

Mount Kosciuszko and Summit Walk Upgrades 2022-23

Stakeholder briefing

Over the 2022-23 summer period, National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) will carry out upgrades to the summit area of Mount Kosciuszko – the highest point in Australia. The Summit Walk, which runs from Rawson Pass to the summit, will also be upgraded.

The project is part of the NSW Government’s Improving Access to National Parks program and commitment to invest in improving accessibility to national parks across NSW. The Mount Kosciuszko and Summit Walk upgrades will complement the many other new and existing walking track projects currently underway in Kosciuszko National Park.

The objective of this briefing document is to provide key stakeholders with:

- An explanation of why the upgrades are being undertaken;
- A brief overview of the project;
- Anticipated short-term impacts on users and how these are being managed; and
- An opportunity to provide any feedback on the proposed project.



Figure 1: Artist’s impression of the upgraded Kosciuszko summit milling area showing:

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|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 Summit cairn | 4 Expanded milling area |
| 2 New low mobility stone paved ramp | 5 Existing steps |
| 3 Upgraded stone paved track surface | |

Why is it happening?

The primary surface for the majority of the Summit Walk is gravel embedded within black plastic 'geo-web'. A significant issue with the current gravel track surface is that over time, extreme wind, water and snow conditions combine to gradually wash much of the gravel material off the track and into the surrounding fragile alpine environment. Furthermore, as gravel material is lost, the embedded geo-web plastic becomes exposed and presents a trip hazard.

The concept of providing a more accessible track to the summit of Mount Kosciuszko has long been discussed with user groups such as the National Parks Association and is in-line with our objective of improving access in national parks for all people, particularly to iconic sites such as Mount Kosciuszko. Whilst the upgraded Summit Walk won't meet the technical specification of an Australian Standard wheelchair-accessible walking track, it will make accessing the summit much easier.

At present, the final leg of the journey to the summit cairn requires ascending a staircase. The installation of a ramp will reduce crowding and improve access to the summit cairn for all people, ensuring the summit of Mount Kosciuszko becomes an accessible and achievable destination for everyone.

Project overview

The Summit Walk is a 1.7-kilometre Class 3 walking track from Rawson Pass to the summit of Mount Kosciuszko. Over 120,000 people reach the summit of Mount Kosciuszko each year, which is the highest use of any track in Kosciuszko National Park. The track experiences its busiest days during January and Easter with up to 4,000 walkers in a day.

While the opportunity to climb to the highest point on the Australian continent will always be one of the key attractions bringing visitors to the Snowy Mountains region, this project provides a unique opportunity to facilitate and promote Mount Kosciuszko as the only one of the seven global continental summits accessible to people of low or restricted mobilities.

This project is aiming to achieve two primary objectives:

1. Upgrade the Summit Walk to a high quality, natural stone-paved surface and remove the embedded and degraded 'geo-web'; and
2. Construct a 40 metre long, 2 metre wide smooth, non-slip, natural stone-paved ramp to the summit.

Once completed, the upgraded walking track surface and summit milling area will also:

- Create a visually appealing, permanent surface that can withstand the rigours of the harsh alpine environment and aesthetically blends with the surrounding alpine environment;
- Provide a safe track surface for all visitors;
- Reduce environmental impacts to the surrounding environment, and
- Significantly reduce ongoing maintenance requirements for the walk.



Figure 2: Example of stone-paved surface similar to intended upgraded Summit Walk track surface

What we've done so far

In preparation for the project, NPWS have:

- Engaged an environmental specialist (Ecological Australia) to complete the environmental assessment (Review of Environmental Factors) for the project;
- Sourced local granite rock to be used in the project; and
- Retained the existing 65 metre Mountain pygmy possum bridge crossing on the western face of Mount Kosciuszko, further protecting this population by reducing the risk of gravel wash into the boulder stream.

When is it happening?

On-ground works are currently scheduled to commence in November 2022 (dependent on weather and residual snow drifts impacting site access) and continue through until early May 2023. Whilst the final 600m of the Summit Walk will be inaccessible to the public during this time, access will be possible via a temporary re-route.

Upgrades to the lower section of the Summit Walk are intended to be completed in future years.

Summit access

To ensure safe public access to the summit of Mount Kosciuszko is maintained throughout the upgrade project, a temporary 200m long pedestrian access structure, specifically designed to withstand alpine conditions, whilst also minimising impacts on the surrounding alpine environment, is proposed to be installed.

The temporary structure will be suitable for walking only. To ensure the temporary pedestrian access structure is as safe as possible to users, steps will be required. An unfortunate impact of this will be that the summit will be temporarily inaccessible to wheelchair and some restricted mobility users. The structure is likely to follow the approximate route to the summit in Figure 3 on the following page.

Potential disruption to visitors

There will likely be some minor delays to the public attempting to access the summit during construction, primarily during the installation and removal of the temporary pedestrian scaffolding structure, as well as during helicopter operations that will occur throughout the project.

All efforts will be made to minimise disruption to the public through measures such as conducting helicopter operations early in the morning and outside of busy periods, such as school holidays, whenever possible.

Always check **NPWS Alerts** or call NPWS on **1300 072 757** (13000PARKS) for more information on current park closures and conditions.

Comments, questions and feedback

As a key stakeholder for this exciting project at one of Australia's most iconic destinations, we are happy to answer additional questions and welcome any feedback you may have regarding the project.

If you require further information in relation to the project or have any comments or feedback on the proposed project or information contained above, please feel free to contact NPWS Alpine Queanbeyan Area at npws.alpinequeanbeyan@environment.nsw.gov.au.

Map of upgrade area



Figure 3: Kosciuszko Summit Walk – proposed upgrade area and temporary access