

The Great Koala National Park

Horseshoe Trail



The Horseshoe Trail

**A Concept Plan for a horse-riding trail
within the proposed
Great Koala National Park**

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for the Great Koala National Park Steering Committee**

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Overview

The proposed Horseshoe Trail is a 65 km horse riding trail over existing roads within the proposed Great Koala National Park (GKNP), in the upper catchment of the Nambucca Valley on the New South Wales mid north coast.

The three-day trail can be ridden in either direction, with the south to north direction being the easiest on both horse and rider. The trail follows ridgelines between the North Arm catchment (headwaters of the Nambucca River) and the Missabotti catchment. Both the southern and northern start/finish points are located at rural local community halls.

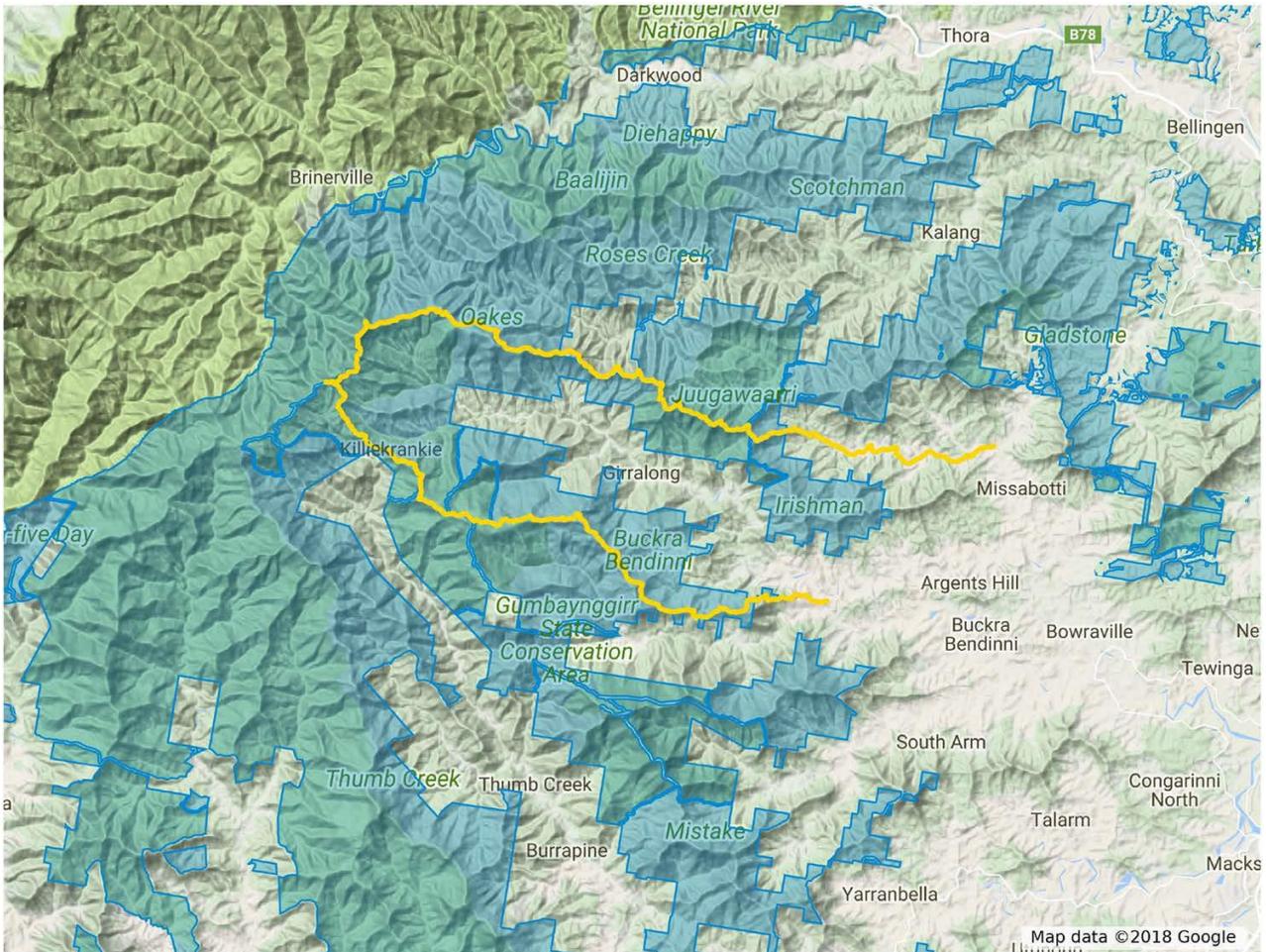
The trail travels along North Arm, Horseshoe, Bellbucca and Missabotti Roads. Climbing 940m from scenic farmland through forested mountain country to the very top of the Nambucca catchment at Killiekrankie Mountain. Riders and horses will require a fair degree of fitness for this trail. Riders will enjoy passing through various forest types from dry and moist eucalypt to lush rainforest, as the trail winds its way from the valley floor to the mountainous Nambucca Valley hinterland and back down again.

The trail is divided into three sections and is described following the south to north route in this document. There are four designated off-road safe camping areas for riders and horses using existing roadside log-dump sites and logging trails. Multiple roadside rest spots exist along the way.

Parts of the Horseshoe Trail are multi-use being proposed for walkers, 4-wheel drivers and mountain biker riders. To ensure that conflict is minimised between user groups and that visitors are assured of a high-quality experience, management will be required to ensure that incompatible uses are kept apart either spatially or temporally.

No water is available on the trail. Riders will be required to be self sufficient for food and water for both themselves and their horses. This will necessitate the use of at least one support vehicle depending on the number of riders.

This trail proposal is consistent with the NSW Office of Environment & Heritage's *Horse Riding Policy 2017* and the NSW Office of Environment & Heritage and National Parks and Wildlife Service's *Code of practice for horse riding in parks 2010, updated 2014*.



The GKNP Horseshoe Trail (yellow line)

Trail Sections

Horseshoe Section – 15.4km

The Horseshoe Section travels from the starting point at Argents Hill Hall along 1.7km of North Arm Road (bitumen with grassed verges) before turning onto Horseshoe Road. A cattle grid exists at the start of Horseshoe Road close to the intersection with North Arm Road with a functional livestock gate to the side.

Horseshoe Road is a well-formed gravel road which climbs up through dry and moist sclerophyll forest offering various vistas with stunning mountain and valley views through the trees to north and south, as the trail ascends.



Argents Hill Hall

Photo Paula Flack

Riders have the chance of seeing a koala in the wild in this trail section which has records of koala sightings especially between Gravelly Creek Road and Bottle Creek Road. Riders are also likely to see a wide range of birds including the threatened glossy-black cockatoo.

Goannas, carpet pythons and non-venomous green tree snakes are also often seen along Horseshoe Road. Riders might even notice evidence of the rare nocturnal yellow-bellied glider which chews notches into the bark of mahogany and grey gum tree trunks to feed on the dripping sap.

Two potential campsites exist in this section which could safely house up to 20 horses and riders. Bottle Creek Campsite is located at a log dump on the start of Bottle Creek Road at 12.1kms from Argents Hill Hall and Horseshoe Campsite is located in a log dump area adjacent to Horseshoe Road at the section end, 15.4km from Argents Hill Hall.

Numerous roadside rest area sites exist along the route.



Volunteers assessing proposed Bottle Creek campsite

Photo Calumn Hockey

Killiekrankie Section – 25km

From the Horseshoe campsite, this section travels along Horseshoe and Bellbucca Roads through breathtaking rainforest and moist eucalypt forest. This is the most environmentally sensitive section of the Horseshoe Trail and will need careful planning and management to ensure minimal impacts.

Riders will enjoy the change in temperature with increasing altitude and see dripping fern-clad rock cliff faces, giant old growth trees and wonderful glimpses of stunning vistas along the way.

This section is abundant in wildlife and riders are likely to see and hear lyrebirds, parrots, cockatoos and many small forest birds such as scrub wrens. The more observant rider may even get to hear the very rare rufous scrub bird and sphagnum frog which only live at higher altitudes.

At its highest point, the trail skirts around the eastern slope of Mount Killiekrankie which is the very source of the Nambucca River. Here riders pass a vantage point which offers an awe-inspiring view to the east down over the Nambucca Valley to the ocean including the country they have just ridden up through and are about to descent back down into.

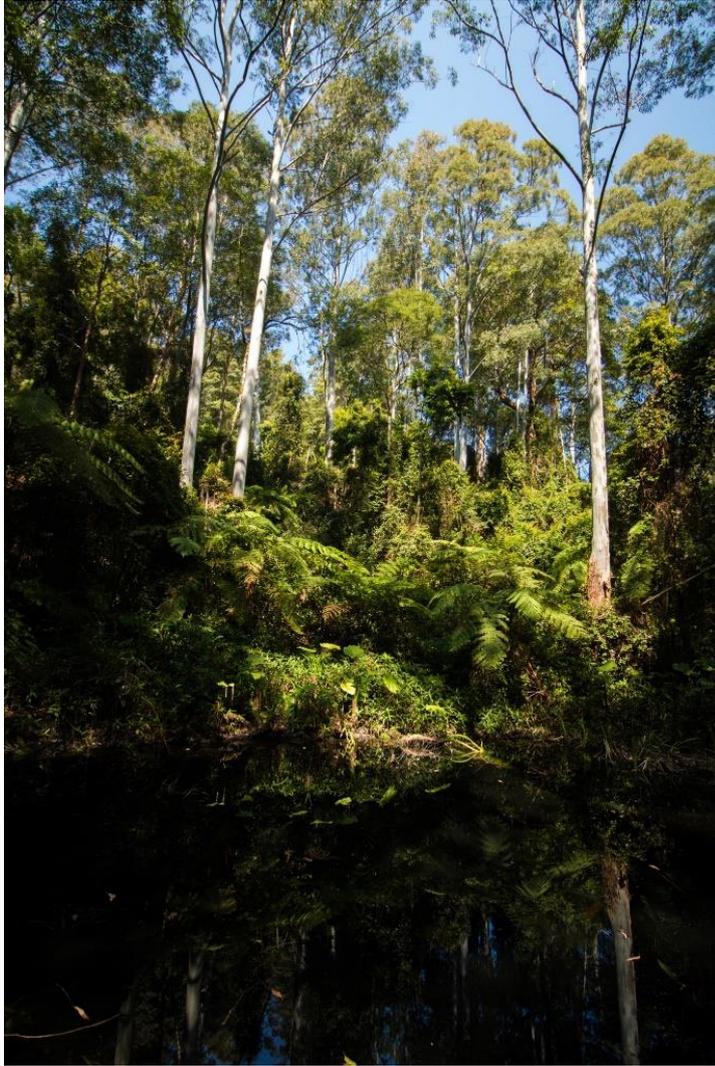


View down over Nambucca Valley from Killiekrankie Mountain

Photo Lyn Orrego

A small campsite/rest area exists on the side of Bellbucca Road at the intersection with Crow Road. This site is potentially too environmentally sensitive for camping and will require further assessment and consultation. There is also a fire fighting dam in the vicinity which may potentially be available for emergency use.

The Killiekrankie section ends at the Oakes Campsite on an old logging track parallel to Bellbucca Road west of the intersection with Kellys Road.



*Potential emergency watering point
off Bellbucca Road at a fire-fighting
dam.*

Photo Calumn Hockey

Bellbucca Section – 24.6km

In this section, riders commence their descent through drier eucalypt forests to the Missabotti Valley from the Oakes Campsite. Along the way they will see some spectacular views to north over the Kalang and Bellinger valleys and beyond and to south down into the North Arm valley.

Cockatoos frequent these forests including the threatened glossy-black cockatoo and riders may catch glimpses of wedge tailed eagles soaring as they ride the Bellbucca ridgeline.



Bellbucca Road ridgeline

Photo Calumn Hockey

The last 9km of this section travels along Missabotti Road a quiet rural gravel road through farmland to Missabotti Hall.



Missabotti Community Hall end point of the Horseshoe Trail: Photo Calumn Hockey

Consultation

Preliminary consultation has occurred during the preparation of the Concept Plan. Caitlin Hockey and Paula Flack presented the GKNP proposal and the Horseshoe Trail concept to a meeting of the Argents Hill Hall Committee in October 2018 and Missabotti Hall Committee in November 2018. Both committees expressed support for the GKNP proposal and the Horseshoe Trail concept. Hall committee members are enthusiastic for the local community and business opportunities that the proposals offer and are keen to assist in further planning of the Horseshoe Trail.

Informal consultation has occurred with a number of local and regional horse riders, all of whom have expressed enthusiasm for the proposed trail. Further consultation with local and regional equestrian groups is planned. Horse riding is an extremely popular sport in the region and it is expected that the Horseshoe Trail will generate considerable interest with further promotion of the Concept Plan.

Early consultation has been undertaken with local Gumbaynggirr Elders who have acknowledged that as long as the trail stays on existing roads (which it does), there should not be any Gumbaynggirr Aboriginal cultural issues. Further consultation with the Gumbaynggirr community will be undertaken.

Plan of Management

A Plan of Management for the new Great Koala National Park will need to be prepared, including issues specific to the Horseshoe Trail. The Plan of Management should consider key issues such as environmental impacts, Gumbaynggirr cultural heritage, facilities, safety, fees, track signage, trail maintenance and interaction with other park users, especially on multi-use sections of Horseshoe Road. The Plan of Management should be developed with thorough public consultation. Community groups have done significant work over several months to provide a model by which a variety of reserve categories and planning tools can be used to ensure that recreation activities are appropriate to tenure and that conflict between user groups is minimised.

Facilities & Services

Both Argents Hill and Missabotti community halls have public toilets which can be accessed without having to open the facilities. Inside, the halls have catering facilities and plenty of space for entertaining. Missabotti has a large covered outdoor entertainment area perfect for bush dances and BBQs, and tennis courts. Both halls have grassed areas adjacent to the building where horses can be safely loaded, unloaded and penned for a short period before or after the ride.

The nearest town to the trail is the historic town of Bowraville fondly known as the 'Verandah Post' town, with its old-world charm. Bowra as the locals call it, has a full range of shops and services including post office, supermarket, ATM, hotel, clubs, rural produce/horse feeds/supplies, cafes, accommodation, cinema, gifts shops, farrier, doctor's surgery, chemist, museums, bakery, mechanic and a community technology centre.

A Great Koala National Park visitor centre is also planned for Bowraville.

Camping with horses

All trail campsites should include minimal fixtures to facilitate safe camping and minimise environmental impacts. Hitching rails may be provided. It would be preferable to have a unisex composting toilet, simple shelter and rainwater tank at the two main proposed campsites (the Horseshoe and Oakes campsites). Although these amenities may not be considered essential at the outset, depending on level of use of the Horseshoe Trail, they may be deemed necessary at some point, to reduce environmental impacts and to improve the horse and rider experience.

Horses are not to be tied overnight to vegetation. The preferred method of holding horses overnight is in temporary yards formed by using portable yard panels or electric fences. Low power energisers only should be used and electric fence warning signs should be prominently displayed. If electric fencing is to be used, riders must ensure that their horses are accustomed to this system prior to riding the trail.

Riders should take turns to keep a watch over their horses at night if possible. Campsites must be left free of litter, residual horse feed and manure.

Campers will get the chance to see or hear some of the nocturnal species as they move through the forest, feeding and socialising at night. It is more common to hear rather than see nocturnal fauna. Campers should keep an ear out for such threatened species as yellow-bellied gliders, koalas and large forest owls such as the sooty owl, barking owl, masked owl and Australia's largest the powerful owl, all of which are known to occupy the forests that the trail traverses.

Safety

Mobile phone reception exists at many points along the trail. It is important for riders to consider their own, their horses and other trail user's safety at all times.

The Horseshoe Trail follows well-formed roads and although steep in sections, it is pretty straight forward riding, providing horse and rider are fit for the task. However, the track is relatively distant from services and riders should come prepared. Some important safety measures include:

- Riders should let someone know they are riding the trail and their expected completion day and time.
- Carry a suitable first aid kit for riders and horses – first aid training is advisable.
- Carry extra ropes and a torch with well charged batteries.
- Ensure enough battery power for mobile phones and torches for duration of ride.
- Check all equipment and tack is in good working order and fits the horse well before setting out.
- Ensure horses are accustomed to the things they may encounter on the trail such as wildlife, hikers, cars, motor bikes and cyclists.
- Ensure horses are under adequate control at all times.
- Keep all emergency gear in backpacks, not saddlebags, so it isn't lost if you become separated from your horse.
- Check predicted weather conditions before beginning the ride.
- Riders under the age of 18 must wear helmets when riding in parks. It is strongly recommended that all other riders also wear helmets.
- Being forested for most of the trail, fallen trees are a possibility. It is recommended that the support person be equipped with chainsaw, strong rope or chain and/or a winch and is skilled in the safe use of these.



Photo by Paula Flack

Riders assessing part of the trail on Bellbuca Road

Multiple trail users

Horseshoe Road from Argents Hill Hall to the Bellbuca Road intersection is part of the proposed Horseshoe Road 4WD route.

Horseshoe Road from the Mackays Road intersection to the Killiekrankie Lookout trail is part of the GKNP proposed Long Distance Walking Trail.

Clear signage highlighting the multi users will be required. Temporary signage for any organised trail riding events is recommended. Other options also exist to ensure conflicts are minimised, such as alternating access for different user groups in different time periods.

Minimising environmental impacts

Like any recreational activity in the natural setting, horse riding has environmental and potentially Aboriginal cultural impacts and in the National Park setting these must be carefully monitored and managed.

A key focus of the Plan of Management will be that of the potential for the spread of weeds within the park, mainly from horse manure. Biosecurity standards and controls along with monitoring of the trail and adjacent areas will be applied to manage this issue.

No vegetation is proposed to be removed for campsite establishment. Campsites are located in already cleared of vegetation.

Rider information and education are useful tools to help build awareness of and minimise environmental impacts and any potential Gumbaynggirr cultural issues.

The Office of Environment & Heritage's *Recreational Horse-riding Policy 2017*, acknowledges that horse riding in National Parks has impacts on parks and that park managers and horse riders need to work together to balance protecting park values with using parks.

The *Recreational horse-riding policy* sets out some simple guidelines for reducing some of the impacts caused by horse riding. However, guidelines are unenforceable and thus rely on the goodwill and commitment of riders. In most circumstances guidelines along with rider awareness will be adequate to minimise environmental impacts, however it is recommended that some enforceable rules are applied to the Horseshoe Trail to further minimise environmental impacts such as:

- Off-track riding is not permitted.
- Hitching horses directly to trees or vegetation is not permitted.
- Temporary yards must not include shrubs, small trees or other sensitive vegetation or features.
- Paddock hay or bedding straw is not permitted.

Suitable guidelines could include:

- If no alternative exists, horses can be tethered to a strong tree via a breakable string hitching loop which must be removed after use.
- Minimise weed seed introduction by feeding a weed free diet for 4-5 days prior to riding the trail and making sure horses are used to this diet before departing.
- Only bring weed-free feed into parks eg good quality lucerne hay, clean chaff, pellets and cracked, rolled or steamed grain.
- Feed is not to be spread on the ground and any spillages must be cleaned up.
- Scatter manure away from campsites and rest stops to speed up decomposition.
- Floats and trucks should not be cleaned out in the park.
- Groom horses and clean hoofs prior to starting the trail to remove introduce seeds.
- Horses should not be wormed within three days of riding in the park.
- Horses found straying may be impounded.

Riders must contact park staff as soon as possible if horses escape or are lost or injured, and if vehicle access is needed to recover horses in areas not normally open to vehicles.

If monitoring of introduced weeds from horse manure and/or feed is found to be a problem, then measures would be introduced to reduce the impacts such as requiring all manure to be bagged and removed from the park by support person or team.

Getting to the Start/Finish points

From the north leave the Pacific Highway at the Nambucca Heads exit and follow the signs to Bowraville via Old Coast Road, Wirrimbi Road and Rodeo Drive. From the south leave the Pacific Highway at the Macksville exit, travel through Macksville on Giinagay Way and across the Macksville Bridge over the Nambucca River. Turn left onto Rodeo Drive immediately after the bridge and follow the signs to Bowraville.

If riding the trail from south (Argents Hill Hall) to north (Missabotti Hall) drive over Lanes Bridge on the outskirts of Bowraville and turn right onto North Arm Road at the first cross roads (primary school on left) then travel 12kms on bitumen road to Argents Hill Hall.

If riding the trail from north (Missabotti Hall) to south (Argents Hill Hall) turn right onto Bellingen Road from Rodeo Drive 1km north of Bowraville. Travel 5.65 km on Bellingen Road then take the left fork onto Helliwells Road. Travel 3.18km to the T intersection and turn right onto Missabotti Road. Travel 2.75km to the Missabotti Hall.

Benefits of the Horseshoe Trail

Direct benefits:

- Fundraising opportunities for Argents Hill Hall and Missabotti Hall for use of facilities and potentially for catering or horse and rider support on the trail
- Fees
- Vigilance and reporting by riders eg inappropriate activities, track condition, park damage, pollution etc
- Greater awareness through information about the GKNP, native forests and koalas.
- Networking & promotion of the GKNP via social media in the equestrian community.
- Tour guiding

Indirect benefits

- Accommodation
- Horse agistment
- Support vehicle services
- Catering
- Farriers
- Human masseuse
- Equine chiro/masseuse
- Horse feed merchants
- Saddlery and equestrian supplies
- Fuel suppliers
- Food and beverage outlets
- Camping supplies outlets

Relevant legislation, policies and strategies

- The *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* requires that the principles of ecologically sustainable development be applied to achieve the purposes of the Act.
- *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* - Activities in national parks are subject to the requirements of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*.
- *Horse Riding Policy 2017, NSW Office of Environment & Heritage* – This policy applies to all lands acquired or reserved under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* (NPW Act) and was adopted 24 May 2017. There does not appear to be a downloadable version of the policy but it can be viewed at: <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/parks-reserves-and-protected-areas/park-policies/horse-riding>
- *Code of practice for horse riding in parks – Office of Environment & Heritage, National Parks and Wildlife Service 2010, updated 2014* - A guide for horse riders and horse enthusiasts about riding in parks. <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/-/media/OEH/Corporate-Site/Documents/Policy-and-law/horse-riding-in-parks-code-of-practice-140324.pdf>
- *Strategic Directions for Horse Riding in NSW National Parks - Office of Environment & Heritage, National Parks and Wildlife Service 2012*. This strategy was developed as a guide to improving horse riding opportunities in the park reserve system. <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/-/media/OEH/Corporate-Site/Documents/Parks-reserves-and-protected-areas/Horse-riding/strategic-directions-horse-riding-nsw-national-parks-120848.pdf>

The team

Planning for the Horseshoe Trail so far has been a community driven project overseen by GKNP Steering Committee members Paula Flack and Caitlin Hockey. We would like to acknowledge the volunteer efforts of Steve Hensler (driver) Calumn Hockey (photography), Lyn Orrego (photography), Karen Holloway and Julie Hockey. Special thanks to trusty trail horses Bailey and Banjo.



Photo Karen Holloway

Further information

www.koalapark.org.au