AN OUTRAGEOUS NATIONAL PARK DEVELOPMENT GRAB DISGUISES ITSELF AS A COMMUNITY LED PROPOSAL. PHIL INGAMELLS TAKES A GOOD LOOK AT IT.

Mount Buffalo National Park is one of Victoria’s oldest and most loved natural areas. First gazetted in 1898, it’s roughly equal with the Prom as Victoria’s oldest national park.

It has long been a favourite destination for nature-based tourism, well before the term was invented. Indeed, Alice Manfield, the legendary Guide Alice who brought many travellers to the plateau around the year 1900, was following in the footsteps of her parents and grandparents.

I once met Guide Alice’s daughter, Genevieve Baumgarten, who told me how much her mother was captured by the spirit of the plateau, spending months at a time there while viable road made access easy. Buffalo’s many plants and animals, especially the lyrebirds, fascinated her, and wandering among the plateau’s tumbled granite boulders gave her strength.

I couldn’t help remembering Genevieve’s account of Guide Alice as I read through the ‘Vision for Mount Buffalo’, launched recently by the ‘Mount Buffalo Destination Advisory Group’.

The comparison left me sad. ‘The Vision’ is flagged as a ‘gift from the community’, but has been delivered to Parks Victoria before the Victorian government had a chance to weigh in.

The government’s last attempt to fix the Chalet ‘problem’ was when its construction in 1899, a rambling haphazard arrangement of buildings, was extended in 1962 to provide water and deal with waste, but not to supply all of these developments, provide water and deal with waste, but clear about where that considerable infrastructure might be located. (Power supply has been a long-standing problem for off-park attractions, such as wineries and B&Bs, to capitalise on the natural ambience.)

The Buffalo Gorge is tiny by some half a million hectares; its 450 kilometres long and occupies 650 precious hectares, its skywalk has limited visual impact. The proposed skywalk would have a disastrous visual impact on Mount Buffalo. The proposed skywalk would have a disastrous visual impact on Mount Buffalo's famous gorge, and is a completely inappropriate addition to an already fine natural attraction.

Perhaps the most bizarre aspect of the proposal is the mooted key visitor attraction, the ‘Mount Buffalo Gorge Skywalk’ – a great glass-bottomed loop walkway extending out over the Buffalo Gorge, it would be modelled on the USA’s Grand Canyon Skywalk (try Googling it!).

But the Grand Canyon is around 450 kilometres long and occupies some half a million hectares; its skywalk has limited visual impact.

The new ‘village’ would create a parking problem, so the plan is to turn the current park office and works area into a ‘centralised car park hub and logistical point’ and shuttle people around the plateau in electric cars.

There is more. The Lake Catani camp ground would be expanded with ‘glamping’ facilities and wilderness huts. Dingo Dell would get a new ‘Outdoor Education Centre of Excellence’, and an ‘Alpine Activity Centre’ would be constructed at Cravotta Valley. The plan is honest about the need to generate a considerable amount of power to supply all of these developments, provide water and deal with waste, but clear about where that considerable infrastructure might be located. (Power supply has been a long-standing problem with the Chalet, as the plateau is often cloaked in cloud, and winds tend to be updrafts.)

But accommodation options would be doubled, with the construction of a new Mount Buffalo Spa Retreat Hotel and day spa.

The many old outbuildings would be revamped, or rebuilt (see map opposite). The new ‘village’ would create a parking problem, so the plan is to turn the current park office and works area into a ‘centralised car park hub and logistical point’ and shuttle people around the plateau in electric carts.

There is more. The Lake Catani camp ground would be expanded with ‘glamping’ facilities and wilderness huts. Dingo Dell would get a new ‘Outdoor Education Centre of Excellence’, and an ‘Alpine Activity Centre’ would be constructed at Cravotta Valley. (The plan is honest about the need to generate a considerable amount of power to supply all of these developments, provide water and deal with waste, but clear about where that considerable infrastructure might be located. (Power supply has been a long-standing problem with the Chalet, as the plateau is often cloaked in cloud, and winds tend to be updrafts.)

Proposed Chalet ‘Village’

An outrageous National Park ‘Vision’ – again!