

Meeting with Council and Parks Victoria Regarding the Use of Black Range for Orienteering

Meeting held at Ararat at 3pm on Tuesday December 4 2012

Present: Don Fell (secretary of Orienteering Victoria)
Jenny Bourne (orienteer)
Geoff Lawford (orienteer)

Scot Douglas, Northern Grampians Shire (Planner)
Shirley Rickard, Northern Grampians Shire (Event Administration)
Anne-Marie Browne, City of Greater Ararat (Events Coordinator)
Prue Daley, Parks Victoria (Tourism and Communications)
David Roberts, Parks Victoria (Ranger in Charge - Grampians)

Absent: Joel Hastings, City of Greater Ararat (Planner)

The meeting lasted a little over an hour. Most of the non-orienteers were unfamiliar with orienteering and so the meeting started with a general description of the nature of orienteering and then some additional description on what the 2015 national championships carnival might involve. The remainder of the meeting largely consisted of us fielding questions about assembly area, facilities that would be erected and the like. They asked where people would stay. Anne-Marie Browne asked if we had figures on the financial benefit to the local community of the carnival (Don estimated a figure per person). But the general tone of the meeting – like the phone discussions I had previously had with Scot Douglas and Prue Daley - was negative. They did not appear to welcome the carnival and the benefits this might bring to their community. They spoke of obstacles for orienteering in the Black Range. Prue Daley and Scot Douglas did much of this talking, with Scot at one stage bordering on being rude. Anne-Marie Browne was more positive and encouraging (though only a smaller part of the range falls within her Shire). We presented them with a document explaining the sport, plus one or two other documents detailing the environmental impact of orienteering.

The obstacles for orienteering in the Black Range, and as presented to us at the meeting, are:

1. Most of the area of interest is in the Northern Grampians Shire, most being private land, though some land is held by Parks Victoria. Scot Douglas's interpretation of the Planning Scheme is that organised recreation/sport is banned from private land in the Black Range (zoned Rural Conservation). Should the Planning Scheme change (it is under review) he considers orienteering would be allowed after obtaining a Planning Permit (a fairly costly time consuming process).
2. There are three aboriginal groups with interest in the area and their permission would be needed to access the area. It was suggested that they may require that significant areas be out of bounds. And that also it may take up to a year to obtain permission.
3. There is a Black Range Land Management Group which is a powerful lobby/interest group in the area with a strong conservation focus. It was suggested it would be critical to obtain their permission for access to the area and that this might be difficult.
4. The area is divided into many small landholdings. Chasing their permission for access may be difficult and time consuming. Council offered to help in a small way in this regard.

My personal recommendation is to look elsewhere for holding of the 2015 carnival. Although the area appears to be particularly attractive for orienteering the work involved in gaining permission for use of the area is too onerous and there is too great a risk that one or more of the owners/interest groups, after initially giving permission for access, may change their mind, leaving us out-of-pocket (for mapping) and in a position where a hasty rethink/re-organisation of the carnival is required at a late stage.

It may be worth revisiting the area again for orienteering potential if the Planning Scheme is revised as currently suggested, and Scot Douglas retires.

Geoff Lawford