

SUBMISSION ON MT. STIRLING ALPINE RESORT BY MANSFIELD
BRANCH OF THE MOUNTAIN DISTRICT CATTLEMENS ASSOCIATION
OF VICTORIA

Our members and their families have many years experience in the Alpine areas adjacent to Mansfield.

Mt. Stirling area is grazed by the Purcell family.

Firstly, we wish to comment on two statements included in the information sheet issued, inviting public comment on the proposed Mt. Stirling resort.

STATEMENT 1

"Mt. Stirling is not a completely natural environment, many years of cattle grazing and logging on the lower slopes have wrought their changes".

STATEMENT 2

"The vegetation is similar to other Victorian Alpine environments. The few exceptions include the relative scarcity of water, presumably because of cattle trampling of sphagnum moss beds. These beds can be very useful in holding water through the spring".

These two statements can not be substantiated and are grossly misleading to uninformed people who are seeking a lead from the information sheet.

We are astonished that professional consultants who are supposed to be without bias could publish such statements which can only prejudice public opinion. When one considers what is in store for that Mountain, it amounts to hypocrisy to drag up arguable past problems in an attempt to justify future development plans which, if implemented, will change the Mountain environment more in 12 months than it has ever been changed since creation.

The true position with moss beds and water on Mt. Stirling is that there are few true Sphagnum Moss beds (or ever have been) in the whole of this area of the Alps.

Mt. Stirling has always been a comparatively "dry" area with a few springs feeding the head of creeks.

These springs were affected slightly by cattle some years ago, and when prompt action was taken by our Association and the Forest Commission to build dams below the springs, they quickly healed and are now, according to SCA Officers, in acceptable condition.

We would like to point out that our cattle numbers are strictly controlled and regular inspections are made by Soil Conservation Authority Officials. If people numbers had been similarly controlled over the years a different story would exist on many of our mountain areas. People have yet to learn to walk or drive on the contour as cattle do.

Since 1960, bi annual inspections of Mt. Stirling have been made by officials from various government departments, cattlemen and other interested people.

Officials have been satisfied with cattle numbers grazed on Mt. Stirling and very pleased with the improvements to the water situation. We, therefore, consider people making snap uninformed interpretation of cattle grazing on Mt. Stirling, are on shaky ground.

It is our contention that cattle could be grazed successfully in an Alpine Ski Resort if the trouble was taken, while ski runs were re-vegetating, to keep them out of sensitive areas. We further believe that if careful planning and placing of development was undertaken, grazing could still be carried out in adjacent areas. In fact, if the village was placed anywhere on the slopes of Mt. Stirling, grazing would almost be mandatory.

You no doubt will be aware of the extreme danger to any village placed in this area, and the difficulties presented to ever keep the village protected from fire. There is probably no need to point out the vast difference in location between such a village, and say Mt. Buller, Falls Creek or Mt. Hotham, which are all up out of the heavy timber and relatively safe. Under these circumstances, we ask that planners consider the future of grazing on Stirling very carefully and attempt to co-ordinate the requirements of all interested parties in the planning of the Development to help prevent the build up of a fire hazard and keep grass short and green.

Combined with the assistance in fire protection of the Stirling Ski Development, there is another aspect of cattle grazing which we would like you to consider. Mountain cattle grazing is one of the few practices carried out in the same way as it was 100 years ago. It is part of our national heritage and aesthetically pleasing and interesting to a great many people.

Cattlemen are always among the first to offer assistance in search and rescue and other operations needing local knowledge.

Our Association has the following opinions and would gladly expand on them if required.

1. The planning of Mt. Stirling provides a never before opportunity to develop an alternative type resort complementary to Mt. Buller and which could provide for cheaper skiing for many people who no longer afford the escalating cost of Mt. Buller skiing.
2. Residential accommodation at lower levels or in the valley could provide this cheaper accommodation with private car/bus access to the lift points. This is successfully done in many other world resorts.

3. If popular local opinion is overruled and the village is placed high up in the snow, our Association favours the King Saddle Spur Upper location. We believe this would solve some sewerage problems, keep development away from traditional Nordic areas and not interfere with grazing as much as some other sites.
4. We believe that the transport and ski tow Companies chosen should have no financial connection with Mt. Buller Companies, to provide the maximum competition between resorts for the benefit of the skiing public.
5. Naturally with this type of development, someone has to suffer and this time it is the people, mostly locals, who have been coming to Mt. Stirling for many years for the simple enjoyment of snow and/or Nordic skiing.
We believe these people should be considered and provision made for their continued access to areas such as King Saddle and Northwards, without being subjected to the fees which no doubt will apply.
6. The socio economic implications to the people of the Mansfield District are of concern to us and the effects on them of such enormous development should be considered. In our opinion, the Mansfield Shire Council's opinions on development should be carefully considered as development will create a greatly increased demand for services within the Shire.
7. As locals, we are aware of what happens on the highway east of Mansfield. One has to live in the area to fully realise the seriousness of the present crowding of the highway, which in our opinion has reached dangerous levels, especially with the increase in bus traffic which slow cars considerably, and cause drivers to become impatient.

In conclusion, we believe we have experience and expertise in the area which we would gladly share if called upon.

We would be pleased at any time to meet with planners to give our views in more detail and invite them to Merrijig to a Meeting at any time to suit.

GRAEME STONEY.

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