

GRAMPIANS PEAKS TRAIL

BACKGROUND

As noted in the Introduction to this document, the identification of a preferred location for the Peaks Trailhead was a key deliverable of this project.

It is therefore important for any Action Plan to be based on a solid understanding of just what the 'Peaks Trailhead' will comprise of to ensure that recommendations about the optimal location are sound. The majority of direction around the trailhead is included in the *Grampians Peaks Trail: Trailhead Report (2017)* prepared for Parks Victoria which built on the 2014 *Grampians Peaks Trail Master Plan*.

The Peaks Trail currently starts from the car park in Halls Gap, where walkers are directed to walk past the swimming pool, cross the road and follow signs to Venus Baths (see Figure 8).

Regarding aspirations associated with the delivery of the trailhead, perhaps most critical for this Action Plan is the intention to transform Halls Gap into an internationally recognised 'walking town' that will support the development of businesses that provide world class products and services for the Grampians Peaks Trail. The Action Plan for the Village Centre needs to consider this primacy of the walker / pedestrian in considering how the Centre may evolve over the coming years. For the most part this will relate to improvements in the 'public spaces' of the centre, but development on private land can, and will, exert a strong influence on the amenity and functionality of the pedestrian environment. Clear and legible linkages to the trailhead, wherever it is located, are clearly required. The *Trailhead Report* also clearly identifies the need to improve the presentation of the township and capitalise on the "stunning" landscape setting.

The Trailhead Report identifies that the Grampians is predominantly a self-drive destination with over 97% of visitors being self-drive tourists. Consequently, adequate car parking at trailheads should be provided, as many groups of independent walkers will car pool shuttle, dropping a car at either end of a walk segment. Because public transport around the Grampians is limited, the Trailhead Report identifies that the establishment of a regular and convenient shuttle service may be needed to assist the movement of walkers to and from different sections of their walk.

Major trailheads such as Halls Gap are identified as potentially including a range of facilities where appropriate and feasible, including shelter, seating, toilets, signage and track information, tank water and car parking (understood to be about 15 long term spaces in Halls Gap) and the Action Plan will need to consider the benefits of delivering / consolidating these requirements with existing facilities. It is understood that signage is the key priority for trailhead locations but the starting point of the actual walk may also comprise a visual marker, such as a small plaza or sculptural element. Previous discussions have identified the potential for the Brambuk Centre to function as the Halls Gap Trailhead. This is potentially problematic in terms of the delivery of the anticipated benefits to the Halls Gap Village Centre and is discussed further in the following sections.

Matters to consider in relation to the Peaks Trailhead include the following:

- There is a clear need for the priority of pedestrian movement to drive the delivery of public realm investment.
- Locating the trailhead some distance from the Village Centre may discourage walkers from accessing and interacting with services and facilities in the Village Centre and may compromise the aspirations to deliver a 'walkable town'.
- Improvements to the quality of design outcomes and protection of the landscape setting will be important to the tourism offer.
- The delivery of complementary car parking spaces will also need to be considered, but will need to be delivered in a way which has regard to the matters outlined above.
- In addition, an area which either provides or has easy access to shelter, seating, toilets, signage and track information and tank water will need to be provided. Public toilets are perhaps the 'big ticket' item here, and within the Village Centre are available in the reserve and at the Visitor Information Centre.
- Locating the Trailhead at the Brambuk Centre, while it would provide convenient car parking, would likely compromise the delivery of spin off economic benefits to Halls Gap.
- The *Halls Gap Masterplan* (see following section), puts forward a number of potential trailhead locations and provides a brief summary of advantages and disadvantages. Option 4 which adjoins the School Road bridge, responds most appropriately to the above considerations.

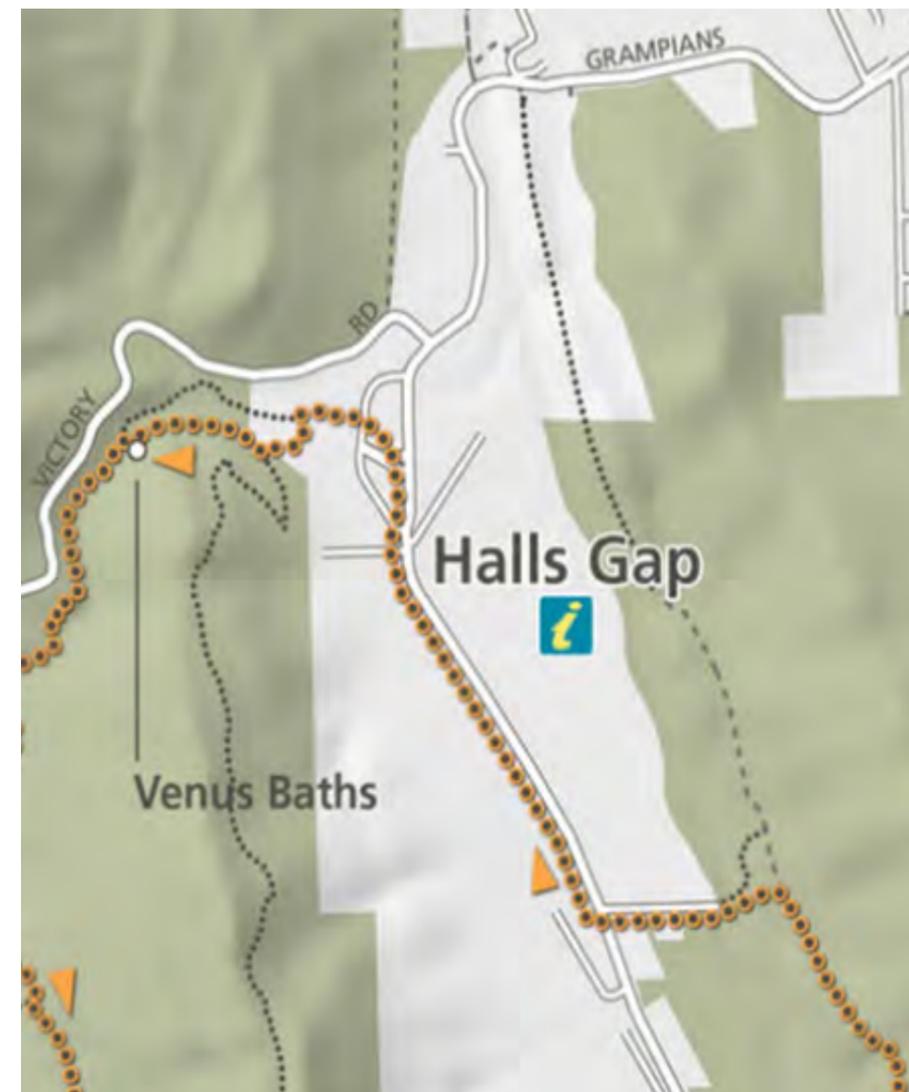


Figure 8. Existing Grampians Peaks Trail circuit (source: Parks Victoria website)