

The Cobungra Ditch Walking Track

The Cobungra Ditch Walking Track follows the course of an abandoned water race, a ruin from the gold mining era of the district. Literally carved through the steep mountain ranges and retained for much of its length by an impressive dry-stone wall, this engineering wonder once conveyed a stream of water 10.5km to the hydraulic sluicing operations of the Cobungra Gold Mining Company (GMCo.). The water race commences its course from the head of Swindler's Creek, an upper tributary of the Cobungra River, and terminates at the Brandy Creek mine towards Dinner Plain.



Hydraulic sluicing using pressurised water from the ditch (A Swift)

Gold in the Alps

The history of Victoria's high country is rich in gold with much of the European History of the region influenced by this precious metal. The first gold discoveries in the area were made by diggers travelling over the ranges between the Omeo diggings and Beechworth, Buckland and the Upper Ovens fields during the 1850s. Initially the alpine gold deposits were left in preference to the richer pickings of the more habitable lower goldfields, and it wasn't until the early 1860s that a substantial population would return to prospect and mine these high country gold deposits.

Alluvial gold (stream deposits) were worked in upper branches of the Ovens, Dargo and Cobungra Rivers for many decades. Miners also worked for many years in Swindler's Creek, in fact the stream was named after a party of diggers who tried to 'swindle' one of their members out of his share of the takings.

Doing the Walk

The Cobungra Ditch Walking Track offers bushwalkers a unique opportunity to experience some of the high country's rarely seen significant natural and historic landscapes. Interpretive signs highlighting some of the remarkable history of this feature have been installed along the route. Whilst the walk takes you through a range of natural landscapes, from shady and sparsely open forest to damp gullies and impressive waterfalls. In late January early February the ditch is alive with a range of spectacular wild flowers. Quieter walkers may also spot local inhabitants such as a grazing wombat or a foraging flame robin.

The total distance of the track is 12.5km one way. The track is well graded following the contour of the hill with a gradual fall towards the Brandy Creek mine. The path is well formed with some obstacles and short sections with steps. Some bushwalking experience is recommended. Four hours should be allowed for a one-way walk along its length (a vehicle left at the opposite end would be ideal).

The walk is accessible at both ends from the Great Alpine Road. The northern end of the walk is reached on foot 1.4km along the Davenport Access Track. The southern end of the walk is reached on foot 500 metres along the Brandy Creek Fire Track.

A return circuit could be completed by a more direct walk along the Hotham – Dinner Plain Trail adjacent to the Great Alpine Road. This would complete a circuit of approximately 18km.



Construction workers preparing rock for blasting on the ditch (A Swift)

Be Prepared

The best months for walking the Cobungra Ditch are from November through to April, however, weather conditions can change rapidly, and snowfalls and blizzards can occur at any time of the year.

Be prepared with:

- Wind and waterproof jackets
- Warm clothing – hat, gloves, sunglasses, and strong footwear
- Food and water
- First aid kit and sunscreen
- Map and compass
- Check the weather forecast before departing
- Let someone know where you are going
- Mobile phone (reception in some areas)

Caution

The 2003 bushfires have damaged snowgums, which are now regenerating but dead branches are shedding with the new growth. High wind days may result in falling limbs and branches. It is not recommended to use the track on windy days.

During the warmer months snakes can be found along the track.

See also 'Mt Hotham Track Notes - Bushwalker Code'

Why the Cobungra Ditch?

When the water race was originally constructed in 1883-4 by the Cobungra Gold Mining Company, the workers on the race referred to the features as the Cobungra Ditch. Upwards of 120 men were employed by the company, most on the ditch. The huge work force actually lived in a temporary workers camp known as the Cobungra Ditch Camp. In November 1883 the company suddenly dismissed the workers on the ditch and in protest they banded together and held a protest march along the Alpine road carrying a large calico banner. The following bills were posted on trees around the camp and the Mt Hotham area.

Sacred
To the Memory of the Cobungra Ditch
Camp, which departed its life 10 No-
vember, 1884.

Not gone from memory not gone from
love,
But gone to that great ditch above,
Where silver and gold are in great
supply,
And bread and stores you can always
buy.



The Cobungra Ditch Walking Track

Grade of Walk:	Grade 3, as per <i>The Australian Walking Track Grading System</i>
Distance:	12.5km one way 18km return circuit via Great Alpine Road/Hotham- Dinner Plain Trail
Time:	4 hours one way
Gradient:	Mostly level with some gradual steep sections on the entry and exit
Quality of Path:	Mostly formed track, with some obstacles
Steps:	Occasional steps
Experience required:	Some bushwalking experience recommended

Comments and feedback are appreciated by emailing mhar@mthotham.com.au, or telephoning 03 5759 3550 during business hours.

We hope you enjoy the walk.

