

Overview of existing walking trail classification systems

Walking Trails Classification & Improvement Project

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Executive Summary

Walking is the easiest physical activity for Victorians to undertake and is the most popular physical activity undertaken in Victoria's parks and forests. Victoria has more than 2,000 trails with a total length of some 8,000 kilometres. These walks vary from short walks of a few hundred metres to long-distance trails that take many days to traverse. However, there are no standards for trail classification that make it easy for the public to choose the trail that is suitable to their skills and level of fitness. Victorian trails are currently classified in different ways on different land tenures and across different parts of the State. Where trail classifications vary, are confusing or are poorly understood, it can act as a deterrent to people undertaking walks, particularly to less confident and able walkers.

Trail classifications are a primary means of marketing and promoting walking trails and enable trail users to gauge whether a particular trail is suitable for them. Whilst there is an Australian Standard for walking trail construction (AS 2156.1), there is no Australian Standard to classify or grade the difficulty to complete the trail. The lack of an agreed trail classification standard for Statewide use (which addresses signage, trail rating and degree of difficulty) limits the accessibility and use of walking trails for recreation and physical activity.

The need for uniform trail classification standards was highlighted as a key action in the Victorian Trails Strategy 2005-2010. As a result the Walking Trails and Improvement Project sets out the Implementation Plan to achieve this goal. The project is funded by Go For Your Life (GFYL) which seeks to improve the ongoing health and wellbeing of the Victorian community by reducing preventable chronic diseases. The first stage of this plan is research and consultation.

The findings are summarised in a table that comprises the systems researched. In Australia, the research investigated Victoria, New South Wales, Tasmania, Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia. At an international level the research investigated the classification systems used by selected countries that are considered leaders in walking trails. These included New Zealand, United States, United Kingdom, Canada, South Africa and Ireland. The last section of the table includes a literature review of books, walking guides, articles and official publications.

There is no separate section for the classification systems for disabled access that were identified. These appear in a subsection under the organisation implementing them.

Research found that the majority of walking trails in Australia have been built or improved to meet the Australian Standard AS 2156.1. However AS 2156.1 considers design and construction standards but does not take into account factors such as level of fitness or ability of the user to complete the trail.

Inconsistency in the classification systems for walking trails used across organisations and different land tenures was also identified. Although trails are classified in Victoria and Australia, and the difficulty level for some trails is provided, the description and definitions behind each level are not always available resulting in ambiguity of the information. This makes it harder for the user to determine the difficulty level assigned to each walk. The research identified the complexity of the classification systems proposed by some articles and academic papers.

People with a disability can be regarded as one of the higher user groups of information concerning the classification of walking trails, and also as one of the groups that would rely on and benefit the most from the existence of this information. There is generally very little information on access for people with disabilities and barely any classification systems in place.

General interest in the implementation of a standard walking trails classification system was identified during conversations with various stakeholders in Victoria and other states, especially those from local councils. Some stakeholders mentioned that they do not use any classification systems but they would be interested in implementing one.

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1. Project Background

The **Walking Trails Classification and Improvement Project** is funded under **Go For Your Life (GFYL)**, which is a whole-of-government initiative aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of Victorians through healthy eating and increased participation in physical activity. Walking is seen as an inexpensive activity that can be undertaken by the majority of the population in a variety of settings.

There are four DSE/Parks Victoria projects funded under this initiative:

- Walking Trails Classification and Improvement project
- Green Gym
- East Gippsland GFYL community partnerships
- GFYL Active in Parks

The Walking Trails Classification and Improvement Project is funded for 4 years and is coordinated through DSE. There are two parts to the project:

- Developing a standard classification system for walking trails across Victoria
- Facilitating upgrades to selected forest walking trails

This project will work across agencies and key stakeholders such as Bushwalking Victoria to develop uniform trail classification standards for walking trails. It will ensure the physical activity dividend from Victoria's investment in its walking trail network is maximised by making it easier for people to select walks that suit their needs.

By developing a standard classification system, walkers will be better able to make informed decisions about trails that are suitable for them in terms of the required time and fitness level needed.

2. Research Background

In order to develop a standard classification system for walking trails in Victoria it was necessary to identify the systems that are currently being used across the state, in other states and overseas. This objective is set out in the research and consultation stage of the Implementation Plan for the Walking Trails Classification and Improvement Project.

This report aims to achieve the following deliverables set out in the Implementation Plan:

- Complete research on current walking trail classifications systems in use in Victoria, other states and internationally (to include disabled access classification systems), across Parks Victoria, Department of Sustainability and Environment, local councils, walking clubs and in saleable publications promoting walking.
- Conduct consultation with interstate and international land management agencies to research current walking trail classifications systems in use (to include disabled access classification systems).

The research includes detail on the definitions and descriptions behind each level in individual classifications where available.

The methods used to complete this research included desktop research, telephone interviews with selected land managers, collection of brochures from various sources and library research for literature review.

3. Findings

A summary of the findings of the research is presented in this section in a table that compares various Walking Trails Classification Systems used by different organisations and specialised publications. The systems researched were found in various resources including telephone interviews, books, guides, reports, other publications and internet sites. The table integrates three columns that list: the organisation, the categories they use and the description of these categories where available.

The first section of the table analyses the systems used in Australia including Victoria, New South Wales, Tasmania, Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia. It excludes the Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory. This section generally looks at state-government agencies and government initiatives (Great Walks of Queensland and Trails South Australia), local councils and in some cases it also studies the classifications by certain associations or committees within each state.

The following section looks into the classification systems used by selected countries that are considered leaders in walking trails. They include New Zealand, United States, United Kingdom, Canada, South Africa and Ireland. A particularly interesting finding is that the Irish Trail Strategy makes mention of Victoria as a leader in walking trails.

Relevant literature is analysed in the final section, which compares the classifications used by different publications specialising in walking and bushwalking. There is little academic research on walking trails available in Australia and other countries. However, some documents were provided by different organisations and they are also analysed in this section, along with academic articles.

Some of the organisations included in this section did not provide any classification systems but provided some important findings. One example is the Department of Environment and Conservation in Western Australia that has currently completed a proposal for a state-wide walking trails classification system. This proposal is currently under consultation by various Local Government Areas (LGAs) and committees.

There is no separate section for the classification systems for disabled access; they appear in a subsection under the organisation implementing them.

Some of the findings from this research include the inconsistency of walking trail classification systems across organisations and land tenures, the lack of detail behind the classification systems and the complexity of classification systems proposed by some articles. A major finding of this research is also the fact that although trails are classified in Victoria and Australia, and the level of classification for some trails is provided, very little information is available on the description or the definition behind each level. In addition, it appears that walking trail classification systems are implemented inconsistently across individual land management sectors, even when they exist for management purposes.

Along with the classification systems, descriptive information has been also studied when available. This section includes an analysis of whether descriptive information is provided uniformly throughout the trails listed for the organisations. These descriptive elements are particularly time and distance.

Descriptive Information			
	Provided	Uniformly	Meaning
Time			
	Yes	Always	Always listed
	Yes	Partial	Not always listed
	No		Never listed
Distance			
	Yes	Always	Always listed
	Yes	Partial	Not always listed
	No		Never listed

Existing Walking Trail Classification Systems

3.1 Australia		
3.1.1 Australian Standard AS 2156.1		
Class	Item	Description
Class 1	Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities: walks for a large number of visitors, including visitors with reduced mobility. • High level facilities and interpretation. • Numerous opportunities to learn about the natural environment (by the use of interpretive signs or brochures) • Regular encounters with other visitors.
	Track Conditions	Wide track with hard surface (appropriate for wheelchairs). Width: 1.2m or more. Good maintenance, minimum intrusions.
	Gradient	The grades are compatible with the AS 1428 series Steps only when ramp is also available.
	Signage	Frequent use of signs for interpretation and management purposes. Intersections should have arrow type track markers
	Infrastructure	Facilities may include lookout platforms, seats and barrier rails. No camping permitted along the track in general.
	Terrain	No need of previous experience is required for the user. Personal Safety: exercise normal care
	Weather	N/A
Class 2	Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities: Trails are easy to walk. Offered to a large number of visitors. • High level facilities and interpretation. • Moderate to plentiful opportunities to learn about the natural environment (by the use of interpretive signs or brochures) • Regular encounters with other visitors.
	Track Conditions	In general, modified hardened surface. Width: 0.9m or more Good maintenance, minimum intrusions
	Gradient	In general no steeper than 1:10. Keep the use of steps to a minimum.
	Signage	Signs for management and interpretation often used. Intersections should have arrow type track markers

	Infrastructure	Facilities may include lookout platforms, seats and barrier rails. No camping permitted along the track in general.
	Terrain	No need of previous experience is required for the user. Personal Safety: exercise normal care
	Weather	N/A
Class 3	Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities: Slightly modified natural environments. Require a moderate level of fitness. • Provision of facilities and interpretation not common. • Opportunities to observe and appreciate the natural environment (limited use of interpretive signs or brochures) • Sporadic encounters with other visitors.
	Track Conditions	In general, modified surface and some sections hardened. Width: variable and less than 1.2m Minimum intrusions and obstacles.
	Gradient	Short sections may exceed 1:10, but in general no steeper than 1:10. Steps may be commonly used.
	Signage	Signs for management and interpretation with limited use. Signs and trackers for direction may be used.
	Infrastructure	Facilities not provided in most of the cases. Only for safety and environmental considerations. No camping permitted along the track in general.
	Terrain	No need of bushwalking experience necessary. Minimum level of specialised skills. Common natural hazards include steep slopes, unsuitable surfaces and minor water crossings.
	Weather	Navigation and safety may be affected by storms.
Class 4	Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities: Relatively undisturbed natural environments. Require a moderate level of fitness. • Minimal facilities. • Opportunities to observe and appreciate the natural environment without provision of signage. • Opportunities for solitude with few encounters with others.
	Track Conditions	In general, distinct but without major modifications. Width: variable Encounters with fallen debris and obstacles likely.
	Gradient	Only limited by environmental and maintenance considerations.
	Signage	Minimal signage for management and directional purposes only.
	Infrastructure	Facilities not provided in most of the cases. Only for safety and environmental considerations.
	Terrain	Moderate level of specialised skills eg. navigation, emergency first aid. Users need to be self reliant.
	Weather	Storms and severe weather may affect navigation and safety.
Class 5	Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities: for visitors to find their own way along often indistinct tracks in remote locations. • Require advanced outdoor knowledge and skills. • Few encounters with other visitors. Frequent opportunities for solitude.

	Track Conditions	Little modification to natural surfaces. The alignment of the track may be unclear in places. Minimum clearing. Debris along the track.
	Gradient	Steep sections of unmodified surfaces may be present.
	Signage	Limited. Only for management purposes.
	Infrastructure	Facilities: generally not available. Only provided for safety and environmental considerations.
	Terrain	High degree of specialised skills required, including navigation. Maps and navigation equipment necessary to complete the track. Users are self-reliant in the case of an emergency and weather hazards or in the need of first aid.
	Weather	Storms and severe weather may affect the navigation and safety of visitors.
Class 6	Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities: for experienced walkers to explore remote and challenging natural areas. • No reliance on managed tracks. • Long periods of solitude. Limited encounters with others.
	Track Conditions	Natural environment, non-modified.
	Gradient	Steep sections of unmodified surfaces.
	Signage	Not provided, generally.
	Infrastructure	Facilities: generally not provided.
	Terrain	Users require previous experience in the outdoors. High level of specialised skills, including navigation. Maps and navigation equipment necessary to complete the track. Users are self-reliant in the case of an emergency and weather hazards or in the need of first aid.
	Weather	Storms and severe weather may affect the navigation and safety of visitors.
Notes	<p>The criteria that need be met to classify a track include track conditions and gradient, signage and infrastructure and also terrain and weather.</p> <p>Each class contained in this standard includes 'guidance for management'. This information has not been considered under the scope of this report, as this does not affect the classification of the trails. The full document can be found at www.standards.com.au</p>	

3.1.2 Victoria				
Organisation	Categories	Description		
Department of Sustainability and Environment (State Forest)	Skill			
	Basic	Users need no previous experience and are expected to exercise normal care regarding their personal safety (C1 & C2).		
	Moderate	Users need no bushwalking experience and a minimum level of specialised skills. Users may encounter natural hazards such as steep slopes, unstable surfaces and minor water crossings. They are responsible for their own safety (C3).		
	Intermediate	Users require a moderate level of specialised skills such as navigation skills. Users may require maps and navigation equipment to successfully complete the track. Users need to be self-reliant, particularly in regard to emergency first aid and possible weather hazards (C4).		
	Advanced	Users require a high degree of specialised skills such as navigation skills. Users may require maps and navigation equipment to successfully complete the track. Users need to be self-reliant, particularly in regard to emergency first aid and possible weather hazards (C5).		
	Expert	Users require previous experience in the outdoors and a high level of specialised skills such as navigation skills. Users will generally require a map and navigation equipment to complete the track. Users need to be self-reliant, particularly in regard to emergency first aid and possible weather hazards (C6)		
	Fitness			
	Low	Low level of fitness required. Grade is mostly flat.		
	Average	Average level of fitness required. Grade has some moderate inclines.		
	High	Good level of fitness required. Some steep inclines which may be sustained.		
	Endurance	High level of fitness required. Regular steep inclines which may be sustained.		
	Notes	The system used by DSE considers Skill and Fitness levels required to complete the walking trail. The classifications draw from AS 2156.1		
	Descriptive Information	Time	Yes (partial)	Distance
Disabled Access	Fully	Independently accessible to people who may be reliant on wheelchairs or walking aids, have difficulty in bending and/or have stamina limitations (i.e. Asthma, heart condition, weak cardio-vascular strength) Specifications: Trails and other facilities provide barrier free access. Gradient <1:12, no steps.		
	Partial	Partly accessible, or accessible only with assistance, to people with the above impairments. Specifications: Trails and other facilities may require assistance to access. Steps present or medium to low gradient.		
	None	Generally inaccessible to people with any of the above impairments. Inaccessible for most people in wheelchairs.		

Organisation	Description			
Parks Victoria (National Parks and State Parks)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The classification used for the public is a descriptive system that measures estimated time and distance. It does not have a prescribed classification system to grade difficulty. It appears that the classification system based on AS 2156.1 is only used internally for management purposes. A number of resources that provide information on walking trails in national parks are available to the public through Parks Victoria, on Parkweb www.parkweb.vic.gov.au, including 'Park Notes' (studied below) and some other relevant publications (see 3.3) that provide information on walking trails. The parks listed below were researched on Parkweb as examples to compare the uniformity of the information available to the public. 			
	<i>Descriptive Information</i>	Time	Yes (partial)	Distance
Park Examples	Document	Description		
Wilson's Promontory	Short Walks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Estimated time and distance Levels of difficulty Easy, Easy/Moderate, Moderate, Moderate/Hard The notes also give information on pram access when available. They mention that Loo-Errn Track is designed for people with limited mobility. 		
Grampians National Park	Visitor Guide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The range of walks vary from 'short easy strolls' to 'challenging overnight expeditions' Walkers are referred to the 'Walking Guides' available at the Cultural Centre 		
	The 'Overnight Walking' fact sheet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information about two overnight walks: 'Fortress & Mt Thackeray' and 'Gar (Mount Difficult) & Briggs Bluff', they are both graded as 'Hard' and the fact sheet also mentions distance and time, elevation change and trail description. 		
Great Otway National Park	Torquay to Kenneth River	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Three walks: time/distance and a brief description for each walk. Separate brochures are available from the Visitor Information Centres with details on the variety of walks available. 		
	Kenneth River to Princetown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Separate brochures are available from the Visitor Information Centres with details on the variety of walks available. 		
Croajingolong National Park	Walks around Shipwreck creek	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lists the walks: time/distance and a brief description for each walk. 		
	Walks around Thurra River and Points Hicks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lists the walks: time/distance and a brief description for each walk. 		
Alpine National Park	Walks around Feathertop, Hotham and Dinner Plain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lists the walks: distance and a brief description for each walk. 		
	Walks around Bogong High Planes and Mountain Creek	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lists the walks: time/distance and a brief description for each walk. 		

Little Desert	Visitor Guide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lists the walks: time/distance and a brief description for each walk. 			
Park Notes by Parks Victoria	Park Notes is the most comprehensive source of information on parks available to the public through at www.parkweb.vic.gov.au . The Park Notes sometimes include walking trails and the classifications used appear to be ad-hoc.				
Tourism Victoria The organisation has included these trails in the ‘walking and cycling trails’ section on www.visitvictoria.com.au , the official website.					
	Category	Description			
	Length	Lists the distance of the walk			
	Walk	Expected time. One way or return.			
	Track	Use of descriptors such as: Good/Moderate/Rocky and rough/etc			
	Grade	Flat/Moderate/Steep			
	Start/Finish	Locates the start and finish points of the walking trail			
	Nearby	Identifies the area in which the trail is located			
	Permits/Bookings	Makes mention of any special requirements to undertake the trail			
	Descriptive Information	Time	Yes (always)	Distance	Yes (always)
Notes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The system seems to be uniformly used throughout the walks listed. This system can be considered user friendly. It is easy to identify the different features of the trail i.e. length, grade, expected time, etc. The site does not present information on the definitions or the descriptions behind each level. This can present a problem for users that need more information to assess their ability to complete the trail. This system does not appear to provide information on disabled access. 				
Other Land Management Agencies					
Alpine Resorts (Examples)	Categories	Description			
Falls Creek	N/A	No system. Describes trails within the resort with lengthy text e.g. ‘flat, wide with gentle gradient’, ‘exposed and steep’, etc.			
Mt Hotham	N/A	Uses an ad hoc system (easy, moderate, difficult).			
Mount Buller / Mount Stirling	Ski Trails	Uses the same system as for their ski trails. Easy (green), intermediate (blue), advanced (black).			
Lake Mountain	N/A	Resort gives no indication of difficulty of trails.			
Mount Baw Baw	Easy	Medium level of fitness.			
	Moderate	Moderately fit.			
	Advanced	Good level of fitness.			

Local Councils (Examples)	Categories	Description			
Swan Hill Rural City	N/A	The communication approach is to inform visitors about the length of the trails as they are relatively flat, smooth and generally easy. The possible difficulty of using a walking trail may be the length and the weather conditions.			
Nillumbik Shire	N/A	There is a description of the walks on the website, but they are not classified.			
Bass Coast Shire	N/A	The walking trails in the area have not been classified. They inform the visitors about possible obstacles that they may find along the way, e.g. fences, gates or loose soil.			
City of Bendigo	Easy	e.g. bitumen track all the way.			
	Easy/Medium	e.g. some hills but footpath and bitumen track all the way.			
	Medium	e.g. steep climb to One Tree Hill lookout; otherwise generally flat.			
	Notes	The classification of walking trails for the public was done in an empirical manner, based on the personal experience of the Project Officer by walking the trails. The elements that were considered while classifying the walking trails include fitness and ability, terrain and surface, and also distance and time, however there is no system to classify the walks. In some cases there is a description provided with the grade. The strategy of the council includes access to trails for people with disabilities.			
	Descriptive Information	Time	Yes (always)	Distance	Yes (always)
Tour Operators (Examples)	Categories	Description			
Grampians Personalised Tours and Adventures	Grade 1 easy	Easy walking along well defined tracks. Minimum climbing or rock hopping.			
	Grade 2 easy/medium	Easy walking along defined tracks with some climbing and rock hopping.			
	Grade 3 medium	Longer walks along defined tracks, challenging steep track gradients, with rock hopping involved.			
	Grade 4 difficult	Strenuous longer walks along defined tracks, may include steeper track gradients, with rock hopping involved.			
Wilderness Escape Outdoor Adventure	All levels	Catering for everyone. Special section in the website for disability services.			
Both Feet	All levels	No grading - quotes distance per day. Divides walks into "Sojourns" (shorter/easier 10km per day) "Great Walks" (longer, 15km per day)			
Auswalk	Easy, moderate, harder	Uses multiple grades within each walk eg. 45% easy, 35% moderate, 20% harder			
Bunyip Tours	Easy, easy-medium	No description			

Epicurious	1 boot (easy)	Up to 3 hours at an easy pace. This may involve ascents and descents but overall the walk is manageable for someone of average fitness.
	2 boots (moderate)	Up to 5 hours walking per day at an easy to moderate pace with some ascents and descents. You will need a good level of fitness.
	3boots(moderate/ Challenging)	Up to 7-8 hours per day at a steady pace with some challenging sections which involve some ascents and descents. You will need a good level of fitness and endurance.

Bushwalking Associations (Examples)

Bushwalking Victoria	N/A	Walksafe Brochure: Recommends users to match difficulty and ability, its website also points out resources available to users through other organisations.
Other		
Adventure Activity Standards	Tracked or easy untracked (easy)	Areas are reliably marked on maps and are obvious on the ground; tracks are inspected on a regular basis and road or other safe collecting features are easily reached within 2 hours by applying elementary navigation principles.
	Difficult or trackless (intermediate)	Limited modifications to the natural surface so that track alignment is indistinct in places: there is minimal clearance along the track: signage is minimal and only for management purposes: there are terrain and man made hazards (such as cliff lines or dense forests): the possibility for changes in weather and visibility exists.
	Bushwalking standard Unmodified landscapes (advanced)	'Unmodified landscapes' are those that are totally natural: where there are no modifications to the natural surface so that track alignment is indistinct and no clearance along the track: there is no signage: the track is not managed for public risk and where the onset of extreme environmental conditions have a significant adverse impact upon the bushwalk.

3.1.3 Australian Capital Territory

Organisation	Categories	Description			
Environment ACT		The walks are described as easy or moderate and give distance and time. There is a broad description of the trail. No consistent system exists in the ACT.			
	<i>Descriptive Information</i>	Time	No	Distance	Yes (Partial)

3.1.4 New South Wales				
Organisation	Categories	Description		
Parks and Wildlife Service	Easy	The classification system is based on AS 2156.1. Description given on each walk.		
	Medium difficulty	The classification system is based on AS 2156.1. Description given on each walk.		
	Difficult	The classification system is based on AS 2156.1. Description given on each walk.		
	Notes	Website http://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/parks.nsf/\$\$search?ReadForm&Type=WalkingTrack has a selection feature that allows users to choose a track of a particular difficulty and filters for area, length, attractions, and landscape features. This page is called 'Find me a walking track'		
	Descriptive Information	Time	Yes (always)	Distance
Disabled access	Easy	Access is free of obstacles such as steps, rough terrain or significant slopes, and may have ramps or boardwalks.		
	Medium	Access presents some minor difficulties, such as a grassy surface. However, you should be able to get around without assistance.		
	Hard	Access is via steps or a steep slope, or you'll have to move across a rough surface (with potholes, tree roots, rocks and/or similar obstacles). Assistance will be necessary.		
	Note	The website has a wheelchair access menu that allows the user to choose a park from a list. Once a park is selected, there is a description of the access conditions in that park.		
NSW Dept of Lands	N/A	There is no classification system in place.		
Alpine Resorts (Examples)				
Perisher Blue	N/A	Resort does not offer many summer activities.		
Thredbo		Comprehensive system of walking trails and maps for summer activities. Trails are classified according to the fitness level required i.e. Low, moderate, high, very high.		
Charlotte Pass	N/A	No trails in this area.		
Selwyn Snowfields	N/A	No summer program.		

Local Councils (Example)				
Blue Mountains Council	Path: easy	All-access. Hard surfaced track with no steps. Suitable for wheelchairs. High safety level. Suitable for all ages and fitness levels.		
	Walk: easy	Well-surfaced track with some steps and few difficulties. Not suitable for wheelchairs. High safety level. Suitable for all ages but take care with children.		
	Track: moderate	A distinct track with steep and rough sections, steps and some difficulties. Moderate safety level. Suitable for people who walk occasionally.		
	Track: hard	A distinct track with long steep and rough sections, many steps and stairs and/or frequent difficulties. Low to moderate safety level. Suitable for people who walk regularly. Visitors with heart or breathing difficulties should not attempt these tracks.		
	Route: hard	Rough, unformed track. May be steep with frequent difficulties. Minimal signage and low safety level. Experienced bushwalkers only. Navigational skills and high level of fitness required. Minimum 3 in group.		
	Notes:	The Blue Mountains Walking Track Management Strategy provided by the council contains detailed information on the application of the AS 2156.1 to the classification system developed for the public.		
	<i>Descriptive Information</i>	Time	Yes (always)	Distance

3.1.5 Northern Territory		
Organisation	Categories	Description
Parks and Wildlife Service		Similar project underway in partnership with Tourism NT, Parks Australia North and NT PWS.
Department of Environment and Heritage		Federal Government regulates Kakadu and Uluru - Kata Tjuta National Parks. Managers in Kakadu are currently working towards a classification system.

3.1.6 Queensland					
Organisation	Categories	Description			
Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service	Class 1	Tracks provide opportunities for large number of visitors, including those with reduced mobility, to traverse the natural environment easily. They provide high level of interpretation and facilities. Steps allowed only with ramp access. Users need no previous experience and are expected to exercise normal care regarding their personal safety.			
	Class 2	Tracks provide opportunities for large numbers of visitors to walk easily in natural environments. They provide moderate to high level interpretation and facilities. Generally low gradients. Users need no previous experience and are expected to exercise normal care regarding their personal safety.			
	Class 3	Tracks provide opportunities for visitors to walk in slightly modified natural environments requiring a moderate level of fitness. They provide low level of interpretation and facilities. Users need no bush walking experience and a minimum level of specialised skills. Users may encounter natural hazards such as steps and slopes, unstable surfaces and minor water crossings. They are responsible for their own safety.			
	Class 4	Tracks provide opportunities for visitors to explore and discover relatively undisturbed natural environments along defined and distinct tracks with minimal (if any) facilities. They provide minimal interpretation and facilities. Users can expect opportunities for solitude and few encounters with others. Users require a moderate level of specialised skills such as navigation skills. Users may require maps and navigation equipment to successfully complete the track. Users need to be self reliant, particularly in regard to emergency first aid and possible weather hazards.			
	Class 5	Tracks provide opportunities for visitors with outdoor skills to discover the natural environment. Visitors require a higher degree of specialised skills such as navigation skills. Users may require maps and navigation equipment to successfully complete the track. Users need to be self-reliant, particularly in regard to emergency first aid and possible weather hazards.			
	Class 6	Users require previous experience in the outdoors and a high level of specialised skills such as navigational skills. Users will generally require a map and navigation equipment to complete the track. Users need to be self-reliant, particularly in regard to emergency first aid and possible weather hazards.			
		The classifications used for the Great Walks of Queensland , are based on the AS 2156.1. There is no detail or definitions behind each class. All the walks are listed in the QPWS website but the information provided, varies from trail to trail (including the fact that some walks only show time/distance and some others are classified).			
		Descriptive Information	Time	Yes (always)	Distance
Disabled access	N/A	Brochure 'Access for people with disabilities' offers information on access to 16 different parks and also a link for further reference on 30 other parks.			
	Notes	The QPWS is runs the Great Walks of Queensland. The QPWS also has an interactive spreadsheet to assess the classification of walks. It seems that this is for management purposes and is not universally applied.			

Examples	Categories	Description			
Great Walks of Queensland - Sunshine Coast Hinterland		<p>The tracks in this area are divided into short and long walks. Both systems are classified under the AS 2156.1. However, the information provided for long walks is merely descriptive and it does not provide a level of difficulty.</p> <p>The short walks use the same classification system as the AS 2156.1, but there were guidance principles behind the construction of these trails, and they involved access for a diverse range of people including those who are disabled. Therefore there is a limited range of difficulty levels in the classification of these trails, the majority are under Class 3 (moderate) Class 4 (moderate to strenuous)</p>			
	Descriptive Information	Time	Yes (always)	Distance	Yes (always)
Queensland Walks	Come under QPWS	Easy, medium, hard. No detail behind the definitions.			
Local Councils (Examples)					
Hervey Bay Council	N/A	There is a 20km paved esplanade trail and a compacted granite trail in the conservation reserve. The two trails accommodate people with disabilities however they do not meet the Australian Standard. The Council does not encourage the construction of walking trails.			
Maroochy City Shire Council	N/A	AS 2156.1 was used for the construction of trails but there is no classification for visitors. The council assessed the trails within the scope of the standard. This only applies to trails managed by the council and excludes areas managed by 'Great Walks of Queensland'.			
Pine Rivers Shire Council	Class 1	Trail and Boardwalk Australian Standard 1 & 2			
	Class 2	Trail Australian Standard 3 & 4			
	Class 3	Trail Australian Standard 5 & 6			
	Descriptive Information	Time	No	Distance	Yes (always)

3.1.7 South Australia					
Organisation	Categories	Description			
Trails South Australia	Easy (walk)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Even surfaced trail • Suitable for small children - Australian Standard 1 & 2 			
	Moderate (hike)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some moderate inclines • Irregular surface with loose, uneven base • Average level of fitness - Australian Standard 3 & 4 			
	Hard (hike)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some steep inclines • Irregular surface with loose, uneven base • Average level of fitness. Some hiking experience - Australian Standard 3 & 4 			
	Challenging (trek)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long distance trail with some steep inclines • Irregular surface with loose uneven base, suitable for experienced walkers with navigational skills • High level of fitness • Submit a 'let us know before you go' form to the local park office - Australian Standard 5 & 6 			
	Descriptive Information	Time	Yes (always)	Distance	Yes (always)
Local Councils (Examples)					
Adelaide Hills	N/A	Use of personal knowledge and a network of local volunteers. The Council aims to establish a system, however nothing has been developed at a standard level yet.			
	Descriptive Information	Time	No	Distance	Yes (always)
Mount Gambier	Easy to moderate	Walks in the area are easy or easy to moderate.			
City of Onkaparinga	Easy	e.g. some hills			
	Moderate				
	Easy to moderate				
	Moderate to Hard	e.g. steep in places			
	Hard				
	Notes	This system in some cases provides descriptive information with the level of difficulty. However it does not provide definitions of the classifications. The information provided with the level of difficulty of the walks considers features such as distance, time and accessibility.			
	Descriptive Information	Time	Yes (always)	Distance	Yes (always)

Bushwalking Associations (Examples)					
Adelaide Bushwalkers	Daily Distance		Gradient		Terrain
	S	Short	E	Undulating	E Track or open 4km/hr +
	M	Medium	M	Steep	M Medium scrub 2-4km/hr
	L	Long	H	Very Steep or exposed	H Heavy Scrub/rock 0-2km/hr

3.1.8 Tasmania					
Organisation	Categories	Description			
Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service	Easy	e.g. easy. Wide track with gentle grades are usually dry underfoot			
	Moderate	e.g. Moderate walk uphill			
	Difficult				
	Descriptive Information	Time	Yes (always)	Distance	No
	Notes	<p>There are no details or definitions behind each level of this classification. Any steep or difficult sections are generally noted. The walks are divided into short walks and long walks. PWST indicated that this classification system only intends to communicate what the visitor may encounter. The criteria behind this classification consider elements such as distance, metres ascent/descent, type of track and it is based on AS 2156.1. These features are generally indicated for the majority of the walks.</p>			
Disabled Access	(3 stars) Accessible to most independent wheelchair users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paths to and/or around the facility have minimal gradient, suitable width, good surface material and no steps. • Barrier free access into and within buildings. • Toilet/shower facilities are fully accessible including grab rails and good circulation space within cubicles. 			
	(2 stars) Wheelchair users may require assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paths to and/or around the facility may have slight to moderate gradient and/or uneven surface material, but width is suitable and there are no steps. • May be minor obstacles restricting access into and/or within buildings. • Toilet/shower facilities are accessible, but may be lacking grab rails and/or have moderately restricted circulation space within cubicles. 			
	(1 star) Inaccessible to most wheelchair users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paths may have moderate to steep gradient, very uneven surface material, unsuitable width and/or steps. • Major obstacles may make access into and/or within buildings difficult. • Toilet/shower facilities are not accessible to wheelchair users due to a lack of grab rails and very restricted circulation space within cubicles. 			
	Notes	Ratings are based on access for wheelchair users, as these are the people who generally have the most restricted mobility. There is an emphasis on access to buildings.			

Forestry Tasmania	N/A	Walks are listed on the website and they provide distance and on overview for each trail. Only involved in the construction and maintenance of tracks.
Disabled Access		There is no classification system in place but the website shows a table of access to state forest, including: visitor centre, disabled toilet, wheelchair walk, Impaired walk and picnic facilities.
Local Councils (Examples)		
Central Highlands	N/A	The walks are managed by Parks and Wildlife Service.
West Coast	N/A	The walks are being developed by a consultant from Sport and Recreation Tasmania (unable to contact).
Tasman Council	N/A	The walks are managed by Parks and Wildlife Service.
Alpine Resorts	Ben Lomond /Mt Mawson	Come under Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service.
Tour operators		
Cradle Mountain Huts	No grading	Gives time and distance. Operator provides two walks - Overland Trail and Bay of Fires.

3.1.9 Western Australia					
Organisation	Categories	Description			
Department of Environment and Conservation (formerly CALM)		The Department is now called Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC), formerly CALM. The Department is developing a documented assessment system in order to classify trails according to AS2156. The draft system will be available for comment in the near future.			
	<i>Descriptive Information</i>	Time	Unknown	Distance	Unknown
	Notes	Currently trailheads state name, length and estimated time to complete. Some include specific information for the trail.			
Local Councils (Examples)					
Perth	N/A	Several walking trails are listed with descriptions in the Perth City Council's website. There is no classification or grade of difficulty provided.			
	<i>Descriptive Information</i>	Time	Yes (partial)	Distance	Yes (partial)
Boyup Brook	Easy to medium	The four shires in the region use same system. Currently working on the consultation process of the classification system directly sourced from the State Standard developed by the DEC.			

Bushwalking Associations		
Walk GPS	Easy	Suitable for beginners e.g. mainly short distances on gentle terrain. Usually In most cases GPS or compass is not required
	Medium	Reasonable level of fitness required e.g. able to walk a minimum of 15kms over variable terrain in a total of 4-5 hours without significant physical stress. Reasonable navigation skills also required. These walks are often more than 15kms and include variable terrain and/or significant amount of off track walking.
	Hard	Same as for medium grade except includes more challenging terrain in part.

3.2 Other Countries				
3.2.1 Canada				
Parks Canada	<p>The information on hiking trails includes features such as distance and elevation, expected time to complete the walk and an overview of the trail. Generally, the information is fairly descriptive of the sights. However, the extent of the information given is not uniformly applied. Information regarding specific trails was variable. The information presented varies across parks and some of them grade the difficulty of the walks, but the classifications differ. The only classification system found is that used by Gros Morne National Park.</p>			
	<i>Descriptive Information</i>	Time	Yes (Partial)	Distance
Park Example	Categories	Description		
Gros Morne National Park	Easy	Trails are short and level, and can be hiked by almost anyone.		
	Moderate	Trails are of medium length (5-10 km), or are shorter trails with a major hill. Most people should have little difficulty. You should take a snack and be prepared for changing weather.		
	Strenuous	Trails are long, with steep sections. You should have a map, a first-aid kit, extra clothing, drinking water, and food.		
Cape Breton Highlands National Park	Examples	Trail Name: Bog “e” Boardwalk, ideal for baby strollers, wheelchairs. Orchids, moose, insect-eating plants. 0.6 km (0.4 mi) loop. Hiking time: 20-30 minutes.		
		Trail Name: Clyburn Valley <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trailhead: Just north of the Clyburn River bridge • Significant Feature: Hardwood valley, river, remains of old gold mine • Length: 9.2 km (5.7 miles) return • Hiking Time: 2 - 3 hours • Elevation: 30 m (100 ft.) 		
	Note	The way information is presented varies even within the same park		
Riding Mountain National Park		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trail Name: Arrowhead • Trail difficulty: Moderate • Trail length: 3.4 km (return) Time: 1 to 2 hours • Driving distance to trail head from Wasagaming: 7 km (10 minutes) 		
Banff National Park	N/A	The hiking trails are divided in half day hike (1-4 hours) and full day hike (5+ hours) The information for each walking trail includes distance, elevation gain, time to complete the walk and features of the walk.		

Trans Canadian Trail	N/A	This is a multipurpose trail and the information varies across the sections of the trail. No classification system in place.
Bushwalking Associations		
Canadian Volkssport Federation (walking club)	Incline	Terrain
	1. Very little hill or stair climbing	A. Almost entirely on pavement, probably suitable for baby stroller
	2. Some moderate hill or stair climbing	B. A significant part of the walk takes place on well-groomed trails with very little more difficult terrain
	3. Some significant hill or stair climbing	C. A significant part of the walk takes place on somewhat difficult terrain (rocky/rooted paths)
	4. A good deal of significant hill or stair climbing	D. A significant part of the walk takes place on very difficult terrain
	5. Many steep hills or high altitude trails	E. The majority of the walk takes place on very difficult terrain

3.2.2 Ireland				
Organisation	Categories	Description		
National Waymarked Way programme (The Irish Sport Council)	Easy way walking sections	Walking sections that include mostly paths and tracks that are easily walked in any weather with little climbing. There are no significant navigational difficulties, and stiles and gates are generally in good repair. Suitable for most walkers especially those starting to walk the Ways for the first time.		
	Moderate way walking sections	Walking sections that may involve off-road walking, on more rugged ground with more climbing and some more awkward obstacles, like badly maintained gates, and places where walking the trail would require more thought and skill. Suitable for those with some previous experience of walking on Waymarked Ways and looking for walks which are a little more challenging.		
	Hard way walking sections	Walking sections that may take the walker onto higher, rougher, steeper and sometimes wet ground and into regions where there is exposure to more difficult terrain. Walkers should always be equipped with proper footwear, spare clothing and food and drink and be aware of weather conditions. Quality of trail furniture may vary from good through moderate to poor and may be minimal. Experience of walking on Waymarked Ways is strongly recommended. Stamina and experience of off-road walking are essential. Basic map /guide reading ability is required. Walking the route in winter should be well researched and assessed in advance of setting off. For the more experienced trail walker.		
	<i>Descriptive Information</i>	Time	Yes (partial)	Distance
Ireland Official Tourism Website	N/A	All the trails include an overview that is fairly descriptive of the sights and attractions along the trail. Some walks are graded easy, moderate, etc. However, the grading system is not uniformly applied to all walking trails. Other descriptive features are also given for some walks, these include: ascent, distance, estimated time. These features are not uniformly applied to all the walks. Criteria to why some trails are presented with more information than others are not indicated.		
Abstract from the Irish Trails Strategy	(Under development) Time Scale: Early 2007	Aim: to establish a Classification System for all Trails. It is essential that the information provided to recreational trail users be provided in a format that is reliable, accurate, easily understandable, and consistent. This is also important from a promotion and marketing perspective. A classification system based on slope, tread surface, obstacles, physical effort required, and time estimates should be developed and adopted by all agencies for all trails. Note that this document identified Victoria, South Australia and New Zealand as leading example in Walking Trails Strategy among other countries.		

3.2.3 New Zealand		
Organisation	Categories	Description
Department of Conservation	Easy access tracks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy walking for up to an hour • Even surface, well formed with no steps or steep sections • Suits people of all abilities, wheelchairs, buggies and strollers • Streams and rivers are bridged • Walking shoes required
	Short walks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy walking for up to an hour • Track is well formed, with an even well drained surface. There may be steps • Suitable for people of most ages and fitness levels • Streams and rivers are bridged • Walking shoes required
	Walking tracks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gentle walking from a few minutes to a day • Mostly well formed, some sections may be steep, rough or muddy • Suitable for people with low to moderate fitness and abilities • Some tracks suitable for mountain biking • Clearly sign posted. Water crossings bridged • Walking shoes or light tramping/hiking boots required
	Great walk/ easy tramping tracks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comfortable multi-day tramping/hiking • Generally well formed, some sections may be rough, muddy or steep • Suitable for people with limited backcountry (remote area) experience • Some tracks suitable for mountain biking • Track has signs, poles or markers. Major water crossings bridged • Light tramping/hiking boots required
	Tramping tracks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenging day or multi-day tramping/hiking • Mostly unformed, may be rough and steep • Suitable for people with moderate to high level backcountry skills and experience, including navigation and survival • Some tracks suitable for mountain biking • Track has markers, poles or rock cairns • Expect river crossings • Tramping/hiking boots required

	Route	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenging overnight tramping/hiking • Track unformed and natural, may be rough and very steep • Suitable for people with high level backcountry skills and experience, including navigation and survival • Be completely self sufficient • Track has markers, poles or rock cairns • Expect river crossings • Sturdy tramping/hiking boots required 			
	Note	The DOC website has a detailed section for classification of walking trails, the classification is based on grade of difficulty, standard of surface formation and gradient See http://www.doc.govt.nz/templates/summary.aspx?id=38516			
	Descriptive Information	Time	Yes (always)	Distance	Yes (partial)
Tour operators					
Ultimate hikes	Variety of walks including Milford Track, Routeburn Track, Holyford Track etc. "Our walks are neither easy nor difficult". Operator does not use NZ system of classification.				

3.2.4 South Africa					
Organisation	Categories	Description			
South Africa Hiking Trail Owners Association	From 1 to 10+	This classification system is a scientific model that analyses a combination of factors, such as equivalence to horizontal trail, walking time at 3km/h, Kcal consumed by 'model' walker (average person that hikes few times a year). The trails are graded by difficulty but there is no information on time or distance or surface of the trail. It is used across accredited trails in South Africa and Peru. See Academic Research in this section for further detail.			
	Descriptive Information	Time	Yes (always)	Distance	Yes (always)

3.2.5 United Kingdom				
Organisation	Categories	Description		
Walking Scotland Official site for the National Tourism Organisation	Moderate walks	Walks under 5 miles, usually suitable for most abilities, walk surface may be loose, uneven and muddy. Sensible footwear required.		
	Longer walks	Walks over 5 miles, usually suitable for those with a good standard of fitness. Walks surface likely to be more challenging, loose, uneven and muddy. Stout waterproof footwear with ankle support required.		
	Long distance routes	Walks of more than 25 miles, usually taking more than one day and requiring a high level of fitness and stamina. Usually on waymarked and mixed surface trails which will be more challenging, loose, boggy, steep, rocky and muddy. Hill walking boots required. Further information about long distance routes can be found here .		
	Hill and mountain walks	Walks of any length involving prolonged and usually strenuous climbing, requiring a high level of fitness and stamina. Walks surface may be challenging, loose, boggy, steep, rocky and muddy. Hill walking boots required. In winter, additional equipment and the ability to use them will be necessary. Climbing, hillwalking and mountaineering are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions and involvement. Please click here for further guidance on this type of walking.		
	Disabled	The website offers a link to walks that are accessible. The classification is not available. Link not working.		
	Descriptive Information	Time	Yes (partial)	Distance
British Walking Federation	Grade 1	An easy walk on pavement or well-maintained paths with minimal stiles or hills. May be suitable for wheelchairs and pushchairs.		
	Grade 2	A moderate walk in any setting with some difficult terrain, one or two substantial hills, steps or stiles. Pushchairs and wheelchairs questionable.		
	Grade 3	A more difficult walk. All on poorly maintained paths or tracks, rough fields or woods. Steep climbs, rough, uneven terrain or frequent stiles. Not likely to be suitable for wheelchairs or pushchairs. Participants with health problems should take caution.		
	Notes	Where a trail falls between two categories then a plus has been added to the lower grade.		

3.2.6 United States					
Organisation	Categories	Description			
US Department of Agriculture Forest Service	Easy	These routes are appropriate for novice through advanced users. They generally follow obvious, well-marked trails and roads. Grades are gentle, and few obstacles will be encountered.			
	More Difficult	These routes are appropriate for intermediate through advanced users. Terrain may be steeper, trails narrower, and some obstacles may be encountered.			
	Most Difficult	These routes are recommended for advanced to expert users only. Terrain is steep, and routes are not well marked. You should have considerable skill in your chosen activity, as well as knowledge of navigation and survival before attempting these trails.			
	Notes	There is inconsistency in the classifications used throughout the Department. A section on the website show difficulty levels as easy, moderate, moderate/difficult and Difficult. These differ from the official classifications shown above.			
	<i>Descriptive Information</i>	Time	Yes (partial)	Distance	Yes (partial)
National Trail System		The website links to the different parks but it does not classify the trails. It is possible to find trails by category under the classification of the National Recreation Trails.			
National Parks Service		National Parks Service Trails are part of the National Trail System.			
National Recreation Trails Database	Easy, Intermediate, Difficult	Integrated by US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Federal Highway Administration and National Park Service. The database captures trails for various purposes from different land management agencies. There is no information on the details and definitions behind each level of these categories.			
Appalachian Trail (example)	1-10	1= Flat 5= Strenuous ups and downs, only occasional flat sections 10= Use of hands required, footing precarious - not recommended for those with fear of heights and not in good physical condition.			
	<i>Descriptive Information</i>	Time	No	Distance	No
Forest Service Manual FSM 2353.05 US Standard	Easiest	A trail requiring limited skill with little challenge to travel.			
	More difficult	A trail requiring some skill and challenge to travel.			
	Most difficult	A trail requiring a high degree of skill and challenge to travel.			
	Notes	The degree of challenge a trail presents to an average user's physical ability and skill. Difficulty is a function of trail condition and route location factors such as alignment, steepness of grades, gain and loss of elevation, and amount and kind of natural barriers that must be crossed. Difficulty levels may be applied to all the types of trails discussed in this manual and Trails Management Handbook. This classification system applies to all types of trails, i.e. horse riding, cycling, walking, etc. It draws from the national standard FSM 2350.			

3.3 Literature Review		
Publication	Categories	Description
Classic Walks of Australia	Five-point scale	'A five-point scale rates the walk from a fitness perspective. One symbol indicates a family-style walk for beginners, while five symbols represent a gruelling expedition with long, steep ascents. Heavy overnight packs will be required'. This book also mentions time and length for the walks.
Bushwalking in Australia	Easy	Follows well-defined, mainly flat tracks and is capable of being completed by walkers of average fitness. Simple navigation may be needed on these walks.
	Easy-medium	Follows marked tracks and may involve some short steep climbs and descents or short off-track sections.
	Medium	Requires a reasonable fitness level. Navigation experience is required on off-track or alpine sections. Generally have some sustained climbs and descents.
	Medium-hard	Requires a good level of fitness and previous walking and navigational experience. May have tracked and untracked sections with sustained climbs and descents, sometimes climbing several hundred metres. May feature creek crossings that require wading.
	Hard	For experienced, fit walkers who are also competent navigators. Walks can follow rough tracks, have difficult off-track sections or may include many long, steep climbs and descents. May involve rock scrambling/hopping wading across rivers.
	Notes	Gradings are influenced by a combination of walking distance, scrub, navigational challenge, amount of climbing involved and fitness required. They are similar to those used by bushwalking clubs.
Day Walks around Melbourne	Easy	Generally level walking on well-made trails. Gradual hills.
	Moderate	Undulating, rough and less-defined trails. Steep hills.
	Difficult	Steep and sustained hills. Trail may not exist. Some scrambling.
	Note	These grades relate to a walks difficulty and not to its distance.
Take a walk	Easy	Indicates a leisurely walk on level or undulating terrain.
	Moderate	Means you may need to follow route markings and walks may involve rock hopping or long uphill or downhill sections.
	Hard	Walks may require navigational skills, scrambling ability and a long day.
Outdoor Victoria	A guide for the disabled to over 100 parks	Published in 1984, superseded by AS 2156.1.

120 Walks in Victoria		The book includes comprehensive track notes with appropriate detailed maps for all. Each suggestion is graded as one day or overnight and as easy, medium or hard. Times and distances are shown.
Victoria's National Parks Explorer's guide.	N/A	Some walks are graded (e.g. easy, medium) but not all of them. No information regarding classifications is provided.
Access Guide to Victoria's Parks (disabled access)	1 star	High Level of Access
	2 stars	Moderately Accessible
	3 stars	Low Level of Access
	Note	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The book gives a good general description of the trails for each park i.e. no specific information for each trail. The classification applies for all facilities in the parks including trails, picnic facilities and toilets.

3.4 Walking Strategies	
Strategy	Description
Victorian Trails Strategy 2005-2010.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The vision is “to have a sustainable trail network that provides diversity of experience and equity of access for the health and the wellbeing of Victorians and visitors alike”. Under the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum, it identifies the need for trails to have facilities and services for the comfort and safety of users that are appropriate to the style, setting and user group of the trail. It establishes the need to undertake research initiatives to increase trail understanding, including trail user needs and the environmental, social and economic effects of trails. The standard recognises that there is lack of agreed standards and “currently, each trail management group develops and maintains trails to different construction and descriptive standards. This has resulted in similar trails being classified and described in different ways”. There is the potential for the development of a classification system based on AS 2156.1 that identifies participant fitness or skill levels required. The Walking Trails Classification and Improvement Project originated from this statement.
Noosa Walking and Cycling Strategy	The strategy establishes the vision for cycling and walking for Noosa for the next twelve years. The strategy is an overarching document that will be supported by a Network Development Plan and Education and Encouragement Plan. The aim of the Strategy is to improve the cycling and walking environment and to promote more cycling and walking and establish both forms of transport as viable alternatives to car travel.

<p>Wet Tropics Walking Strategy</p>	<p>It integrates the following classification system based on time taken to complete the walk. Easy - Short (1 hour or less) Moderate - Medium (1 hour up to half a day) Strenuous - Long (full day/overnight)</p> <p>The strategy establishes the process to manage the diverse walking experiences in the region. It recognises the importance of stakeholder engagement and participation in this process and the value of information, interpretation and promotion of the walking network. The strategy aims to cater for the range of interests, capabilities and needs of the local community and visitors. It also intends to ensure monitoring and research into the sustainable use of walking tracks, walking satisfaction and demand for diverse walking opportunities by recognising walker needs, expectations and characteristics.</p>
<p>Greater Bendigo Cycling and Walking Strategy</p>	<p>This is a comprehensive document that sets direction for the design, maintenance and improvement of walking and cycling trails within suburban areas and connections between townships in the municipality. It provides a meticulous inventory of trails that require upgrades or maintenance. Hiking trails in natural areas are not considered under the scope of this strategy.</p>
<p>Blue Mountains Walking Track Management Strategy</p>	<p>The aim of the strategy is that a single classification system for all walking tracks in the Blue Mountains will enable track standards to be consistently communicated to the public. A track classification system provides a hierarchy of track standards which allows for a wide variety of terrain, a spectrum of different experiences for track walkers and different levels of construction. It provides a thorough account on how AS 2156.1 was applied to the creation of the walking trails classification system used in the Blue Mountains, with detailed description behind the elements considered for each class.</p>

3.5 Related Articles					
Publication	Categories	Description			
A Comprehensive Approach Towards the Planning Grading and Auditing of Hiking Trails as Ecotourism Product (South Africa) (Hugo, M.L. 2002)	Numerical Designation	Equivalent to horizontal trail of:	Walking time at 3km/h	Energy needed (kj) (by model hiker)	Category Description
	A1	< 5 m	1.7 hr	< 2500	Very Easy
	A2	5-10 km	1.7 - 3.3 hr	2500 - 5000	Easy
	B1	10-15 km	3.3 - 5 hr	5000 - 7500	Fair
	B2	15-20 km	5 - 6.7 hr	7500 - 10000	Moderate
	C1	20-25 km	6.7 - 8.3 hr	10000 - 12500	Difficult
	C2	25-30 km	8.3 - 10 hr	12500 -15000	Severe
D	30 + km	10 + hr	15000 +	Extreme	
Classification of trail settings in alpine national park using the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum approach (Saporo, Japan) (Yamaki, K. & Shoji, Y. 2004)	N/A	<p>The scope of this research is the conservation (nature based) and maximising the quality of experience for visitors. This is a management tool for the construction of walking trails; however it does not explore the suitability of walkers to complete the trail.</p> <p>It uses the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS), this model considers the diversity of recreation opportunities that are more appropriate for the area under discussion e.g. walking, swimming, cycling, etc. The ROS offers a framework to understand the relationship between access, remoteness, naturalness, visitor impacts, social encounters, appropriate facilities available and visitor management on a given area of land. The ROS has been applied for the Victorian Trails Strategy 2005-2010</p>			
Recreational Walkers International Route Assessment System (Australia) (McDougal, G -Non-academic enthusiast)	Factor	Values	Levels i.e. 1-5, 1-4, 0-4, 1-4 and 2-17		
	Surface	0-5	Smooth and solid, smooth and soft, uneven, rough, very rough, undefined		
	Context	1-4	Safe, unsecured, insecure, dangerous		
	Incline	0-4	Flat or flattish, gentle undulations, sustained incline, steep, very steep		
	Width	1-4	Negotiable, one-person width, two person width, broad		
Total	2-17	<p>The maximum scoring is 15, making a Grade 5. These are rugged difficult routes.</p> <p>The minimum scoring is 0, making a Grade zero. These are routes suitable for both walkers and wheeled vehicles.</p> <p>Grades by points: Grade Zero: 2-3/Grade One: 4-6/Grade Two 7-9/Grade Three 10-12/Grade Four 13-15/Grade Five 16-17</p>			

4. Issues Identified

4.1 Lack of agreed standards

Control over walking trails varies throughout councils, states and territories. Hence, it is a complex task to identify the Land Management Agencies that provide classification systems used for the various walking trails across Victoria and other states. As the Victorian Trails Strategy 2005-2010 identified, each trail management group applies different principles to the development, maintenance and classification of walking trails. This research has proved that there is a large number of ad hoc classification systems currently in use.

Developing a standard classification system will simplify the decision making process for the public when choosing a walking trail. Having one classification system that is used for all walking trails in the different land tenures would also make it easier for the users to decide on which trail is suitable for them.

4.2 The Australian Standard 2156.1

Research found that the majority of walking trails in Australia have been built or improved to meet the Australian Standard AS 2156.1. However this standard considers design and management features but does not provide any measurement of level of fitness or ability of the user to complete the trail.

There is a benefit perceived in developing a user based standard that is compatible with the AS 2156.1, as it is possible to judge the features of the trails from their existing class under the AS 2156.1. This means that the information on numerous walking trails is already available and it is only a matter of classifying the trails for users under the new standard rather than having to gather information about each trail again.

The majority of the stakeholders contacted for this research mentioned that the classification systems they implemented have modified the grading system from AS2156.1 in order to make it more suitable to their needs, resulting in the use of ad hoc systems and inconsistency across organisations. This shows the need to provide land managers with a standard walking trail classification system. This research also found that land managers have been involved in creating classification systems mainly based on the AS 2156.1 since there is no other standard available for them to use.

4.3 Elements that integrate a classification system

The walking trails classification systems presented in this document represent a large proportion of the systems used in Australia and an overview of what is being used in other countries. However, for the purpose of this research, the number systems studied give a clear indication of the components of a classification system. Although the degree of difficulty to complete a trail has been perceived as one of the influencing factors for decision making when choosing a trail, the user may also consider other elements that are also part of the trail. These elements include, but are not limited to, distance, gradient, estimated time to complete the trail, surface and seasonality. Even if such features have been considered to classify a trail, it seems practical to inform the user of such characteristics to simplify the decision making process.

Some organisations display only the difficulty level with the trail description. These descriptions also may include attractions on the trail and they do not necessarily inform the user of any attributes of the trail. There are organisations like Trails SA that inform the user about various features including distance, time and whether the walk is linear or a loop. Various organisations list the metres ascent/descent of the trail and some others even have a short description of the type of obstacles next the grade of the walk i.e. moderate with steep climb in a short section. All these elements are useful to the user and should be presented when possible.

4.4 Short Walks and Longer Walks

The classification of short walks (which could be half a day or up to a day) may be different from that used in longer walks (may be full day or overnight hikes). A short walk can be classified under certain elements since they can be more uniform throughout; whereas a longer walk may vary in terrain and features throughout its length, which can result in difficulty in applying a single class system.

When looking at this issue from the perspective of the AS 2156.1 it is evident that classes 1 to 4 suit most users and classes 5 and 6 required higher fitness level and skills. Therefore trails built under classes 1 to 4 could be graded under one classification system and classes 5 and 6 could belong to the category of longer walks.

4.5 Disabled Access

The limited availability of information on access for disabled people is one of the most important issues identified by this research. There is very little information on this topic, and even less information on classifications. People with disabilities can be identified as one of the higher user groups of information regarding the classification of walking trails, and also one of the groups that would benefit the most from the existence of this information.

The needs of people with disabilities vary from other users, either when planning ahead of their visit or on the spot, they need to assess their ability to complete the trail, assisted or unassisted. This information should also be available to users prior to their visit but also at the trailheads.

Although Parks Victoria and Vision Australia Foundation publish the Access Guide to Victoria's Parks that provides general information on access to facilities in the parks and a 3 star classification system, it does not provide specific classifications for each trail.

The Parks and Wildlife Service NSW website includes the walking trail planner option for people with disabilities and it also integrates a 3 level classification system. This option allows the user to select a walking trail, and then it describes the trail and the extent and areas to which the trail is accessible. It also recommends whether assistance may be necessary.

Parks and Wildlife Service in Tasmania use a similar classification system of three levels and they produced a booklet that is also available online for all the walks that offer access for the disabled. Not all the organisations have a special classification for disabled access. They draw their classification systems from the Australian Standard.

4.6 Limited Availability of Information

The evidence gathered in this research shows that the information on walking trails classifications that is available to the public is not consistent; neither is the way in which this information is presented. The walking trails that are classified show the levels of difficulty in different formats, this is generally presented with the information on the walk and it does not always include descriptions and definitions behind each level of classification.

There are certain user groups including disabled people and those who are less confident walkers that need to access descriptive information before undertaking a walking trail. The availability of this information simplifies the decision making process and allows the user to choose walks that better suit their abilities. The information may be web-based or available through printed material.

Very few sources of information show detail on the classification system that they use. Some resources that are particularly helpful and informative include the website of the Department of Conservation in New Zealand that includes an individual page with comprehensive information for each classification level. Trails South Australia website is entirely dedicated to trails, including walking trails. From the websites visited for this research, Trails SA encompass the most extensive and uniformly classified walking trail system. It also provides great detail in the information for each walking trail.

There are various sources of information about walking trails in Victoria; however, there is not an official resource available to the public that shows a consistent classification system across all land management agencies.

4.7 Weather conditions

When considering the elements to classify a trail, it is necessary consider the physical features of the trail, but it is also relevant to look at the environment in which the trail is situated. The climate, seasonality and overall environment have an impact in the difficulty for the walker to complete the trail. Coastal trails may be temporarily affected by tides and storms, while the conditions for mountain trails may change throughout seasons being hot and dry in summer and covered by snow in winter. Areas with a high average rainfall should pay particular attention to the surface of their trails, especially if they are unsealed, as the effects of rain over walking trails can include mudslides, accumulation of water in segments of the trail or mud-covered surfaces.

4.8 Stakeholder Engagement

General interest in the implementation of a standard walking trails classification system was identified during conversations with various stakeholders in Victoria and other states and especially those from local councils. Some stakeholders mentioned that they do not use any classification systems but they would be interested in implementing one.

Nevertheless, there are some states that have already invested resources in the classification systems that they currently use. This is the particular cases of Tasmania or South Australia that already have consistent and well organised walking trail classification systems. It is necessary to conduct further consultation in order to gauge the interest of other stakeholders in working towards a national standard.

4.9 Academic Research and Articles

There is very little academic research available in the area of walking trails classification. However, two articles that use an actual grading system were identified and both of them offer a very complex model for a walking trails classification system. From the research perspective they are highly elaborate models; on the other hand, when looking at the implementation and putting them to practice they seem unrealistic to use.

One of these articles, 'A Comprehensive Approach Towards the Planning, Grading and Auditing of Hiking Trails as Ecotourism Products' (Hugo, M.L. 2002), is a scientific model that uses a combination of factors, such as equivalence to horizontal trail, walking time at 3km/h, Kcal consumed by 'model' walker (average person that hikes few times a year). This model is the walking trail classification system used in all the accredited walking trails in South Africa.

A non-academic article identified, 'International Route Assessment System' (McDougal, year?) allocates values to different elements of a walking trail such as Surface, Context, Incline and Width and the resulting score gives the trail a grade from zero to five. Both of these articles suggest models that would be rather complicated to put in place and to communicate to the public.

5. Conclusions

The results of this research confirm the statement from the Victorian Trails Strategy 2005-2010, which recognises that control over walking trails varies throughout councils, states and territories. Therefore, each trail management group applies different principles to the development, maintenance and classification of walking trails, resulting in a large number of classification systems currently in use.

The majority of walking trails in Australia have been built or improved to meet the Australian Standard AS 2156.1. However this standard considers design and construction standards but does not provide any measurement of ideal experience, level of fitness or ability of the user to complete the trail. The majority of the stakeholders indicated that the classification systems they implement have modified the grading system from AS2156.1 in order to make it more suitable to their needs, resulting in the use of various systems and inconsistency across organisations.

A classification system is useful to make decisions prior to the visit and the channels used to communicate these systems are as important as the classification system itself. It can be assumed that for someone that wants to plan before visiting the trail, web-based information will be important. However, for someone that is already in the area the information should be provided at the start of the trail. The findings reflect how the description and definitions behind each level are not always available, resulting in ambiguity of the information. This makes it difficult for the user to determine whether the difficulty level assigned to walk will be suitable or not. Thus, information provided on the web or printed material should be available with descriptors.

People with a disability can be regarded as one of the higher user groups of information concerning the classification of walking trails, and also one of the groups that would benefit the most from the existence of this information. There is generally very little information on access for people with disabilities and barely any classification systems in place.

When implementing a standard classification system there are other issues to consider beside the ability of the user to complete the trail. Weather elements like heat, cold and rain can impact the classification given to the trail, affecting the ability of an average person to complete the walk. The classification of a trail may also change with time due to maintenance; this means that a trail that lacks maintenance may need to be reclassified to a grade that reflects its current physical condition if this is significantly different to its original state and the current physical condition noticeably affects the visitor's ability to complete the trail.

In general, there seem to be a positive attitude from stakeholders towards adopting a standard classification system, especially by local councils. However, it is necessary to conduct further consultation in order to evaluate their interest to work towards a national standard, since other states, in particular Queensland, Tasmania and South Australia, have developed classification systems that work across the state.

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