

Climbers clinging on after being told to sling their hooks

JOHN FERGUSON
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

The secret to finding peace and adrenaline in equal measure in Victoria's Grampians National Park is going deep and high.

Deep into the bush, far from the mainstream tourist trail in and around Halls Gap, and high on the rocks, where few tread.

For Australia's climbing industry, that pursuit of tranquillity at the southern tip of the Great Dividing Range has ended in deep disappointment and potential court action after the state government banished the sport from large parts of one of the world's great climbing theatres.

Simon Carter, a Blue Mountains-based climbing photographer with a global reputation, published a book on the routes in the Grampians and is one of many of the industry's stunned leaders trying to carve a path forward.

In one stroke of the bureaucratic pen, Parks Victoria has closed more than 500sq km to climbing and is handing out \$1611 fines, imperilling the sport and casting a shadow over a multi-million-dollar adventure tourism attraction.

At the heart of the bans are claims of mistreatment of Aboriginal rock art and environmental damage, sparking a ferocious battle with a sport that carved its reputation on its green credentials. It may well end in court as climbing activists raise cash for a so-called "access fund" and the government ploughs ahead with a new management plan being worked on by Parks Victoria.

Few things come closer to environmental activism than a collective of climbers, a community that traditionally shuns the madding crowd.

"If you are going to ban climbing you might as well ban bushwalking," Carter said yesterday at the northern tip of the ranges.

"Just look around at some of the popular (walking) tracks, all the litter, graffiti, faeces, vegetation and infrastructure. Basically, we have been the subject of a disgusting and shocking smear campaign from Parks Victoria."

Considered in the top group of climbing destinations in the world



SIMON CARTER

Rock climber Kerrin Gale scales the Taipan Wall on the Dance of Life climb in the Grampians while she still can

because of its variety and vast number of routes, the Grampians is a prime site for overseas visitors.

Standing near the Taipan Wall yesterday, British climber Alistair Kennedy said he and his partner had travelled from Bristol to climb in the area and he was surprised by the push. "It's unique, we've come from the other side of the world just to climb here," he said.

Parks Victoria chief operating officer Simon Talbot is not backing away from his criticism of sections of the sport, which he has accused of cultural vandalism, using bolts inappropriately and crashing through vegetation in pursuit of a vertical thrill.

"You can't go to a national park and just cut a track in," he said. But the law-abiding majority

are furious with the way climbers have been characterised during the debate, accusing the government of deliberate misinformation. Authorities were forced to retract a claim that climbers had driven a bolt through Aboriginal rock art. The bolt had been placed decades ago by parks officials.

Parks Victoria has started fining people for climbing in certain

areas, pointing to a 2003 management plan that created eight protection areas where some sports could not be carried out.

But amid increased tourist activity and lobbying from local indigenous groups worried about damage to cultural sites, Parks Victoria has swooped on climbers, citing, among other things, the use of drills and chalk on rock faces,

lighting fires outside of designated fireplaces and smashing vegetation while bouldering.

A prominent defender of the sport, Mike Tomkins, says the extreme examples of alleged vandalism are deliberate distortions of the truth, masking a wider agenda to shut down large parts of the park. "It's scandalous," he says. "It's been hurtful

and harmful. The bans are illegal."

Locals are confused. Nationals state member for Lowan Emma Kealy says the parties want a resolution that respects and preserves cultural sites but allows meaningful access for climbers.

While much of the attention has focused on the impact on high-end sports climbing, the Grampians are considered its nursery,

particularly Summer Day Valley in the north.

Daniel Pearl is a private operator who has taught thousands of children in the valley but has been told the area may have a limited lifespan for teaching. "Finding another site isn't straightforward," he said. "The way they have shut down vast areas has been really inappropriate."

Penguin and seal poop fuel Antarctica

WASHINGTON: For more than half a century, biologists studying Antarctica focused their research on understanding how organisms coped with the continent's severe drought and the coldest conditions on the planet.

One thing they didn't really factor in, however, was the role played by the nitrogen-rich droppings from colonies of cute penguins and seals — until now.

A new study published in the journal *Current Biology* found the influential excrement supported thriving communities of mosses and lichens, which in turn sustained vast numbers of microscopic animals such as springtails and mites for more than 1000m beyond the colony.

"What we see is that the poo produced by seals and penguins partly evaporates as ammonia," said co-author and ecologist Stef Bokhorst from Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam.

"Then the ammonia gets picked up by the wind and is blown inland, and this makes its way into the soil and provides the nitrogen that primary producers need in order to survive in this landscape."

Braving bitter temperatures, the researchers waded through fields of animal waste — not to mention hordes of elephant seals and gentoo, chinstrap, and Adelie penguins — to examine the surrounding soils and plants using infra-red gas analysers that measured their respiration.

Samples examined in labs revealed that there were millions of tiny invertebrates per square metre because of the lack of predators in their environment — unlike in European or American grasslands, where the number may typically be between 50,000 and 100,000.

"The more animals we get, the larger the footprint there is, and we're finding higher diversity in those sites," Mr Bokhorst said, emphasising that species' richness was linked less with how cold or dry the region was and more to the nutrients added by the excrement. Ultimately, the research found penguin colonies to be a proxy for biodiversity.

AFP

BENT POLICE FEARED INVOLVED IN DOUBLE MURDER, LAWYER X HEARING TOLD

Anti-graft cops warned off

CHIP LE GRAND

On the night Terence and Christine Hodson were murdered in their Melbourne home, Victoria's former top cop Simon Overland told anti-corruption investigators to avoid the crime scene so the public wouldn't know it was suspected bent police were involved.

It has also emerged that Nicola Gobbo, the former defence barrister known as Lawyer X, was sleeping with drug squad officer Paul Dale at the same time she helped police persuade Terence Hodson to provide evidence against him.

The revelations to the Royal

Commission into the Management of Police Informants were made by retired detective inspector Peter De Santo, a senior internal affairs officer who led a taskforce investigation into drug squad corruption.

Mr De Santo told the hearing that on the evening of May 16, 2004, shortly after the Hodsons were found executed in their Kew home, Ms Gobbo called him to say Andrew Hodson, one of her clients, needed to talk to him. Andrew Hodson subsequently told Mr De Santo that his mother and father had been shot in the back of the head. Mr De Santo noted in his police diary the

words: "I don't want to talk to anyone else. Will you come?"

Mr De Santo said he agreed to meet Mr Hodson but was delayed by "police politics", with Mr Overland, then assistant commissioner for crime, warning that if he went to the crime scene it would blow the lid on suspected police involvement. "I was told not to go," he told counsel assisting the royal commission Chris Winneke. "There was politics being played out. I later learned that Overland didn't want corruption investigators there because the media would pick up that possible police corruption is involved."

Mr De Santo said he was

eventually allowed to attend the crime scene so long as he stayed out of sight.

The murder of Terence Hodson, a career criminal and police informer who provided a statement to Mr De Santo implicating two drug squad detectives, David Miechel and Mr Dale, in a theft from a suburban drug house, is the most notorious unsolved killing from Melbourne's gangland war.

The royal commission was told how Ms Gobbo played a pivotal role in convincing Terence Hodson to provide the statement.

Mr De Santo said he and other senior police developed a strategy to use Ms Gobbo, who had pre-

viously represented Andrew Hodson on unrelated criminal charges, to "get to Andrew to get to Terry".

"There is no doubt she was helping," Mr De Santo said. He noted that six months before his death, a fearful Terence Hodson called him from a telephone box.

Mr De Santo noted Hodson telling him that he'd spoken to the "three striper", a coded reference to then detective sergeant Dale.

Mr De Santo's notes read: "Advised that the blonde lady is sleeping with the three striper." Mr Dale has confirmed he had a sexual relationship with Ms Gobbo.

Mr Dale was charged with the murder of Terence Hodson but the case collapsed after Ms Gobbo refused to testify and another witness, Carl Williams, was murdered. Mr Dale is expected to provide evidence to the royal commission when public hearings resume on Tuesday.

Mr De Santo told the hearing he learned only in 2013 that Ms Gobbo had been registered as a police informant.

Under questioning from counsel for Ms Gobbo, Rishni Nanthani, he agreed that in his dealings with Ms Gobbo, she always acted in the interests of her clients.

\$947k 'found in fuel tank'

Almost \$1 million in cash was allegedly found concealed in a rental car in NSW's far west yesterday after a nervous-looking driver prompted a police search.

Police stopped to talk to the 52-year-old male driver of a rental car that was stopped on Rakow Street in Broken Hill at 3.30am.

They allegedly found an ice pipe in his luggage but a new fuel storage tank raised further suspicion. It was taken to a local machinery dealer who drained the fuel, allegedly revealing a false bottom. A steel box was found inside the tank, allegedly containing \$947,000 cash.

The driver was charged with dealing in the proceeds of crime and goods in custody. He was refused bail and will appear in the Broken Hill Bail Court today.

EMILY RITCHIE

Taxman to put influencers off their meals

JOHN LETHLEAN
NATIONAL RESTAURANT CRITIC

Enjoy restaurants? Sick of cat videos and memes? Jump on Instagram and follow #couscous-forcommot for some light relief as the restaurant industry turns the tables on the ultimate millennial vocation, the "influencer".

The Facebook-owned, image-based platform is huge in restaurant land and has spawned thousands of influencers whose "business model" is chasing free meals in exchange for social media posts, usually on Instagram, of varying return on investment to the restaurants.

But a couple of high-profile cases have played out in social and traditional media recently, with restaurateurs telling would-be collaborators exactly what they think of the concept of giving away profit for dubious return.

One, in Adelaide, saw prominent chef Duncan Welgemoed engaged in an online spat with a former *My Kitchen Rules* contestant looking for a freebie that made its way to the front page of Adelaide's *The Advertiser*.

Another in Brisbane this week resulted in a so-called influencer — spurned by a new restaurant — posting fake revenge "reviews" at Google Reviews. Unfortunately,



MATTHEW POON

Joel Valvasori of Perth's Lulu La Delizia restaurant

many in the hospitality industry feel conflicted by incessant overtures to "collaborate" on social media exchanges for meals, asking themselves: "What happens if we don't go along with this?"

"I don't think you really need to respond to them," said chef Joel Valvasori, who owns Lulu La Delizia restaurant in Perth's Subiaco. "We ignore them; they'd just take up too much of our day otherwise."

He described "influencer" as "a bit of a lazy vocation, trying to make a career out of nothing", although he acknowledged that some businesses felt vulnerable to constant overtures for collaborations. "Personally, I'm very sceptical about instant celebrity ... and I think the whole influencer thing will pass when people cotton on to just how much fluff is out there."



Katherine Emily Bowden
Joy Restaurant
22 hours ago ·

Very rude, I would not go back. Disappointing food



Joy Restaurant

We see you are the blogger that we called out for requesting a free meal for three people. Its unfortunate that you think it was rude of us to decline. What's even more unfortunate is that you've tarnished your honesty and integrity to write a fake review. You're welcome at Joy anytime you like ... provided you are willing to pay.



Joy Restaurant

I'm also happy to post a screen shot of you requesting free meals if you like?

A social media exchange between an influencer and a restaurant

From July, such undeclared Instagram endorsements of restaurants, cafes, bars and pubs in return for freebies might constitute a tax problem.

It may be news to many influencers that in-kind receipt of goods and services is taxable, but tax lawyer Chris Davis, of McInnes Wilson Lawyers, said: "Constructive or actual receipt of non-cash benefits has always been taxable."

Using trusts and companies won't work for avoiding declaring "in-kind" income.

Imminent changes to the law first proposed in last year's federal budget and flagged in a Treasury discussion paper in December may also hit the Instafamous industry. From July 1, all income, including all non-cash benefits, will be treated as part of an individual's taxable income and will be taxed accordingly at higher rates than apply to the companies and trusts used to date.

Non-cash income, such as meals, earned via reputation will be taxed at the higher personal rate and cannot be shielded by a trust or other corporate entity at a lower one.

INQUIRER P21

Davidson Executive & Boards

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