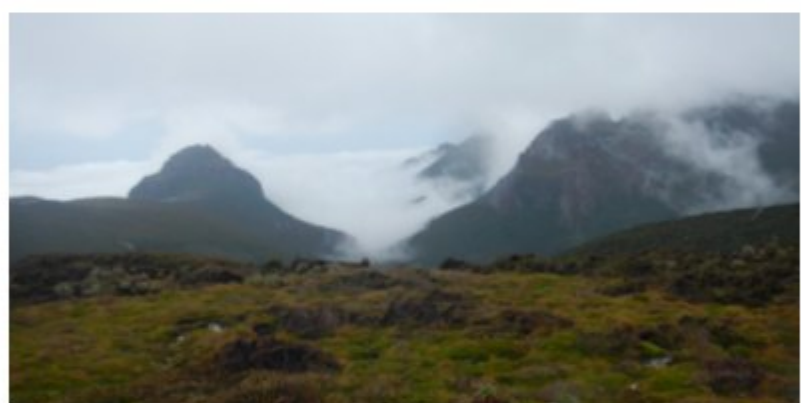


Many months in the planning, this walk in the wilds of Southern Tasmania demands thorough preparation as weather, terrain, vegetation and mud all conspire against the unwary.

Our route starts at an old limestone quarry near Ida Bay a few km before Australia's most southerly road end (and our final destination) Cockle Creek – although we were taking the long way round.

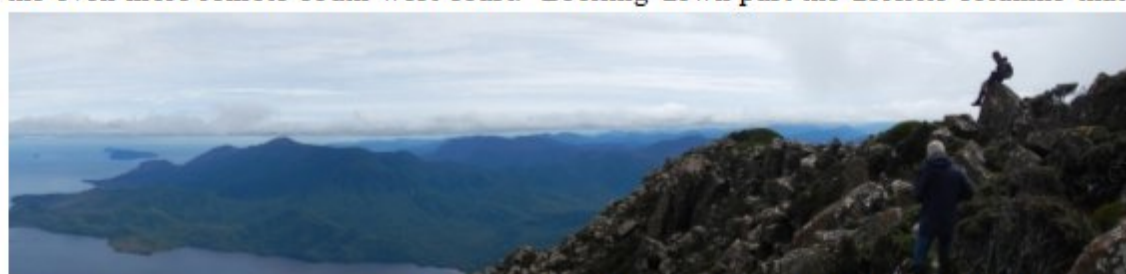
An early flight from Melbourne saw us begin the climb up onto the Southern Range just before midday. Delightful Myrtle-beech and Leatherwood in flower, mosses, fungi and lichens everywhere. Some steep pinches soon saw us above the tree-line but no views as the mists swirled unbroken around us. Passing Bullfrog Tarns a second time highlighted the need for frequent referral to the compass – with no visual reference points, just following the track had turned us 180° and consumed an hour of our time. After a muddy slog, we made Moonlight Creek and scratched together 3 campsites in the damp.



The Hippo and the Cockscomb emerge briefly from the mists

The next 3 days across the range required many hours of pushing through near-impenetrable scrub, strolling across open tarn-dotted moors, lurching through tangled lichen-covered boulder fields, steep climbs and descents along exposed ridges and edging along precipitous drops. Although almost entirely enshrouded in mist or drizzle, occasional glimpses of the Cockscomb, Hippo, Pindars Peak and Mt Wyllly whetted our desire to experience Precipitous Bluff in clear air.

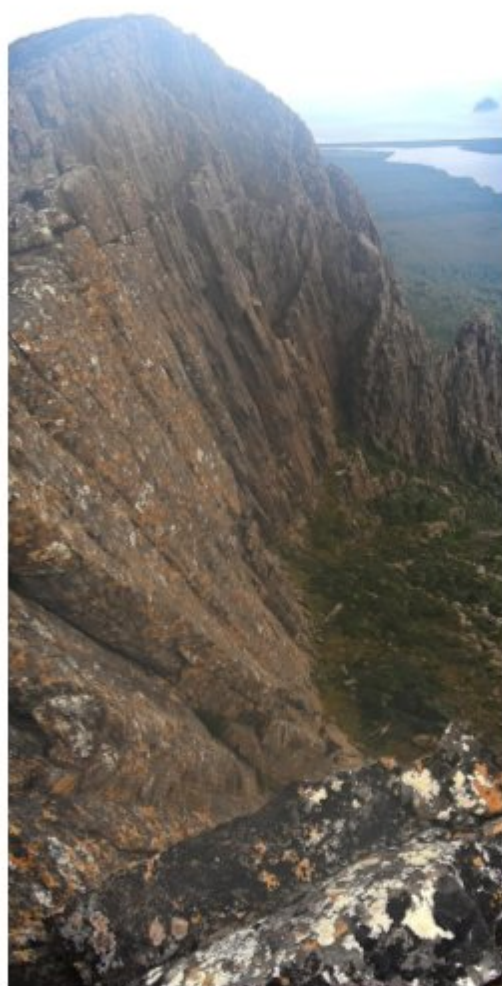
Almost magically, as we struggled along the bolder-strewn ridgetop of remote Kameruka Moraine, the mists began to lift and PB was revealed. The next day dawned still and clear and our 350m climb to the top of the hanging valley, and our next campsite, was a stroll in comparison to the walk so far. After careful site selection and a leisurely lunch, we struck out for the summit and spectacular views of the South Coast. Unexpectedly, to the north, the unmistakable profile of Federation Peak etched the skyline – clear of its usual grey shroud. To the west, layer on layer of varying hues of blue define the Ironbound Range and successive ranges to the even more remote south-west coast. Looking down past the dolerite columns that are Precipitous Bluff, we see New River Lagoon stretching to the South Coast – as enticing a scene as could be imagined.



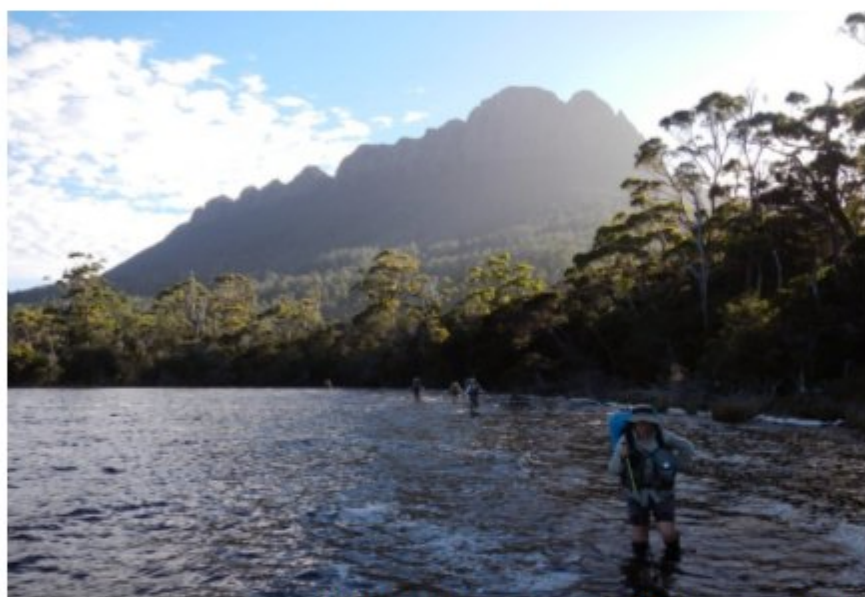
Surveying the South Coast and the Ironbound Range from PB

Overnight gale-force winds made for limited sleep and gave rise to some concern over the 1100m descent, the first 300m near-vertical and very exposed. However, although very steep, the descent was straightforward and in less than 3 hours we re-entered the protection of the forest. Still steep, the wet tree-roots made for a long and slippery scramble down to Cavern Camp and the lagoon. We were pleased to arrive before 2 groups of 6 coming up from the South Coast as campsites were limited with more than 20 people in the area.

Before us the next day was an 8km splash through New River Lagoon to the South Coast and a (relatively) easy 3 day stroll back to civilisation in the form of Cockle Creek. The lagoon was low and the walking enjoyable – we quickly learned that the ease of shallow water far outweighed any advantage from cutting corners.



The dolerite columns of Precipitous Bluff edge the descent to New River Lagoon



New River Lagoon with PB looming above

We stuck close to the shore. The next 2 days were very hot – 38° is unheard of in this region. Although a little cooler under the forest canopy, we drank copious quantities of water and slowed our pace to compensate. It was still demanding – camp and an ocean swim were strongly anticipated long before arrival.

An easy 8km to finish saw us in Cockle Creek at 10am – in time for a clean-up and a cuppa before pickup and the long trip home. A rewarding walk, enhanced by the tenacity of the Tasmanian bush and 6 resilient trampers.