

# **MT.ARAPILES PRECINCT PLAN AND FEASABILITY STUDY**

## ***The Victorian Climbing Club Submission***

**16/9/07**

Mt. Arapiles State Park holds a unique place in so many different ways. From its prominent status on the plains of the Wimmera, a treasured icon in the hearts, mind and history of the climbing community, both in Australia and internationally – a must visit destination and a constant in the everchanging generations of the local community. Arapiles for many, is an opportunity to enjoy the simplicity of life without the distraction of modern conveniences. Besides the attraction of the natural environment of the Mount and the recreational pursuits that see it as the premier climbing destination, one of the key points that draws people in, is the very fact that it is undeveloped and has remained that way for a long time.

The Victorian Climbing Club has a long history of involvement with Arapiles and its park surrounds. Through many of its members being instrumental in the climbing development of the Mount throughout the years, to its environmental projects that repair and rehabilitate. We are committed to our continued work for and on behalf of the climbing community, and more importantly, to provide any help that is necessary to ensure that Arapiles is cared for and protected, so that not only future generations of climbers but also other park users have the opportunity to experience Mt. Arapiles as we do now.

In response to the recent Mt. Arapiles Precinct Plan and Feasability Study commissioned jointly by Parks Victoria, Tourism Victoria and Horsham Rural City Council, the Victorian Climbing Club would like to take this opportunity to offer our submission outlining what we feel are workable solutions to the key challenges that Arapiles presents.

**Mt. Arapiles including Centenary Park ,Mitre Rock and its surrounds should be left undeveloped, retaining only the basic amenities that it now has. These amenities should undergo an improvement that can responsibly handle the visitor traffic the area now receives. Rather than rely on water from the bore to operate the flushing amenities block, a more sustainable waterless solution should be implemented.**

**Continued environmental projects to repair and rehabilitate the cliff environments in collaboration and discussion with local community, advisory and climbing groups.**

**Any Tourism development should take place within the township of Natimuk. This has the added advantage of not only benefiting the local community but also of easing some of the visitor load that the park must handle in peak times. Especially in the case of large groups.**

**i. Toilet Amenities:** The Campgrounds are currently serviced by two toilet units. The Gums has a 4 pedestal composting toilet and the Pines Campground has a flushing toilet block with 6 pedestals and 1 urinal. Considering the fact the the water for the toilet is supplied by a bore which in recent times has become quite low, the park is not in a position to handle the visitor waste loads , especially at peak times, should the bore fail. A more environmentally friendly solution would be to construct and install one or more waterless systems. Given the inconsistency of visitor usage, the composting component is not particularly effective and a possibility that could work for the needs of Centenary Park is a unit that although similar in design to the composting toilet in the Gums works more on the simple principle of a drop toilet with a larger holding tank.

**ii. Water Supply:** The park/campgrounds should be able to operate using only the water collected in the rainwater tanks. This would deter the excessive use and waste of water that currently occurs with the taps. Majority of climbers do bring their own water supply and this would further encourage users to ensure they have enough water to supply their needs.

**iii. Accommodation:** The park should continue to provide the same level of accommodation that it currently offers in the form of basic camping through Parks Victoria. Much of the appeal of camping at Arapiles is this very fact. It offers a simple, affordable experience that allows people to enjoy the natural environment of the Mount and its surrounds. Further developing of alternate sources of affordable accommodation, such as Backpackers hostel, campgrounds with extra amenities such as water supply, showers, supplies etc should take place within the township of Natimuk. This could be encouraged as a preferable option for larger groups, again easing the load at peak times. Most groups have their own transport. A morning/afternoon mini bus service could cater for those without transport.

**iv. Day visitors:** The Park currently has a number of car parks that more than adequately handle the vehicles that the campers use as well as those of days visitors. What they could benefit from is some further work/improvement to the barriers to deter drivers from parking closer into the vegetated area. This is currently causing vegetation loss and erosion.

**v. Land Degradation:** This is one of the biggest concerns that faces Arapiles and is a continuing problem that we must be aware of at all times. Erosion in the gullies, loss of vegetation in heavily visited area. The Victorian Climbing Club plays a key role in the repair and rehabilitation of many of the areas in use, as do other concerned community and environmental groups. Continued support and regular environmental works in collaboration with these groups will allow the users to enjoy these areas whilst minimizing our impact. Further development in the Park and its environs would only add to this problem.

**vi. Revenue:** Mt. Arapiles has always been and should continue to be an affordable camping venue. Understandably there are costs that are involved with running the park and whilst small fee increases in camping would be acceptable to most campers to offset these costs, any development in the park would make it financially difficult to offer this. Privatising the campground, from a business perspective, would necessitate further development in order to increase financial return.

**vi. cont:** Possibly more promotion to encourage day visitors to contribute to 'donation' entry fees could help with running costs. Tourism promotion aimed at Natimuk would increase local revenue which is vitally important to the future survival of country towns.

There are endless possibilities with regards to Tourism and Mt. Arapiles Precinct. These are choices that we should all consider carefully before making decisions, especially in the case of development at Mt. Arapiles. Rather than "How can we develop Mt. Arapiles to encourage tourism" a more visionary approach would be "How can we enhance and manage tourism and not develop Mt. Arapiles." As has been said in the past, the present and hopefully the future, Mt. Arapiles is a unique jewel that deserves to be cared for. It is unfortunate that other areas that have been classed as 'unique' and a 'jewel' have lost the very essence of what they are through overdevelopment. Hopefully through this community consultation, this study will support what many of the climbing community and park users know and love about Mt. Arapiles.

To keep it as it is.

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(on behalf of The Victorian Climbing Club)