

Best Nature Walks

Evaluation Criteria & Methodology Report

July 2015



Prepared for:



Office of
Environment & Heritage
NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service



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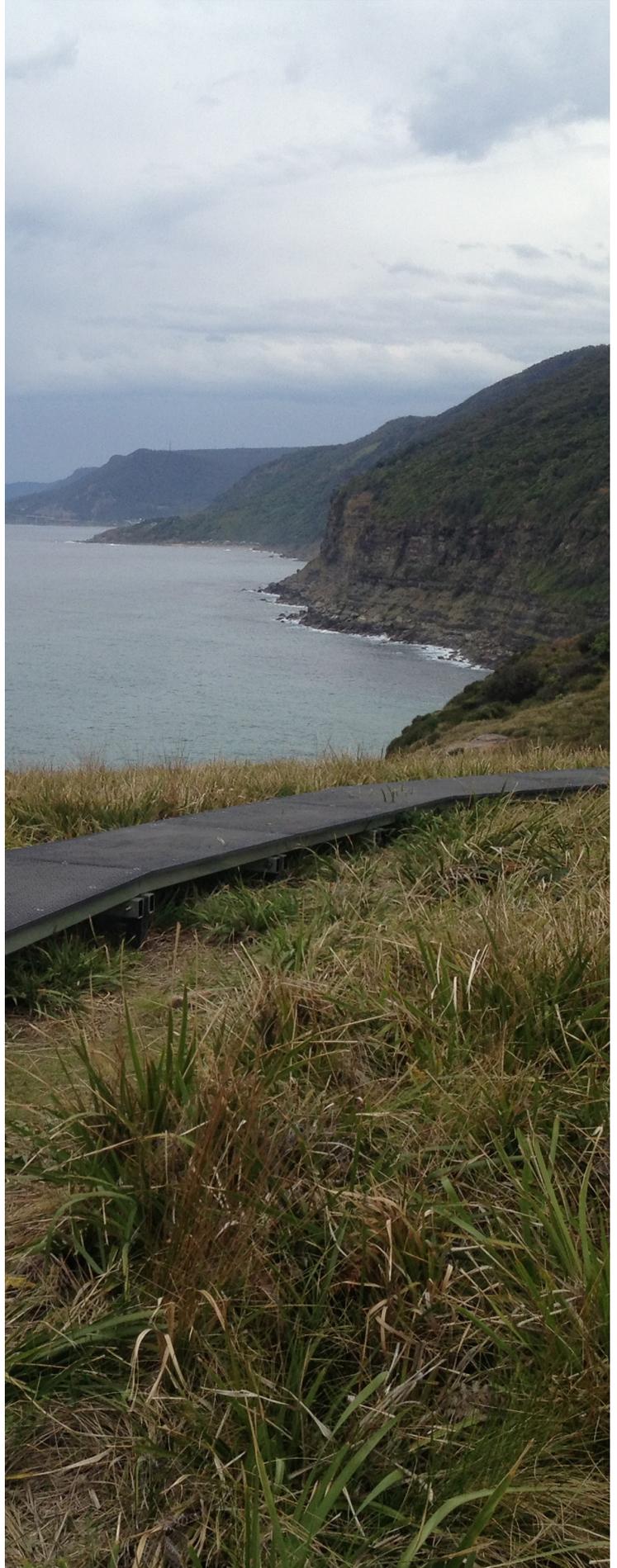
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Background

In 2014 NPWS ran a three month web and Facebook campaign asking the public to nominate their favourite nature walk in NSW.

Over 200 responses were received from the public, and it was noted the most popular walks generally correlated with the popularity of “hits” for walks on the NPWS website.

The nominated walks were validated by NPWS marketing and field staff to determine if they were suitable and safe for visitors, with the result being that one walk was excluded.

Field staff were asked if there anything left out that should be included on the list and Kosciuszko Summit Walk was added.

The best nature walks list

Four multi day walks

- Coast Track (Royal NP)
- Six Foot Track (Dept Lands)
- Light to Light (Ben Boyd NP)
- Gibraltar-Washpool World Heritage Walk

18 day walks

Metro and Blue Mtns and Central Coast

- Grand Canyon (Blue Mts NP)
- National Pass (Blue Mts NP)
- Bradleys Head to Chowder Bay (Sydney Harbour NP)
- South Head Heritage Trail (Sydney Harbour NP)
- Bouddi Coast Track (Bouddi NP)

South Coast

- The Falls walk (Budderoo NP)
- Bingi Dreaming track (Eurobodalla NP)
- Pigeon House Mountain Didthul track (Morton NP)
- White Sands walk and Scribbly Gum track (Jervis Bay)

North Coast

- Tomaree Head Summit walk (Tomaree NP)
- Cape Byron (Cape Byron SCA)
- Wonga walk (Dorrigo)
- Gloucester Tops circuit (Barrington Tops NP)
- Sea Acres Rainforest boardwalk (Sea Acres NP)

Snowy Mountains

- Thredbo Valley Track (Kosciuszko NP)
- Mount Kosciuszko Summit walk (Kosciuszko NP)

Central NSW

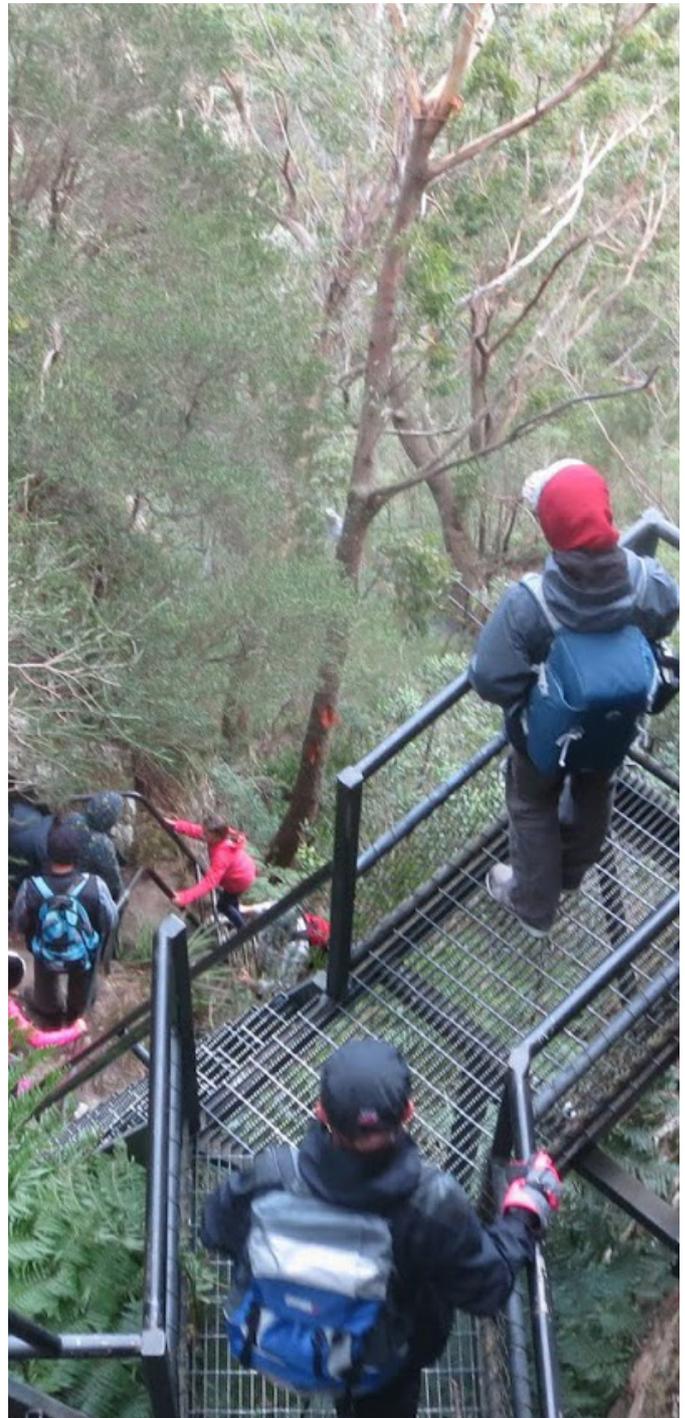
- Breadknife and Grand High Tops walk (Warrumbungle NP)

Far West

- Red Top lookout and boardwalk (Mungo NP)

Project objectives

In July 2015, landscape architectural consultants NewScape Design were commissioned to develop an *assessment criteria and methodology* that would enable NPWS to review the selected walks and to ensure that the experience meets customer needs and expectations. It is envisaged that the assessment criteria and methodology will also provide a basis for adding new walks to the list as required in the future.



Target audience

It was considered that Best Nature Walks would generally appeal to two main market segments – *Beginner / Family*, and *Intrepid / Experienced*. The evaluation criteria and methodology should assess the walk’s appeal for each market.

A summary of the market characteristics are provided below.

Beginner / Family (Compatriot)

Demographics

- Female skew
- 25 to 54
- Family unit with kids aged 8-15

Geographics

- Located in Sydney and surrounds, Country NSW, North, Central and South Coast, Canberra and surrounds.
- Live within 1-2 hour drive of National Parks e.g. Canberra – south coast and Snowy Mountains, and Sydney – Sydney to Newcastle National Parks, Blue Mountains

Psychographics

- Seek bonding with family members as part of leisure experience
- Education/learning something new with their kids important emotional driver
- Role-driven
- Need to plan ahead
- Activities focused – for kids
- Budget conscious
- Likes comfortable accommodation
- Value WOM reviews and opinions when it comes to planning a trip
- Prefer quick weekend or day trip
- Value spending time with family and friends
- Understand need to provide healthy experiences for their children that don’t involve digital devices and screens

Products

- Short stroll (s)
- Day walk (M)
- Rainforest loop walks



Intrepid / Experienced / Adventurer (True Traveller)

Demographics

- Primarily male
- White collar
- Experienced adventurer

Geographics

- Live in NSW or VIC

Psychographics

- Driven by goal of doing something meaningful, achievement, ticking off the bucket-list
- Outdoorsy/adventurous
- Desire experimental and adventurous trips
- Value spending time in a single destination to gain full experience
- Physically active
- Small group/individual traveller

Products

- Day walk (M)
- Multi day trek (L)



Assessment criteria

A workshop was held with a group of 12 walking tracks experts to develop the evaluation criteria. The group included representatives from various fields including:

- Magazine, internet and video media
- Tourist operators
- Hiking equipment stores
- National Parks Association
- NPWS
- Design consultants (NewScape Design)

The group’s expertise covered both the Intrepid and Family market segments and the gender split was 25% female / 75% male.

In evaluating what makes a great nature walk, the working group was asked to think about the following questions:

- What makes a great nature walk ?
- How do we rate and compare nature walks?
- Various market segments with different *essential* and *desirable* criteria

As a prompt to the discussion on assessment criteria, the group were presented with a series of slides (shown in right hand column).

The working group were provided with broad criteria categories for assessing nature walks, and through the process of the workshop discussions the group developed a range of criteria considered to be desirable and/or essential for a great nature walks.

The criteria categories presented to the group were:

Experiential (wow factor)

- Visitor attractions
- Landscape setting
- Pristine condition
- Recreation and adventure
- Solitude

Tracks and related infrastructure

- Track route / alignment
- Track material
- Track structures

Understanding the site

- Pre - trip information
- Way finding
- Interpretation
- Guided tour option
- Sense of arrival and completion

Accommodation

- Camping
- Cabin
- Heritage
- Off park

These full list of assessment criteria were compiled into a survey and the workshop participants scored the criteria’s relevance to each market segment (Beginner / Family and Intrepid / Experienced) e.g.

- 0 = not required
- 3 = desirable
- 5 = essential

What is a great nature based visitor experience



- Has WOW factor from the ability to immerse yourself in a natural setting
- Connects and provokes emotion
- Exceeds the needs and fulfills the aspirations of the present without compromising for future generations
- Triggers a passion for life and our environment
- Generates repeat and WOM



Feelings and emotions

Appeal To The Senses

Research into nature tourism by Destination NSW shows that *visitors want to connect with nature using all their senses*. They want to experience a heightened sensory awareness that may be missing in their everyday existence.

They want their getaway to provide them with opportunities to:

- Feel the sand between their toes
- Look at the beautiful landscape
- Taste the salt air
- Hear the animals,birds,or nothing at all (and appreciate the quietness)

Feelings are the main measure of visitor satisfaction but feelings are difficult to quantify for the purpose of track assessment !

Key elements

that contribute to the visitor experience

- *Encountered landscape* – views, people, objects actually seen
- *Sequence* – order in which scenes and objects are encountered (effects how a visitor understands the environment)
- *Feelings* – subjective qualities e.g. mood and satisfaction. These will likely vary over the course of the trail and are difficult to assess. They will occur naturally if items 1 and 2 are working well

Two walkers on the same trail in the same spot can have a different response based on what they perceive which can be dependent upon their cultural and knowledge background

Physical and logistical attributes

of a track are easier to quantify / rectify than visitor feelings and emotions

If the attributes are positive then this will lead to positive visitor feelings and experiences

Survey results

Italic text listed in the criteria below were not part of the original survey but have been suggested by participants

Criteria	Family	Intrepid
Marketability		
<i>Existing levels of market recognition</i>		
<i>Iconic features / world recognised</i>		
<i>3rd party "best" endorsement</i>		
Experiential (wow factor)		
Visitor attractions		
There are a series of natural and/or heritage features along the route (i.e. more than one)	4	4
Caves, arches, rock formations	3	3
Cultural heritage - Aboriginal	3	3
Historic heritage	3	2
Wildlife - likelihood of encountering wildlife e.g. kangaroos, lyrebirds, and the ecosystem that supports it if you don't see one	4	3
Whale watching	3	2
Scenic Lookouts	4	3
Inspiring / world class views along the track or in the park	4	3
Waterfalls	3	3
Special events, eg. sculptures at scenic world / sculpture by the sea	3	1
Flora - wildflowers / seasonal - spring, early december for wildflowers cape to cape WA	3	3
Exceptional facilities e.g. swing bridge on the 6 foot track	4	2
Playfulness - for children / adults e.g. children rock climbing on the three sisters track, creek crossings, etc	4	2
Landscape setting		
Combination of several landscape types	3	4
Forest	3	3
Rain forest	3	3
Beach	3	3
Heath	2	3
Headlands	3	3
Alpine	2	4
Mountains	3	4
Desert	2	3
Escarpment	3	3

Criteria	Family	Intrepid
Outback	2	3
Farmland	3	1
Canyons	2	4
Wetlands	3	3
Rivers and creeks	3	4
Villages with shops / proximity of services	3	1
Semi-urban e.g. Sydney backyard walks	3	1
Pristine condition		
The landscape is kept in pristine condition with little or no visitor impacts visible aside from the track and facilities	3	5
The natural vegetation community is entirely intact	2	4
Weeds - there are no weeds noticed during the walk	2	3
Bush fire - e.g. dead trees in the Victorian Alps (clarification: <i>No evidence of bush fire</i>)	3	3
Track erosion (clarification: <i>The track surface is not eroded</i>)	4	3
Erosion of creeks and stream banks (clarification: <i>There is no evident erosion of creeks and stream banks</i>)	3	3
Rubbish / littering does NOT occur along the track	4	4
Human waste / toilet paper is NOT evident along the track	4	4
<i>Track is maintained in a good condition</i>		
Recreation and adventure		
There are a range of potential recreation activities that can be experienced in addition to walking	3	3
While hiking		
Fishing	2	3
Swimming	3	4
Bird watching and wildlife spotting	3	4
Canyoning	2	3
Photography / great photo opportunities	4	4
UAV (drones)	1	2
Citizen science post for photos	3	2
Abseiling	2	3
Rock climbing	2	3
<i>BBQ / picnic</i>	3	1

Criteria	Family	Intrepid
Other organised activities		
Flying fox - tree tops	3	1
Kayak / canoe (paddling)	3	2
Mountain biking and cycling	3	2
Surfing	1	2
<i>Caving</i>		
<i>Horse riding</i>		
Solitude		
You can experience a real sense of remoteness and solitude	2	5
Solitude is interrupted by prolific signage (directional and/or interpretive)	3	3
Few people (lesser known bush walk)	2	4
Some big groups (e.g. The Royal NP Coast Walk)	2	2
Lot of people (e.g. Three Sisters)	2	1
Can experience day visitors while on an a multi-day hike (e.g. coast walk and light to light)	4	2
One way direction of travel implemented by management to minimise passing of other visitors	2	3
Supply managed / capacity restrictions		
Understanding the site		
Weather	5	5
Walk can be done all year round	4	3
Walk is better suited to some seasons	3	3
Walk can definitely not be done in some seasons	2	3
Possibility of closure due to bad weather	2	3
Pre - trip information		
Accurate information is provided to manage visitors expectations	5	4
Track type, condition, length, difficulty	5	4
Suitability in seasons	5	4
Up to date information on temporary track closures or other issues	5	5
Suggested gear lists for environments and time of year	4	3
Water availability	5	4
Toilets location and type	5	2
Maps - downloadable PDF, avenuza, printable, digital	4	3

Criteria	Family	Intrepid
Suggested itineraries	4	2
Bush safety	4	2
Bookings	3	2
Interpretive information e.g. booklet provided for the Cradle Mountain walk	4	3
Disabled accessible track and/or facilities provided	3	2
Social media	3	3
User feedback	4	3
Way finding		
Clear way-finding signs (e.g. junctions, both directions if that's an option, especially at the start)	5	3
Length of walk, time, grading,	5	4
Large map at trail heads and visitor nodes	4	3
Re-assurance signage		
Interpretation		
NPWS interps shelter (with a map)	4	3
Downloadable audio tour	3	1
Interpretive signage along the walk	4	2
Interpretive signs are up to date and in good condition	4	3
Smart phone app	4	2
Interps are designed relative to the site e.g. Yuragir emu footprint, etc	3	3
<i>Pre-trip downloadable information</i>	1	5
<i>Guidebook available</i>	1	3
Guided tour option		
Availability and price	3	2
Bookable via website	4	2
Information on the target market e.g. education focus	4	2
Postive testimonials from past participants	4	3
Assisted travel		
Several day guided tour	3	2
Gear drops	3	3
Transfer to start / finish for one way	4	4
Disabled access	3	1

Criteria	Family	Intrepid
Sense or arrival and completion		
Clear direction signage to the trailhead when driving / walking	5	4
Track starts at a logical point, rather than the park boundary	4	4
Entry / completion "gateway"	4	3
Log books at entry and waypoints	2	3
How difficult the track was can provide a sense of achievement	3	3
Tracks and related infrastructure		
Track route / alignment		
Out and back	3	2
Loop	4	4
Disabled accesable / pram accessible	3	1
One way	2	4
Track material		
Natural soil	3	4
Gravel surface	3	2
Paved surface (e.g. concrete, asphalt, etc)	3	1
Boardwalk structure	4	2
Single track width	3	4
Fire trail width	3	2
<i>Mixture of track materials - boardwalk, single track, natural</i>		
Physicality of the track (time, distance, ascent / descent)		
Easy	4	1
Medium	4	3
Difficult	2	4
Length of track		
Half day	4	2
Full day	3	4
Multi day	2	4
<i>Scaleability - able to offer smaller sections</i>		

Criteria	Family	Intrepid
Track structures		
Bio security	2	3
Seating along track	4	1
Lookout structures	4	2
Boardwalk structures	3	2
Steps and stairways	4	2
Ladders	2	3
Bridges	3	3
Toilets		
Flushing	4	1
Pit toilet	2	3
Clean condition	5	4
None available	2	3
Facilities		
Wheelchair access - also includes site / hearing / intellectual disabilities	3	1
Barbecues	3	1
Showers / toilets	3	2
Electricity	2	1
Water for drinking - natural sources	2	4
Water for drinking - potable water	4	3
Transport / access		
Fees / paying		
Annual pass (annual vehicle entry fee)	3	2
Daily vehicle entry fee	3	3
Walking permit (may be an opportunity to limit numbers to make the walk appealing to intrepid market)	2	2
Free	4	4

Criteria	Family	Intrepid
Car parking		
Security	4	3
Proximity to track	4	3
Properly defined spaces	3	2
Adequate capacity	4	3
Bookings		
At a shop	3	2
Online	4	4
Toll booth	3	2
Visitor centre	3	2
Public transport		
Available (yes / no)	3	4
Proximity to track start	4	3
Frequency	4	3
Mobile phone reception		
4G internet (for email, social networking, etc)	4	2
Basic mobile phone coverage (for calls including in an emergency)	4	3
No phone coverage at all	2	3
Risk / safety		
Rock falls	2	2
Snake bites	2	3
Bushfire	2	3
Getting lost	3	2
Ease of recovery / rescue	4	3
Personal locator beacons - can get them free in Blue Mountains from the police station	3	4

Criteria	Family	Intrepid
Gear requirements		
Suitable footwear e.g. running shoes - not thongs or high heels	4	4
For cold weather, rain, etc	3	3
Gear lists / general equipment lists for environments and time of year	3	3
Normal clothes - nothing special required other than sensible clothing	5	2
Accommodation		
Camping		
Toilets	4	3
Showers	3	2
Camp fire	3	3
Service vehicle access	3	2
Public vehicle access (on a multi day walk)	3	2
Camping platforms - with posts for hammocks	2	3
Hammocks (trees)	2	3
Wow factor / view	4	4
Water available	5	4
Supported - tents set up for you	3	2
Bookable	4	2
Kiosk	3	1
Capacity small	2	4
Capacity medium	3	3
Capacity large	3	1
Large space between individual camp sites	3	4
Crowded camp ground	2	1
Camp kitchen	3	1
Hard roof		
Cabin	3	2
Heritage	3	2
On park	3	3
Off park	2	2
<i>Hotel</i>	2	2
<i>Motel</i>	3	2
<i>B&B</i>	3	2
<i>Hostel / backpackers</i>	2	3
<i>Guest house</i>	3	2
<i>Disability access</i>	2	1
<i>Caves house</i>	3	2
<i>Beach cottage</i>	3	2
<i>Hut</i>	1	3

Conclusions

The following observations can be made in relation to the assessment criteria that were developed by the working group and the assessment score.

Experiential (wow factor)

- Visitor attractions are important to both Family and Intrepid markets, however novel or facility attractions are less desirable for the Intrepid market
- Particular types of landscape settings are likely to be a matter of personal preference, however the Intrepid market has a general preference for natural settings over urban settings
- Pristine conditions are important for both markets, however some environmental degradation may be more acceptable to the Family market (less desirable to the Intrepid market) - littering and human waste is not acceptable to either market
- Add-on recreation opportunities with a natural focus such as swimming, fishing, bird watching, photography, canyoning, rock climbing and abseiling were seen as desirable for both markets
- Less natural recreation opportunities such as flying fox, kayak / canoe and mountain biking were seen as activities that were generally more suitable to the Family market than the Intrepid market
- The potential for walkers to experience solitude is considered to be generally desirable for the Family market and essential for the Intrepid

Understanding the site

- It is almost essential that Family market walks can be done all year round whilst the Intrepid market finds it desirable that a walk may not be possible to do year round or may be closed due to bad weather
- Good pre-trip information is desirable for both markets but more important for the Family market which may have less experience planning for hikes
- Clear way finding signs are essential for less experienced hikers but still desirable for the Intrepid market
- Interpretation is desirable for the Family market but less so for the Intrepid market
- Assisted travel options including gear drops and transfers are seen as valuable to both markets
- Guided tours and disabled access are desirable for the Family / Beginner market
- A good sense of arrival / completion is seen as essential for both markets

Tracks and related infrastructure

- Loop route configurations are preferred over out and back routes
- One way direction is essential for the Intrepid market to prevent frequent sittings of other hikers

- Natural soil / materials for tracks are desirable for Families and essential for the Experienced walkers
- Easy physicality is preferred for the Family market whilst difficult physicality is preferred for the Intrepid market
- Families typically prefer shorter walks while Intrepids prefer full and multi day experiences
- Track structures such as seating, lookouts, boardwalks, etc are seen as desirable on Family walks but less so on Intrepid walks
- Flushing toilets are essential for the Family market whilst not desirable for the Intrepid market - who would prefer a pit toilet
- Toilets that are in a clean condition were essential for both markets
- Wheelchair access is desirable for the family market
- Facilities such as barbecues and showers are desirable for the Family market but not the Intrepid market

Transport / access

- Good and safe car parking close to the trail head is desirable for both markets
- Online booking is the preferred method over at a shop, toll booth or visitor centre
- Public transport to the trail head is desirable for both markets
- Good mobile phone coverage is essential for the Family market and less desirable for the Intrepid market
- Potential to be able to undertake a hike in "normal" clothing was considered essential for the Family market but not required for the Intrepid market

Additional walks

Other walks that could potentially be included in the BNW list:

Dan Slater:

- Grose Valley, Blue Mtns (2 Days)
- Main Range Circuit, Kosciuszko (2 Days)
- Great North Walk, Sydney to Newcastle (10 Days)
- Sassafra Gully, Springwood, Day walk

Christina Bullivant:

- Blue Gum Forest overnight walk - Blue Mtns NP
- Green Gully track - Oxley Wild Rivers NP
- Three Sisters track - Blue Mtns NP (when complete)
- Spit to Manly - Sydney Harbour NP and council managed land

Matt Gunn:

- Great North Walk, specifically from Hawkesbury through to Middle Harbour. Broken down into manageable sections during Oxfam trailwalker

John Newman:

- Three Sisters Walk, Blue Mountains NP (Family)
- Henry Head, La Perouse, Botany Bay NP (Family)
- Hermitage Foreshore Walk, Sydney Harbour NP (Family)
- Lady Carrington Drive, Royal National Park (Family bike ride)
- Blue Gum Forest, Blue Mountains NP (Intrepid)

Matt Colahan:

- Green Gully Walk Oxley Wild Rivers NP

Andrew Smith:

- Valley of the Eagles walk (Gundabooka NP)
- Anything on the Grose Valley side of Blue Mtns NP. Govetts Leap or Ridge Top etc

Kieran Babich:

- Great North Walk (fits both demographics and can be done in weekend chunks and b2b)
- Gloucester Tops if I remember correctly was all firetrail with no views, but lovely differentiation in the foliage as you climbed. Perhaps swap this for the Mt Warning walk.

Caro Ryan:

- Mt Solitary Circuit, BMNP
- Gardens of Stone NP
- The Lost City, Wollemi NP

