

2nd June 2008

Standing Committee on Planning and Environment
ACT Legislative Assembly

Dear Ms Porter, Mrs Dunne and Mr Gentleman.

Reference: Namadgi National Park Draft Plan of Management – in response to some of the witness statements made on the 13th May 2008.

I would like to make the following information available to you in regard to the re-routing of the Bicentennial National Trail from Mt Clear BNT camp ground following the Long Flat, Burnt Hill and Grassy Creek Fire Trail into private property on the ACT Namadgi Border fence.

Attached is a map and information leaflet which is now available from the BNT office for information of location of new trail to include in BNT guide book 10. As you can see from the information it gives clear direction, distances and guidelines when using trail in this section of the Namadgi National Park. Walkers, cyclist and horse riders welcome the new diversion to avoid a 5km dangerous section of the Boboyan Road. It follows a good formed vehicle fire trail and shortens the distances between water points at Mt Clear BNT camp and Bradley's Creek culvert on the Yaouk Road.

This trail is used by trekkers as a one way route to get thru a difficult and dangerous section of the Boboyan Road. It is not considered a return day ride track. It is approx 25km from Mt Clear camp to Yaouk camp.

It would not be a pleasant day ride track. There is no circuit there is no reliable water on track. It is a very dry track and quite steep in parts. As with most fire trails it mainly follows the ridge lines, and stays close to the ACT border once it is west of the Boboyan Road.

As the Bicentennial National Trail Voluntary Co-coordinator in the area it is my job to give local information and assist and help trekkers as needed. I also am an environmentally conscious horse rider, belonging to the Monaro Horse Trekkers and have been riding in Nomadic since 1990 on the permitted trails. We are members of the Australian Trail Horse Riders and follow a "Code of Conduct".

I find some of the witness statements a little prejudice against horse riders.

For example P 24 of the witness statement. Paragraph one and two. ***"Keep them out of the sensitive areas"*** My comment. The BNT trail follows a formed broad vehicle fire trail from Mt Clear Campground along Long Flat Trail and diverts into the new formed Burnt Hill Fire Trail there is a vehicle crossing across the Grassy Creek which has been built up with rocks on either side for vehicle access. Picture attached. The trail then continues up the forested hill along the fire trail and then down along the border fence to the Boboyan Road. There are locked gates which equestrians need to contact Namadgi for the combination. (photo attached). There is no way a horse can get thru without contacting Namadgi Visitors Centre. This was agreed to monitor who was using the Trail. There is another locked combination gate across the road. The trail then also follows the formed Grassy Creek Vehicle Fire trail for 5km until the locked combination gate of the private property which trekkers traverse. There are no bogs or creeks on this formed vehicle trail. There is no reason to go off the trail into a bog.

The statement of ***“horses and riders go right into and damage the wetland banks, the pools and the bogs and do more damage than pigs.”*** My comment is referring to this statement why would you deliberately ride your horse into a bog or creek thru the long uneven tussocks of grass on bogs risking snakes and sinking down into an unknown depth of these alpine creeks if you have the choice of riding on a formed road which will cross a creek as in the new BNT route. (photo attached of Grassy Creek) All horse trekkers on long distance carry collapsible water buckets it would be preferable if water is needed not to risk a situation of losing your horse and pack horse which has all your belongings on it to an unknown situation. In my riding experience in areas of the Kosciuszko and Namadgi National Park I have seen whole areas dug up by pigs like a ploughed paddock and then reported sightings of pigs to rangers for shooting.

P 25 Paragraph two. With reference Ms Thompson comment ***“horse riders asking for are to go beyond that and along Back of Grassy Creek which is a major wetland”***. The BNT does not go beyond Back of Grassy Creek it stays on a formed vehicle fire trail.

Comment of Ms Thompson makes Re huts. ***“They take them up and tie them to the verandas, the posts and whatever”***.

My comment. Horse Code in Alpine areas states 30metres from streams, lakes and huts. How ridiculous one would be a complete idiot to tie their valued trekking horse that gets you through the longest day and distance, to risk injury by tying up to a verandah post and pulling the building down on your transport. I am quite sure if this happened it would have been an extreme case. Most horse riders take baling twine or use a slip to tie up to a solid object e.g. tree. If the horse pulls back the twine breaks thus no damage or your slip the knot. Other than that trekkers long distances use hobbles at rest stops or horses are trained to stand to dropped reins.

P25 Paragraph two. Information regarding feed from the Chair. My comment. Alpine Code states Begin using permitted feeds at least 48 – 72 hours before entering a national park and horses not to be fed spreading feed on ground. Use a nose bag. Sorts of feed are cracked grain, proprietary and processed feed and certified chaff.

P25 Paragraph nine. Ms Thomson comment ***“20 horses going thru the Grassy Creek Area”*** My comment. Bicentennial Trail user guidelines say 15horses The BNT trail does not go thru a creek it stays on the formed vehicle fire trail. The amount of horses in this area West of Boboyan can be monitored when the gate combination is requested from Visitors Centre. P26 Comment by Mrs Dunne. Re policing the fodder. My comment. When Trekkers use the trail they rely on high energy processed feed and the native grass at the camp sites. You cannot carry the amount of kilos of feed necessary to sustain a horse on a long trip. Horses need at least 5kg of pasture a day to maintain a healthy gut. A pack horse cannot carry that amount of weight plus all one's belonging hence the high energy vitalized pellets on an extended trip needed. eg 1kg per day. Feed drops of clean feed at certain locations are prearranged if necessary. Trekkers with horses require at least one pack horse that would be 10kg of bulk feed per day. The average size pack horse is packed up to 50kg includes saddles. Hence high energy clean feed taken.

Page 38 Paragraph 5. Mr Butler's example of Paterson's curse spread. ***“Once it is eaten, it comes out of the horse. “It is dropped in a nice little pat of fertilizer, ready to get established”***

My comment. Another over the “top” statement. Paterson's Curse is highly toxic to horse's liver and results in permanent liver damage and consequent an agonizing death or an

unusable horse with cirrhosis of the liver. Horses do not choose to eat Patterson's. If in a bare paddock with no other green pick as was after the 2003 fires they will. 110 horses died in Canberra area from liver failure. Patterson's Curse is a nightmare to horse owners and every effort is made to prevent its ingestion.

It's very common amongst trail riders to jump off their horses and "kick out any curse" in national parks. Some people may find this hard to believe but we don't want it there either.

I have attached some photos taken on the 31st May 2008 depicting the crossing on the Grassy Creek at the Burnt Hill Fire Trail, the formed vehicle track which the BNT follows, a deep alpine Grassy Creek which no way you would risk breaking your horses leg crossing, the locked combination gates on the Boboyan Road, and the danger sign at the entrance at the South Border.

I have had some input into supporting this trail. I can only say it is the 20th anniversary of the Bicentennial National Trail it is a constant effort of a voluntary board and voluntary co-coordinators to keep it as a national trail for all to enjoy. The only paid person is the NSW Co-coordinator Col Roberts.

The trail is the gateway from the South and the passage from the North through our Nation's Capital. It attracts much publicity and trekkers come from all over the country and overseas to enjoy it. It is a self sufficient trail and the people who use it love the bush environment.

I believe a couple of signs at the combination gates to stop any ideas of non compliance with going off track would be a good reinforcement. Perhaps just a reminder of the monitoring of its use.

On the 2nd November combined with the Tharwa Fair and with participation from Namadgi National Park we are celebrating its 20th Anniversary with 3 trekking teams of bike riders, horse riders and walkers coming from North and South and converging on Tharwa. We are promoting the trail and making more people aware what adventures lies out there on a self sufficient trail experience. It is planned to be promoted widely thru the media. It would be very sad indeed for trekkers to have to go back to the dangerous dusty 5km of Boboyan Road risking their lives with cars going high speeds around blind corners at them. Please leave our BNT trail as it is a huge amount of time effort and expense has gone into this new route.

Yours sincerely,

Jenny Costin
Voluntary Trail Co-coordinator thru the ACT.



