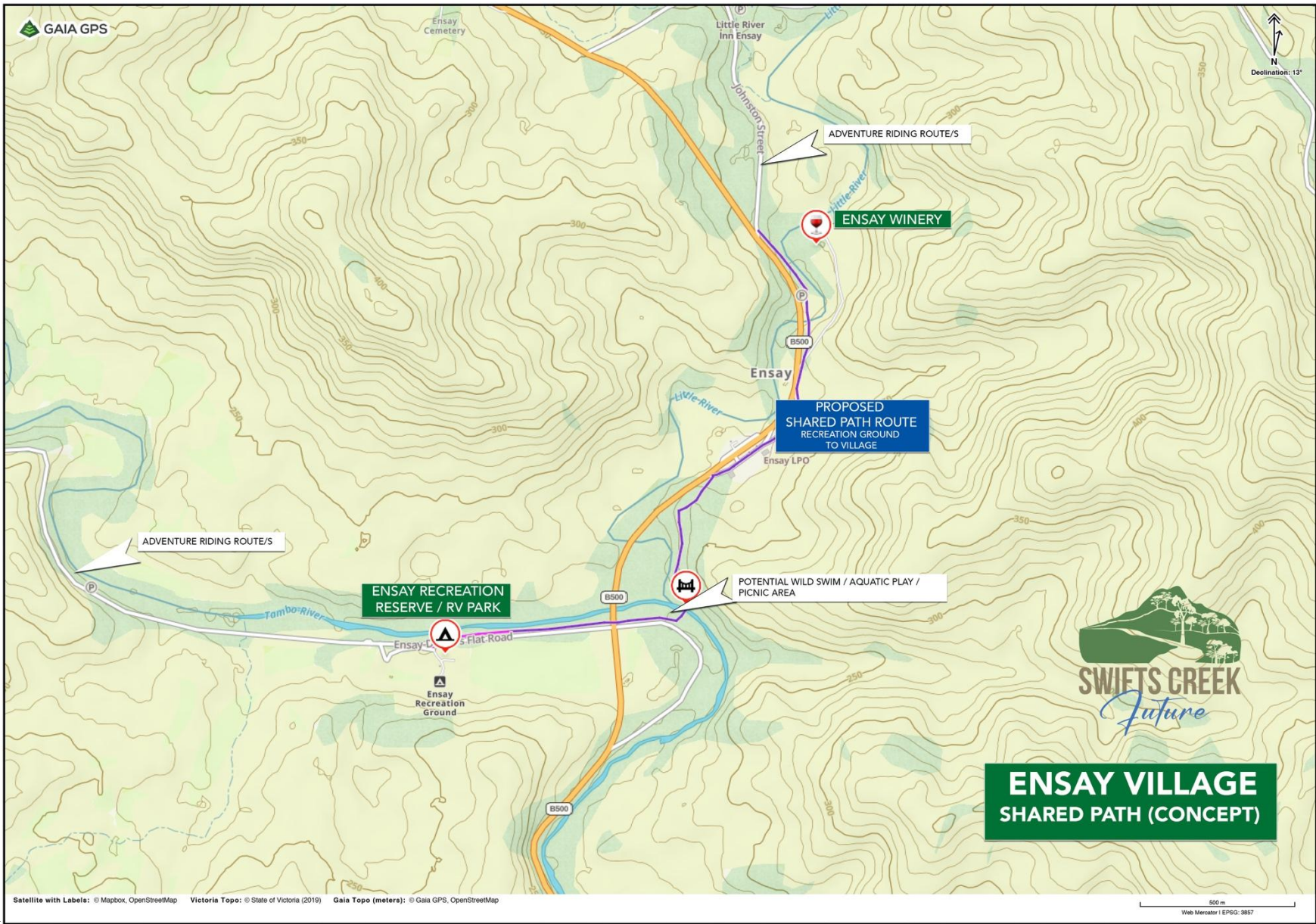
- Identify other added value projects relevant to and anchored on trail route i.e. riverside picnic and aquatic recreation activation.

Outcomes

- Shared use trail connecting Recreation Reserve with Ensay Township servicing riders and walkers
- Critical connectivity for regional adventure riding routes intersecting with Ensay
- Leverage Swifts Creek intention to become a Cycle Friendly Town
- Leverage recently completed investments in RV camp capacity at Recreation Reserve
- Improved safety
- Develops a pillar for encouraging business investment in Ensay

Costs

COMPONENT	COST	NOTES
Feasibility Study, Concept Planning & Business Case	\$40,000	Assessment of Visitor Impacts and Economic impacts. Site concept plan.
River bridge & Trail Construction	\$1.2 - \$1.5 million	As per identified in previous Ensay Trails Development Plan inclusive environmental and heritage studies.



Opportunity 3.3: Aquatic Play Activations

Aquatic recreation activations encompass a range of activities centred around natural water bodies, such as rivers and lakes. These include wild swimming, riverbank play, and different forms of paddling, all of which offer immersive experiences in natural settings.

Wild Swimming

Wild swimming, defined as swimming in natural, outdoor water bodies, has seen a notable surge in popularity in recent years. This trend gained momentum during the COVID-19 lockdowns, as individuals sought outdoor activities that promote both physical and mental well-being. The Rivers Trust in the UK observed that wild swimming has "surged in popularity and looks set to continue to grow."

Recognising the growing interest in natural water-based recreation, urban planners and governments in Australia are taking steps to enhance access to these activities. For instance, the New South Wales government in Australia has established a taskforce aimed at creating more public swimming spots in Western Sydney. This initiative seeks to transform parts of Sydney's rivers into vibrant areas featuring boardwalks and recreational facilities, thereby encouraging community engagement and visitation. Mildura in Victoria has rebranded itself as "Tropical North Victoria" to highlight its sunny climate and promote the Murray River as a safe water-based recreational asset including paddling and swimming.

In Warburton, Victoria, the Upper Yarra River Reserves Committee of Management has overseen development of an in-town river-based

swimming hole based on a rock-build platform at the riverside behind the retail high street. The site has since become a popular and safe swimming spot for locals and visitors.

River sledding / lilo / paddling

Warburton also now hosts an annual 'Lilo Derby' as part of its Warburton Trail Fest event on the March Labour Day Long Weekend (now in ninth year). The lilo derby – involving 'river sleds', surf lilos and other flotation devices – host up to 200 people as they 'race' down the Yarra River each year. The event was seeded by the common recreation of 'tubing' or using lilos to float downriver as a recreation activity enjoyed every summer by locals and holidaying visitors.

River play parks

In Bundaberg, Queensland, the Washpool Creek Naturalisation Project transformed a former concrete drain into a natural waterway. The project includes nature play elements that allow children to engage directly with the creek, fostering a connection to the local ecosystem. Features such as a bush tucker garden, yarning circle, and public artwork enhance the educational and cultural value of the play area.

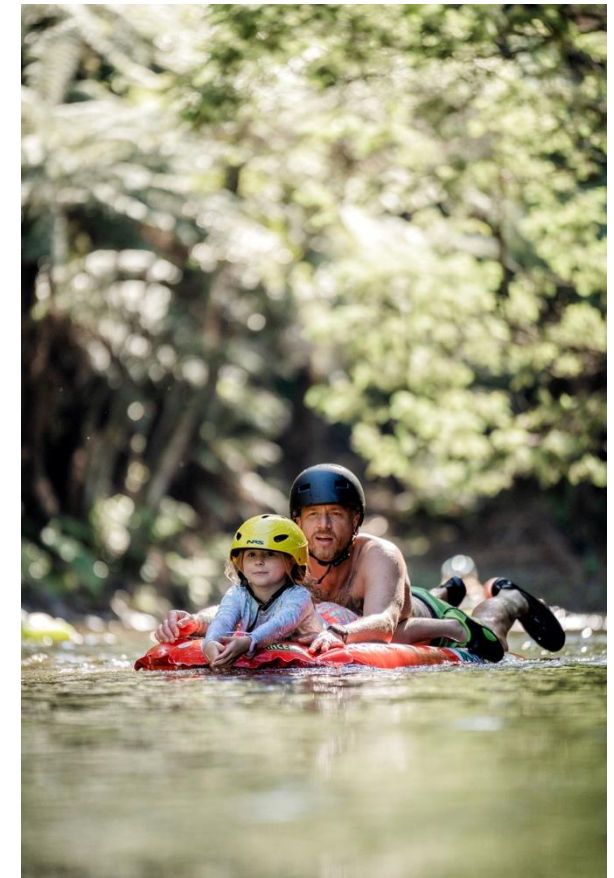
The Tambo River flowing through Swifts Creek and Ensay is ideal for identifying water play locations given its generally low water levels and safer environment.

Safety

It is important when developing aquatic recreation opportunities to recognise the increased safety risk profile, especially pertinent in rivers where water levels and forces can change quickly according to rain

events. The need for increased water safety awareness among visitors engaging in activities like wild swimming is paramount when promoting recommended locations, and site closure triggers should be planned for, communicated and enacted as and when needed, with on-site signage / warning of the dangers of entering waterways.

IMAGE: Warburton Lilo Derby



Opportunity Objectives

- Confirm preferred locations to activate aquatic, river-based recreation safely along the Tambo River
- Promote Swifts Creek Study Area as an ideal wild swimming and safe paddling destination in summer and shoulder seasons
- Create a dedicated children’s river-play site to encourage visitation and create added value for families visiting the Swifts Creek Caravan and Holiday Park

Strategies and Actions

- Identify and risk analyse opportunities and Wild Swim Adventures, creating a ‘series’ of locations between Swifts Creek and Ensay (and potentially further downstream)
- Create a specified and prescribed ‘river sled / lilo’ course along a select section of the Tambo River.
- Consider prospect for an annual river sled / lilo / sit on top recreational (non competitive) paddling event. Potentially activated as an attachment to another event as it is in Warburton (i.e. Tour de Tambo proposed cycling event)
- Feasibility and design study into a riverbank play park at the Swifts Creek Caravan and Holiday Park including river run ball slides and/or creative nature play adjoining river (may link to art).

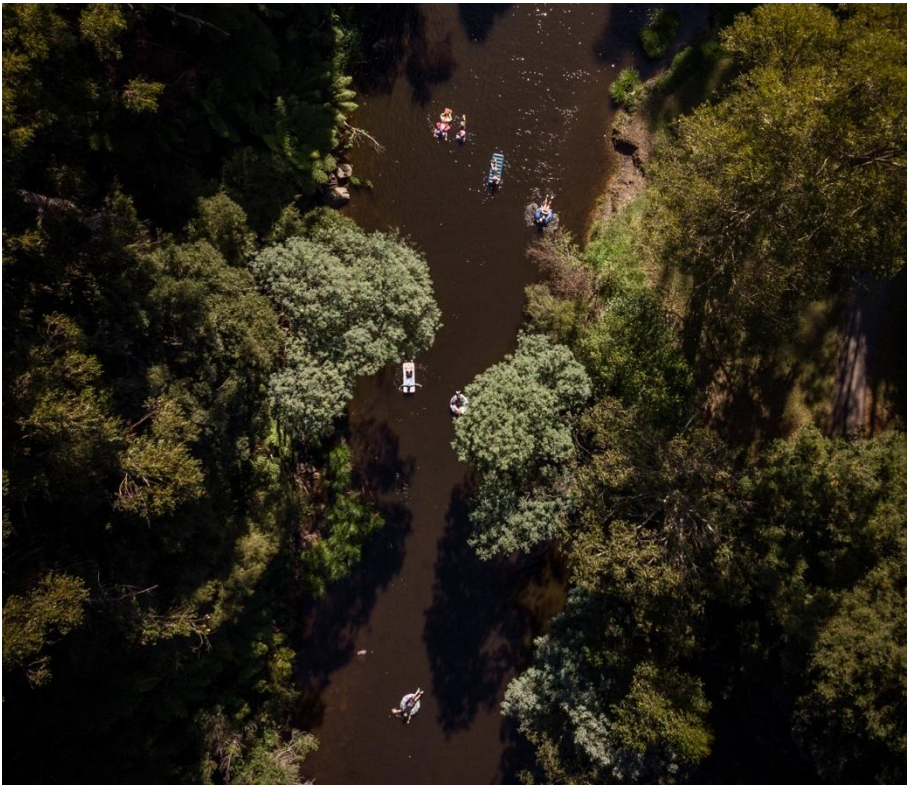
Outcomes

- 3-5 Wild Swim locations identified, assessed, approved and promoted as a collection.
- Increased visitation seeded by summer aquatic activity attraction recreation
- Added activation of Caravan and Holiday Park
- River Play Park feasibility and concept design initiated



Costs

COMPONENT	COST	NOTES
Feasibility Study, Concept Planning & Business Case – Wild Swim Collection + River Sled Course	\$40,000	Assessment of Visitor Impacts and Economic impacts. Site selections, risk analysis and concept plan.
Construction – riverside amenity and signage	TBC - predicted \$30,000-\$50,000+ per site pending engineering complexity / treatment	Pending outcomes above and final solution approach. Simplified approach = signage + basic floodproof rockwork river entry.
Concept Planning & Business Case – River Play activation at Caravan Park	\$40,000	Assessment of site and concept planning ready for next stage feasibility assessments



Opportunity ④: History in Motion

Opportunity 4.1: Engaging Visitors Through Immersive Storytelling and Historical Activation in Swifts Creek and District

Opportunity Objective

To develop and activate the Swifts Creek and District historical and contemporary assets through compelling storytelling, interpretation, and interactive visitor experiences.

This initiative aims to attract a broad range of visitors, including heritage and cultural tourists, while preserving and sharing community history.

This Opportunity was strongly identified and supported in the community workshop held in December 2024.

Value and Benefits

The value and benefits of the Opportunity are multifaceted and across economic, social and cultural elements. They include:

Economic Growth and Tourism Stimulation

By leveraging the region's rich historical and cultural assets, the project will attract a broad range of visitor personas including heritage and cultural tourists, increasing visitor numbers and length of stay. This, in turn, supports local businesses, hospitality and retail, creating job opportunities and stimulating economic growth in Swifts Creek and the surrounding areas.

Community Engagement and Cultural Preservation

The initiative fosters strong community involvement by capturing and preserving local oral histories, heritage images and events, and historical narratives. This not only strengthens community pride but also ensures that valuable stories and traditions are shared with future generations in an engaging and accessible way. This project was a key takeout of the community workshop that was strongly supported, especially as forestry transition impacts on the communities.

Enhanced Visitor Experience through Immersive Storytelling

Through digital storytelling, audio tales, augmented reality, living history performances and events, and self-guided heritage trails, visitors will experience a deeper and more interactive connection with Swifts Creek's past. This unique and engaging approach makes history come alive, offering compelling experiences that appeal to diverse audiences, from families to cultural enthusiasts.

Sustainable and Scalable Heritage Activation

With a focus on digital archives, virtual reality experiences, and QR-code-based interpretation, the project provides cost-effective and scalable solutions for heritage activation. These initiatives ensure long-term sustainability and adaptability, allowing the project to evolve with emerging technologies and visitor expectations.

Stronger Partnerships and Regional Collaboration

The project encourages collaboration between local businesses, tourism operators, historical societies, traditional owners, historical and heritage custodians, government entities and regional tourism boards. These partnerships will not only enhance the authenticity and credibility of the heritage experiences but also expand marketing reach, funding opportunities, and regional tourism alignment, making Swifts Creek a standout heritage destination.

Strategies and Actions

1. Planning Phase

Strategy: Develop a Comprehensive and Integrated Interpretation Plan

Actions:

- Engage project co-ordination and contract heritage interpretation consultancy to develop the Plan
- Identify and prioritise key historical themes unique to Swifts Creek and District, such as mining heritage, the gold rush era, high country legends, traditional owner storylines and the timber forestry industry.
- Conduct community consultations to ensure historical accuracy and inclusivity.
- Establish project milestones and funding requirements for activation.
- Develop a project timeline with phased implementation to align with funding cycles.

- Engage with other technical experts in heritage tourism, digital storytelling, visual/audio production to inform the plan.
- Coordinate with local businesses and accommodation providers to identify opportunities to create package deals.

2. Development of Content

Strategy: Establish Signature Storytelling Experiences

Actions:

- Engage an audio and videographer expert to develop a high-quality oral history archive.
- Capture community interviews with local historians, Indigenous elders, and long-time residents.
- Create immersive, multi-sensory experiences, such as:
 - Living history performances and re-enactments at historical sites.
 - Guided tours featuring folklore and local legends.
 - Self-guided audio storytelling trails with narrated historical accounts.
- Expand the oral history archive with video interviews and documentaries featuring local stories.
- Integrate digital engagement tools, such as:
 - QR code-linked audio posts at key historical sites.

- Podcast series featuring ‘Tales of Swifts Creek Junction’
- Online archives files with historical documents and images.
- Development and hosting of an interactive app for visitors to use to explore historical sites, access guided audio tours, maps and directions and other facilities and services.
- Develop educational resources and school excursion programs linked to regional history.

3. Implementation & Delivery

Strategy: Heritage-Based Events & Activations

Actions:

- Implement interactive augmented reality (AR) experiences for key heritage sites.
- Improve visitor access and site amenities by:
 - Installing wayfinding and interpretive signage for self-guided tours.
 - Securing funding for preservation and restoration of heritage assets.
 - Enhancing visitor facilities such as directional signage, parking areas, and information/map boards.
- Develop pop-up heritage exhibits in collaboration with local cultural institutions and businesses.
- Develop an annual calendar of heritage-themed events, including:
 - Festivals celebrating gold mining, high country and local history.

- Heritage trails and scavenger hunts at key historical sites.
- Artist collaborations to create works inspired by local history.
- Introduce hands-on workshops such as blacksmithing, gold panning, and traditional crafts.

4. Marketing & Promotion

Strategy: Digital Engagement & User-Generated Content Activation

Actions:

- Implement a ‘Share Your Story’ campaign to encourage visitors to share personal reflections via social media using #SwiftsCreekJunctionstories.
- Install specifically designed photo and video hotspots at scenic and historic locations to encourage visitor-generated content to upload.
- Encourage businesses to create compelling content and utilise their channels.
- Run incentivised UGC campaigns, including:
 - Heritage photo, video and storytelling competitions.
 - Augmented Reality (AR) features that overlay historical images with present-day landscapes.
- Launch a seasonal marketing activation plan:
 - Summer: ‘Walk Through Time’ sunset storytelling tours.

- Autumn: ‘Heritage Harvest’ featuring historical farming practices and local traditions.
- Winter: ‘Ghosts of the Past’ lantern-lit heritage trails focusing on folklore.
- Spring: ‘Then & Now’ side-by-side photo challenges linking to a digital archive.
- Partner with tourism influencers and content creators to amplify the campaign reach.
- Develop interactive social media challenges that encourage engagement with historical sites.

5. Partnerships & Stakeholder Engagement

Strategy: Community and Business Collaboration

Actions:

- Partner with local communities, historical societies, individuals and artists to co-develop authentic narratives.
- Work with local tourism organisations, marketing bodies and local businesses to cross-promote heritage experiences.
- Engage influencers and travel bloggers to showcase the historical storytelling experience.
- Seek funding from Government grant sources such as the Disaster Recovery Heritage Grants, Strengthening Regional Communities and Regional Arts Victoria grants.
- Establish a volunteer ambassador program where local residents act as guides and storytellers.

6. Measurement and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Strategy: Monitor and Evaluate Project Impact

Actions:

- Measure website, podcast, app and social media engagement, including UGC contributions and campaign reach.
- Assess economic impact, including business collaboration outcomes and increased tourism revenue.
- Gather visitor feedback through surveys and program evaluations.
- Conduct annual heritage impact assessments to measure preservation and engagement success.
- Use AI-driven sentiment analysis on social media to gauge public perception and interest levels.
- Track visitor engagement and attendance at heritage events

Outcomes:

- A compelling, multi-sensory heritage experience enhanced by visitor-friendly infrastructure and organic digital marketing, where visitors actively engage, create, and share East Gippsland’s history. This will drive consistent interest, wider exposure, and deeper community engagement
- Estimating the costs for implementing key actions for the History in Motion: Engaging Visitors Through Immersive Storytelling and Historical Activation in Swifts Creek and District project involves several components.

Following is an approximate costing table:

Table 3. History In Motion Costings

COMPONENT	ESTIMATED COST (AUD)	NOTES
1. Interpretation Plan Development		
Consultancy Services	\$50,000 – \$100,000	Engaging experts in heritage interpretation, digital storytelling, and tourism experiences to develop a comprehensive plan Costs may vary based on the consultancy's experience and the project's complexity
Community Consultation	\$10,000 – \$20,000	Facilitating workshops and meetings with local communities, historians, traditional owners and residents to ensure inclusive and accurate representation
Research and Documentation	\$15,000 – \$25,000	In-depth research into local history, pioneers and heroes, heritage sites and businesses, and archival documentation to inform content development
2. Content Development and Implementation		
Living History re-enactments	\$30,000 – \$50,000	Developing scripts, hiring performers, and organising re-enactments at historical sites for filming of specific events for content
Personal Guided Tours	\$20,000 – \$35,000	Creating guided tours, including delivery toolkit, training guides, maps and developing thematic content
Audio Storytelling Walks	\$25,000 – \$40,000	Producing narrated audio content, integrating with mobile apps or QR codes along trails
Oral History Archive	\$15,000 – \$30,000	Recording and editing interviews with local historians, Indigenous elders, and long-time residents
Digital Engagement Tools	\$40,000 – \$70,000	Developing and maintaining online archives, virtual reality experiences, and interactive mobile applications
3. Infrastructure and Site Enhancements		
Informative Signage and Wayfinding	\$20,000 – \$40,000	Designing, producing, and installing interpretive signs and directional markers at key sites
Restoration of Heritage Sites	\$100,000 – \$500,000+	Depending on sites condition, restoration costs can vary significantly, priorities based on risk *Major restorations may exceed this range
Visitor Amenities Enhancement	\$50,000 – \$150,000	Upgrading facilities such as parking, viewing points and information boards to improve visitor experience
4. Marketing and Promotion		
'Share Your Story' Campaign	\$10,000 – \$20,000	Social media marketing initiatives encouraging user-generated content, including hashtag promotion and content curation
Seasonal Marketing Activations	\$15,000 – \$25,000 per season	Developing and promoting seasonal events like 'Walk Through Time' tours, 'Heritage Harvest' festivals, etc. Costs include marketing materials, advertising, and event coordination

COMPONENT	ESTIMATED COST (AUD)	NOTES
5. Partnerships and Stakeholder Engagement		
Volunteer Ambassador Program	\$5,000 – \$10,000	Recruiting and training local volunteers to act as guides and storytellers
Educational Collaborations	\$10,000 – \$15,000	Partnering with schools and universities to develop heritage-related programs and research projects
6. Monitoring and Evaluation		
Visitor Feedback Systems	\$5,000 – \$10,000	Implementing surveys and feedback tools to assess visitor experiences and gather data
Annual Impact Assessments	\$10,000 – \$20,000	Conducting evaluations to measure the project's economic, social, and cultural impact

Total Estimated Budget: Approximately \$400,000 – \$1,000,000+

Note: These estimates are indicative and can vary based on specific project requirements, regional cost variations, and selected service providers. Detailed costings should be obtained through a formal tender process or consultation with professionals in heritage tourism development

Opportunity ⑤: Star Gazing Lounge Experience

The proposed Star Gazing Lounge Experience will offer visitors an immersive celestial encounter in a tranquil, light-pollution-free location. This experience can blend astronomical education, fit for purpose design led 'park furniture', and sustainable tourism experiences to attract astro-tourists, eco-travellers, and wellness seekers.

Opportunity Objective

- Create a premium star gazing attraction in one or multiple locations
- Design and install custom-built reclining park bench couches for comfortable viewing
- Incorporate eco-friendly sustainable infrastructure with a minimal environmental footprint and maintenance requirements
- Create added value with onsite and online interpretation and information
- Offer guided and self-guided experiences to cater to various visitor preferences
- Encourage the region's nighttime tourism appeal and economic development

Setting up an immersive Star Gazing Lounge in Swifts Creek and its surroundings will require selecting a site(s) that maximises astronomical visibility, visitor accessibility, and environmental harmony.

Site(s) Selection

There are key factors to consider when choosing the perfect location(s):

Low Light Pollution and Clear Skies

- Bortle Scale 1-3: Look for a location with minimal artificial light interference to ensure crystal-clear views of celestial objects
- Swifts Creek region is already a low-population area, but consider a site away from main roads, farms with strong floodlights, or townships
- Ideal locations would be elevated areas that reduce atmospheric distortion and provide panoramic night sky views

Elevation and Terrain

- Higher elevations provide clearer night skies due to less atmospheric disturbance (e.g., ridgelines, hilltops)
- Ensure the terrain is flat enough for seating installation while still offering unobstructed horizon views for sunset-to-stargazing transitions
- Avoid deep valleys that may trap fog or moisture, reducing visibility

Accessibility and Visitor Experience

- Road access: The location should be accessible via gravel and/or sealed roads for visitors (including people movers, coasters or 4WDs if

targeting small groups. Vehicle access could be located within a reasonable walking distance

- Nearby amenities: Proximity to small towns like Swifts Creek, Ensay, or Benambra ensures visitors have options for accommodation, food, and fuel
- Proximity to other regional attractions (wineries, trails, recreational activities)
- Parking and trails: A small car park and a short walking trail leading to the viewing area can enhance the arrival experience

Environmental and Seasonal Considerations

- Minimal tree and mountain range obstruction: Select a site with open landscapes but some wind protection (e.g., behind a low ridge)
- Avoid areas prone to seasonal fog/mist, which can affect visibility (e.g., river valleys in winter)
- Wildlife impact: Ensure the site doesn't disturb local fauna including nocturnal species and follow environmental regulations and reduce visitor impacts

Unique Selling Points for Tourism

- Natural and Cultural Significance: Sites with ties to Indigenous astronomy stories, gold rush history, or alpine landscapes can create added tourism value.
- Multi-Use Potential: Consider a location that could host stargazing plus other experiences for example sunset/sunrise yoga, acoustic performances, meteor shower events, wild/bird life watching

Potential Sites Around Swifts Creek

Based on these criteria, several sites may warrant exploration and analysis. These sites are predominately on public/crown land but there may be other tenured or private land that could accommodate the Star Gazing Lounges and potentially create a higher value experience. It would be a more compelling proposition for generating awareness and encouraging visitation if there was more than one Lounge established.

Mount Hopeless - Remote, panoramic, and ruggedly beautiful. Offers high elevation and minimal light pollution, ideal for uninterrupted stargazing

Mount Delusion – Elevated, low light pollution, and panoramic views

Cassilis Historic Area (possibly the cemetery area) – Remote, scenic, and has heritage significance

Tongio Lookout – Closer to the highway, but might offer a great viewing spot with accessibility

Benambra Plains – Open landscapes with clear 360° views but check for seasonal fog

Visitor Experience Development, Infrastructure Design

Park Furniture/Bench Couches

- Ergonomically designed with a slight recline for sky viewing
- Some full reclining options
- Spaces for singles, couples, families and small groups to view and consideration for guide/specialist podium

- Weather-resistant and durable materials sourced locally (wood, metal, or eco-composite)
- Design has interpretive elements that reflect cultural history
- Low maintenance and low cost replacement if damaged/destroyed that can be serviced locally
- Integrated armrests, small tables, and some soft-touch surfaces for comfort (portable)

Site Enhancements

- Surrounding decks/storage boxes for packs/coats/provisions to be stored
- Subtle, red-light illumination to preserve night vision
- QR-coded plaques with information and constellation maps and app connectivity
- Branded curated spot to encourage user generated content (selfies) for uploading
- Telescope platforms
- Solar-powered lighting and motion-activated pathways
- Sustainable material sourcing for all installations
- Low-impact, locally crafted furniture pieces

Experience Development

To enhance the visitor experience, support self-guided adventurers and generate economic opportunities for local providers, tour operators and guides several interpretive aids could be developed.

Self-Guided Experience

- Mobile-friendly interactive sky maps
- Augmented reality app for real-time constellation overlays
- Custom star-gazing kits available for purchase (blankets, binoculars, guidebooks)

Guided Experiences

- Astronomer-led tours with telescopes and storytelling
- Themed evenings (e.g. meteor showers, full moon yoga, indigenous sky stories)
- Integration with regional tourism packages (stargazing + luxury glamping, food/wine experience, wild/bird life viewing)

Marketing and Partnerships

- Collaborations with regional tourism boards, accommodation providers, recreational and nature-based activity providers i.e. MTB/hiking/rafting.
- Development of seasonal event series including the Perseid meteor shower (17 July-24 August), solstices, equinoxes
- Social media and influencer marketing initiatives and famils to attract digital nomads and astro-tourists
- Branding that emphasises uniqueness, sustainability, and immersive experiences
- Targeted promotions within the STEM and education sector

Estimated Budget, Funding Sources and Timeline

The estimated budget and timeline outlined below for this proposal is indicative and serves as a preliminary guide for project feasibility only. Final costs may vary based on site-specific conditions, final design, material selections, contractor quotes, and regulatory requirements.

A detailed cost assessment, including supplier quotes and logistical considerations, will be required to confirm the final investment. It is recommended that a full financial review and procurement process be undertaken before committing to expenditures.

- Planning, detailed design, regulatory requirements: \$30,000 - \$50,000
- Infrastructure (1 site): \$50,000 - \$100,000 (site prep, seating, signage, solar lighting)
- Access: road, parking, pathway preparation - \$30,000 - \$50,000
- Marketing and Event Programming: \$15,000 - \$30,000
- Project Management: \$20,000
- Potential Funding: Regional tourism grants, Forestry Transition program, Local, Federal or State Government funding streams, corporate sponsorships, use/entry fees.

Timeline – based on one site only

PHASE	TASKS	TIMELINE
Phase 1	Planning, Feasibility and Site Selection	2–6 months
Phase 2	Detailed design, site and access preparation	3-4 months
Phase 3	Installation, Testing, Industry engagement	2 -3 months
Phase 4	Marketing and Launch	1-2 months

Alignment with Destination Gippsland

The *Star Gazing Lounge* project aligns seamlessly with Destination Gippsland's strategic initiatives to enhance astro-tourism in the region.

By offering an immersive experience, the *Star Gazing Lounge* contributes to the broader goal of positioning Gippsland as a premier destination for night-sky enthusiasts. This initiative not only leverages the region's natural dark skies but also enriches the tourism portfolio, attracting both domestic and international visitors.

Incorporating Indigenous storytelling into the *Star Gazing Lounge* experience resonates with Destination Gippsland's commitment to cultural tourism. The Gippsland Dark Skies Project, for instance, emphasises Indigenous interpretation and storytelling of the land and skies, enhancing the visitor experience through cultural narratives. By integrating Gunaikurnai astronomical traditions, the *Star Gazing Lounge* offers guests a unique perspective on the cosmos, fostering a deeper appreciation for the region's rich cultural heritage.

Furthermore, the *Star Gazing Lounge's* focus on sustainable infrastructure and eco-friendly practices

aligns with Destination Gippsland's emphasis on environmentally responsible tourism development. By minimising light pollution and preserving natural habitats, the project supports the region's environmental conservation efforts. This commitment to sustainability not only protects Gippsland's pristine night skies but also appeals to the growing market of eco-conscious travellers.

Collaborating with Destination Gippsland provides the *Star Gazing Lounge* with access to industry development resources, marketing support, and training opportunities. Engaging with initiatives like the Gippsland Dark Skies Project and participating in regional tourism campaigns can enhance the project's visibility and success. This partnership fosters a cohesive approach to promoting Gippsland's astro-tourism offerings, ensuring that *Star Gazing Lounge* contributes meaningfully to the region's visitor economy.

Ancient Skies: Aboriginal Astronomy and Cultural Connections

Swifts Creek, located in East Gippsland, Victoria, is within the traditional lands of the Gunaikurnai people.

While specific astronomical traditions from this area are not extensively documented, the broader region of Victoria is rich in Aboriginal sky lore. Here are some notable aspects:

The Emu in the Sky

- Description: A prominent constellation recognised by many Aboriginal groups, including those in Victoria. It is formed by the dark patches of the Milky Way, representing an emu.

- Cultural Significance: The appearance of the Emu in the Sky is used to determine the timing of emu egg collection and other seasonal activities.

Bunjil the Creator

- Description: In the traditions of the Kulin nation, Bunjil is a creator spirit often depicted as a wedge-tailed eagle.
- Astronomical Association: Bunjil is said to reside in the sky, and some interpretations associate him with the star Altair.

The Seven Sisters (Pleiades)

- Description: Known in various Aboriginal cultures, including those in Victoria, as a group of ancestral women
- Cultural Significance: Stories often describe these sisters being pursued across the sky, and their appearance signals specific seasonal events

While these stories are prevalent in Victoria, it's essential to consult with local Gunaikurnai Elders to gather specific astronomical knowledge and Dreamtime stories unique to the Swifts Creek area. Engaging with the local indigenous community and obtaining consent and permission ensures the respectful and accurate representation of their rich cultural heritage.



Opportunity ⑥: Marketing, Digital & Business Skills Development & Community Activation

Objective

To empower local tourism operators, event organisers, community members and businesses in the Swifts Creek and surrounding areas with practical and new skills in digital marketing, product packaging, and small business operations, fostering a collaborative and sustainable tourism industry.

Introduction

Tapping into existing training programs conducted by Destination Gippsland, Victorian Tourism Industry Council, East Gippsland Shire and Business.vic.gov and other state government agencies, as well as regional service providers that may be delivering funded skills programs, offers significant benefits for small businesses and tourism operators.

These programs often provide free or subsidised training, marketing support, and networking opportunities. By leveraging these existing resources, businesses can access expert advice, industry insights, and funding opportunities without the need for large investments.

Strengthening ties with such organisations ensures that local businesses stay informed about industry trends, best practices, and collaborative opportunities that can enhance tourism growth in the region.

It is recognised however, that funding is required to underpin costs and incentivise entities and practitioners, who deliver such programs, to ensure on ground regional face to face delivery of workshops and training. We know that online module training has a strong supportive place but for communities in this region face to face training and workshops delivery multiple benefits.

This strategy outlines a range of actions to support industry development in Swifts Creek and surrounds. It is recommended that other local townships including Omeo, Anglers Rest, Benambra, and Dinner Plain/Hotham Heights be included in any face to face workshop and training opportunities to increase participation and skills in the region, strengthen collaboration and break down parochialism for the benefit of all.

Please note that not all initiatives identified need to be undertaken simultaneously; rather, they serve as options for the community to prioritise based on their specific needs.

The flexibility of this approach allows businesses and operators to identify and implement the most relevant strategies that align with their capacity and growth ambitions.

Key Focus Areas and Actions

Swifts Creek's Digital Footprint: Strengths and Opportunities

Swifts Creek and its surrounding areas in Victoria's East Gippsland have a modest but growing online presence aimed at promoting local attractions and community initiatives.

The town maintains a Facebook page, "Visit Swifts Creek," which highlights local events and points of interest. Additionally, the "Swifts Creek Future" project has established a dedicated website to engage the community in building a resilient future, focusing on areas like nature-based recreation and tourism.

The regional tourism board, "Visit East Gippsland," also features Swifts Creek on its platform, providing information about local attractions and activities.

- Facebook.com
- Swiftscreekfuture.com.au
- Visiteastgippsland.com.au

The strengths of Swifts Creek's online presence include active community engagement through social media platforms and dedicated websites that showcase local projects and events.

These platforms serve as valuable resources for both residents and visitors, offering insights into the town's cultural and recreational offerings.

The collaboration between local organisations and the regional tourism board enhances the visibility of Swifts Creek within the broader context of East Gippsland's attractions.

However, there are notable gaps in the current digital landscape. The online content is somewhat limited, with few comprehensive guides or multimedia resources to fully capture the area's unique appeal. There is also a lack of cohesive branding and marketing strategies to unify the various online platforms, which could lead to fragmented information for potential visitors.

Enhancing the quality and accessibility of online content, as well as developing a unified digital marketing approach, could significantly boost tourism and community engagement in Swifts Creek and its environs

Digital Marketing Upskilling

Objective: Increase operators' and businesses online presence and ability to attract visitors through digital channels.

- **Host Digital Marketing Workshop(s):** Short, practical sessions on topics like social media basics, content creation, and website optimisation
- **Create a Digital Marketing Checklist:** A simple guide covering essential steps for improving online visibility
- **Develop a Local Business Peer Support Group:** Encourage businesses to share digital marketing tips and successes via a Facebook or WhatsApp group
- **One-on-One Digital Audits:** Offer quick, free assessments for businesses to identify key areas for improvement

Content Creation for Tourism Operators

Objective: Equip businesses with the skills to create engaging content that attracts and retains visitors.

- **Run Content Creation Workshops:** Teach operators how to take quality photos and video, write compelling descriptions, and leverage storytelling
- **Develop a Content Calendar Template:** Provide a downloadable resource to help businesses plan

and schedule content leveraging key notable dates

- **Encourage User-Generated Content Campaigns:** Help businesses engage customers to share their experiences through social media hashtags and reviews
- **Provide Free Online Tools & Resources:** Introduce businesses to free and easy-to-use content creation tools like Canva

Packaging and Collaboration

Objective: Encourage local operators to bundle products and experiences to enhance visitor experience and increase spend.

- **Facilitate a “Tourism Bundling” Workshop:** Educate operators on how to create appealing experience packages (e.g. accommodation + adventure + dining)
- **Create a Simple Partnership Guide:** A step-by-step resource on how businesses can collaborate effectively
- **Consider a ‘Local Experience Passport’ Initiative:** Encourage visitors to explore multiple businesses in the region through a discount or reward system

Public Relations for Tourism

Objective: Strengthen local businesses' ability to engage with media and public relations efforts to elevate regional tourism visibility.

- **Develop a PR Toolkit:** Provide templates and guidance on crafting press releases, pitching stories, and engaging with media outlets

- **Facilitate Media Networking Events:** Host sessions where local operators can connect with journalists, travel bloggers, and influencers
- **Create a Press Trip Program:** Organise curated experiences for media representatives to showcase the region's tourism offerings
- **Encourage Participation in Regional and National PR Campaigns:** Assist businesses in engaging with larger tourism campaigns through regional, state and national tourism entities

Hosting Journalists and Families

Objective: Improve local capacity to host media, influencers, and families to boost regional exposure and visitor engagement.

- **Develop a “How to Host Journalists & Influencers” Guide:** Outline best practices for welcoming media representatives and ensuring quality exposure
- **Offer Media Hosting Workshops:** Teach businesses how to create compelling press kits, conduct tours, and follow up with journalists
- **Family-Friendly Business Training:** Help businesses tailor experiences, facilities, and marketing to attract more families and multi-generational travellers

Maximising Festivals and Events

Objective: Leverage regional events to drive tourism traffic and increase local business revenue.

- **Create/Access an Event Tourism Guide:** Provide businesses with strategies on how to capitalise on

events through special offers, packages, and extended opening hours

- **Host a Pre-Event Collaboration Session:** Bring together local businesses before major events to align promotions and cross-market services
- **Encourage Event-Related Digital Content:** Help businesses develop social media and website content that highlights their event offerings and special deals
- **Leverage Event Listings and Promotion:** Ensure businesses know how to list their services on event websites, regional tourism boards, and community platforms

Business Operations and Resilience

Objective: Strengthen small business capabilities for sustainable and profitable tourism operations.

- **Run Quarterly Small Business ‘Survival’ Sessions:** Cover essential topics like financial management, customer service, online facilities and pricing strategies
- **Invite Small Business Bus to Town:** request Shire of East Gippsland to book the Small Business Bus to come to Swifts for two days in the region at two locations
- **Small Business Workshops:** work with East Gippsland Shire to schedule face to face workshops based on the Small Business Toolkit. Workshops scheduled to maximise attendance and topics covered but not be onerous to community participation
- **Profile the Small Business Toolkit:** Promote and explain the downloadable resource with

templates and tips for managing a small tourism business

- **Encourage a ‘Buddy System’ for New Businesses:** Pair experienced operators with newer ones to provide mentorship and knowledge-sharing

Implementation Approach

Community Engagement and Collaboration

- **Engage a dedicated resource:** Identify, pitch and allocate specific funding to hire a (local) resource that can be the facilitator/organiser/deliverer for this opportunity. It’s important that the program have a dedicated co-ordinator charged with delivery
- **Establish a Tourism Industry Network:** Create an informal but structured group for networking, sharing ideas, and accessing support
- **Leverage Local Champions:** Identify respected business operators to advocate and drive participation
- **Use Existing Community and Industry Assets:** Partner with the local council, industry bodies, and community resources to host events at no/minimal cost

Funding and Sustainability

- **Forestry Transition Fund:** Seek funding for resources and implementation of the full program including a coordinator position
- **Seek Local Grants and Sponsorships:** Apply for small business or tourism development grants to cover workshop costs

- **Use Online Resources Freely Available:** Tap into free digital marketing and business operation tools provided by government agencies.

Measuring Success

- **Increase in Workshop Attendance** Goal: 15-20 participants per session
- **Growth in Online Engagement** Goal: More businesses actively using social media and websites effectively
- **New Tourism Packages Created**(Goal: At least 3-5 collaborative tourism products launched in the first year
- **Operator Feedback & Satisfaction** Goal: Positive feedback from at least 80% of participants

This strategy is designed to be practical, cost-effective, and community-driven, ensuring that small tourism businesses in Swifts Creek and surrounds as well as nearby community businesses thrive through skill-building, collaboration, and supportive guides.

Opportunity 7: Art in Nature

Integrating arts and the creative industries into the tourism offerings of small regional towns like Swifts Creek and surrounding area can yield multifaceted benefits. The fusion of art and tourism not only enhances the visitor experience but can also stimulate local economies and engenders community pride.

These communities, rich in history and natural beauty, have seen a resurgence of artistic residents, transforming them into active creativity hubs. They have been an attractor for artistic creative individuals, including professionals, to undertake a 'tree change' and relocate to the area and therefore create a creative hub of skills and expression.

The presence of venues such as the Great Alpine Gallery in Swifts Creek exemplifies the positive impact of art on tourism. Established as a permanent exhibition space, the gallery showcases and sells works by local artists, and has potential for attracting visitors from various regions.

This influx of visitors contributes to the local economy through spending on accommodation, dining, and other services, thereby supporting small businesses and encouraging entrepreneurial ventures within the community.

Incorporating arts and the creative industry into tourism strategies also promotes cultural preservation and community engagement. By valuing and showcasing local artistic talents, these towns preserve their unique cultural identities and pass down traditions to future generations.

Community-led art projects and events encourage local participation, strengthen social bonds, and instil a sense of pride among residents. This collaborative spirit not only enhances the quality of life for locals but also creates an inviting atmosphere for visitors seeking authentic cultural experiences.

Moreover, the integration of art into public spaces, as seen with installations like the "Poet's Walk," enriches the cultural landscape and provides unique experiences. Such initiatives not only beautify the area but also offer immersive experiences that deepen visitors' connection to the locale.

Engaging storytelling through art allows tourists to appreciate the region's heritage and fosters a sense of place, making their visit memorable and meaningful.

Adventure and Discovery Through Art in Nature

The **Regional Sculpture Trail** is a curated outdoor art experience featuring large-scale sculptures inspired by local wildlife/birds, local heroes and regional heritage. These artworks, crafted by local and/or renowned artists, will be strategically placed at key heritage sites, natural landmarks, and trailheads, forming a cohesive and immersive visitor experience. Each piece will tell a story about the region's history,

ecology, or cultural significance, creating an engaging blend of art and storytelling.

The Trail will encourage discovery and exploration, offering visitors an adventure through diverse landscapes and townships. Some sculptures may serve as standalone attractions at trailheads, while others will form a linked network that guides travellers between destinations. This design ensures both casual visitors and dedicated trail-goers can engage with the art at their own pace, whether experiencing a single location or completing the full route.

To enhance engagement, an interactive component could be incorporated, allowing visitors to track their progress along the trail through digital check-ins or a collectible passport system. A reward, such as a commemorative badge, locally crafted keepsake, or digital certificate, could be available for those who complete a set number of locations. This element adds an incentive to explore multiple sites, or revisit the area on another occasion to complete the "set", increasing foot traffic to lesser-known areas.

The sculptures will not only serve as artistic family friendly attractions but also as a means of cultural preservation, highlighting historical sites and stories, Indigenous heritage and regional biodiversity. By collaborating with a mix of local artists and commissioned renowned sculptors, the Trail will feature a range of artistic styles and narratives, ensuring a rich and diverse experience for visitors of all ages and interests.

With the growing trend of social media-driven tourism, the sculpture trail presents significant marketing opportunities. Visitors taking selfies and sharing their experiences on platforms like Instagram,

Facebook, and TikTok will naturally promote the region through user-generated content. A dedicated hashtag and social media challenge can further amplify visibility, encouraging wider engagement. This organic branding approach will not only attract new visitors but also establish the region as a must-visit cultural destination.

Process: Development and Implementation

1. Planning and Partnerships

- Set up local working group and define scope to establish pathway and determine themes, elements, specifications, mandatory requirements
- Identify key locations: Select town locations, historic sites, trails heads, parks and public lands ideal for sculpture placement
- Engage stakeholders: Work with Parks Victoria, East Gippsland Shire, DEECA, VicRoads, Omeo Region Business and Tourism Association, Destination Gippsland, local arts groups, heritage and Indigenous representatives
- Secure Government planning and implementation funding: Explore and access Government funds and grants to support the project.

2. Artist Selection and Artwork Commissioning

- Call for artists: Invite submissions from local, national and/or international artists by EOI
- Thematic alignment: Ensure artworks reflect regional themes (heritage, environment, wildlife, history)

- Sustainable materials: Encourage use of eco-friendly or local recycled materials reflecting regional industries.

3. Trail Infrastructure and Digital Integration

- Install signage: Include interpretive plaques, artist bios, and QR codes linking to multimedia content
- Develop a trail app: Offer maps, visitor check-in features, and interactive storytelling
- Develop a gamification element and/or physical or digital passport/souvenirs: Visitors collect 'stamps' at each site and claim a small prize upon completion at local retail outlets and community locations.

4. Commercial Partnerships and Economic Opportunities

- Engage with local businesses: Establish collaborations with accommodations, bakeries, cafés, pubs, and shops to offer discounts or promotions for trail visitors
- Sponsor involvement: Seek corporate, organisational and/or philanthropic sponsors to who align with arts, tourism, regional industry and environmental initiatives
- Branded merchandise: Develop limited-edition souvenirs such as sculptures, prints, or artisan crafts linked to the trail
- Artist residency programs: Partner with businesses to host artist-in-residence programs that contribute to the trail and enhance tourism appeal.

5. Marketing and Launch

- Promotional campaign: Utilise social media, influencers, and local tourism networks
- Special launch event: Host an opening weekend with guided tours and artist talks
- Seasonal events: Plan art workshops, school engagement programs, or night tours to maintain interest year-round.

6. Ongoing Management and Expansion

- Regular maintenance: Ensure sculptures remain in good condition
- Community engagement: Encourage local participation in events and potential future commissions
- Trail evolution: Introduce temporary installations or rotating exhibits to keep the trail dynamic and encourage repeat visits.

Case Study

Giants of Mandurah

The **Giants of Mandurah** initiative in Western Australia, featuring large wooden sculptures by Danish artist Thomas Dambo and has been extensively covered in various reports and articles.

There are six Giants in total. One of the Giants is in Subiaco (Perth) and the other five Giants are in Mandurah. The Giants are constructed from recycled materials and represent characters inspired by Dambo's mythology. Thomas Dambo is the world's leading recycle artist. He was taught from a young age about the value of recycling, sustainability, and unlimited imagination.

The project aims to connect people with nature and promote sustainable practices. It is designed to be family-friendly, encouraging exploration and interaction with the environment.

Economic and Cultural Impact

The exhibition has significantly boosted tourism, bringing international attention to the region.

Local businesses benefit from the increased visitation, contributing to the economic and social vitality of Mandurah.

The initiative often included guided tours, educational programs, and community activities, making it a dynamic cultural experience.

The exhibition attracted over 86,000 visitors in its first year, resulting in approximately \$64 million in spending within the Peel region. Visitors averaged four-night stays, significantly benefiting local tourism and hospitality sectors.

The Mandurah Visitor Centre reported a 300% increase in visitors from July 2022 to June 2023, indicating heightened interest in the Giants.

The Giants of Mandurah exhibition received accolades, including gold for best sculpture park or trail at the Australian Street Art Awards in March 2024, and FORM, the organising body, secured gold at the WA Tourism Awards in the major festivals and events category.



Investing in Local Creativity for Tourism Enhancement

Adventure and Discovery Through Art in Nature

Activating Local Arts and Creative Residents - Local Arts Funding Pool:

Swifts Creek and surround townships of Cassilis, Tongio, Bindi, Brookeville, Ensay, Ensay North, Reedy Flat, Tambo Crossing, and Doctors Flat, possess a wealth of artistic talent, yet many local artists lack the resources or opportunities to contribute their work to public spaces.

Establishing a **Local Arts Funding Pool** would enable artists to apply for grants supporting the creation of public art projects that enhance the town's aesthetic and cultural appeal. The focus would remain on arts in nature, with funded projects strategically placed throughout the town and surrounding natural areas, fostering a deeper connection between art, community, and tourism. The successfully chosen pieces may form part of trailhead infrastructure and/or enhance an existing trail.

By encouraging the creation of outdoor artworks, this initiative transforms everyday spaces into immersive cultural experiences. From sculptures and murals to interactive installations, these art pieces will celebrate the region's identity, history, and environment while drawing visitors to explore local attractions.

Providing financial support through a structured independently managed grant application process

ensures a fair and transparent system that prioritises artistic excellence, content authenticity and appropriateness, community engagement, and long-term tourism benefits.

Scoping the Funding Pool and Application Process

The *Local Arts Funding Pool* would be an annual or biannual initiative supported by local and state governments departments, tourism boards, corporate sponsors, and community contributions. The fund would be open to emerging and established artists, including collaborations between multiple artists and/or community groups. Funding categories could include site-specific sculptures, nature-inspired installations, and participatory public art projects designed to engage visitors and locals alike.

Artists would apply for grants by submitting proposals outlining their concept, materials, budget, and projected impact. A selection panel, composed of representatives from the arts, tourism, and community sectors, would review applications based on criteria such as artistic merit, sustainability, content appropriateness, feasibility, and alignment with the town's tourism and cultural goals. Successful applicants would receive funding to cover material costs, artist fees, and installation expenses, ensuring high-quality outcomes.

Placement Strategy and Artistic Vision

Selected projects would be strategically placed in high-visibility locations, such as main streets, galleries, public buildings, historic makers, adjacent to public facilities, nature reserves, walking trails, and park areas, to encourage organic discovery by visitors. Some artworks might be standalone

features, while others could form mini art trails linking key points of interest or visitor facilities. A digital, Information Board, or printed self-guided art map would highlight these installations, fostering an interactive visitor experience and encouraging exploration beyond traditional town centres.

Tourism and Community Benefits

Investing in local arts not only elevates the town's visual appeal but also strengthens its identity as a cultural tourism destination. Public art projects funded through this initiative would:

- Increase visitor engagement by offering unique, Instagrammable experiences which will raise the awareness of the destinations
- Support local artists by providing economic opportunities and recognition
- Encourage repeat visitation through evolving and seasonal art installations
- Foster community pride by showcasing local talent and stories
- Drive economic impact by enhancing tourism experiences linked to local businesses, galleries,

This initiative represents an opportunity to position the town as a hub of artistic vibrancy while ensuring that creative talent remains an integral part of the local tourism landscape. With structured funding and a well-planned approach, the Local Arts Funding Pool will leave a lasting artistic and economic legacy for the region.

Artist-in-Residence (AiR) Program

Establishing an Artist-in-Residence (AiR) Program in Swifts Creek region offers a unique opportunity to invigorate and engage with the local arts and creative scene, attract visitors, and foster community engagement.

By inviting both local and visiting artists to immerse themselves in the town's environment, the program can stimulate creative collaborations and enhance Swifts Creek's cultural profile.

The funding pool could support temporary art residencies where visiting artists collaborate with local creatives to produce works reflecting the region's identity.

Workshops, community participation, and artist talks could be incorporated to ensure public involvement and build local pride in the artworks being installed.

Support for the visiting artist may be in the form of subsidised accommodation, working and display space and hosting events that may generate sales.

Activating the AiR Program

Implementing an AiR program in a small community like Swifts Creek and surrounds area requires thoughtful planning to ensure it aligns with local values and resources.

Key steps may include:

1. Community Consultation and Collaboration: Engage local artists, residents, and stakeholders in the planning process to gather input and foster a sense of ownership. This collaborative approach ensures the program reflects the community's identity and aspirations.
2. Utilising Existing Resources: Identify available spaces that may be repurposed as studios or living quarters for artists. This might include unused buildings, community centres, or shared spaces, minimising the need for new infrastructure. This could be a great way to utilise empty shopfront space in the main street.
3. Establishing Partnerships: Collaborate with the regional arts organisations, educational institutions, and local businesses to secure funding, resources, and promotional support. Partnerships can enhance the program's sustainability and reach.

Ensuring Local Arts Community Involvement

To maintain support and encourage active participation from Swifts Creek's local artists, the AiR program should:

- **Inclusive Selection Process:** Develop a transparent application and selection process that welcomes proposals from both local and external artists. Including local artists on the selection panel can ensure diverse perspectives and fair representation
- **Collaborative Projects:** Encourage resident artists to engage in projects that involve local artists and community members, fostering skill-sharing and joint creative endeavours
- **Regular Open Studios and Workshops:** Host events where resident artists share their work and processes with the public, creating opportunities for interaction, learning, and cultural exchange.

Potential Activities for Artists-in-Residence

Artists participating in the residency might engage in various activities, such as:

- **Site-Specific Art Installations:** Creating artworks that reflect Swifts Creek's natural beauty and heritage, enhancing public spaces and attracting tourism
- **Community Art Projects:** Leading collaborative art initiatives that involve residents, such as murals, sculptures, or performance pieces, strengthening community bonds
- **Educational Workshops:** Offering classes or seminars in various art forms to local schools and the public, enriching the town's cultural education
- **Cultural Events:** Organising exhibitions, performances, or festivals that showcase the work created during the residency, drawing visitors and boosting local pride
- **Documentation and Storytelling:** Recording the residency experience through blogs, social media, or publications, promoting Swifts Creek's cultural vibrancy to a broader audience.

Risk Management for the Artist-in-Residence (AiR) Program

Implementing an Artist-in-Residence (AiR) program presents numerous benefits but also requires careful risk management to ensure its success. The following table outlines potential challenges and corresponding mitigation strategies to maintain program sustainability, community engagement, and long-term impact.

By thoughtfully integrating an Artist-in-Residence (AiR) program into Swifts Creek and the surrounding communities, the region can celebrate its unique character, support artistic innovation, and foster a dynamic cultural tourism offering.

RISK	MITIGATION STRATEGY
Community Resistance	Engage local artists in planning, include them in selection panels, and promote collaborative projects
Funding and Sustainability	Diversify funding sources through grants, sponsorships, and partnerships to ensure long-term viability
Logistics and Accommodation	Use available community spaces for housing and workspace, seek partnerships with local businesses
Public Reception and Engagement	Implement a strong communication and marketing strategy to generate interest and participation
Environmental and Site Challenges	Ensure artworks use sustainable materials and are built to withstand weather conditions and events

12 Enabling Visitor Infrastructure

12.1 Enhancing Streetscapes and Public Facilities to Encourage Visitation

Regional towns play a crucial role in Victoria's visitor economy, yet many smaller communities struggle to capture the economic benefits of passing traffic.

Enhancing streetscapes and public facilities can transform a town into a key destination. By creating inviting, functional spaces, towns like Swifts Creek can attract travellers to explore and support local businesses. Improved streetscapes and visitor amenities can boost the economy and local identity. Simple upgrades such as landscaping, pedestrian pathways, signage, and rest areas encourage visitor engagement. Enhancing amenities like toilets, picnic areas, EV charging stations, and parking ensures travellers feel comfortable staying longer.

Placemaking

Placemaking initiatives can highlight a town's unique character, leaving a lasting impression on visitors. Public art, historical signage, and heritage-focused streetscapes create a distinct sense of place. Small installations can make a big impact.

For Swifts Creek and Ensay, themes celebrating timber, gold mining, and High Country heritage could boost visitor interest. Local businesses and public entities should incorporate these themes into their storefronts, services, and products.

Strategic Alignment

Investing strategically in streetscapes and visitor-friendly infrastructure supports regional development, economic diversification, business resilience, and community pride. Such improvements in towns like Swifts Creek and Ensay attract more tourism spending, benefiting local businesses. This initiative not only boosts the visitor economy but also improves liveability for residents by creating vibrant town centres.

The East Gippsland Shire Council is finalising the Swifts Creek Open Space Masterplan, incorporating community priorities. Modern facilities will encourage travellers to stop, rest, stay, and shop, promoting Swifts Creek as an appealing destination.

Identified Opportunities

The following have been identified through community consultation and gap analysis and could be considered as creating a *hub of public facilities* that enhances the streetscape and encourages stops and stays:

- **Changing Places toilet facility** and upgraded and contemporary public toilet block
- **EV charging station** in safe location
- **Public seating and picnic style tables** (adjacent to EV charging station and play facilities)
- **Pump Track / Skateboard park** – there are contemporary designs that allow a facility to be multiuse for bikes, skateboards, rollerblades
- **Completion of Poets Walk** to create a safe loop trail (as per identified in Trail Opportunities) and activate further with nature-play and/or artistic features
- **Themed playground (nature)** – possible relocation of current playground or new contemporary playground facility to Swifts Creek Caravan and Holiday Park – potentially a river / aquatic themed play area as per Aquatic Trail Opportunity.

13 Conclusion

The Swifts Creek Nature-Based Tourism Study highlights a compelling opportunity for sustainable economic growth and destination positioning through the strategic and staged development of nature focussed tourism experiences.

With the transition away from native timber harvesting, Swifts Creek and surrounds faces an urgent need to leverage off existing and create new industries that can generate employment and stimulate investment.

Nature-based tourism offers a sustainable and scalable solution, building upon the region's natural beauty, cultural heritage, and adventure tourism potential.

By implementing some or all of the key opportunities outlined in this report, Swifts Creek can attract new visitors, extend length of stay and expenditure and create long-term economic benefits for businesses and the community.

Investing in nature-based tourism infrastructure will directly contribute to job creation and provide opportunity for small business development. Enhancements such as cycling trails, heritage walking routes, star-gazing lounges, and visitor-friendly township facilities will support existing businesses while encouraging new enterprises in hospitality, guiding and support services, accommodation, and local retail.

13.1 Tourism potential

The tourism sector has the potential to provide a more stable and diversified employment base, reducing the town's reliance on a single industry and fostering a more resilient local economy.

The introduction of well-planned adventure cycling routes and walking trails will position Swifts Creek as a premier outdoor recreational hub.

Cycling tourism is a high-yield market, with adventure riders known for extended stays and strong spending patterns on accommodation, food, and local experiences. The ability to leverage Omeo's growing cycling market also ensures that Swifts Creek benefits from the growing visitation, reinforcing its role within a broader regional tourism strategy.

Cultural, creative and historical tourism presents another high-value economic opportunity. The activation of heritage assets such as Cassilis Mines, Jirnkee Water Race, and Tambo Trenches can attract history enthusiasts, school groups, and heritage travellers who engage deeply with immersive storytelling and interactive experiences.

Integrating Indigenous history and perspectives into Swifts Creek's tourism offerings could further enrich the visitor experience and strengthen relationships with Traditional Owners.

13.2 Community benefit

The benefits of implementing these initiatives extend beyond economic growth, they also contribute to community well-being and will create a distinct regional identity for the Swifts Creek community.

Improved public infrastructure, revitalised streetscapes, and increased visitor retail options will enhance local pride and liveability, making Swifts Creek a more attractive place to live, work, and invest.

Community-led tourism initiatives can also foster skills development, business entrepreneurship, and social cohesion, ensuring that tourism growth aligns with the needs and aspirations of residents.

13.3 Challenges and risks

However, failing to act on these opportunities carries significant risks. Without investment in infrastructure and product development, Swifts Creek risks losing potential visitor traffic to competing destinations, particularly as Omeo continues to expand its mountain biking offering.

The town's lack of visitor infrastructure and limited accommodation options already contribute to low visitor retention rates, and without intervention, this trend may continue. A lack of diversified industry also increases economic vulnerability, leaving the

community at risk of population decline, business closures, and long-term financial instability.

Further, the absence of a coordinated tourism strategy means that historical and natural assets remain underutilised, missing a chance to create compelling, marketable experiences that drive regional visitation. The decline of heritage sites due to lack of management, or the continued invisibility of Swifts Creek within key tourism networks, could result in lost revenue and diminishing prospects for local businesses.

Additionally, without investment in sustainable tourism infrastructure, the environmental and cultural assets of Swifts Creek may degrade due to unmanaged visitor activity, rather than being protected through responsible tourism initiatives and regulations.

13.4 Moving forward

Despite these risks, the path forward is one of opportunity and potential. By taking decisive action to develop and enhance nature-based tourism, Swifts Creek can redefine itself as an active regional township in East Gippsland. The opportunities outlined in this study provide a practical, achievable roadmap for creating a thriving local tourism economy that respects the environment, honours cultural heritage and the creative arts, and strengthens community resilience.

With a focus on collaboration, investment, and strategic planning, Swifts Creek can transform its untapped potential into measurable success. By embracing its unique strengths and seizing on emerging tourism trends, the town and its surrounding communities can secure a prosperous and sustainable future, ensuring that it remains a welcoming and dynamic place for both residents and visitors.



Appendix A – Situation analysis

Overview of Swifts Creek and Region

Swifts Creek is a small, vibrant community nestled in the picturesque Tambo Valley of East Gippsland, approximately 400km north-east of Victoria's capital.

Positioned within the Great Dividing Range and defined by its scenic waterways—including the Tambo River and Swifts Creek—it offers an authentic rural experience enriched by a deep historical and natural heritage.

The township sits on the famous touring route of the Great Alpine Road and is approximately 27km from Omeo. The town is regarded as gateway to the snowfields located further afield at Dinner Plain and Mount Hotham.

The district is home to around 590 residents according to the 2021 ABS Census, with an estimated residential population of 615. The community has a median age of 55, and there is a notably smaller proportion of residents aged between 15 and 34 compared to the broader East Gippsland Shire.

Swifts Creek contributes 1.4% to the Gross Regional Product of East Gippsland, with the district recording a total economic output of approximately \$89 million in 2022. Key sectors driving this output include

agriculture, forestry, and fishing, which account for 41.7% of the region's total production.

With a lower population (and workforce), and limited accommodation available, it is often bypassed by visitors heading north for snow sport recreation, mountain biking and cycling, hiking, fishing, 4WDing and motorbiking.

This trend is exacerbated by the lack of strongly identified tourism activities and activations on offer in Swifts Creek as well as good levels of accommodation stock and type.

The recent opening of Stage One of the Omeo MTB Trails is also beginning to lure people north without stopping or opting to stay in Swifts Creek.

There is a strong historical narrative context to the Swifts Creek study area, albeit interpretation is not focused, coordinated or consistent in terms of in situ/ physical form and/or available online via digital portals, QR Codes and Apps

There is a significant lack of accommodation stock and diversity in the current offering in terms of traditional roofed accommodation motel style, cabins and self-contained limiting the capacity to attract and accommodate overnight visitors.

Whilst there is an abundance of free camping options in the region, most sites are hard to identify, unpowered, offer little to no facilities for overnight stays or groups and families.

There is no centralised comprehensive accommodation or camping listing, and no visibility via online listings on regional tourism organisation portals.

A small number of accommodation venues are listed on online travel agents.

Land management organisations including Parks Victoria, DEECA and East Gippsland Council are working hard under resource constraints.

Popular attractions like Cassilis Historic Area remains officially closed despite still being promoted in some tourism collateral.

Other potential attractions and activities are under promoted, unfunded, have risk and safety challenges, suffer from a lack of focused management actions or are currently unrecognised. These attractions include the Jirnkee Water Race Walk, Tambo Trenches and the Tambo River for aquatic play opportunities.

The community's history of overcoming challenges such as bushfires, floods, and economic shifts has fostered a resilient and innovative spirit.

Strategic approaches like the Smart Specialisation Strategy are being applied to leverage local strengths in developing sustainable tourism and economic opportunities.

The community is optimistic and engaged, as demonstrated by tourism workshop attendance and participation held in December as part of this project.

The new mountain bike trail offering at Omeo is set to spur increased regional visitation by the cycling market.

Whilst this seemingly presents a competitive threat in terms of capturing visitors that may bypass Swifts Creek, it also represents an opportunity for Swifts Creek and surrounds to add value to the regional tourism proposition and leverage that increased market into longer stay and dispersal options.

This may be by developing mountain bike-adjacent activities such as other forms of adventure riding, non-mountain biking activities (for accompanying friends and family) and services and facilities including accommodation, food provisions and retail options.

Nature-Based Tourism Asset Audit

Swifts Creek and its surrounding environs are blessed with spectacular natural landscapes dotted with historical attractions that represent significant opportunity for encouraging and growing nature-based tourism and recreation activities.

While the opportunity to grow the region’s nature-based tourism is significant, the current suite of coordinated, curated and managed activities in nature and appropriate infrastructure is somewhat limited.

Table 4. Existing Assets

ACTIVATION TYPE	STATUS	OPPORTUNITY
Walking / hiking	<p>There are a limited number of short formal and informal (<5km) walking trails. All are under-serviced in terms of pre-trip information, facilitation and promotion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Poets Walk (formal)• Bentley Plains walks (formal & informal)• Jirnkee Water Race (informal)• Town-Shelton Lane Walk (formal)• Caravan Park-McLarty’s Lane (informal/road) <p>There are no long-distance walking trails.</p> <p>Existing trails are generally not anchored by significant geographical features (i.e. lookouts, waterfalls)</p> <p>Most (but not all) walks are anchored to heritage narratives.</p> <p>There are other Points of Interest (POIs) that can potentially create other themed anchors for future walks i.e. viewpoints and waterfalls.</p> <p>Waterfalls identified (no formal access):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bentley Falls• Back River• Stawell Falls• Wentworth Falls• Others to be identified	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Extend / re-align and formalise some short walks to create critical mass of attraction (i.e. Cassilis Historical Site and Jirnkee Water Race).• Better-promote existing short walks as hubs.• Curate more/better pre-trip facilitation information (mapping, description, narratives).• Link short walks to attraction thematic i.e. heritage, art with improved narration and interpretation.• Investigate several waterfall sites and feasibility of creating a set of short access waterfall walks.

ACTIVATION TYPE	STATUS	OPPORTUNITY
Cycling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are no formal cycling trails. There is a small volunteer-run cycling event based in Swifts Creek – Tour de Tambo – currently with uncertain pathway to viability (insurance, funding issues). There exist numerous back country roads and tracks that are used informally by local and regional riders, offering excellent ‘journey through nature’ opportunities. There are no facilities or information supporting these experiences. There are prior plans that recommend development of some new cycling trails seeking to connect Swifts Creek with Omeo and solve missing link alignments in Ensay. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curate, activate and promote ‘adventure cycling’ routes based on back country gravel/dirt roads. Include a specific back road recommended riding route link to Omeo, including solution for missing link. Revisit past proposals for missing link and safer cycle crossing solution of Great Alpine Rd at Ensay, considered in broader context of multiple other tourism activations for the area. Facilitated growth of cycling events – specifically Cattlemen 100 and Tour de Tambo. Integrate heritage and art narratives and Points of Interest (POIs) into some curated back country ride route/s Foster a cycle tourism culture with in-town infrastructure (i.e. appropriate bike racks, bike wash, tool stand) and cycle-based narratives (cycle themed decorations, art, furniture). Create an in-town focal-point departure point for all routes.
Viewpoints / vista POIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a single identified viewpoint, Connors Hill Lookout, located roadside along Great Alpine Road facing north, approximately 9.5km south of Swifts Creek and 9km north of Ensay. There are no other formalised lookout points, nor any walk-in viewpoints. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify feasible location for POI ‘hero’ vista lookout. Potential on western flank of Mount Hopeless or Mt Stawell (with waterfall), albeit for 4WD only access only (at present) via eastern approaches (private landholder laneway on western approach). Investigate vista lookout POI opportunities on Mount Elizabeth 2. <i>Access to be investigated.</i> Mountain hosts rare and significant flora and fauna and is the only known location of endangered plant species <i>leafy nematolepis</i>.
Historical Points of Interest (POIs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Numerous historical POIs are located in the Swifts Creek study area: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cassilis Historical Area including King Cassilis mine, Boatman mine, Mt Hepburn mine, the Chamber of Horrors and Cassilis treatment plants (mining) Jirnkee Water Race (mining) Odell’s Gully Gold Battery Site (mining) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curation of Narrative Trails – using historical themes (mining, timber industry, pioneers, war, huts) to create themed drive / ride / motorbike trails joining the POI dots, with attendant interpretation on site, digitally in at a central township tourism hub location. Further development and activation of Tambo Trenches.

ACTIVATION TYPE	STATUS	OPPORTUNITY
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Charlotte Spur Track historic rockwork (pioneer history) – Dogs Grave (Dargo Rd, Brookville. Pioneer history) – Tambo Trenches (WW2 history) – Reedy Flat WW1 Memorial (WW2) – Reedy Flat State School (pioneering history. NB: privately owned. From roadside viewing only.) – Washington Winch (timber industry) – Ezard's Timber Mill (timber industry heritage) – Moscow Villa Hut – Bentley Plain Hut (aka Bush Hilton) – Murphy's Hut – Strobridge Hut (Mad Lucy's Hut) – Dogs Grave Hut – Marthavale Hut – Commins Hut 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development and formalisation of walking trails (as per above) around Jirnkee Water Race with links to Cassilis Historical Area • Limited development of formalised walking route (as per above) exploring Cassilis Historical Area. • Implementation of a coordinated historical narrative interpretation program across historical POIs
Aquatic Leisure - Nature Based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are numerous river swimming hole locations on the Tambo River popular with locals and visitors. • There is no formal identification or promotion of these 'wild swimming' locations nor information pertaining to safety. • The Swifts Creek Caravan and Tourist Park is located on the riverbank, however there is no formalised river-facing activation. • Visit Gippsland mentions in passing: Bark Sheds, Ramrod and Sardine Flat as swimming spots. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit and identification of best accessible wild swimming locations • Curation and promotion of a 'wild swimming' trail, identifying best river swim locations. • Identification and facilitation of a prescribed point-to-point 'lilo float' self-guided experience. • Develop a form of flood/water surge-proof riverbank activity infrastructure within Swifts Creek Caravan and Tourist Park that encourages and activates children and families to 'play in nature'. • Identification and promotion of numerous best fishing spots.
Birdwatching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are currently no formalised birdwatching areas, focus point destinations or infrastructure. • eBird.com shows some recent birdwatching activity. • Birdlife East Gippsland lists Cassilis and Upper Livingstone as birdwatching sites in its Omeo brochure with one hosted outing listed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of more / better birdwatching sites bird watching species that may be rare and/or indigenous, in the Swifts Creek catchment • Work with Birdlife East Gippsland to create more awareness of sites identified.

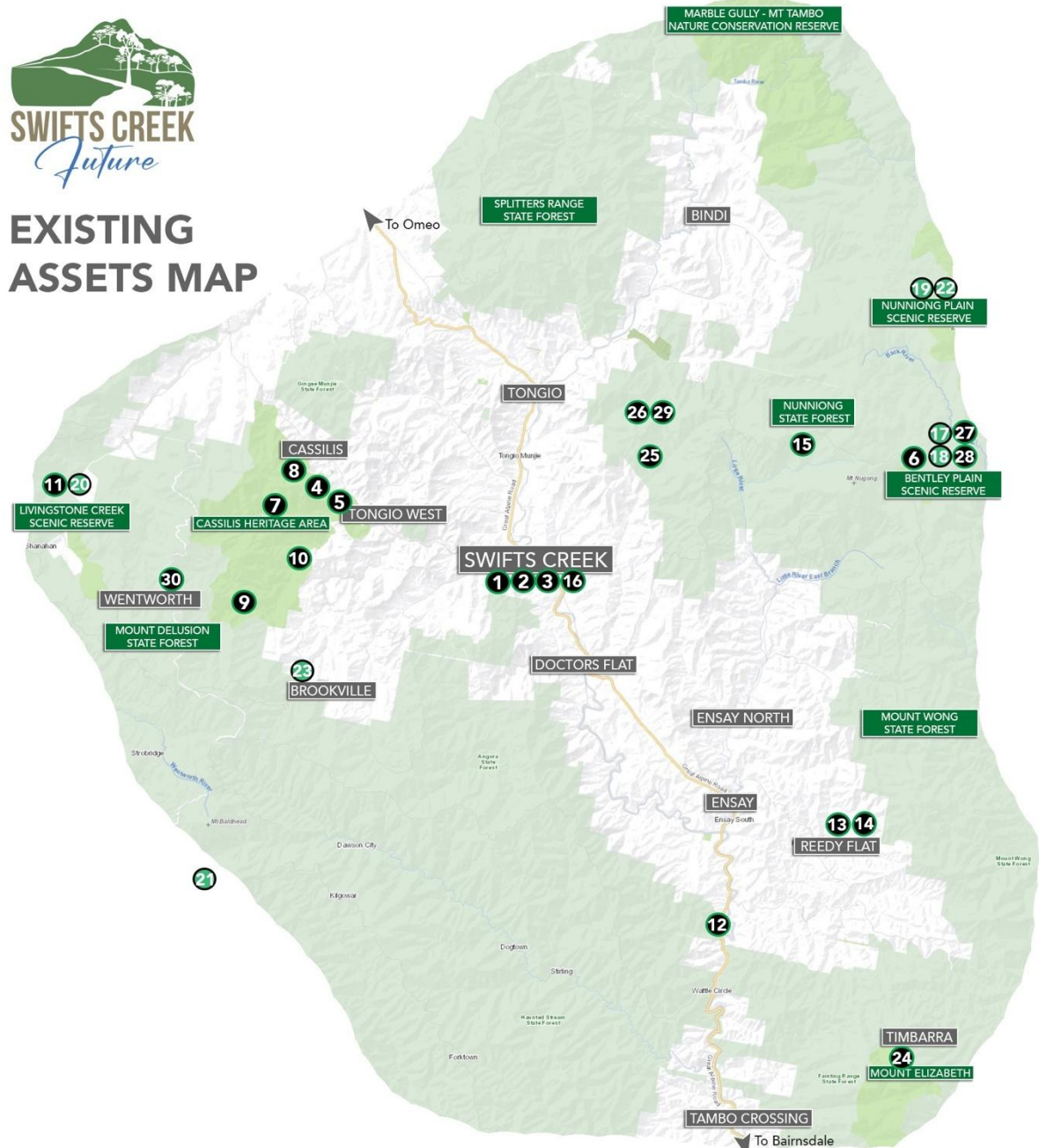
ACTIVATION TYPE	STATUS	OPPORTUNITY
	<p>for 2025 to Cassilis (and Oriental Claims, Omeo). https://birdlife.org.au/groups/birdlife-east-gippsland/</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Birding Victoria does not currently list Swifts Creek (or Omeo Valley) as a site of significance for Birdwatching. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate feasibility and viability of a specific birdwatching infrastructure (hide) anchored to richest birdwatching site identified in region. Promotion of birdwatching sites by local businesses / information streams.
Hunting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Victorian public land hunting maps available via DEECA in PDF and via the App <i>More To Explore</i>. These define where hunting can and cannot take place in the Swifts Creek study area. Swifts Creek and environs is a popular location for hunting, including for sambar deer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote region to hunting tour organisers and online hunting forums. Potential to attract a shooter and hunting supplies retailer to town.
Camping / RV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A range of formal and informal camping sites are identified across the study region. Some are actively managed with facilities (mostly limited), many are not managed and/or informal sites with no facilities. There is a formal (paid) camping at Swifts Creek Caravan and Tourist Park. There is now RV camping and facilities (dump) at Ensay Recreation Ground. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review all user generated camping app and websites directing visitors. Consolidate camping opportunities into preferred and permissible sites. Record and log details of sites (water/toilets/fires allowed etc). Review sites for further prospective development (water, toilets, maintenance schedules) Investigate feasibility and costing for extending offering at Swifts Creek Caravan and Tourist Park to include a limited number of eco-cabins. Consider extending RV facilitation to Swifts Creek Recreation Ground.
Indigenous Heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peoples of the Brabrulung Tribe of the Gunaikurnai Nation are the original inhabitants of the area. No current POI or interpretations identified. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physically and digitally host historical narrative of Brabrulung People.

Figure 2. Map of existing Trails and Recreation Assets

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 Poets Walk | 7 Cassilis Heritage Area |
| 2 Shelton Lane Walk | 8 Cassilis Cemetary |
| 3 McLarty's Lane Walk | 9 Odells Gully Gold Battery |
| 4 Jirnkee Race Walk | 10 Charlotte Spur Track |
| 5 Cassilis Heritage Walks | 11 Dogs Grave |
| 6 Bentley Plains Walk(s) | 12 Tambo Trenches |
| | 13 Reedy Flat WW1 Memorial |
| | 14 Reedy Flat State School |
| 15 Washington Winch | 23 Mad Lucy's |
| 16 Ezards Timber Mill | 24 Mt Elizabeth |
| 17 Moscow Villa Hut | 25 Mt Hopeless |
| 18 Bentley Plain Hut | 26 Mt Stawell |
| 19 Commins Hut | 27 Bentley Falls |
| 20 Dogs Grave Hut | 28 Back River Falls |
| 21 Marthavale Hut | 29 Stawell Falls |
| 22 Murphy's Hut | 30 Wentworth Falls |



EXISTING ASSETS MAP



Infrastructure Assessment & Gaps

Table 5. Walking Trails

There are a limited number of formal trails within Swifts Creek Study Area and some recognised albeit informal walks. All face challenges in delivering a high quality walking experience with a lack of features / POIs on many, with the exception of those walks based on heritage sites i.e. Jirnkee Water Race and Cassilis Heritage Area, and an overall lack of collective distance enough to create a critical mass of attraction.

TRAIL	INFRASTRUCTURE GAP	RECOMMENDED REMEDIAL WORKS
Poets Walk (formal) 1km	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited picnic / seating Limited wayfinding Limited interpretation - storytelling limited to specific poet-related works. No formal trailhead with signage Loop requires roadside / footpath return with no feature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extend walk on southern side of McMillan Street, south along Tambo River west bank to link to southern end of Town-Shelton Lane Walk to create longer short walk loop (3.5km total / 2.6km extension works). Develop further art-themed installations, interpretations and storytelling activations. Add picnic and seat infrastructure.
Town-Shelton Lane Walk (formal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basic footpath walk with no features or interpretation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Link to Poets Walk as an extension creating a loop. Develop some continuation of art-themed installations and/or story telling.
Bentley Plains walks Bentley Creek Walk 1.7km, Grade 2 Douglas Reserve Walk 800m, Grade 2 Bentley Plain Walk 2.5km, Grade 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trails require maintenance Steel boardwalks on one loop with lookout doesn't appear to highlight a specific feature No central trailhead and mapping Limited wayfinding No coordination between three walks existing. One walk not signed and seems informal. Lack of specific feature / POI nodes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New central trail head created with all three existing walks connected to a central node with map board and wayfinding. Review alignment with a view to features Develop interpretation and narratives, potentially around timber industry Consider long term walking track link to/ from Washington Winch. Potential to extend main Bentley Plains Walk to take in waterfalls to the north-east (Bentleys and Back River falls) Log final walk network on user generated walk mapping apps (AllTrails etc)

TRAIL	INFRASTRUCTURE GAP	RECOMMENDED REMEDIAL WORKS
Jirnkee Water Race Walk 2km, Grade 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Currently an informal walk Trailhead is roadside, poorly marked and no parking (unsafe trailhead) Trail is poor and hard to find in parts No interpretation or wayfinding (bar poorly sighted/located orange flashes) on trail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct trail audit to identify desired and feasible extension/s / re-alignments and infrastructure required to create network linking Jirnkee Water Race with Cassilis Recreation Reserve (Camp) to the north and Cassilis Heritage Area to the south. Requires independent feasibility study. Re-locate trailhead/s to safer site/s (suggest Cassilis Heritage Area car park and Cassilis Cemetery in the north). Add appropriate wayfinding and interpretation. Formalise trail and online / digital pre-trip information and interpretation.
Caravan Park- McLarty's Lane (informal/road)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Currently an informal walk with no major feature or POI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No change recommended - leave as informal morning walk for visitors of caravan park.
Cassilis Heritage Area Walk – Mt Hepburn Mine Walk 2km, Grade 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Currently informal walk, although has an information sign on Cassilis Rd and information can be found online. Navigation is confusing on site Parts of site are officially off limits (but not cordoned off) due to hazardous materials. Parts of trail are undesirably steep / challenging for market (up to mine sites) No interpretation on site No wayfinding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extend / re-align and formalise to create critical mass of attraction. Link Cassilis Historical Site and Jirnkee Water Race. Use a limited infrastructure and online mapping approach to define and limit movement around the Cassilis Heritage Site. Create physical barriers to bar visitors from dangerous / sensitive sites within the Area. Better-promote existing short walks as hubs. Curate more/better pre-trip facilitation information (mapping, description, narratives) and onsite interpretation (car park signage). Install wayfinding.
General - Walking Trail Commentary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a lack of 'threshold attraction' in terms of collection of walking trails identified, with many lacking any infrastructure and often informal in nature. Existing trails are generally not anchored by significant geographical features (i.e. lookouts, waterfalls) Most (but not all) walks that do have POIs are anchored to heritage narratives. There are other POIs that can potentially create other themed anchors for future walks i.e. viewpoints and waterfalls. 	<p>Redevelop existing short walks as hubs with a focus on Cassilis / Jirnkee walk network and Bentley's Plain Walks network.</p> <p>Investigate feasibility for developing short waterfall walks including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bentley Plains link to Bentley Waterfall and Back Creek Waterfall Wentworth Waterfall Others to be identified in further investigations <p>Investigate feasibility for establishing a 'lookout' point of interest – Mt Hopeless or Mt Stawell. Likely 4WD-only if Mt Stawell. Private leasehold challenge for best/quickest access to Mt Hopeless. Investigate Mt Elizabeth.</p>

TRAIL	INFRASTRUCTURE GAP	RECOMMENDED REMEDIAL WORKS
		<p>Curate more/better pre-trip facilitation information (mapping, description, narratives) and engage in publishing curated content on user-generated mapping and walking information source websites i.e. AllTrails.</p> <p>Link short walks to attraction thematic i.e. heritage, art with improved narration and interpretation.</p>

Table 6. Cycling Trails

TRAIL	INFRASTRUCTURE GAP	RECOMMENDED REMEDIAL WORKS
Backcountry Cycling	There are any number of back country roads idea for back country (gravel grinding, bike packing) in the Swifts Creek (and adjacent) region, however there are no pre-trip guides, information, delineated routes, recommended trailheads, wayfinding (digital or physical) or promotion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit prospective routes and curate a selection of recommended routes according to difficulty, target rider market, appropriate infrastructure support (i.e. campsites), and safety. • Create a suite of pre-trip facilitative and inspirational information available online and in situ (in township) . • Activate Swifts Creek township to create a ‘cycling culture’ to ‘own’ the gravel grind and bike-packing space regionally. • Revisit recommendations in <i>Ensay Trails Development Plan</i>, specifically the development of under-bridge shared path under-crossing of Great Alpine Rd and associated trail works linking Ensay Recreation Reserve to Ensay township (eastern side) and Ensay / Winery. This is integral to both cycling and walking opportunities.
Cycling Events	<p>There are two back country road riding events in the region:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cattlemen 100 • Tour de Tambo <p>Cattlemen 100 does not currently route via Swifts Creek as it operates from Omeo, but has potential to shift base to Swifts Creek, confirmed by operator.</p> <p>Tour de Tambo is a small event run from a volunteer base from Swifts Creek to Ensay. It faces feasibility issues regarding financing and costs of operation – specifically insurance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with Cattlemen100 operator and work towards shifting event start/finish to Swifts Creek. Requires works for approx. 1km of dirt road refurbishment / reinstatement to create link between Swifts Creek and Omeo / other desirable included event routes. • Further activations to encourage a dirt ride bike culture in town (bike friendly businesses, artistic cycle related works, bike racks, tool stand and wash stands). • Re-imagine Tour de Tambo as a larger event supported by seed funding and advised by event design professionals to grow into a self-funding entity.

Table 7. Aquatic Trails

TRAIL	INFRASTRUCTURE GAP	RECOMMENDED REMEDIAL WORKS
Tambo River	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No defined aquatic play activations or location aside from some car parks located riverside along the Great Alpine Road. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Audit and identification of 'wild swimming' locations to be promoted as a target collection. Audit of a section of Tambo River 1-2km in length to be identified as a recognised 'river sled (lilo)' course with dedicated and signposted put in zone (preferably at Caravan Park) and pull-out zone (attached to a car park). Could also be promoted to Stand Up Paddleboard community (potentially longer section- no infrastructure required. Activation tools digital/online). River sled hire / surf lilo purchase facilitated in town. Investigate appropriate child's aquatic play activation site within caravan park linked to river. Design to be considered.
Aquatic Event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No event activation of river at present. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate feasibility and design of a 'lilo derby' (and/or similar accessible aquatic activity) family event in summer. Potentially as an add on activation to Tour de Tambo event.

Table 8. Heritage Trails

TRAIL	INFRASTRUCTURE GAP	RECOMMENDED REMEDIAL WORKS
General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No defined (formal) heritage trails with exception of Poets Walk. Existing heritage trails (Cassilis and Jirnkee) are informal with no dedicated maintenance oversight (for trail). No 'at trailhead' and on trail interpretation or wayfinding with exception of Historical Society signage installed roadside away from trailhead of Cassilis / Jirnkee Water Race. Some online information but limited. Issue of contamination at Cassilis site. Issue of alignment assessment and maintenance at Jirnkee Water Race Hut to Hut 4WD loop - none identified to link all huts in region together as a suggested drive loop. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cordon off contaminated areas of Cassilis. Seek funding for a Heritage Area Trails Masterplan that may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> short walk alignments in/around site working in with cordoned off areas to better guide visitors and maintain distance from contaminated site and sensitive heritage infrastructure. Assess feasibility for linking revised Cassilis short walks with Jirnkee Water Race to create a heritage walk trail network hub, including linking through to Cassilis Cemetery. Reassess alignment of existing Cassilis Walk, including re-siting trailhead away from main road (dangerous location, no parking). Trailheads suggested at Cassilis Car Park and Cassilis Cemetery. Complete Historical Interpretation Masterplan as part of Heritage Short Walks Masterplan. Create digital trip planning and informative collateral describing and facilitating a 4WD (and/or 2WD if feasible) Hut to Hut loop with accessible narratives supplied per hut (i.e. QR download onto phone while in service – could be simple PDF).

Table 9. Accessible Trails

TRAIL	INFRASTRUCTURE GAP	RECOMMENDED REMEDIAL WORKS
General	<p>No defined accessible trails for all abilities and adaptive use are specifically identified in the region.</p> <p>There is no specific information collateral advising of recommended all abilities and adaptive nature-based experiences.</p>	<p>Poets Walk (and potential extension) could be audited and promoted for all abilities access.</p> <p>Any development of adventure cycling routes should take into consideration planning for adaptive cycle use. Not all routes need to be suitable (i.e. gradients on some can remain steep for the 'challenge' rider), however a number should be specifically identified and designed as adaptive cycle suitable and promoted as such.</p>

Accommodation Audit

There is a recognised lack of accommodation stock and variety of offerings servicing the Swifts Creek study region.

There is limited pub-style accommodation, no motel or residential hotel, and a low number of commercial accommodation offerings, primarily B&B, self contained or farm stay. There is no online booking gateway to the two pub accommodation offerings.

The key accommodation site is the Swifts Creek Caravan & Tourist Park which offers 20 powered and unpowered sites for camping and caravanning/RV.

There is RV friendly camping facility recently installed at Ensay Recreation Ground.

When investigating development of new nature-based tourism attractions and experiences, availability and type of accommodation in regional locations can be seen as one of the major challenges. In seeking to develop and grow the overnight r stay visitation in Swifts Creek and surrounding area it is important to be mindful of the current capacity but also the opportunities for sustainable expansion and activating unused stock.

Although this study is focused on nature-based recreation, experiences and trails, it is pertinent to highlight the current lack of available accommodation and to recommend strategies to increase over time the overall offering and the variety that may be developed to service different market segments.

There are several campsites available in the region, both formal under the management of DEECA and informal.

Table 10. Listings

LISTING	NO OF LISTINGS
Listings on AirBnB	4
Listings on Booking.com	0
Listings on Stayz	0
Listings on VisitGippsland	0
Listings on VisitEastGippsland	0
Listings on Google Search (map area)	3
Listings on RipaRide	1
Listings on Hipcamp	0

Table 11. Accommodation Assets

TYPE	NUMBER	IDENTIFIED
Hotel/Motel	0	<ul style="list-style-type: none">NA
Pub	2 Unknown pax	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Junction Hotel, Swifts Creek (free camping by booking only)Little River Inn, Ensay
AirBnB / Short Term	5 properties 38 pax	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Miners Cottage (AirBnB) Capacity 6Apartment in Swifts Creek (AirBnB) Capacity 6Great Alpine Church (AirBnB) Capacity: 7Blakes Hut (AirBnB) Capacity 4Swifts Creek Accommodation – McMillans (www.swiftscreekaccommodation.com.au) Capacity 15
Farm stay	1 4 pax	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Shed 'n Home in Bindi (AirBnB) Capacity 4
Caravan Park	1 20 sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Swifts Creek Caravan & Tourist Park Capacity 20 sites
RV site	1	Ensay Recreation Ground

Table 12. Camping Assets

TYPE	NUMBER	IDENTIFIED
Camping	3 paid locations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Swifts Creek Caravan & Tourist Park (paid)• Ensay Recreation Reserve (incl RV, paid)• Tambo Valley Golf Club (paid)
	23 free camp locations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cassilis Recreation Reserve, Cassilis• Bentley Plain• Moscow Villa• Murphy’s Hut• Lake Hill, Nunniong• Culverts, Nunniong• Commins Hut, Nunniong• Cow Pat Pasture, Nunniong• Marthavale Hut (Quarry Creek Rd)• Dawson City (Haunted Stream Track)• Dogs Grave (Birregun Rd)• Mt Birregun, (Birregun Rd)• Camm’s Top Place, (Dane Track)• Baylisses Haunted Stream, Five Mile Spur & Haunted

TYPE	NUMBER	IDENTIFIED
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">Stream 1&2 (Haunted Stream Track)• Wattle Circle (Great Alpine Rd)• Tambo Crossing (old Coach Rd)• Tambo Bridge (Mt Elizabeth Rd)• Swifts Creek (Cassilis Rd)• Tambo River / Ensay (Collins Rd)• St Patricks Creek (near Tambo River Info Board)

Strategic Alignment

The following table outlines key reports and government strategies that demonstrate support for tourism development opportunities in the Swifts Creek region, VIC.

Table 13. STRATEGIC ALIGNMENTS

STRATEGY	SUMMARY	STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT
NATIONAL		
Thrive 2030 Strategy	<p>The Thrive 2030 Strategy outlines a national approach to rebuilding and sustainably growing Australia's visitor economy from 2022 to 2030.</p> <p>It includes aspirations to reach \$230 billion in total visitor expenditure by 2030, with \$100 billion spent in regional areas. It prioritises regional engagement and the development of nature-based tourism and active experiences to meet evolving visitor expectations.</p>	<p>The strategy advocates for upgrading regional tracks, trails, and facilities, supporting projects like cycling trails that connect communities and provide immersive nature experiences. The plan encourages sustainable tourism that balances economic benefits with environmental stewardship, making Swifts Creek an ideal location to promote eco-friendly cycling and nature-based tourism.</p> <p>Opportunities for developing distinctive experiences such as nature tours and cycling events tailored to East Gippsland's unique landscapes, which align with the goals of enriching the visitor economy and regional growth.</p>
STATE		
Experience Victoria 2033	<p>Experience Victoria 2033 will ensure Victoria maximises growth opportunities in the visitor economy between 2023 and 2033. It prioritises driving growth in nature-based experiences that are connected and supported by appropriate infrastructure.</p> <p>The plan supports development that protects the environment, ensuring visitors leave nature – based attractions in a better state than when they arrived.</p> <p>At its core is a Nature-Based Tourism Plan to sustainably grow nature-based tourism and enhance the resilience of the sector through practices that will enhance our exceptional natural places and support the wellbeing of communities and visitors to our state.</p>	<p>The project will reflect the plan's nature-based visitation priority through building on sustainable tourism opportunities with a focus on maintaining the integrity of local environments and supporting sustainable tourism.</p> <p>The Plan seeks to engage local communities in tourism initiatives, foster partnerships between stakeholders, and promote education and awareness about the importance of nature conservation.</p>
Victorian Cycling Strategy 2018-28	<p>Aims to promote cycling as a safe, accessible, and enjoyable mode of transport. It focuses on increasing cycling participation among all demographics, improving cycling infrastructure,</p>	<p>The project will directly respond to and support this strategy by initiating projects that will facilitate and promote cycling visitors to the region.</p>

STRATEGY	SUMMARY	STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT
	<p>enhancing safety for cyclists, and integrating cycling into broader transport policies. The strategy seeks to support environmental sustainability and public health while fostering local economies through cycling-related initiatives.</p> <p>Includes tourism goals aimed at promoting cycling as a key activity for visitors. It seeks to enhance cycling routes that connect tourist attractions, encourage cycling events, and develop cycling-friendly infrastructure to boost regional tourism. The strategy recognises the potential of cycling to attract tourists and stimulate local economies through cycling-related tourism initiatives.</p>	It will seek to develop safe cycling routes and establish Swifts Creek as a destination that welcomes cyclists and embraced cycling culture.
Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037	Long-term plan that aims to halt the decline of Victoria's biodiversity and improve the health of ecosystems across the state. The strategy outlines key actions to protect native species, restore habitats, and enhance conservation efforts. It emphasises the importance of collaboration among government agencies, communities, and stakeholders to achieve biodiversity outcomes, while also addressing the impacts of climate change and promoting sustainable land use practices.	Directs the sustainable and regenerative aims of any nature-based tourism initiatives giving a framework within which tourism businesses should operate.
REGIONAL AND LOCAL		
Towards 2030 Gippsland	Outlines a strategic vision to enhance Gippsland's tourism sector by 2030.	<p>Key messages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guiding Principles: emphasises inclusivity, sustainability, resilience, and innovation to drive tourism development. • Visitor Growth Targets: aims to attract an additional 270,000 visitor nights annually by 2030. • Emerging Travel Trends: recognises shifts in traveller behaviour, such as increased demand for socially distant and wellness-focused experiences, and a preference for eco-conscious travel choices. • Strategic Focus Areas: include enhancing food, drink, and agritourism offerings, improving infrastructure, and fostering business investment to boost visitor experiences and regional sustainability.

STRATEGY	SUMMARY	STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alignment with Broader Initiatives: aligns with regional plans like "Gippsland 2035," which emphasises integrated development, poverty eradication, and sustainable economic growth.
East Gippsland Economic Development Strategy 2022-2032	The East Gippsland Economic Development Strategy 2022-2032 outlines a vision for sustainable economic growth, emphasising resilience and inclusivity. It focuses on leveraging the region's natural and cultural assets. Key areas of focus include fostering local business growth and enhancing tourism.	<p>Goals and Strategies</p> <p>Supporting Nature-Based Tourism in Swifts Creek include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leveraging East Gippsland's natural assets, including tracks, trails, and bushland reserves, to attract eco-tourism. Enhance tourism opportunities on public and private land, emphasising Swifts Creek's surrounding natural areas Improve public and private infrastructure to support high-quality visitor experiences, including signage, facilities, and connectivity in remote areas Incorporate cultural and historical elements into the tourism offering, utilising Indigenous heritage and stories as a foundation for unique visitor experiences
Gippsland Tracks & Trails Feasibility Study (2019)	Supports a range of trail opportunities through its Inspired Adventure experience pillar including trails proposed at the Omeo Adventure Hub.	Specifically aims to grow trail visitor experiences along the Great Alpine Road.
Regional Forest Agreement Joint Engagement Summary Report: East Gippsland	The East Gippsland Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) consultation focused on understanding the views of stakeholders regarding sustainable forest management and the future of the timber industry. Key themes included transitioning from traditional timber industries to diversified uses such as nature-based tourism. Stakeholders highlighted the need for inclusive forest management that integrates ecological, social, and economic values. There was significant discussion about leveraging Traditional Owner knowledge, improving connectivity between protected areas, and promoting sustainable tourism to replace jobs lost in declining industries.	<p>Goals and Strategies</p> <p>Supporting Nature-Based Tourism in Swifts Creek includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transitioning from traditional timber harvesting to activities such as nature-based tourism supports developing opportunities for Swifts Creek <p>Tourism as a Competitive Advantage:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The report recognised the region's tourism potential as a driver for economic resilience, especially through exclusive licenses to manage public lands for tourism activities The report also called for improved facilities such as tracks, signage, and other visitor amenities to support nature-based tourism and enhance visitor experiences and encouraged partnerships with Traditional Owners to integrate cultural heritage and knowledge into tourism offerings

STRATEGY	SUMMARY	STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT
Gippsland Destination Management Plan	The Gippsland Destination Management Plan 2022-2030 outlines a strategic vision for revitalising and growing the region's visitor economy through sustainability, resilience, and inclusive development. Building on the region's natural beauty and rich cultural heritage, the plan prioritises the creation of immersive nature-based and adventure tourism experiences, infrastructure upgrades, and collaboration with First Nations communities. It emphasises the importance of sustainability, eco-conscious tourism, and year-round visitation while supporting economic recovery from recent crises, such as bushfires and the pandemics.	<p>Key Takeouts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting Nature-Based Tourism in Swifts Creek from the Gippsland Destination Management Plan Gippsland's natural beauty, including the alpine and bushland areas surrounding Swifts Creek, is identified as a key driver for nature-based tourism. These landscapes offer opportunities for activities such as hiking, birdwatching, and scenic exploration <p>Infrastructure Development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritised investments in trails, signage, and accessible infrastructure to enhance visitor experiences in nature-based destinations like Swifts Creek Improved visitor facilities and wayfinding infrastructure to better cater to tourists exploring the area The promotion of immersive and sustainable nature-based experiences, such as guided walks, cultural tourism, and eco-accommodation, aligns with growing visitor demand Support for adventure and eco-tourism activities, including cycling and hiking trails, to attract both domestic and international markets Emphasis on sustainable tourism principles and partnerships with First Nations communities to integrate cultural heritage and Indigenous knowledge into visitor experiences Leverage Gippsland's brand identity, "All Kinds of Wonder," to attract eco-conscious and adventure-seeking travellers <p>Nature-based tourism identified as a significant economic driver for regional towns, with benefits including job creation and support for local businesses</p> <p>Encouragement for community involvement in tourism development to ensure benefits flow directly to local residents</p>
Ensay Trails Development Plan	Identifies and investigates a number of cycling projects that, if funded, will provide cycling opportunities and trails for the benefit of the Ensay community and the broader East Gippsland region.	<p>Proposed projects include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Tour de Tambo – a scenic on-road cycling route commencing at the Ensay Recreation reserve and travelling beside the Tambo River.

STRATEGY	SUMMARY	STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Ensay Township Loop – providing an off-road trail that links the recreation reserve with the Ensay township and the local businesses (i.e.. the Little River Inn, the Ensay Winery, the Community Hall Café).• The Reedy Flat Loop – providing a scenic loop using an off-road trail and on-road route.



East Gippsland has become the first destination in Victoria to achieve ECO Destination Certification through Ecotourism Australia, meeting global best-practice sustainability standards.

It joins an exclusive group of just ten certified regions in Australia, solidifying its reputation as a leader in sustainable tourism. The East Gippsland Shire Council led the certification process with support from key partners, including the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA), Parks Victoria, Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC), and Destination Gippsland.

Achieving certification required meeting over 90 rigorous criteria across four sustainability pillars: sustainable management, environmental impact, socio-economic benefits, and cultural preservation.

This certification, based on the internationally recognised **Green Destinations Standard**, highlights East Gippsland’s leadership in sustainable tourism. The region underwent a thorough assessment, including an independent on-site audit, to ensure it met best-practice sustainability benchmarks.

By securing ECO Destination Certification, East Gippsland sets a new standard for sustainable tourism in Victoria, demonstrating that environmental protection and economic growth can go hand in hand. The recognition positions the region as a top choice for eco-conscious travellers seeking meaningful and responsible tourism experiences.

For smaller towns like **Swifts Creek**, this recognition provides a valuable opportunity to align with sustainable tourism initiatives and attract eco-conscious travellers. Nestled in the High Country, Swifts Creek is well-positioned to benefit from increased visitor interest in nature-based and cultural tourism. By embracing sustainable tourism practices, such as eco-friendly accommodations, guided nature experiences, and support for local producers, Swifts Creek can further integrate into East Gippsland’s ecotourism network. Additionally, local businesses could seek ECO Certification, gaining access to marketing benefits and strengthening their role in a sustainable regional visitor economy.

Appendix B – Stakeholder Engagement

Consultations occurred in situ and online, with a focus workshop held for community attendance in Swifts Creek.

TRC Tourism conducted:

- Site visits, some with stakeholders,
- Community Workshop held in Swifts Creek with approximately 14 attendees,
- One-on-one interviews with relevant stakeholders of interest.

Completed one-on-one consultations include:

- Mal Smith - DEECA, Forest Fire Management and long term resident
- Kath Smith - Emergency Management EGSC, long term resident
- Sally Kendall - Reedy Flat Resident, member Activating Ensay and Tour de Tambo facilitator
- Tracy Joyce – resident, bushwalker
- Sharna Johnson - local resident, business owner, IWG member
- Graeme Deveson - Historical Society, local resident, historian, IWG member
- Debra Herbertson - Cassilis Estate winery (and BnB)
- Jane Rowe - Pub proprietor
- Steve & Collen Porter - Owners Creekers Cafe
- Renee Lancaster - Swifts Creek Accommodation services, Studio 21 owner (health & wellbeing)
- Emma Halafihi - Tambo Valley Bowls Club, Ensay resident
- Anne Richardson - Great Alpine Gallery, local resident
- Janine Hayes - Destination Gippsland
- Nick Matolytsch – EGSC
- Rebecca Steenholdt - EGSC
- Helenka King - Previous ORCRA Project Manager, Bindi Resident, IWG member
- Leanne Stedman - Swifts Creek Community Centre Manager, Cassilis Resident
- Pauline Fox - Swifts Creek Hall Committee pres, local resident
- Ben Reeves - Omeo MTB Trail Coordinator
- Jo Durrant - Ranger, Omeo & Buchan Valley
- Jarrod Bowd - Ranger Team Leader, Omeo and Buchan Valley
- Steve Crellin - Owner Post Office / Petrol Station
- Christophe Stevens - event operator and regional cyclist, Cattlemen 100
- Customer Service – Giant Bairnsdale (bike shop)
- Steve Peterson – Events, AusCycling

Appendix C – Adventure Cycling Overview

Differentiation in a Growth Market

Although many reports focus on mountain biking as a core adventure cycling discipline, there are growing markets that can be described as similar but distinct to mountain biking that also use trails and dirt roads for cycling recreation. They (along with mountain biking) are more broadly described under the label ‘adventure cycling’ defined as any style of cycling that travels off bitumen seeking an experience enjoyed in nature and on two wheels.

Most people participating in what is often called mountain biking but can in fact refer to any number of disciplines, do so for fun and enjoyment, with only a small proportion focused on competitions. A study of different adventure biking categories, quickly becomes a study of fragmentation. TRC Tourism recognises 17 categories with plenty of crossover between them.

The attractive points for adventure biking are that it enables people to choose who they ride with, generally family or close friends; it can be done anytime; it does not require a minimum level of competency (other than the ability to ride a bicycle) and allows people to choose trails to match their ability; people that may be self-conscious about their ability can choose where, when and who they ride with.⁴

Regions looking to attract and facilitate the adventure biking community need to be mindful of the increasingly diverse nature of what ‘adventure/mountain biking’ actually is or is perceived to be by different markets. Curators of nature-based cycling also need to recognise that riders today demand a higher quality of experience and service across what is an increasingly fragmented market profile. The challenge for nature-base cycling regions is to target the biggest user base that best matches the style of riding best suited to the landscapes available.

Adventure cycling can be broken down into subset descriptors of mountain biking, bike packing/touring and gravel grinding. Each subset has different engagement profiles, if sometimes overlapping.



⁴ Warburton Mountain Bike Feasibility Study 2019

1. **Mountain bikers** use predominantly singletrack trails (although often use dirt and fire roads as connecting trails), seek more technical terrain with features that are increasingly designed and groomed for use (i.e. flow trails, jumps and berms).

There are many different styles of mountain biking from cross country (XC) to all mountain, gravity, flow and downhill (DH), along with niche styles of trails, freeride, freestyle, 4X, and slalom. For the purposes of this study, the target user would predominantly be cross country riders, which is one of the largest markets and more traditional style of mountain biking focusing on using a mix of singletrack and dirt roads, riding variable terrain both ascent and descent profiles, to experience an adventure ride in natural environments.

Rides would usually be 2 hours to full day. Many mountain bikers will seek out extensive networks of trails and/or require a critical mass of 50km-100km of trails to consider a destination for ride-specific travel.

2. Gravel grinding encompasses a fairly broad sweep of riding activity but pertains mainly to long distance day rides – most often approx. 100km – that seek out back country, dirt and fire track roads with little to no traffic. Gravel grinders will often seek high-end ascent profiles and likely compete with friends either in person or through online platforms (such as Strava).

Gravel grind events – both competitive races and non-competitive challenges – are a rising phenomenon across the world, but particularly in North America and Australia where the countryside is vast and fairly unpopulated and

landscapes attractive to ride through. Gravel grind bikes are versatile, adaptable and durable, with a focus on greater comfort for longer-form adventures and the types of rough, remote road routes and variable surfaces that comes with rural landscapes.

3. Bike packing / back country touring is the birthchild of mountain biking and backpacking. It delivers the adventurous freedom of multi-day backcountry hiking, combined with the range and added thrills of riding a mountain bike. It's about exploring remote places via singletrack trails, gravel, and abandoned dirt roads, carrying only essential gear.

4. While backcountry touring can be done on gravel grind bikes, it is more often undertaken on a mountain bike, which delivers better capacity for loading up with luggage while maintaining better stability – important when your load is heavy and you are rolling over rough ground. Because mountain bikes tend to move more slowly than road bikes, and carrying loads tend to be much more than on gravel grind adventures, daily distances tend to be shorter for backcountry rides, favouring roughly the 60km mark and often entailing lots of stopping enroute to admire vistas, or stop at the country bakery. More determined riders can, however, surpass 100km in a day, depending on terrain, climbing profile of the route, luggage load, weather and sunlight hours. Where gravel grinding is usually (but not always) a single day outing and orientated towards competitive or challenge-related goals, bike packing is all about slow travel exploration. It is based around multiday, often multi-week and sometimes multi-month journeys where the focus

is on exploration of places, landscapes, towns and tourist attractions: simply, it is having a grand adventure on two wheels while being mostly self-sufficient. 'Mostly' because while hardcore riders take pride in being an island unto themselves in terms of sufficiency, the profile of bike packing has softened somewhat with riders now often staying at B&Bs, hotels, motels and caravan parks and eating out at cafes and restaurants.

Adventure biking markets can be further separated into the categories of local, domestic and international visitors, to gain an understanding of the needs and expectations of each. The cycle tourist is much more likely to undertake a range of other activities compared to non-cycle tourists, explaining why the cycle tourist's average spend is much higher than non-cycle tourists. Of interest is their tendency to eat at restaurants, go to licensed venues and go shopping; all activities which would benefit the economy of Swifts Creek and the wider region.



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