

# A3. Dinner Plain Master plan - Background Review

# Dinner Plain Masterplan

## Background Review

Tract and FMSEA

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Independent insight.



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# 1 BACKGROUND REVIEW

## 1.1 Alignment with existing research

The *Alpine Shire Recreation and Leisure Strategy 2010* and the *Market Research, Marketing and Events Positioning Analysis for Dinner Plain 2010* (Marketing Strategy) provide a comprehensive review of Dinner Plains existing tourism and recreation facilities and infrastructure and through stakeholder consultation and visitation profiling have identified a potential suite of facilities, tourism products and events which could encourage and sustain year round visitation to the Village.

The research promotes a focus on grassroots level consolidation of high quality, low cost, resource minimal, long term initiatives which set the foundation of the Dinner Plain product offer. Facilitators and stakeholders also need to be aware of prematurely appealing to all of the possible markets until each product has been effectively developed and established.

SGS's research for the *North East Victoria Tourism Gap Analysis* indicates that products which required organising on behalf of the visitor, those that were intrusive or had a negative impact on the environment, and those which could be found in a location closer to Melbourne were not desirable. Best practice features should include responsiveness and respect of the natural environment, pre-organised itineraries, and local expert knowledge guiding the facilitated experience.

A part from the products identified within the two strategies the study team would like to examine the role that the Alpine School Campus has in Dinner Plain in terms of encouraging and maintaining year round visitation. The planning of a new CFA building could also offer the opportunity for a combined facility which could incorporate a bushfire history museum and visitor and community centre.

In the following section we have identified the suite of product offerings that could best maintain and promote the unique history, culture and natural Alpine environment of Dinner Plain to future visitors while meeting the high quality, low cost and resource minimal requirements.

## 1.2 History, Culture and Learning

### Indigenous History and Unique Alpine Environment

Dinner Plain is located amongst some of the rarest plant communities in Australia, alpine woodland and Alpine Grassland. These plant communities are nationally recognised and are protected by Federal and Victorian Government Acts.

The 'mountain loop', a three part looping trail totalling 12kms beginning and ending in dinner Plain will cover Flora and Fauna, Indigenous history and European heritage (cattleman) establishing Dinner Plain as an interpretation centre for high country history pre and post European settlement. The Marketing Strategy identified potential plans to approach an elder to reconstruct an authentic indigenous heritage and cattleman history journey. The trail will be available for multi-purpose use – walking, cycling and horse riding.

The Mountain Loops greatest strength is that it incorporates a broad range of vegetations from river flats, to snow gums, mountain ash regions, natural saddles and open high plains. It provides a natural

environment to tell the story of the history of the region from Indigenous land carers to European settlement.

The Dinner Plain Landcare group believe that this is the **only multipurpose trail of its kind in Alpine Australia.**

This product does not rely on operational costs, staffing and ongoing resources. The Marketing Strategy indicates that the 'mountain loop' is part of a long term vision and ties in perfectly with the research undertaken by Tourism Victoria which indicates an increase in demand for products which are experiential and nature based. Support for this product will result in a longer term offering which has integrity and a richness epitomising what Dinner Plain can offer into the market place with a strong point of difference.

### **European Settlement – Grazing, Huts, Mining, Exploration, Early Ski Touring**

Many of the historical attributes still exist in the form of huts, mining sites, and cattle/horse yards. A movement to effectively communicate this history surrounding these high country relics is underway. Cultural heritage is central to identity and to community and individual's feeling a 'sense of place'.

The Marketing Strategy informs that the formation of the High Country Huts association which has over 200 members and the publication of some local factually books has resulted in increased exposure and consequently opportunity for leveraging on the depth of product that Dinner Plain can offer as the base location for exploring this product.

### **Combined Interpretative and Visitor Centre**

The planning of a new CFA building could offer the opportunity for a combined facility which could incorporate a:

- CFA bushfire museum or interpretive centre which identifies the history of bushfires in the region
- Community centre which was identified in the *Recreation and Leisure Strategy*, and
- Visitor centre.

The museum could play an important part in engaging the community and visitors in disaster preparedness and response and contribute socially, spiritually and economically to a community's recovery following a bushfire.

Visitor Information Centres (VICs) help to promote and manage local tourism and to enhance the visitor experience through providing quality information and a high level of customer service. VICs provide information and recommendations on specific visitor products and help orient visitors to local and regional attractions and businesses, ultimately leading to increased visitor spending and time spent in the region<sup>1</sup>. VICs also play a role in promoting surrounding regions and provide information and guides for regions in other states<sup>2</sup>.

In recent years, the role of VICs has transitioned from reactive information providers to centres of proactive business generation. VICs are now expected to harness business opportunities for the local economy, by maximising visitor yield in a region and directing visitors to appropriate businesses. The role of some VICs has now evolved to become booking or reservation centres, including providing ticketing services for tours and local events<sup>3,4</sup>. One advantage of a VIC offering a booking service, and not just information provision, is that it reduces the risk of visitors not making a booking after recommendation from the VIC.

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<sup>1</sup> Tourism Alliance Victoria (2008) *Visitor Information Centre Frequently Asked Questions – Fact Sheet*.

<sup>2</sup> Phone interview with Danielle at Korumburra Visitor Information Centre, 17 April 2012

<sup>3</sup> Phone interview with David Zacher at Mildura Visitor Information Centre, 18 April 2012

<sup>4</sup> Phone interview with Julie Kukainis, Manager, High Country Reservations, 19 April 2012

The means for delivering these key services has also changed over time. VICs now have more of an online presence, offering web based information and booking systems. Online content is constantly updated and online systems are increasingly becoming more user-friendly. Many VICs have also developed, or are in the process of developing, smart phone apps which enable users to source information on a region, including attractions, activities, visitor navigation and interpretation, accommodation and restaurants, and make bookings.

#### **Korumburra Visitor Information Centre**

The Korumburra VIC is located just off the South Gippsland Highway within the Coal Creek Complex. Coal Creek consists of a historical village and museum set in natural bush land and is a major tourist attraction. The VIC and Coal Creek have separate service desks but work in close conjunction. The complex is run by local volunteers who have knowledge of the local history.

### **Alpine School Campus – School for Student Leadership**

School for Student Leadership is the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's initiative offering a unique residential education experience for Year 9 students. The curriculum focuses on personal development and team learning projects sourced from students' home regions.

The Alpine School and its staff contribute in a considerable way to the social capital and fabric of the local community and play a valuable role in the economy and social life of Dinner Plain. The location of the Alpine School allows opportunity to explore and interact with many iconic locations in the Victorian Alps, including: The Victoria River, Mount Loch, various huts in the High Country, Swindler's Spur and Mount Hotham. Seasonal features of the outdoor program include cross-country and downhill skiing, mountain bike riding along the Dinner Plain trails, caving at Mount Buffalo and White Water Rafting on the Mitta Mitta River.

Currently the Alpine School provides an intensive, high quality leadership and enterprise program for small teams of Year 9 students selected from Victorian government schools. The Department of Education and Early Childhood website states that there is great interest and activity in primary schools in student leadership. Primary schools report that involving students in leadership activities is one of the most practical and helpful strategies for gaining the cooperation of students and increasing the value that they and their families place on schooling.

The potential for further development of the School and the possible inclusion of primary school students could be examined as well as its current and future integration with the local community. For example the Alpine School, Gnurad-Gundidj Campus partnered with Landcare to protect and enhance environmentally sensitive areas along the Rail Trail. The students worked with Landcare to construct a boardwalk which would allow visitors to walk the trail while minimising the impact to the local flora.

## **1.3 Leveraging off existing facilities and offerings**

The majority of the products and facilities identified in this section, with the exception of the airport and the spa, have a proven ability to attract a base level of visitation to Dinner Plain. Consideration should be given to the further development of these activities through marketing and investment in appropriate infrastructure.

### **Integrated Trail Network**

The development of a well maintained and signed network of graded walking and cycling paths connecting within and providing loops around Dinner Plain. The aim is also to connect Dinner Plain trails with other broader trails connecting to other parts of the high country.

Dinner Plain promotes mountain bike riding as a summer activity and one local tour operator hires bikes and runs mountain bike tours. The Marketing Strategy states that Dinner Plain has excellent cross country mountain biking offer incorporating some private land, state forest and national park. The downside is the trails are not regularly maintained and signage in some areas is poor.

### Weddings and Conferences

- Weddings
  - o Season is in June, September and March
  - o Staffing structures are in place
  - o Current infrastructure has the ability to seat up to 100 in a premium venue and up to 200 in non seated capacity
  - o Natural setting
  - o Proven ability to deliver a high quality experience
  - o Established links to photographers, flowers, music acts and transport and logistics have already been secured.
- Conferences
  - o Existing market which could be grown in the green season
  - o Operators are adept at servicing the market
  - o Facilities for up to 25 or 30 exist and would require no additional infrastructure.

### Aeronautical

- o Dinner Plain is the only airport above the snow-gums which offers a **strong point of difference** and the airport is underutilised during the Summer Months
- o The potential to attract the high yield 'fly in' market for conferences or accommodation should also be considered.

### Events, Clubs, Groups and Recreation

- Self managed groups
  - o Marketed under the brand of 'High country – comfort in nature'
- Special Interest Groups
  - o Art/ Photography
  - o Twitchers (bird watchers)
  - o Star gazers (Astronomy groups)
  - o Bushwalkers, and
  - o Fly fishing.
- Car and Motorbike Clubs
  - o Don't require an 'event' to make the journey, they do require a bed to break the drive, they are self managed and the possibility of luring them to return is high.
- Spa and Wellness:
  - o Spa and wellness was identified as a product strength within Tourism Victoria who have completed a facilitation of a five year Spa and Wellness Tourism Action Plan. As a result the tourism movement into this area has gained momentum and subsequently become competitive market place
  - o The closure of the Onsen spa during summer will affect the accommodation providers which leverage of the Spa.
- Events and Other Products
  - o The Marketing Strategy states that with "Delivery of Promise" at the forefront of the decision, it is in Dinner Plains interest to limit the addition of new community run events into the portfolio to three each year. This will allow for the rollout of high quality, adequately resourced, community adopted events which add to the positioning of the village and add to the already established portfolio. These are over and above those events offered by existing operators.
  - o Given that the community run events will be sponsorship driven, it is important to keep in mind that a "series of events" which have synergy be presented to potential

sponsors who may find a bundled Dinner Plain events “series” more appealing than a single event. The following events were recommended by the Marketing Strategy:

- Boss to Boss
- Spring Fling
- Melbourne Food & Wine – DP Chapter, and
- Geebug Polo – Existing event which could become a flagship event.

The following 2012/13 projects are at different stages of development. Further discussion of these products should analyse their role in attracting and sustaining long term visitation to Dinner Plain and the rationale for investment in these products against or in combination with the initiatives identified earlier in this review:

- Snow Play and Summer Adventure Park
- Gravity Park
- Water Tower climbing and zip line adventure area
- Chess Set
- Disc Golf.

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