

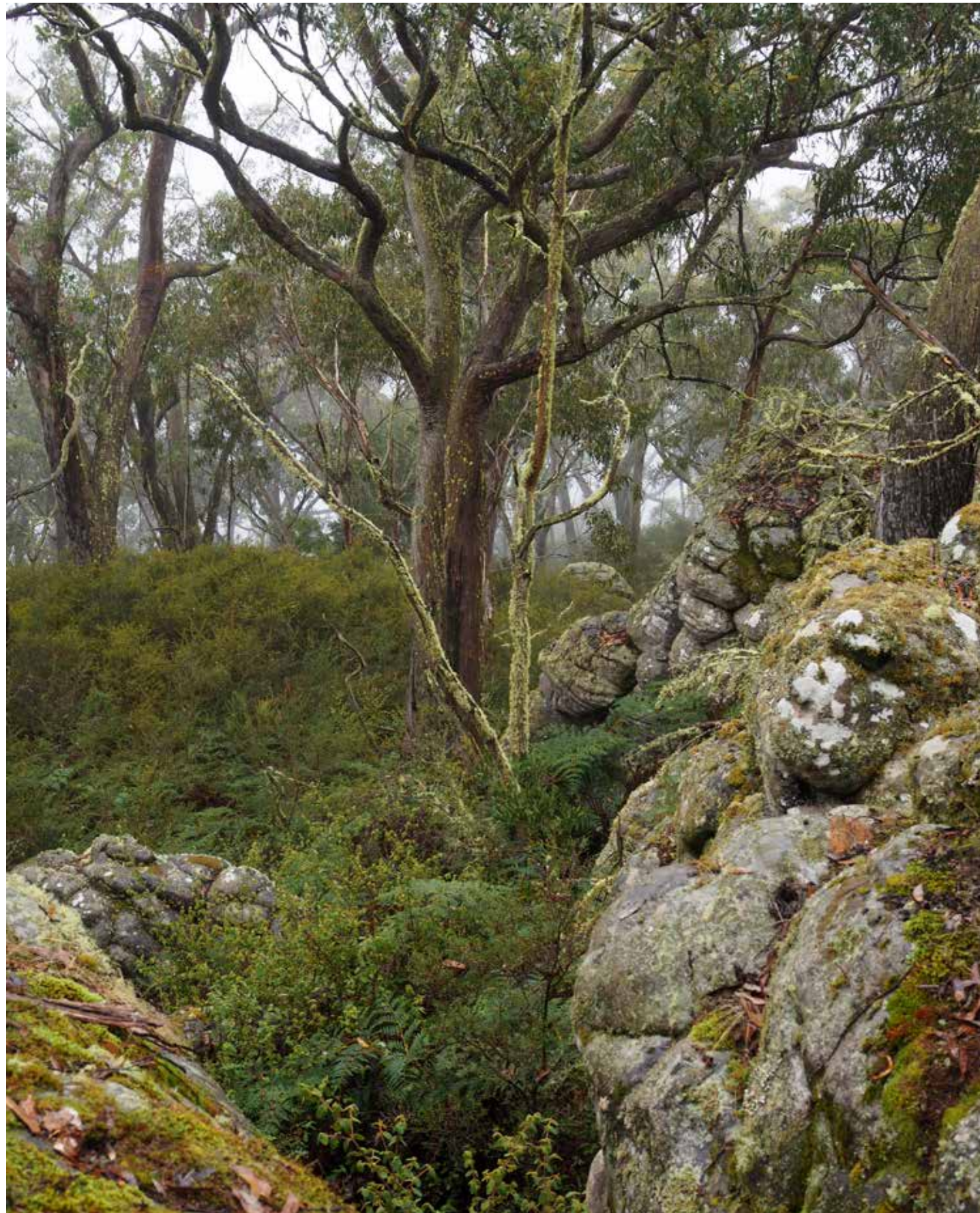
# Great Garriwerd

The sheer sandstone escarpment past the Lower Waterfalls of Gar. **opposite** The sleeping quarters sited sympathetically to take in the view to Lake Wartook at Werdug hike-in campsite.



**A series of hike-in cabins designed by McGregor Coxall and Noxon Giffen offer opportunities for rest and rejuvenation on the stunning Grampians Peaks Trail.**

text: Tom Bodycomb  
photography: Tamsin O'Neill



**top** Hardwood timber lounge chairs positioned for dramatic views at Werdug camp. **bottom** Heading off in the capable hands of the guides from Grampians Peaks Walking Co. **opposite** The lichen-clad wet temperate forest below the main range.

● The enduring image of The Grampians is of a dominating series of peaks rising dramatically from Victoria's vast basalt plain. Now with the finalisation of the 160-kilometre Grampians Peaks Trail and the completion of the hike-in camps, the route is set to become an iconic destination.

The trail commences at Mt Zero and climbs up the Gar (Mt Difficult) range before heading south via Mt William and finishing after 13 days of hiking at Dunkeld. Unlike the Overland Track in Tasmania, this epic trail can also be experienced in shorter multi-day hikes over many visits. The design brief from Parks Victoria was to construct campsites respecting the remoteness of the trail, the cultural significance to First Nations people and the sensitivity of the landscape.

Design and construction firm McGregor Coxall and architects Noxon Giffen have created 11 hike-in camps with tent platforms, communal huts and amenities available for all hikers. The recently finished sleeping huts are at two of the sites in the Northern Grampians and used by operators of guided walks.

In benign late-autumn weather we set off on the Northern Huts Walk with guides from Grampian Peaks Walking Co., passing below the sheer escarpment at the Lower Waterfalls of Gar and the Pacific Wall, before trekking up the ridge. On reaching the peak of Briggs Bluff the views are expansive to the east to the Arapiles and north across the Wimmera Plains. Heading further along the range through sub-alpine heathland and stunted snow gums, the communal hut at Gar camp appears, nestled among low eucalypts. The cathedral aspect of the setting is reflected in the floor-to-ceiling clerestory window framing the ranges of Mt Stapleton and the westing sun. >



The communal hut at Mud-Dadjug (Mt Abrupt). **opposite top** The communal shelter at Stony Creek Group Campground. Photography: Shannon McGrath. **bottom left** Trekking along the main range from Briggs Bluff. **right** Tent pads and communal shelter at Djardji-djawara. Photography: Shannon McGrath

Parks Victoria consulted with Traditional Owners to select each campsite along the trail and to respect the culture of the Jadawadjali and Djab Wurrung peoples who have lived in Gariwerd for thousands of years. The over-arching theme of the sites' placement and construction was to 'touch the ground lightly.' Noxon Giffen and McGregor Coxall staff spent weeks camping out in Gariwerd and throughout the design process shared office space to assist the collaborative design process. The camp structures blend into the environment with a considered selection of materials. A variation of cladding has been selected comprising a mix of oxidised mild steel and charred and silvered timber to weather and merge into the surrounding topography and flora.

Heading south across the exposed ridgeline, the tent platforms are enveloped by wind-sculpted eucalypts. The three sleeping huts are cleverly positioned at the end of the path with the Gar peak rising to the south-west. In this dramatic setting there is a presence of a larger force and the Bunjil legend resonates from these epic landforms.

An early rise high in a mountain range is never jarring and heralds a promising start to the day. After a trek to catch the sunrise from atop Gar we convened at the communal hut for the morning trail brief over a steaming tea and hearty breakfast. The vista and flora subtly changes as we follow the ridge south with views across the Werdug (Wartook) valley to the south. The effort in constructing this track is truly admirable. On some sections it would take a day to lay just three slabs for steps. In other stages it is like wandering through a landscape architect's native garden. >



**left** Appropriate transport for a road trip with a couple of nights at the secluded DULC cabins. **right** The welcoming Treehouse cabin at DULC after a day on the trail.

Post-lunch, in the lee from a stiff nor'wester, we enter a grove of stunted eucalypts with flame robins flitting through the protective foliage. Further on we descend through towering sclerophyll forest before rising up to the Werdug huts. Incredibly the siting of these sleeping huts is even more astounding. The three demountable huts are positioned amongst large boulders with views framed by these monoliths out to Lake Wartook and the distant Victoria Ranges.

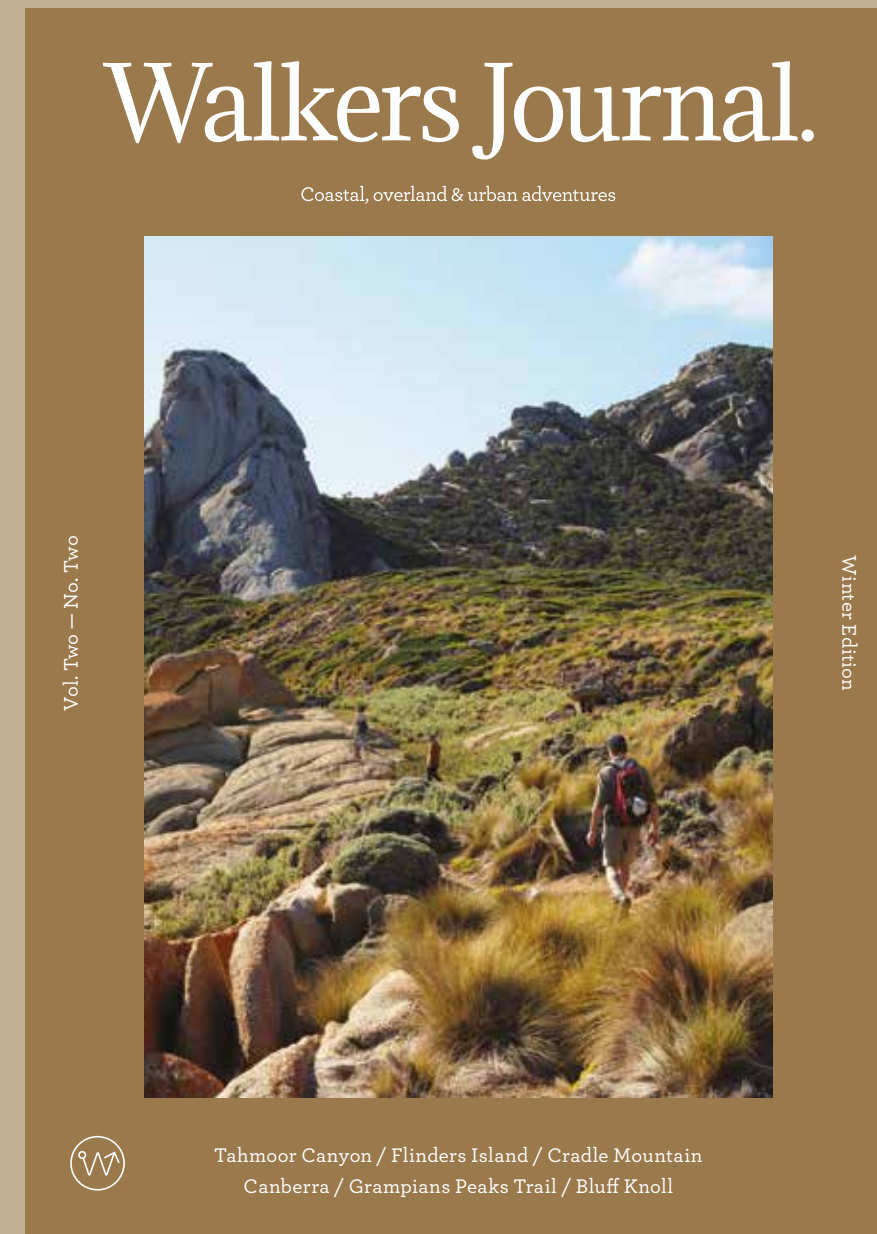
The three-day Northern Huts walk finishes in Halls Gap. This hamlet tucked between the folded sedimentary ranges is an ideal location to spend a few more days exploring the region. There are various accommodation options in the town and environs. We chose the secluded DULC to revitalise weary limbs accompanied by a chorus of twittering New Holland

honeyeaters. From here it is easy to visit local producers and wineries or indulge in more spectacular day walks such as The Pinnacle, The Balconies or any of the nearby waterfalls. Or you may be up for a spot of abseiling or kayaking with the assistance of the capable local operators.

Gariwerd is a favourite destination for many repeat visitors. With this challenging project now completed, the Grampians Peaks Trail is sure to be added to the must-do list for walkers with some overnight hiking experience. 🌿

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