



When planning a summer multi-day hike up Mount Howitt and along the serrated ridge of Crosscut Saw, you may look at the map of the surrounding area and read some rather ominous-sounding names – The Terrible Hollow, Horrible Gap, Mount Buggery. We're after an incredible weekend away, not a hell hike, right? Don't let the names put you off because exploring this region provides some of the best alpine scenery and trails that the Victorian Alps has to offer.

Also known as Toot-buck-nulluck in the Gunai language, Mount Howitt and the nearby peaks are hike-in only, which means they provide an ideal escape away from the crowds with plenty of space to recharge. As travel restrictions carefully ease for our Regional Victorian mates, here's some inspiration to get you planning for when we can start to safely explore our incredible national parks again.



*Exploring Victoria's highest mountain ranges on horseback is very popular for adventure lovers.*

## Getting there

### **From Licola: Tamboritha and Howitt Roads**

The seasonal gate is usually open from November through to May, but it's always best to check with Parks Victoria before you go, just in case there's late-season snow and they delay the opening.

From Licola, drive north on the sealed Tamboritha Road, which closely follows the Macalister and Wellington Rivers, passing many campsites as you make your way further into the Alpine



National Park. About 22 km in, the road becomes unsealed and starts making its way up the southern slopes. Take a left at Arbuckle Junction and continue on Howitt Road which brings you to Mount Howitt Carpark and the trailhead. All up it's about a 4.5-hour drive from Melbourne: 320 km in total, with the last 58 km on unsealed roads.



*Mt Howitt is a Grade 4 hike with a return distance from the car park to the summit of 14 km.*

### Day 1

## Mount Howitt Walking Track

Assuming you've been driving all morning, you will pull up at Mount Howitt Carpark after lunchtime. Here there are no facilities other than a pit toilet, so be prepared with your own provisions and plenty of water for your hike into the campsite.

Hitching up your pack, head north along the clearly signed Mount Howitt Walking Track, which begins in snow gum forest, but then slightly descends into wide alpine meadows. Once the track begins to rise and you reach the junction that is approximately 3 km along, follow the trail left where it's clearly marked towards Macalister Springs. As you approach the camp, there is a trail variant offering an alternative track with about a 10-minute difference in hike time, so feel free to choose your own adventure. Assuming you pick the shorter trail, all up it's about 4.6 km from car to camp and makes a pretty easy start to the weekend, especially after the morning drive.



*Vallejo Gantner Memorial Hut was designed to blend into the environment.*

## Basecamp: Macalister Springs

Nestled amongst the snow gums at the campsite is Vallejo Gantner Memorial Hut. This alpine hut has a striking A-frame design that is somewhat inspired by a hiking tent and was built nearly 50 years ago in memory of Vallejo Gantner. This young, mountain-loving man died 9 years earlier in 1962, from a hunting accident at just 19 years of age. Like all alpine huts in national parks, Gantner's is available for public use, but its primary purpose is as an emergency shelter if inclement weather sets in. Under normal circumstances, please pitch your own tent.

Despite being in a dry part of the bush, Macalister Springs does have a natural spring to collect water most of the time throughout the year, plus a small rainwater tank, however, it's always advisable to boil or filter water from either source. In an effort to preserve the fragile alpine habitat, campfires are not permitted here and as such, it is a designated fuel stove only site.

While most other campsites have rather unmemorable facilities, 'Mac' Springs is well known for its *Loo with a View*. When answering the... call of nature... sitting there and taking in the sweeping views of the valleys to the south, sure makes an unforgettable experience on the trail.



*Replacing the old deteriorated amenity, the 'Loo with a View' opened to hikers in 2013.*

## **Day 2**

### **Crosscut Saw**

After brekkie and a cuppa, it's time to get some kilometres underfoot. Be sure to pack plenty of water, as today we head across the peaks and there are no easy water sources until we return to 'Mac' Springs. Heading west from camp, the trail descends and quickly narrows into a ridge. As the route rises towards the main peaks it offers commanding views both north to The Terrible Hollow and south to the Macalister River and valley below.

1.3 km along, the trail meets the [Australian Alps Walking Track](#). Turning right, the track continues to rise as we reach The Crosscut Saw, named after its prominent, serrated ridgeline continuing further north.



*The trail along Crosscut Saw offers endless views and spectacular sunsets and sunrises.* There are a few small scrambles on The Crosscut, and people who don't enjoy heights might not appreciate the steep slopes falling away from both sides of the ridgeline. However, at 1708 metres The Crosscut provides incredible views in all directions and is worthwhile exploring in length if you can. With so much space you'll feel like you have the whole park to yourself. Pick a favourite spot, grab your lunch, and enjoy the wide-open landscape. Depending on how you're tracking for time, some hikers will want to continue on to Mount Buggery (1608m) or do the climb up to the top of Mount Speculation (1666m) a few kilometres further north. It really comes down to keeping an eye on the ever-changing alpine weather conditions, or if it's a really hot day, and the general morale of the group after tackling such tough terrain.



*The alpine wildflowers are beautiful.*

When it's time to head back we retrace our steps over The Crosscut Saw. Whilst the trail offers magnificent views in all directions, keep an eye out for the many types of alpine wildflowers along both sides of the track. Wildflower varieties bloom through spring, summer and autumn, but tend to peak in early December which makes for a spectacular sight across the mountains.



*Take a moment to relax and soak up the scenery.*

## Mount Howitt

From the Macalister Springs trail junction, continue south along the Australian Alps Walking Track where the trail leads up a broad rise, above the treeline. The Mount Buller ski resort can be seen over on the nearby peak.

The undulating and open grassy summit of Mount Howitt (1742m) gives a feeling of the wide, open space the Alps have to offer. Take some time to enjoy the afternoon sun, relax, soak up the scenery and take that selfie! While you're up here, be sure to pop over to check out Mount Howitt West Peak and admire the view of peaks and bluffs further south on the range. From Mount Howitt summit, basecamp at Macalister Springs is a leisurely 2.2 km stroll back to the morning's starting point and most of it is downhill.

Once back at camp and getting dinner ready, find one of the many vantage points and look back towards Mount Howitt and The Crosscut Saw to enjoy pretty specky views of the sunset as it goes down over the main range.



*Remote and rugged, The Razor and The Viking stand tall in Victoria's High Country.*

## Day 3

### Heading home

It's definitely worthwhile getting up early to catch the sunrise over the Alps. There are plenty of outcrops just to the north of Macalister Springs which provide commanding views of the area.

Two incredible features are The Razor and The Viking; both very distinct, prominent rocky peaks over to the northeast. We might hike over those another time but for now, we need to pack up and begin the return trip to the car park.

Once ready to head off from the campsite, take the alternative trail from your choice on Day 1. This will meet up with the Mount Howitt Walking Track and return you to your car, ready for the trip home.

What an incredible weekend away checking out some of the best scenery in the Victorian Alps. Now, time to plan the next trip!

**Have you ever hiked in the Victorian Alps?**