

Entering a
rainforest
pocket.

GREAT ICONIC
WALKS
.....
HUME AND
HOVELL TRACK,
NSW

TRACKS LESS TRAVELLED

After a few days on the track, *Great Walks* asks, is the Hume and Hovell Australia's most underrated multi-dayer?

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WORDS AND PHOTOS_ CARO RYAN (LOTSAFRESHAIR.COM)



Right: Lunchtime cuppa in the forest.
PAMELA BLACK

Below: Paddys River Dam Campsite.



SAY the word, ‘Snowys’, and most Aussies will immediately think of either ski resorts or the Main Range megalith. Classic hiking icons of Feathertop or Bogong; Kosciusko or Twynam (see pg 26) have been in the spotlight for many years, whilst a quiet corner of the region has been developing an impressive multi-day bushwalking track, away from the ridges and breathless ascents of its brash eastern neighbour.

Stretching 426km from Yass to Albury, the Hume and Hovell Track is a route I’ve never been able to picture exactly where it goes. It calls the green space between the Great Dividing Range to the east and the Hume Highway to the west home, hiding itself within a mix of state forest, Crown land, private land,

local council and national park.

On its meandering journey southwest, it marches through the Yass Valley, brushes past the best of the thriving Riverina communities of Tumut, Tumbarumba and Batlow (with their excellent local produce including local beer and one of Australia’s best Chardonnays) and many other small towns and villages, before shadowing the Murray River towards Lake Hume, arriving in Albury.

It’s here that I have a confession to make and an apology to offer. Somewhere along the line of my bushwalking career, I’d heard rumours of the Hume and Hovell Track and to my detriment, believed them. The impression I received was that it was mostly firetrail and not that interesting. I was wrong.

The spice of life

It’s true to say that beauty is in the eye of the beholder and when it comes to what people are drawn to when walking in nature, the choice is endless. One of the things that I look for in a multi-day bushwalking experience is diversity. I want each day to be different. Different views, different ecosystems, different plant life, different track styles. Mix it up and surprise me around every corner. When it comes to firetrails, I welcome them when they bring the opportunity to stretch my legs and switch-off from the mental focus that is needed on a technical single-track or rock scramble.

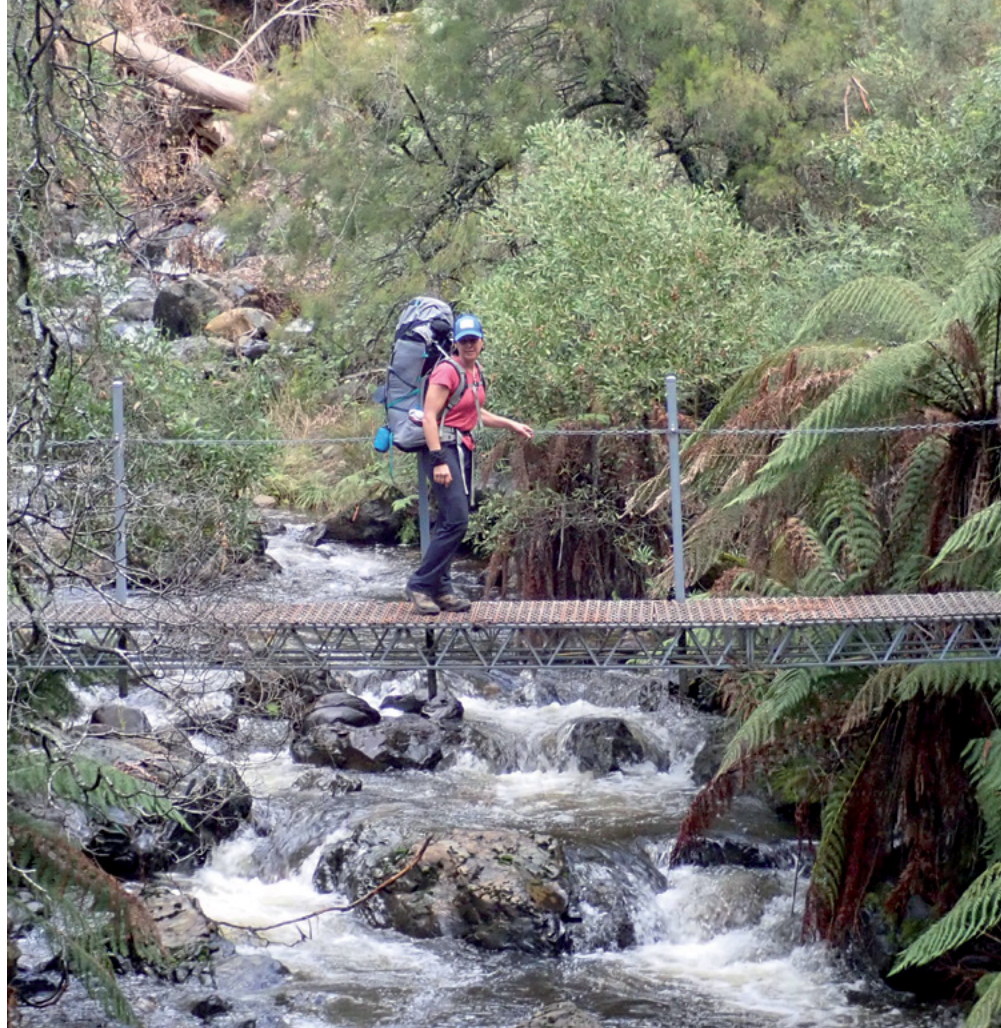
Not having 21 days up my sleeve to undertake the full length of the track and enjoy all 20 campsites, I’ve chosen a three-day section that sees me bookend my trip with a night in Talbingo at the start and a wash up at the end (with a good meal) in Tumbarumba.

Renowned as being one of the best sections of the track, it demonstrates the flexibility and options available to link up local townships and communities, perfect for re-supply, real beds and a hot shower, whilst choosing a duration to suit all types of walkers.

Talbingo (population 250), like its eastern cousin, Jindabyne, was originally a tiny settlement on the Tumut River that was flooded to make way for the Jounama Dam, part of the iconic Snowy-Hydro Scheme in 1968. Although the Hume and Hovell track passes by on the other side of the Jounama Pondage, with clever transfer arrangements, it made for a good launch point from our AirBnB in town. Rumours of a proposed

Right: The Hume and Hovell features around a 1000 small bridges.

Below: Buddong Falls.



footbridge across the Tumut River would make a genius link to the town and no doubt improve the walker experience.

The presence of Snowy-Hydro and its impact on the region, follows us for our first couple of hours of walking. The Tumut 3 Power Station and its six elephant-trunk like pipes cascade down the hill towards the Pondage, whilst its hungry power line tendrils send forth its plunder.

Underfoot, earthy single track, ripe with forest fungus, leads us past the first official campsite we encounter, the Benjamin Smith campsite. A grassy island in the middle of the forest ocean, with a picnic shelter, toilet, fireplace and water tank it's cleverly located away from a trail-head, so less prone to non-walking visitors.

“FROM FOREST TO FARMLAND, GULLY TO GORGE, THE WHITE TRACK MARKERS CLEARLY SHOW THE WAY.”

start of construction in the eighties, it was a Bicentennial grant of \$1.3 million that drove through much of the work. Overall, about 50% of the 426km is on specially constructed single track, whilst the rest is along fire and management trails. The intensive research that went into the planning stages ensured that most of the track is within 5km of the actual route that Hume and Hovell took. The section from Talbingo to Tumbarumba is closer to 85% single track and 15% firetrail.

It isn't long after leaving the shores of the Pondage, a picture-perfect spot for morning tea, that we begin steadily and gently to ascend single track through dry sclerophyll forest, entering Kosciuszko NP. Here, with no evidence of the lower farmland introduced blackberries (which I'm sure would be delicious and a handy hiking snack in season!) the song of running water from Buddong Creek starts to call. More cascade than falls, Buddong is our constant friend this day with lunch taken

DID YOU KNOW

Whilst the track is managed by Crown Lands, the responsibility of upkeep and maintenance is overseen by Snowy Valleys Council, with much of the physical trackwork carried out by low-risk inmates from the Mannus Correctional Centre.

The Hume and Hovell Ultra is an annual trail running event, with races varying from 22km to 160km and starting from the Henry Angel Track head near Tumbarumba.

Sign of the times

From forest to farmland, gully to gorge, the white track markers (with a logo that represents Hamilton Hume and William Hovell from their 1824 expedition) clearly show the way. In contrast to Hume and Hovell, my bushwalking buddy and I are getting along well and there are times when our minds and chatter wander. Distracted, I realise that we really should pay more attention to those little signs! Such is the way of a walking holiday and this certainly feels like it.

Whenever I walk a track, I can't help but think about the people that made it. From the seed of an idea in the seventies, to the



Clockwise from above:

Tree fungus on the track.

Near Talbingo.
PAMELA BLACK.

Buddong Hut

near the river crossing by one of 100 bridges built specifically for the track. I catch myself thinking I can hear music, but it is merely the thump and trill of water pounding on rock.

Fuelled by lunch, we begin the 300m ascent (over 1.5km) to arrive at the Buddong Falls Campsite. Located on a track junction beside a firetrail, we elect to continue on to Buddong Hut in search of solitude.

Built in 1925 to house Water Resources personnel, it's our cosy home for the night as temperatures drop below zero and the fireplace draws us in. Unfortunately, like many accessible mountain huts, it's wallpapered with graffiti and we spend some time removing rubbish and tidying up. Again, as I lay down, strains of acoustic music seemed to drift up from Buddong Creek, only metres from the hut. I fall asleep to the lullaby of the forest.

Winter is coming

Awoken by the sound of rain on the corrugated iron roof, I'm surprised to push open the wooden shutter to find deep blue skies and no sign of cloud. The chill rushes in and I see that the rain is actually water, released from its frozen state, dropping from the frosted towering trees above. The sun catches the droplets as they fall to the ground.

Pressing ourselves into the day, we hit the trail and head for the highest part of the entire track at 1230m. With childish delight, we built the world's smallest snowman (8cm) at the first

patch of white, without realising we would spend many hours later today crunching our way through the remains of the recent snow dump, with up to 5cm blanketing the ground. Fitting for the first day of Winter!

Silence. Silence and the crunch of our feet through the bracken fern-fringed snowy track. This could be my 'walking day of the year'. Magical, in a children's storybook kind of way, there's no sound of birdlife, no wind, just deep blue skies and giant trees hugging us as we walk along with a sense of awe. A cathedral to the majesty and wonder of life.

It's a late lunch when the silence is broken by the hum of trail bikes, signalling once again, that we've moved away from the deep forest that single track brings and are getting closer to firetrails and other people. We haven't seen anyone for almost two days, however we're coming towards our second camp at Paddy's River Dam – a popular spot for 4WDing and camping.

It's here that the smart design of this section of the track reveals itself. The track markers lead past a toilet, across a small bridge and to a lovely northeast facing grassy campsite, accessible only to walkers. The car campers and 4WDers are content on the other side of the mirror-like dam, their voices only drift across occasionally.

Up here at 1160m, the overnight temps drop to around – 6°C bringing an ice-crusted Narnia landscape. As the sun rises before us, we're surrounded by crystal tipped tussock grass, glinting their rainbow-colour spectrum.

NEED TO KNOW

Advice on transfers, accommodation and track conditions:

facebook.com/humeandhovelltrack

Also for more info on the Snowy Valley's region go to
visitsnowyvalleys.com.au
humeandhovelltrack.com.au

“KNOWN TO GROW TO 90M IN HEIGHT WE CRANE OUR NECKS TO SEE THEIR TOPS.”



Above: Nature as art

Left: Paddys River Dam.

Making a connection

I fight every winter campers struggle of deciding whether to wait and dry the tents or hit the track. But with 17.5km ahead of us and a transfer pickup scheduled for 2pm, we give in and pack our damp tents away, ice falling off them as they collapse to the ground.

Skirting the dam towards the silent car-campers, we plunge into the forest (once again on single track) for what becomes our most diverse day in terms of changing landscapes. Bago State Forest is famous for its red stringybark and peppermint pox, but it's the giant alpine ash (*Eucalyptus delegatensis*) with its common name that never fails to make me smile, woollybut. Known to grow to 90m in height we crane our necks to see their tops and stretch our arms to estimate their girth – some are up to 8m around their base.

All this size, silence and snow conspires to remind me why I love bushwalking in Australia. A connection to all living things, being humbly reminded of my place amongst it all and the chance to experience it.

The stringy bark decorations of the Alpine Ash begin to change as the trail starts to descend around the headwaters of East Burra Creek, through wet sclerophyll forest. The crunch of an icy single track gives way to tiny sections of muddy, fern framed gullies surprising us with what looked like micro-pockets of rainforest.

Pressing on towards our planned 4WD pickup at Hussels Mill, near Tumbarumba, I feel like the branches of these wondrous giant trees are reaching out to hold me back. I don't want to break free from their clutches, but our short three days has come to an end – the perfect teaser for a longer journey along the Hume and Hovell Track. ⚙️

Great Walks was a guest of Destination NSW ⚙️

WALK NOTES | HUME AND HOVELL TRACK, NSW

Total Distance: 426km | **Average duration:** 21 days | **Grade:** moderate
Start: Yass | **Finish:** Albury | **Campsites:** 17

