

# **Harmans Valley - A Landscape of Natural and Cultural Significance: A Significant Landscape Overlay is needed to protect this valley from further human- caused destructive activity**

Dr Diane Luhrs  
Sociologist/Social Geographer  
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## **Credentials**

- Active member of Hamilton Field Naturalists Club since 1998. Researcher, writer/editor and publisher of two books for Hamilton Field Naturalists Club both of which include discussion on the significant geological features of Mt Napier and the Harmans Valley lava flow and their associated flora and fauna. Aboriginal presence is also recorded through images of the remnants of the stone dwellings near the tumuli alongside Old Crusher Rd.
- Former local government councillor (1992-1994) with City of Hamilton with interests in promoting tourism and instituting the conservation overlay for the City of Hamilton based on Timothy Hubbard's (1991) Conservation Study for the City of Hamilton.
- Secondary school science teacher in Hamilton 1987-2008 – with a commitment to understanding, valuing and caring for the local environment and incorporating these into secondary science curricula – both the social and natural histories of the volcanic landscapes and features SW of Hamilton.
- From a local (SGSC) multigenerational farming family with a member of the 5<sup>th</sup> generation of Luhrs now working the family farm.
- PhD research (2013-2017) into intergenerational family farm transfer and the emotional and economic attachments family members have to each other, farming, their farming properties and their communities.

## **Area of concern: Two maps show the volcanic regions of Victoria and of Australia (ppt slide no 2)**

We can see from the maps that the volcanic regions (while the volcanic areas may appear extensive for people who live on or near them) are in fact only a small fraction of the entire landmass of our continent. Furthermore, until very recently, the Harmans Valley was a relatively undisturbed/preserved geological landmark of interest to many people for a variety of reasons – interests which also added to the local economy by way of visitation to the region.

## **Hamilton Field Naturalists Club – background to interest in and concern for Mt Napier and the Harmans Valley lava flow (ppt slide nos 4-14 ).**

By the 1950s in this region, there were very few areas not committed to grazing, agriculture or forestry. The only areas retaining remnant vegetation and supporting native fauna were those that were regarded as unproductive wastelands, too difficult for grazing or agriculture or those gazetted as Crown Land. (Luhrs 2009: 6)

The HFNC was formed in 1958 out of interest in natural history by members of the Hamilton community, and because of their concern for the conservation of undeveloped lands in the surrounding district. They saw that unless action was taken, most of the remnant native vegetation and associated fauna and special ecological zones would be lost due to farming or forestry activities.

(Luhrs 2009: 5)

The founding members set the agenda for what this year will be 60 years of environmental activities to visit, record and conserve the natural phenomena within our region. These phenomena include Aboriginal art, artefacts and occupation sites, geology, flora, fauna and ecological zones.

Two HFNC publications depicting HFNC's commitment to surveying and preserving the region's volcanic landscapes (ppt slide no 4)

After 50 years of HFNC activities, a book was compiled to celebrate the club's activities and achievements and further alert the general populace of ongoing threats to the remnants of native flora fauna and geological landforms. The following extracts describe the importance given by HFNC members to Mt Napier and its valleys of lava flows:

Lionel Elmore and Ellis Tucker were the key reporters of geological phenomena during the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, Lionel was the strong advocate for the declaration of Mt Napier and surrounding lava canals and caves as a National Park. He led HFNC in its submissions to the Land Conservation Council during the 1970s for the declaration of Mt Napier as a National Park. (Luhrs 2009: 70)

Ken Grimes (consultant geologist) joined HFNC in the late 1980s and since that time led many excursions to areas of volcanic interest and to limestone regions near and in SE South Australia. Ken has shared his cave survey experiences both on excursions and in special presentations and has provided more details in Rocks and Landforms around Hamilton in Chapter 6. (Luhrs 2009: 70)

The variety of excursions to the many different landforms in the region and submissions for the preservation of significant landforms is evidence of the HFNC's continuing interest in and commitment to preserving local geological landforms and associated flora and fauna.

The Hamilton Field Naturalists Club produced the Hamilton Region Nature Guide in 2010 to share its knowledge of the local environment to both educate people about and interest them in the special locations within an hour's drive of Hamilton. The nature guide was made available to locals and visitors through tourist and retail outlets in the Shire. The volcanic landscapes of Harmans Valley feature in this guide.

**Aboriginal settlement along the Harmans Valley (ppt slide nos 15-17)**

It is now acknowledged (even in Wikipedia) that the SW region of Victoria supported settled populations of Indigenous tribes within defined territories. The fertile and well-watered region with its abundance of wildlife within close proximity supported many settlements of Indigenous people before competition for land for grazing by European pastoralists and their activities to drain many of the extensive wetlands displaced Indigenous people from these lands.

**Visitors and school excursions (ppt slide nos 18-19)**

Science/geography/SOSE include local social and natural phenomena in their curricula. Excursions to particular sites are complementary activities to reinforce student learning. Whole day excursions enable students to experience the diversity and extent of volcanic features within the SW region of Victoria – An excursion to Mt Napier, the Harmans Valley lava flow and the Wallacedale tumuli enables students to appreciate particular volcanic features as well as to observe the effects of volcanic eruptions on and over adjacent landscapes.

Local residents and their visitors and tourists stop to view, appreciate and learn about the region's volcanic landscapes.

School excursions, local day trips with visitors and tourism all add to the health of the local economy – food, fuel and accommodation costs.

Changes to Harmans Valley and the valley view to Mt Napier are apparent in photographs taken in different years (ppt slide no 21)

Current view versus 2001 view. Changes since 2001:

1. Profile of Mt Napier Shield cone obscured by growing plantation;
2. Shrubs (native vegetation) removed from valley;
3. Decrease in rocky surface and increase in cultivated area – removal of rocky habitat

'Unproductive wastelands' and crown lands are areas of environmental significance, and they are 'productive localities'

1. They retain the remnants of the previously extensive native flora and, therefore, habitats for native fauna.
2. They contain evidence of local Aboriginal habitation and activity – long after other areas had been taken up and altered through the activities associated with pastoralism and agriculture.

Harmans Valley is one such area – too difficult to cultivate – and, so, conserved, that is, until the recent years.

The use of rock-crushing of machines:

- Disrupts/destroys the geological formation (the rocks) of the lava flow from Mt Napier;
- Eradicates the geological and Aboriginal history of the area; AND
- Removes the native flora and fauna of the previously relatively undisturbed lava flow.

### **Review of SGSC Planning Scheme Amendment C36 – Part A**

1. Acknowledgement of “a threat of permanent and irreversible damage” to a significant landscape (p. 2). **AGREE**
2. “The proposed amendment will achieve the objectives of section 4(1)(d) of the Planning and Environment Act 1987 as it aims to conserve and enhance places of scientific, aesthetic, historical interest and special cultural value” (p.8). Amendment C36 as it currently stands **DOES NOT** do so!
3. “Planning authorities ... should endeavour ... [to] balance conflicting objectives in favour of net community benefit and sustainable development for the benefit of present and future generations” (p.8). **CONFLICTS WITH POINT 2**
4. “Avoiding development impacts on land that contains ... landscape amenity ... cultural heritage and recreation values, assets and recognised uses” (p.8) .... Assessment comment “... development impacts should be avoided” (p.9). AND, specifically, Harmans Valley is recognized as one such place (p.10). **AGREE**
5. Natural resource management – “to protect productive farmland” (p. 10), BUT Harmans Valley lava flow is not currently regarded as productive farmland (p. 11). **AGREE**
6. The real issue is “C36 enables continuation of normal ‘as of right’ farming practices and includes exemptions for farm tracks and fencing. This is considered an appropriate balance with the need for conservation of an area with special cultural value” (p.11). **THIS IS A REAL PROBLEM** for managing the lava flow for conservation of significant heritage and landscape values, as “as of right” farming practices have the potential to degrade or destroy the significant features in the

Harmans Valley lava flow. While current farm owners may adhere to the intention of the SLO for the lava flow in the immediate future, there is nothing to stipulate how future property owners may construct farm tracks and fences over the Harmans Valley lava flow, nor how current owners may act in the distant future with respect to 'as of right' farming practices.

7. Environmental and landscape values – Assessment comment: “local policy contains strong direction to protect significant volcanic features and their setting” (p. 16). **NOT SO!** “Minimise” and “discourage” has not ensured the protection of “volcanic peaks and features” (p.16).
8. Key issues discussed – The purpose of the SLO “not to be seen as the only mechanism to control or protect the Harmans Valley area” (p. 20). **DISAGREE - The SLO MUST be seen as the mechanism to protect against degradation/ destruction of the remaining intact volcanic features of the Harmans Valley lava flow and hence of its geology and associated flora, fauna and relics of Indigenous habitation.**

## Conclusions

1. The lava flow in Harmans Valley extending from Mt Napier and containing evidence of significant geological formations and associated flora and fauna ought to be protected for conservation of this natural history.
2. The lava flow in Harmans Valley contains real and significant evidence of Aboriginal habitation and ought to be protected because of this anthropological/archaeological significance.
3. The Southern Grampians Shire ought to institute a Significant Landscape Overlay that recognises and protects the Harmans Valley lava flow and its associated natural and anthropological features but which does not hinder farming activities outside and/or adjacent to this lava flow.
4. Conservation ought to be over the whole length, width and depth of the lava flow and not just for selected sections because the whole flow provides the context of the different significant features.
5. The Southern Grampians Shire Council’s SLO for Harmans Valley must:
  - \* provide a precise map that shows clearly the boundaries of the lava flow and other adjacent significant related features (such as stone walls),

AND

\* inform the public of which particular areas are included in the SLO, which activities are permitted on this designated area and which activities are forbidden or subject to SGSC SLO regulation.

The proposed C36 overlay does not appear to specify that the volcanic rocks must not be crushed or moved. Therefore, the overlay does not appear to protect the integrity of the lava flow and its associated features. The farm business exemptions allowed are problematic for the protection of the features of this significant landscape.

6. The Southern Grampians Shire Council’s Significant Landscape Overlay ought to include regulation of how, where and how many farm tracks and fences are constructed along and across the Harmans Valley lava flow to reduce impact over this significant landscape. These structures should not be exempted from the SLO requirements.

**Diane Luhrs 2018**

