

Victorian High Country Huts

Climate change threat

Since 2003 fire has destroyed 53 huts in the Victorian Alpine National Park and adjoining State Forest.

CSIRO predicts the frequency of very high and extreme Forest Fire Index ratings in south-east Australia to increase by:

4 to 25% by 2020

15 to 70% by 2050



Bluff Hut. Ruins. This cattlemen's hut originally built in 1955-56 was destroyed in the 2006-07 Great Divide Fires.

Fire

Since 2003 Fire has been the most serious threat to Alpine huts in Victoria destroying 53 huts in the Alpine National Park and adjoining State Forest.

Victoria experienced two of its most severe fire seasons on record in 2003 and 2006-07. The area affected by fire damage in these years was exceeded only by the devastating 1939 fires.



1939 Burnt almost 2million hectares statewide

2003 Alpine fires burnt 1.12 million ha

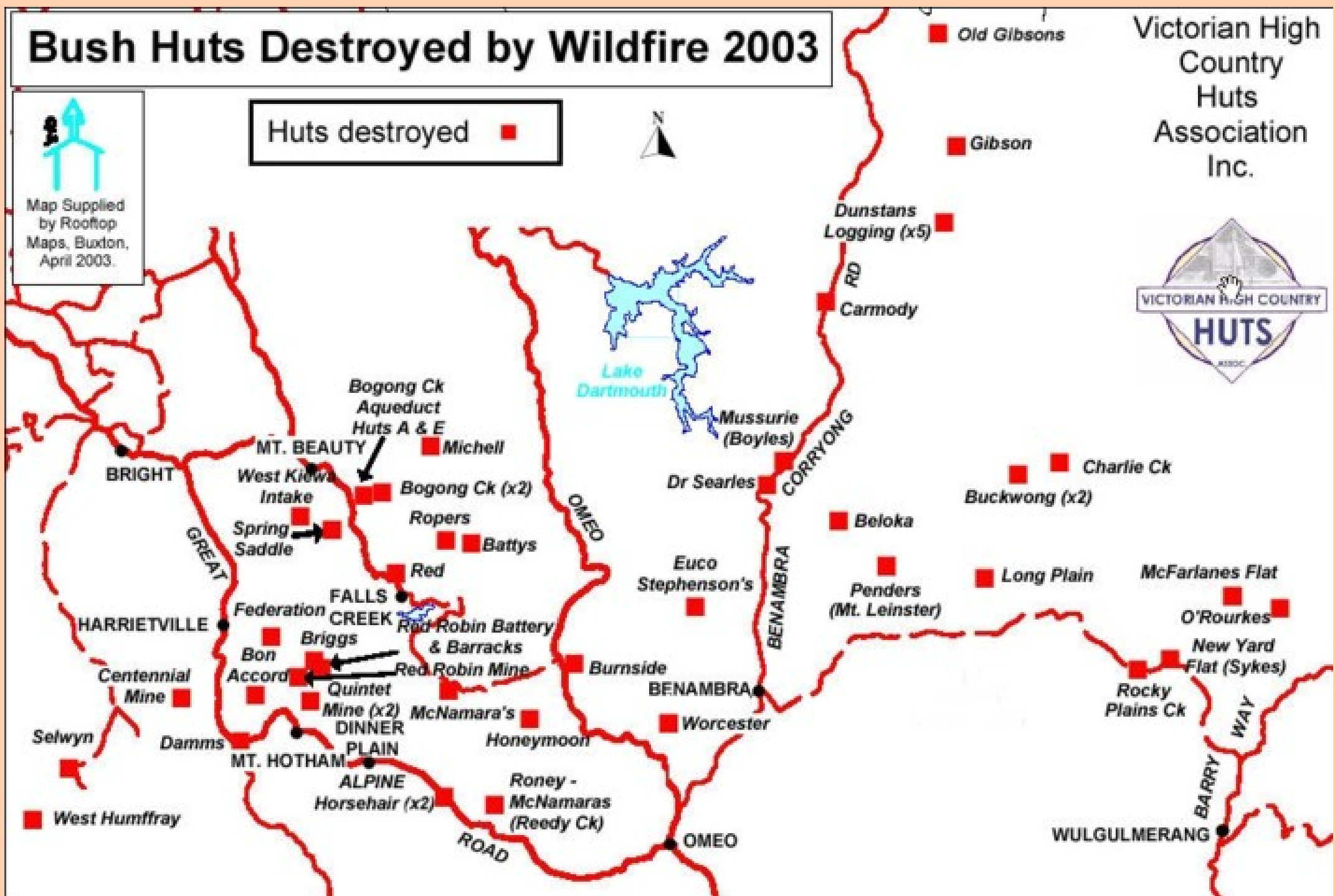
2006-07 Great Divide fires burnt over 1 million ha

Location	Huts pre 2003	Burnt 2003	Burnt 2006-07	Remaining 2007
Alpine National Park	105	29	3	73
State Forest	60	16	5	39
TOTAL	165	45	8	102

Climate change impacts on fire weather

In south-east Australia since 1950 rainfall has decreased, droughts have become more severe and the number of extremely hot days has risen

South east Australia is predicted to become hotter and drier as a result of climate change. The combined frequencies of days with very high and extreme Forest Fire Index ratings are likely to increase by 15-70 % by 2050. (Climate change impacts on fire weather in south east Australia, report by Hennessy et al, CSIRO, 2006)



Response to fires

Community.

The sudden loss of 53 huts in 2003 led to formation of the Victorian High Country huts Association (VHCHA). The volunteer association initially focussed effort on rebuilding huts but over time has become organised to assist Parks Victoria and the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) in the maintenance of surviving huts. A formal memorandum of understanding between the VHCHA and Parks Victoria was signed in 2006.



McNamara's Hut.

Rebuilt by the VHCHA following the 2003 fires.



Fry's Hut, Howqua Hills. VHCHA working bee April 2006

Surveys.

Following the 2003 fires an extensive survey of surviving alpine huts was commissioned by Parks Victoria and DSE. This built upon an earlier 1996 survey of huts in the Alpine National Park. Both surveys were undertaken by Graeme Butler and Associates.



Fire retardant drop

Protection techniques.

Huts are often sited in remote forested locations which are difficult to protect in case of wild fire. It may be too dangerous to position fire crews on the ground in these locations. Other techniques include:

- Use of fire retardant
- Use of bushfire fighting foam
- Wrapping huts in foil sisalation



Wrapping in foil at Wollangarra (not a hut) prior to the 2006-07 fires.

Risks to Heritage Values

Alpine huts are vulnerable to a range of threats:

Fire. Timber buildings in remote and forested locations are very vulnerable to the threat of wildfire. Huts also burn down when fires in their own fire places get out of control.

Visitor activity. Many huts are heavily accessed by a wide range of visitors. They can be subject to vandalism, graffiti and unauthorised alteration and repair.

Environmental factors. Alpine huts are subject to extreme weather conditions, wind, rain, snow and temperature variation.

Inappropriate management. Lack of information or lack of skills can lead to inappropriate management actions, alterations or even demolition.



C1940's. Weston's Hut

Weston's Hut in the Alpine National Park burnt in the 2006-07 Great Divide Fire



2007. Weston's Hut



2007. Bill and Mary (nee Weston) Goldsworthy in the burnt ruins of Weston's Hut