

# Save Grampians Climbing

## Climber Survey, Jan 2021

### --- Summary Paper ---

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**By Goshen Watts**

This paper presents the results of a climbing community survey undertaken on behalf of <http://savegrampiansclimbing.org> between 12/12/20 until 8/1/21. The survey relates to changes in climbing access at Mount Arapiles (Djurite) and in the Grampians (Gariwerd).

The purpose of collecting this information is to better understand the climbing community, capture information to inform an economic assessment and to understand what impact the climbing prohibitions are having on the community and their respective reaction. The survey received 501 responses. This represents a statistically significant sample of the climbing community.

Climbers that responded to the questionnaire survey are largely professional and skilled members of the economy with a very high frequency of visitation to regional areas of Victoria. 95% of the respondents indicated that they climb outdoors often. Most climbers primarily identify as Trad Climbers (58%) (Q12), but just as many sport climb (Q3). The average trip length to climbing destinations in western Victoria is a little over 5 days per trip. Bush camping is the preferred accommodation closely followed by registered campsites.

The sample captures Victorian, interstate and international climbers, 10% indicated they live local, 14% within regional Victoria, 34% are from Melbourne, 35% live interstate, and 7% of respondents were international. The survey indicates that the restrictions are having an impact on where people choose to live and work. It is estimated that 11% of the climbing community has moved or is in the process of moving. A further 38% of respondents to the survey currently living in Victoria are seriously considering moving.

The most important stated aspects of outdoor climbing enjoyed by survey respondents are spending time in nature and the physical and mental challenge of climbing. Climbing is also seen by many as an important factor in managing 'Mental well-being' with 57% indicating this as very important. About half of respondents reported feeling depressed or in grief and 40% reported feeling angry. The response to a further question revealed that 43% of respondents indicated that they or someone they knew had been affected by mental health issues relating to the climbing prohibitions.

A separate paper has been produced on behalf of the Victorian Climbing Club (VCC) with regard to the economic value of rock climbing in western Victoria. The estimated direct and indirect rock climbing tourism benefits to regional communities in 2018 are \$12.3 million for Mount Arapiles (Dyurrite) and \$11.9 million for the Grampians (Gariwerd) (Rowlands 2021). The Economic Assessment is found on the VCC's website: <https://vicclimb.org.au/2021/01/the-economics-of-rock-climbing-what-are-we-worth/>

The majority of the climbing community (76%) is engaged in what is happening in the Grampians having read part or all of the Gariwerd Landscape Management Plan. Over half of the climbing community surveyed (55%) indicated that they had not visited the Grampians since the access restrictions. Respondents to the survey considered Taipan Wall, Tiger Wall, Muline, Bundaleer and Summerday Valley as the top climbing of greatest loss to the climbing community.

The climbing community, like any community, is diverse in its attitudes. The majority of the climbing community show a good level of respect for the SPAs at this time but not all climbers are likely to conform. Some top issues where responses could be quantified:

**Permits:** Most (71%) were in favour of a permit system if this was coupled with education on cultural heritage and the environment, and if it was a way of maintaining access.

**Chalk:** Over 91% indicated that they would climb either with coloured chalk or with no chalk.

**Fixed Gear:** With regards to fixed gear, only 2.1% agree with PV that there should be no new bolts at all. The vast majority of climbers (85%) agree with the bolting policy established by VCC (bolts where no trad gear is available).

**Bouldering:** Without crash pads, bouldering is unlikely to be feasible for most climbers, and it is likely that safety is the primary concern.

In the later sections, we attempted to capture climbers' views on compliance and strategy.

- Q29 Was quite a split between accepting that "climbers will need to respect the bans" (58.5%), and the alternative of "Parks Victoria doesn't have the finances or resources to manage and police an area the size of the Grampians" (41.5%).
- Q32 asked about Strategies, with a 76% indicating that "work with and gain the trust of Traditional Owners" is the best path to regaining access'.

***We acknowledge Gunditj Mirring, Eastern Maar, and Barengi Gadjin as Traditional Owners and custodians of Gariwerd, and we recognize the connections that Traditional Owners have with Gariwerd. We also support the process of joint management and self determination.***

## SECTION 1

### Q1. Are you a climber?

The majority of respondents climbed outdoors often. 95% Selected “Yes, and climb often outdoors.” Only 4% identified as indoor climbers, and no non climbers filled in the survey.

### Q2. Age?

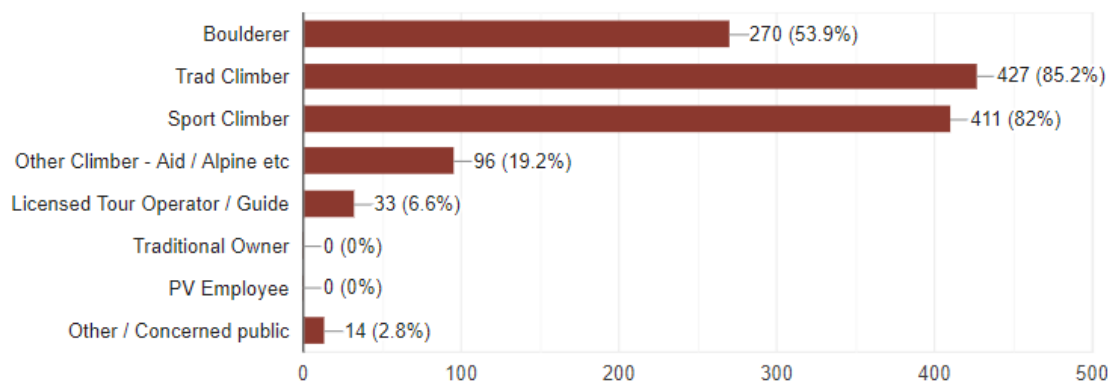
81% of respondents were aged 18-50.

The 50+ age bracket the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest on 18%, followed by under 18 with only 3 respondents (0.6%).

### Q3. Which of the following apply to you? [What Type of climber are you] Tick all those that apply.

Which of the following apply to you? Tick all those that apply.

501 responses



Most respondents identified as either Trad Climbers or Sports Climbers. The survey received responses from 33 Licensed Tour Operators (LTO's) and guides. Question 12 expands further by asking respondents to prioritise their climbing identity.

### Q4 Where do you live?

Respondents identified as 10% local, 14% regional; 34% Melbourne area; 35% Interstate; 7% International. This represents a good spread of climbers across different geographic areas, but importantly it captures a reasonable portion of local and Victorian climbers.

### Q5 What is your profession?

Climbers that responded to the survey are largely professional and skilled members of the economy. See Economic Assessment for a more in-depth analysis (Rowlands 2021).

Updated final tally (Count = 486)		
Count:	Categories:	
104	Professional	Science / Engineer
32	Health	Health Professional / Doctor etc
40	Climbing	All climbing guides / gym workers / rope access etc
26	Education	Teacher / Uni / Outdoor Education etc
53	Business	Retail, Marketing, Other business
43	Trade	All trades including arborist
46	IT	IT, Data, Software
18	Retired	
31	Student	
81	Other	A broad range of employment e.g. Journalist, television producer, artist, truck driver, public servant, farmers and the military.

### Q6 - ('Sentinel Question') Select 3 climbing places from the list below.

The intent of this question was to have some way of picking out surveys filled out in a non-genuine manner – for example by non-climbers (the survey was aimed at climbers). However, although 35 answered this question *incorrectly*, responses were varied, and not 'out of character' and seemed to be genuine (not attempting to skew the results). Perhaps this question was a little tricky for some climbers not so aware of some popular climbing destinations. The correct answers were of course: Font (Fontainebleau), Rocklands (both world class bouldering locations), Yosemite (USA), and Frog Buttress (QLD).

## SECTION 2

*Some of these questions (questions in **BLUE**) are examined in more detail in the Economic Assessment (Rowlands 2021), so are only briefly covered here.*

### Q7 Prior to COVID19 and climbing restrictions, how many days per year did you typically spend on trips to Gariwerd/Grampians for which the main purpose was climbing? (Arapiles is next question).

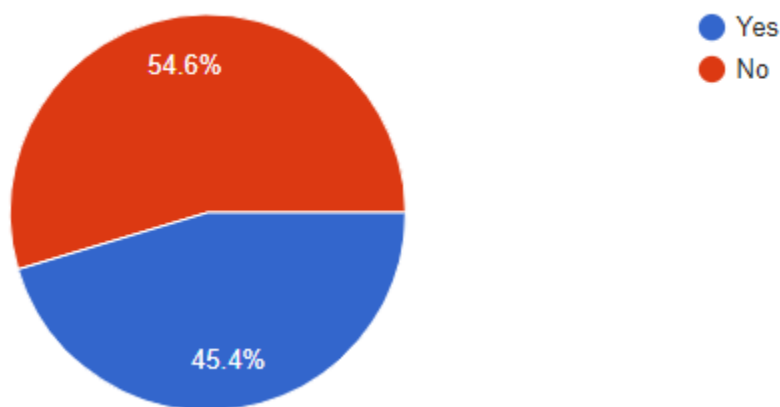
19.7% visited the Grampians at least monthly or more, indicating a very high frequency of visitation by a significant proportion of respondents. A further 35.6% visited the Grampians 3-8 weekends a year. This contrasts with Parks Victoria's own survey, which identified a "frequent user" as someone who visits the Grampians once a year.

**Q8 Prior to COVID19 and climbing restrictions, how many days per year did you typically spend on trips to Djurrite/Arapiles for which the main purpose was climbing?**

Equally at Arapiles the frequency of visitation by recreational climbers is extremely high with over 18% of respondents visiting Arapiles at least monthly or more. Almost 40% visited Arapiles 3-8 weekends a year.

**Q9 Have you climbed in the Grampians (anywhere) since the bans were announced in Feb 2019?**

This question helped identify 'current / active' climbers from those who just have a passing interest, or might not have visited for some time.



**Q10 Have you climbed in any Special Protection Areas (SPA's) since the bans were announced in Feb 2019?** Only 6% of surveys answered yes to this question, (32). See following question for further detail.

Even taking ONLY climbers who have climbed in the Grampians since Feb 2019 (23 / 225) only gives 10.2% who have knowingly climbed in an SPA since the bans were announced.

**Q11 If so, can you let us know where?**

4 respondents listed places that are not actually SPA's, two climbed with LTO's, and 3 responses indicated that they had mistakenly climbed in the SPA. So taking those into account, only 23 climbers (4.6%) intentionally climbed in an SPA. Only 2 climbers declined to identify where they had climbed.

The climbing community is like any community, diverse in it's attitudes. The majority of the climbing community show a good level of respect for the SPAs at this time but we note that not all climbers are likely to conform, especially as many climbers feel unfairly and disproportionately targeted as highlighted by the survey.

**Q12. Rate in order, the climbing that is the most important to you? Could be also what you identify with most. Rate 1 (most important) to 4 (least important).**

The Graphic shows all options, but the easiest way to read this is to identify the activities that were listed as the **MOST IMPORTANT**:

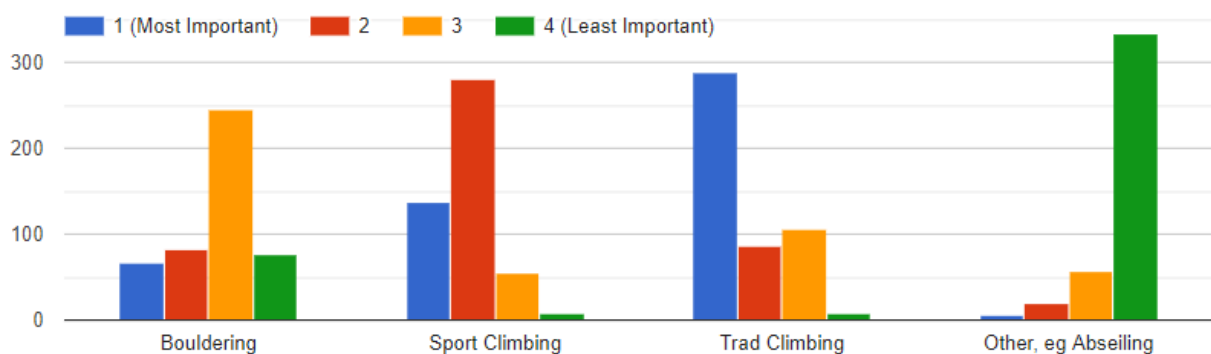
N = 498 (total number of responses for this question)

Trad Climbing 289 (58%)

Sport Climbing 137 (28%)

Bouldering 67 (13%)

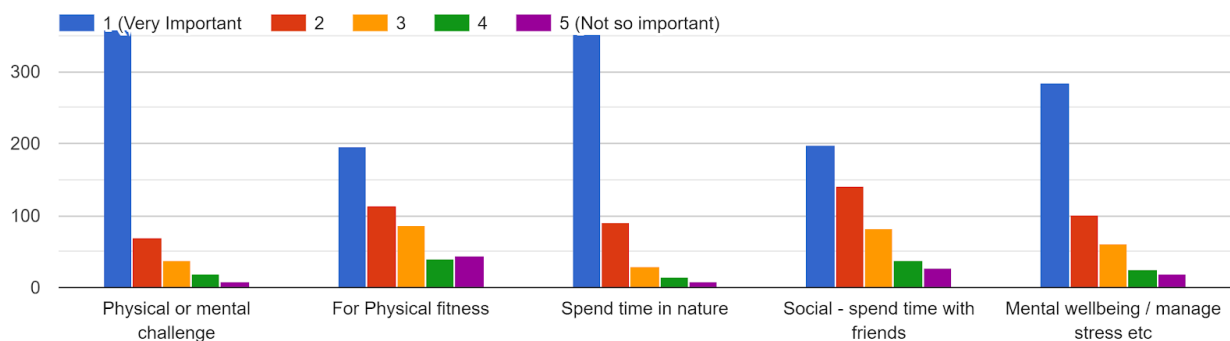
Other 5 (1%)



Most climbers primarily identify Trad Climbing as being of most importance. However sports climbing was rated of second importance by a (majority) 281 respondents.

**Q13. Why do you rockclimb? Rate 1-5**

Why do you rock climb? Please rate each 1-5.



All reasons were rated as very important to climbers. However the greatest weighting was given to 'Physical/mental challenge' and 'Spend time in nature' with about 70% indicating that these were very important. Climbing is also seen by many as an important factor in managing 'Mental well-being' with 57% indicating this as very important. The highest second option (red) was "Social – spend time with Friends", indicating this was still an important factor for climbers.

#### Q14. Do you log your climbing activity on theCrag.com?

Yes 44%. 56% No. This informs the quantification of active outdoor climbers and an estimate of the number of climbing days annually through the use of theCrag.com data. See the Economic Assessment for further information (Rowlands 2021).

#### Q15. How particular are you about logging the correct ascent dates?

(Answers for those who answered YES to Q14):

Dates aren't really important to me, especially for historical ascents.	45	21.1%
Mostly always dated correctly, so the logbook can be a reasonable reflection of my actual climbing	103	48.9%
Some ascents spread over a few days may be logged on same day (eg a weekend's worth of climbing)	64	30.0%

The question is used to understand logging behavior and to make informed adjustments to theCrag.com data.

#### Q16. What proportion (percentage) of your days climbing do you log?

(Answers are for those who answered YES to Q14).

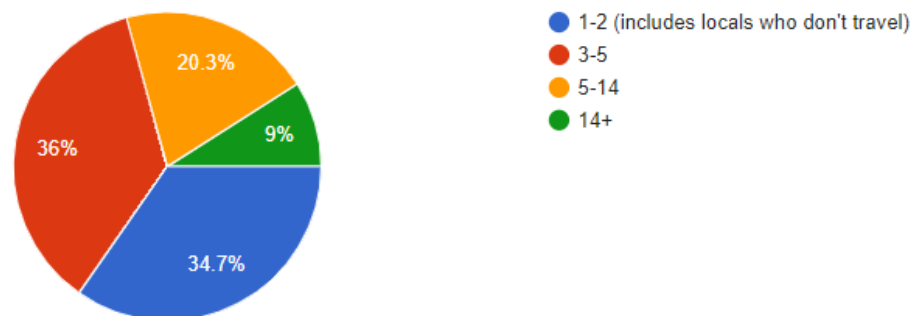
25-50% : I log mainly notable ascents, or when I can remember what I've done.	44	20.7%
50-75% : Eg, I log only climbs I've done without falls, or might miss repeats etc.	59	27.8%
75-100% : I log everything I can so the logbook can be a reasonable reflection of my actual climbing	75	35.3%
Less than 25% : I don't really log ascents, mostly use the Crag for information.	34	16%

The question is used to understand logging behaviour and to make informed adjustments to theCrag.com data.

**Q17. Thinking about your last trip to Arapiles or the Grampians, approx how many nights did you stay?**

The last trip for most respondents lasted at least 3-5 nights (36%), 9% of climbers stayed for longer than 14 days. On average trip length was 5 days however given that we don't know how long the 14+ day respondents actually visit, the average would be marginally higher.

478 responses



**Q18. On your last climbing trip to Arapiles or the Grampians, how much did you / your family spend on food and accommodation (including eating out)?**

This question helped inform the Economic Assessment (Rowlands 2021). The average spend per day based on the results of this question was approx \$82-\$89 (excluding locals). It also helped work out the overall yearly spend by all climbers (not just those who filled in the survey). It was estimated that the annual spend for climbers visiting Mount Arapiles for example is \$3,416,437 (direct economic benefit).  
> For more info, see Economic Assessment (Rowlands 2021)

**Q19. On your last climbing trip to Arapiles or the Grampians, how much did you / your family spend on travel?** (%'s are the portion of overall sample).

International (7.3%)	\$1,047
Interstate (34.5%)	\$381
Local Climbers (100km radius, 10.1%)	\$34
Melbourne Area (33.9%)	\$164
Regional Victoria	\$71

> For more info, see Economic Assessment (Rowlands 2021)

**Q20. Have the bans made you consider moving?**

Specifically examining those respondents that indicated that they live in Victoria, almost 8% have moved or are in the process of moving, however some of those have already moved and so now live interstate or overseas. Adding these figures then it is estimated that 11% of respondents have already moved or are in the process of moving. 38% of Victoria respondents to the survey are also seriously considering moving.

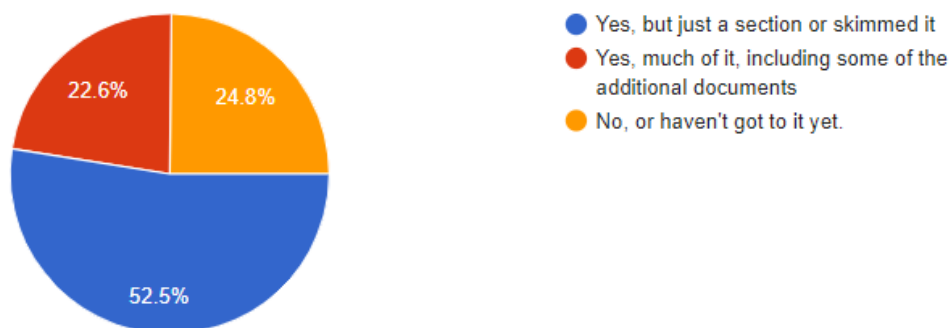


This question was cross referenced against the employment column and where people lived to understand the impact to a range of employment sectors. A summary of the results is found in the Economic Assessment (Rowlands 2021).

**Q21. Have you read the Gariwerd Landscape Draft Management Plan and Associated Documents?**

76% Yes, or at least a portion of it. Most climbers are staying informed.

495 responses



**Q22. Which closed climbing areas (Arapiles or the Grampians) have been the greatest loss to you personally? Write 2 or 3, you can include crags that are 'temporary closures'.**

Quite a huge list – see below for a 'Word Cloud' representation of the areas that are most important to climbers.



**The top 10 Areas by popularity:**

177	Taipan
157	Tiger Wall
80	Summerday Valley
62	Bundaleer
51	Muline
47	Hollow Mt
43	Andersens
43	The Gallery
35	Bard Buttriss
31	Vic Range

\* The graphic closely, but not exactly, represents the numbers above, due to practicalities in fitting in some of the words.

**Q23. Dispersed (Bush) Camping will be banned in the proposed management plan. Please list in order where you most often stay in the Grampians.**

Most popular camping is bush camping (138), followed by camping at a Registered Campground (123), which was also the highest 2<sup>nd</sup> choice option at 119. There is a reasonable percentage of climbers (143) that “Sometimes” stay locally, in either holiday accommodation, or with friends/family.

**Q24. If a free (but with conditions) annual climbing permit was the only way you could access climbing in the Grampians, would you support it? Any thoughts?**

We asked this question with an open-ended (free-form) field, to capture feedback about this particular issue, and we received some great responses. While there was overwhelming support, many express reservations, or the support was conditional. This question also enabled us to see how climbers understand the situation. To quantify the 480 responses to this question, they were categorized into “Yes”, “Depends”, and “No”.

**“Yes” (341):** Many of those who supported the permit scheme suggested it should contain a cultural induction of some kind, and that the permit system was a good way of educating climbers about ways to minimize impact. Some indicated that if it was the only way to prevent areas from complete closure a permit would be acceptable.

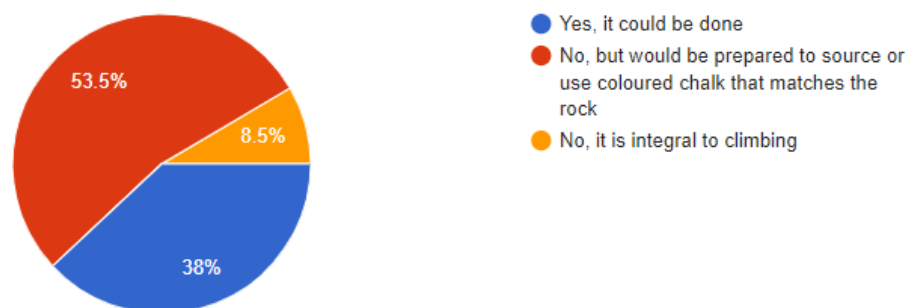
**“Depends” (89):** Those who supported permits conditionally “Depends”, suggested that if some areas were to re-open to climbing, they would consider permits as a compromise, or that they would support permits if it wasn’t just a way of controlling access.

**“No” (50):** Those who answered “No” were concerned about climbers being singled out (where other groups don’t require a permit), others were concerned about the bureaucratic cost, and the opening of an avenue for ‘revenue raising’ from climbers.

**Q25. The proposed draft plan bans the use of white chalk - Could you climb without chalk?**

Only 8.5% would really need / want to continue with white chalk. 38% Could continue climbing but without chalk, much higher than expected, and a much larger portion of climbers would be prepared to make compromises by using coloured chalk.

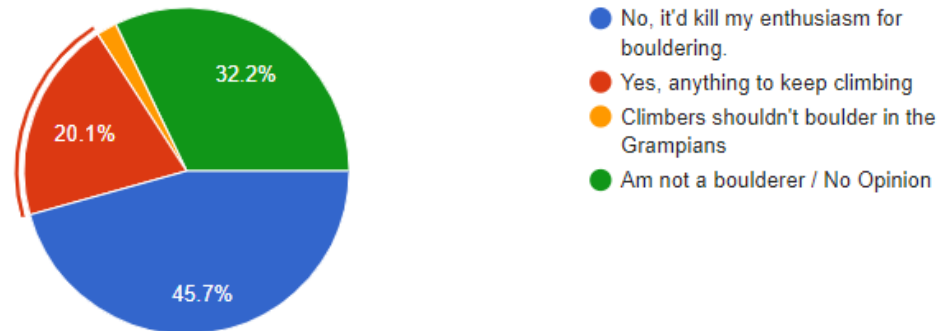
497 responses



**Q26. The proposed draft plan bans the majority of bouldering. Is it possible, or would you be motivated to boulder without a crash-pad? PV have not offered this as an option, but we're just posing the question.**

> 45% saying they probably wouldn't boulder if it's the pads themselves that are the problem. Only 10 People said there shouldn't be bouldering in the Grampians.

497 responses

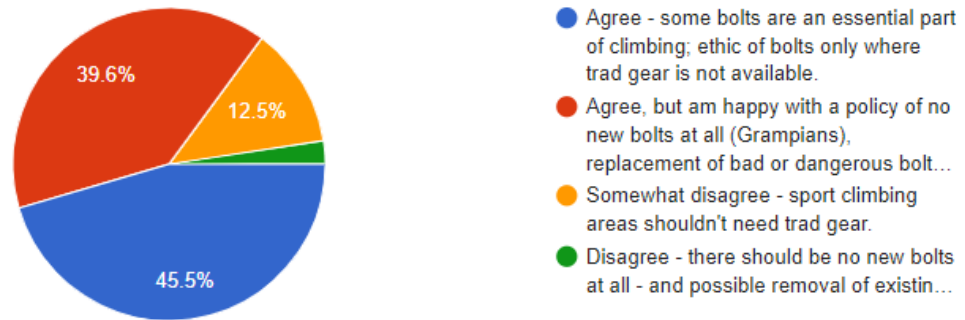


However, taking results from those who listed bouldering as their primary form of climbing, the results are very different. 53 of 67 boulderers suggested "it'd kill my enthusiasm for bouldering", while only 12 would still try to partake in some bouldering without a pad (if that was a way to continue to boulder). Safety is likely to be a factor, as without a bouldering pad the risks of injury are far greater.

**Q27. Question on the ethics of Fixed Anchor placement: The accepted climbing community position on bolting at both the Grampians and Arapiles are that bolts are to be used primarily where traditional protection is not available\*. What is your general position on this statement? \*Referring to both printed guidebooks, and the "VCC Bolting and Fixed Protection Policy For Rock Climbing"**

Only 2.1% agree with PV that there should be no new bolts at all (incl no replacement of dodgy bolts by climbers). The vast majority of climbers (85%+) agree with the bolting policy established by the VCC\* (bolts where no trad gear is available). Half of these (39.6% overall) would be ok with no new bolts, provided existing bolts could be used, and replacement of bad or dangerous bolts could be undertaken where necessary.

497 responses



**General notes:** When viewed by 'Type' of climber, 33% of Sport Climbers suggest that sport climbing areas shouldn't need trad gear (Orange); where only 2% of Trad Climbers think the same. When viewing the 'Agree, but no new bolts at all' (Red) by Type of climber, 26% Sport climbers agree, and 44% of Trad Climbers agree with this 'no more bolting' policy.

\* <http://vicclimb.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/VCC-BoltPolicy.pdf>

**Q28. The 2003 management plan did not officially allow safety-bolts. PV understood that bolts were a necessary part of climbing and decided it was easier for it to remain unregulated. All that has changed with the 2020 Draft Plan (p107), where Installation of new anchors is specifically prohibited, unless authorised by Parks Victoria. Further, areas that have bolts replaced (or new bolts) may be closed, and also suggestions of the removal of anchors in some areas. Do you have any feedback on this?**

Lots of feedback:

- The majority of responses indicated that there is a need for climbers to maintain bolts for safety reasons, and that PV is unlikely, or incapable, of taking over any kind of maintenance regime.
- Many people pointed out the hypocrisy of other PV 'fixed infrastructure' (eg lookouts, hand-rails), and that bolts used in areas not affected by cultural heritage should be ok.
- Also pointed out was how PV (by the proposed heavily handed attempt at managing fixed protection) is out of step with much of the rest of the world.
- However there was also concern about the proliferation of Sport Climbing, and inappropriate bolts that have got us into this mess, with a number of climbers accepting that some bolts have been inappropriately placed (or climbs put up that didn't really add anything anyway), and that climbers might need to get used to a ban on bolting.
- Constructive suggestions (mentioned multiple times) included the camouflaging of bolts (painted), and also rap anchors as a way of reducing vegetation loss from walk-off descents.
- Also, suggestions were made of climbing reps that could work with PV / TO's to manage bolts (ie with direct climber input).

**Q29. PV have indicated they may start to fine climbers, for possible damage caused by chalk / bolts / pads (Fines are up to \$3,300 for infringements, much more if they result in real damage to Aboriginal Places). Which of the following statements more closely reflects your position? (We know there are middle grounds here; and the vast majority of climbers do not wish to cause offense or climb in banned areas if they can avoid it, but we still need you to choose).**

This more “Controversial” question, didn’t actually generate any controversy. Nevertheless, the question was carefully worded (even if a little ‘leading’) as to give climbers an opportunity to select an option which aligned best with their view.

**Answer 1:** Climbers will need to respect the bans, or risk getting fines and offending Traditional Owners

*Result: 58.5%*

**Answer 2:** Parks Victoria doesn't have the finances or resources to manage and police an area the size of the Grampians, and being fined is an opportunity (perhaps via courts) to ensure that Parks Victoria is being fair and reasonable, and applying the law without prejudice.

*Result: 41.5%.*

This is quite a split within the climbing community, and suggests a significant portion of climbing could eventually be driven underground.

## **SECTION 3 (Finally)**

**Q30. How has the impact of these climbing bans made you FEEL?**

This question resulted in a wide range of responses, hard to quantify. However it’s apparent that the bans are having a significant negative effect on the vast majority of climbers.

1. Depressed 52.1%.
2. The “whole 5 stages of grief” 46.9%.
3. Angry 39.6%
4. Guilty 10.3%
5. Happy or Positive 1.2%

Lots of additional comments including betrayed, confused, misunderstood, disillusioned, disappointed, resigned, sad, reflective, intrigued.

**Q31. Have you, or a climber you know personally, been affected by a mental health issue relating to the climbing bans, or has reached out to mental health care services?**

43% answered Yes, with 51% No. A number of comments were received as to how the bans are affecting mental health, and at least 3 references to suicide, which is highly concerning.

**Q32. Strategy: Which of the following do you currently think are THE MOST LIKELY paths to being able to climb again at areas that do not contain significant Cultural Heritage (generally, most climbers accept that some areas need to be closed). We know it's a mix of the options, but please select up to 2 of the most likely.** Despite climbers anger and frustration; this question has demonstrated climbers overwhelming desire to work with Traditional Owners of the land. [Listed in order of popularity]

1. 76% indicated 'work with and gain the trust of Traditional Owners as the primary path to regaining access'.
2. 53% indicated 'putting pressure on PV to apply the rules consistently (eg close walking trails, some tourist areas) in an effort to highlight the 'unworkable' nature of a literal interpretation of the regulations, and bias towards climbers'.
3. 24% indicated 'legal. Direct legal action (based on advice from legal representation)'.
4. 10% indicated 'subversive / quiet 'normalization' of return to climbing in some discrete areas'.
5. 6% indicated 'protest - Visible protest either individually or as groups.

OTHER: 28 / 495. Respondents were also invited to leave an alternate suggestion. Some of common themes include creating a political strategy, others emphasized working co-operatively with PV and Traditional Owners, also suggested were for climbing groups to come together and form a peak body.

**Q33. Are you a member of the VCC / ACAV or another Australian climbing group or organisation? (We don't need to know which one)**

Selecting for Australian residents only, 64% said Yes. It's great to see that most climbers are a part of some kind of climbing organization.

**Q34. Finally, please write anything you'd like to say about the bans facing climbers. Responses will not be published anywhere.**

238 people provided some additional feedback.

Some other questions also enabled freeform text and gave respondents the ability to write more detailed feedback... This final feedback question needs to be considered WITH those to get the full picture of an individual's POV.

We have not published individual responses given our promise not to; but most used this opportunity to express their sadness of the situation (including about future generations not being able to have the same outdoor experiences as they have). Sometimes there was frustration at PV or at how it's been handled, and finally some expressed how climbers need to do better.

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**Thankyou.**

*For any direct feedback or questions about this survey or report, please send us an email: [savegrampiansclimbing@gmail.com](mailto:savegrampiansclimbing@gmail.com)*