

# **HIKING THE OVERLAND TRACK**



#### About the Author

Warwick Sprawson lives in Melbourne, Australia. After studying engineering he spent many years working and hiking in England, Ireland, Canada, Spain, Japan, Mexico and Costa Rica. Returning to Melbourne, he ditched engineering and studied Australian Land Conservation and Management, subsequently working as a bushland regenerator. Developing an interest in writing about Australia's native plants and animals, he completed RMIT's Professional Writing and Editing course, and since 2008 has worked full time as a writer, including as a regular contributor to *Wild* and *Great Walks* magazines.

## HIKING THE OVERLAND TRACK

TASMANIA: CRADLE MOUNTAIN–LAKE ST CLAIR  
NATIONAL PARK

by Warwick Sprawson

**CICERONE**

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### Updates to this Guide

While every effort is made by our authors to ensure the accuracy of guidebooks as they go to print, changes can occur during the lifetime of an edition. Any updates that we know of for this guide will be on the Cicerone website ([www.cicerone.co.uk/1013/updates](http://www.cicerone.co.uk/1013/updates)), so please check before planning your trip. We also advise that you check information about such things as transport, accommodation and shops locally.

The route maps in this guide are derived from publicly available data, databases and crowd-sourced data. As such they have not been through the detailed checking procedures that would generally be applied to a published map from an official mapping agency, although naturally we have reviewed them closely in the light of local knowledge as part of the preparation of this guide.

We are always grateful for information about any discrepancies between a guidebook and the facts on the ground, sent by email to [updates@cicerone.co.uk](mailto:updates@cicerone.co.uk) or by post to Cicerone, Juniper House, Murley Moss, Oxenholme Road, Kendal, LA9 7RL.

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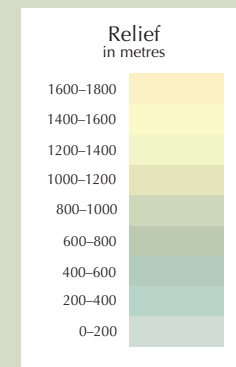
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Front cover: A mountain tarn near the summit of Mt Ossa (Stage 4 sidetrip)

## Symbols used on route maps

	Overland Track
	alternative start
	sidetrip
	other track
	start point
	finish point
	alternative start point
	route direction
	peak
	hut/emergency hut
	campsite
	building
	pass
	water feature
	viewpoint
	significant bridge
	waterfall
	parking
	other feature
	ferry route
	Cradle Mountain - Lake St Clair National Park boundary



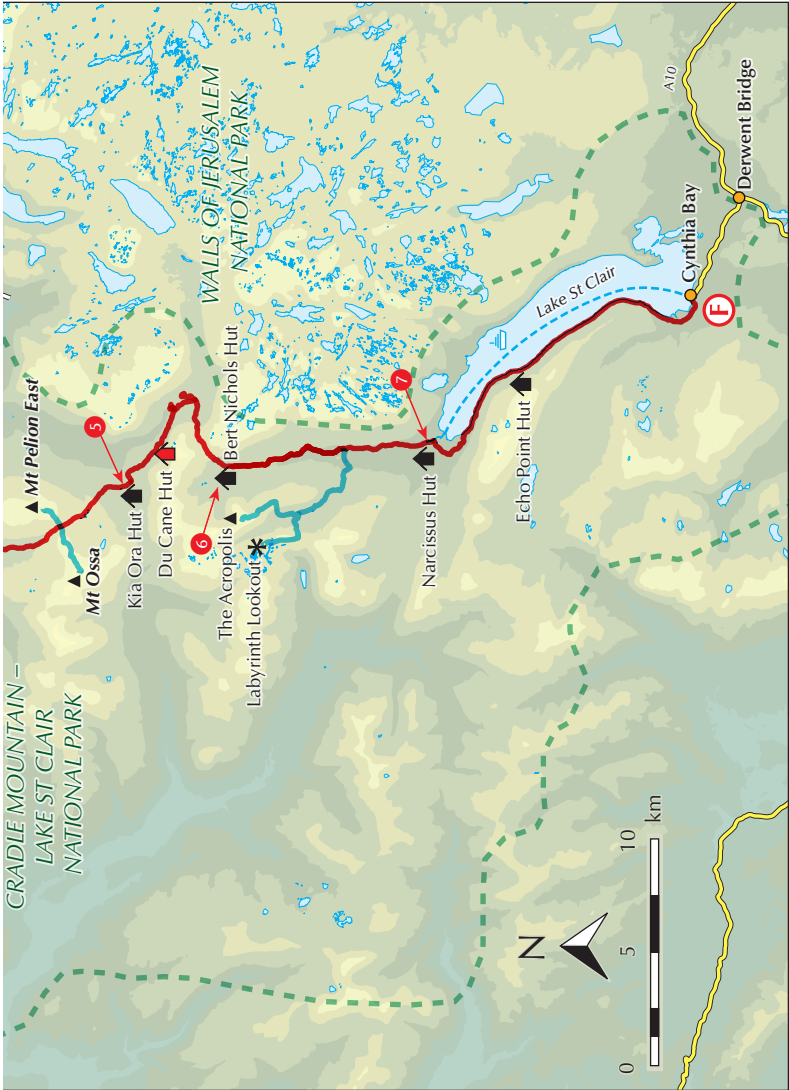
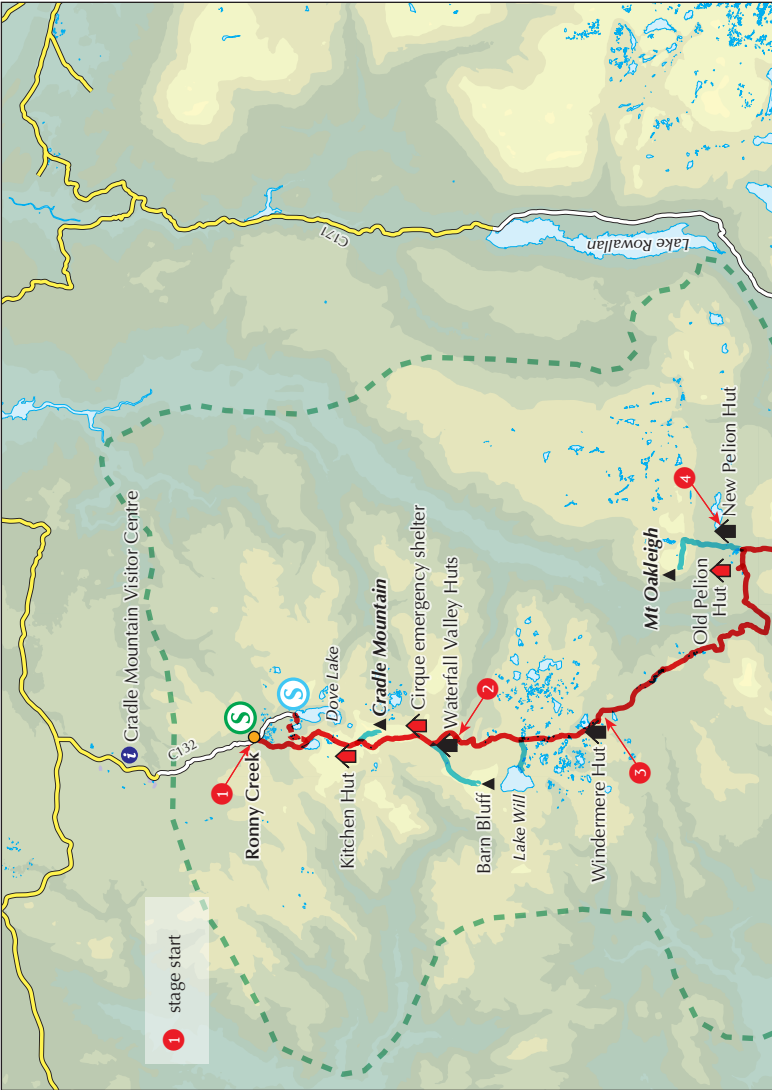
SCALE: 1:50,000

0 kilometres 0.5 1  
0 miles 0.5

Contour lines are drawn at 25m intervals and highlighted at 100m intervals.

GPX files for all routes can be downloaded free at [www.cicerone.co.uk/1013/GPX](http://www.cicerone.co.uk/1013/GPX).





## Mountain safety

Every mountain walk has its dangers, and those described in this guidebook are no exception. All who walk or climb in the mountains should recognise this and take responsibility for themselves and their companions along the way. The author and publisher have made every effort to ensure that the information contained in this guide was correct when it went to press, but, except for any liability that cannot be excluded by law, they cannot accept responsibility for any loss, injury or inconvenience sustained by any person using this book.

### **Distress signal** (*emergency only*)

In Tasmania any pattern of 3 is a distress signal, such as 3 whistle blasts, 3 torch or mirror flashes, or 3 lines tramped in the snow.

### **Helicopter rescue**

The following signals are used to communicate with a helicopter:

Help needed:  
raise both arms  
above head to  
form a 'Y'



Help not needed:  
raise one arm  
above head, extend  
other arm downward



### **Emergency telephone numbers**

In an emergency dial 000.

### **Weather reports**

Bureau of Meteorology: [www.bom.gov.au](http://www.bom.gov.au)

**Mountain rescue can be very expensive – be adequately insured.**



*Pinestone Valley on the way to Kia Ora Hut (Stage 4)*

## ROUTE SUMMARY TABLES

## MAIN ROUTE

	Stage	Time (hr)	Distance (km)	Ascent/ descent (m)	Grade
Stage 1	Ronny Creek (Cradle Valley) to Waterfall Valley Huts	3½–5½	11.0	565/405	Medium–hard
Stage 2	Waterfall Valley Huts to Windermere Hut	2–3	7.7	200/230	Easy–medium
Stage 3	Windermere Hut to New Pelion Hut	5–6½	15.3	520/665	Medium
Stage 4	New Pelion Hut to Kia Ora Hut	3½–4	8.6	335/335	Medium
Stage 5	Kia Ora Hut to Bert Nichols Hut	3½–4½	9.8	380/350	Medium
Stage 6	Bert Nichols Hut to Narcissus Hut	2¾–3¾	10.1	165/310	Easy
Stage 7	Narcissus Hut to Cynthia Bay	5–7	17.2	710/710	Easy–medium
Total		7 days	79.7	2875/3005	

## SIDETRIPS OFF MAIN TRACK

	Stage	Sidetriip	Time (return)	Distance (return)	Total ascent/ descent (return, m)	Grade
Stage 1	Cradle Mountain		2½–3½hr	2.6km	355	Medium–hard
Stage 1	Barn Bluff		3–4hr	6.2km	480	Medium–hard
Stage 2	Lake Will Beach		1¼hr	3.2km	50	Easy
Stage 3	River Forth Lookout		10min	130m	10	Easy
Stage 3	Old Pelion Hut		30min	880m	30	Easy
Stage 3	Mt Oakleigh		5–6hr	9.2km	625	Medium
Stage 4	Mt Ossa		3½–4½hr	5.8km	605	Medium–hard
Stage 4	Mt Pelion East		1½–2½hr	2.8km	290	Medium
Stage 5	D'Alton and Fergusson Falls		45min	1.7km	120	Easy–Medium
Stage 5	Hartnett Falls		1–1½hr	2.2km	85	Easy
Stage 6	Pine Valley Hut (an over-night trip is recommended)		1½–2hr (one way)	4.9km (one way)	150/100 (one way)	Easy

## SIDETRIPS FROM PINE VALLEY HUT

Sidetriip	Time (return)	Distance (return)	Total ascent/ descent, (return, m)	Grade
The Labyrinth Lookout	4–5hr	7.2km	560	Medium–hard
The Acropolis	5–6hr	8.2km	840	Hard





Wombat Pool. Keep it clean, you might be the one drinking it  
(Stage 1 alternative start, photo: François Maréchal)

## THE OVERLAND HUTS

Hut	Distance from previous overnight hut (km)	Distance from Ronny Creek start (km)	Number of bunks	Heating	Water source
<b>Start:</b> Ronny Creek (Cradle Valley)	0.0	0.0	-	-	-
<i>Kitchen Hut</i>	5.5	5.5	<i>Emergency only</i>	No	No source
Scott-Kilvert Memorial Hut (2.1 km off main track)	(10.6)	(10.6)	20	Yes	Tank
<i>Cirque Emergency Shelter</i>	8.5	8.5	<i>Emergency only</i>	No	No source
Waterfall Valley Huts	11.0	11.0	24 (plus 4 in old hut)*	Yes	Tank
Windermere Hut	7.7	18.7	16	Yes	Tank
<i>Old Pelion Hut (440m off main track)</i>	<i>(14.8)</i>	<i>(33.5)</i>	<i>Emergency only</i>	No	Creek
New Pelion Hut	15.3	34.0	36	Yes	Tank
Kia Ora Hut	8.6	42.6	20	Yes	Tank
<i>Du Cane Hut</i>	2.9	45.5	<i>Emergency only</i>	No	No source
Bert Nichols Hut	9.8	52.4	24	Yes	Tank
Pine Valley Hut (4.9km off main track)	(10.6)	(63.0)	24	Yes	Tank
Narcissus Hut	10.1	62.5	18	Yes	Tank
Echo Point Hut	6.5	69.0	8	Yes	Creek or lake
<b>Finish:</b> Cynthia Bay	17.2	79.7	-	-	-

\* A new 34-person hut at Waterfall Valley is due for completion in May 2020

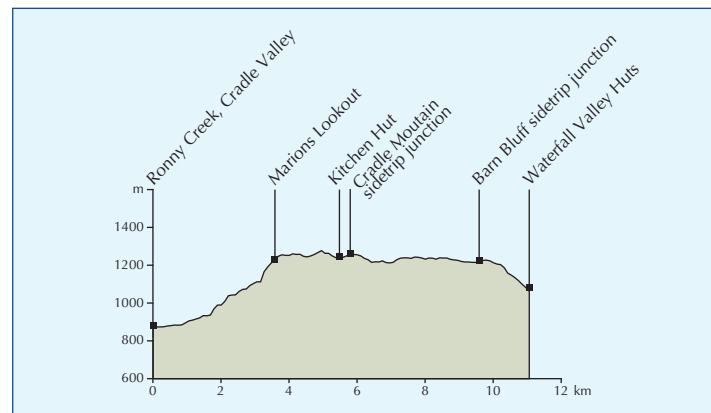
## STAGE 1

## Ronny Creek to Waterfall Valley Huts

<b>Start</b>	Ronny Creek (Cradle Valley)
<b>Alternative start</b>	Dove Lake car park
<b>Finish</b>	Waterfall Valley Huts
<b>Distance</b>	11.0km
<b>Total ascent</b>	565m
<b>Total descent</b>	405m
<b>Grade</b>	Medium–hard
<b>Time</b>	3½–5½hr
<b>Maximum altitude</b>	1271m
<b>Possible sidetrips</b>	Cradle Mountain (medium–hard); Barn Bluff (medium–hard)

The first day is the most difficult, with exposed sections and a tough climb to Marions Lookout. There's much to admire on the way though, including patches of rainforest, stunning lakes and incredible alpine meadows. Kitchen Hut, a wooden hut weathered grey by the elements, is a good place for lunch or a break. An alternative is to start the hike at Dove Lake instead of Ronny Creek. This allows you to enjoy the classic view of Cradle Mountain across the lake before rejoining the main Overland Track (see Alternative start). For more information on transfers between Cradle Valley and Ronny Creek, see the introduction to this guide, 'Accommodation and facilities at the start of the track'.

Note: the Waterfall Valley Huts will be closed from November 2019 to May 2020 while a new hut is constructed. During construction hikers need to stay at the Scott-Kilvert Memorial Hut, a 2.1km diversion from the main Overland Track route. Staying at the Scott-Kilvert Memorial Hut makes Stage 1 10.6km instead of 11.0km. Stage 2 to Windermere Hut increases from 7.7km to 12.3km.



## Ronny Creek Car Park to Kitchen Hut, 5.5km, 2–3hr

Sign in at the walkers' registration booth at Ronny Creek and then start the track, following the boardwalk that meanders along the broad, grassy Cradle Valley. The valley is etched with small streams and pools, the track passing banks of alpine corallfern and scattered pandani. Note the lone boulder about 150m from the start of the walk, a glacial erratic (a rock carried and then deposited by the glacier that carved Cradle Valley). ▶

After 750m, cross **Ronny Creek** on a bridge and follow the arrows for the Overland past the track to Wombat Pool. The path rises through swathes of button-grass into eucalypt forest with a lovely section beside **Crater Creek** as you arrive at the junction with **Horse Track** (so named because the route allowed packhorses – which supported early hikers – access to Cradle Plateau). Continue straight, crossing Crater Creek, to begin the long steady climb towards Crater Lake on a path of pale, crushed rock.

Enter dense, mossy rainforest, where a series of cascades leads to **Crater Falls** tumbling among the sassafras and myrtle beech. Stairs climb out of the gully past deciduous beech and back into moorland, with views ahead to the formidable bluff below **Marions Lookout**.

The valley is also a good place to spot wombats, especially in overcast weather.





The boatshed at Crater Lake

The **boat shed at Crater Lake** is reached, a spectacularly weathered shingle hut with wonderful views across the lake. ▶

**Crater Lake** is a good example of a cirque (see 'Geology' section), where a glacier has formed in the lee of a mountain, wearing away a deep hole that subsequently filled with water to become a lake.

The track skirts around the eastern side of the lake, the shore fringed with King Billy pines, then climbs to reach an exposed ridge and the junction with the alternative start via Dove Lake and Wombat Pool, 2.8km from Ronny Creek. ▶

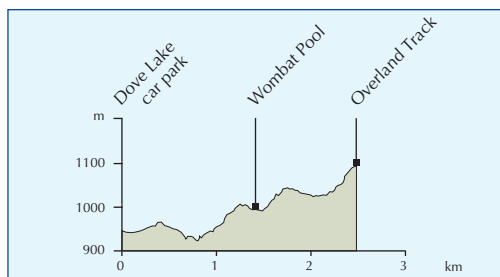
#### Alternative start from Dove Lake car park (via Lake Lilla and Wombat Pool)

2.5km, 45min. Ascent/descent: 190m/50m.

This alternative start rejoins the track near the base of Marions Lookout and takes in the breathtaking view of Cradle Mountain across Dove Lake and Wombat Pool. Although slightly shorter than the route from Ronny Creek, it involves a steeper climb.

From late April into May, this is a great place to admire the autumnal colours of the surrounding deciduous beech.

There's a wooden platform with good views over Dove Lake and the smaller Lake Lilla.



After enjoying the view of the ragged tooth of **Cradle Mountain** across Dove Lake, follow the 'Ronny Ck via Lake Lilla' sign to the south-west, climbing slightly to reach a junction with the Dove Lake circuit track after 350m. Continue straight, **Lake Lilla** coming into view to the left before entering the shade and shelter of rainforest, rock steps leading down to Lilla Creek, with the lake nestled beautifully between the hills.

Cross the creek to reach a track junction after 50m. Turn left and begin the short, steep climb to **Wombat Pool**, a small circular lake fringed with ancient, bleached pencil pines.

From Wombat Pool the junction with the Overland is 1.1km away. Climb steeply again to a lookout 20m off the main track with views over Dove Lake, Lake Lilla and down Cradle Valley. A further steady slog takes you towards **Wombat Peak**, the smooth round hill ahead. The track joins the Overland near Crater Lake, the bluff of Marions Lookout just ahead.

From the junction with the alternative start via Lake Lilla and Wombat Pool, head south towards Marions Lookout. The climb begins with rock-strewn steps, stunted snow peppermints and deciduous beech growing in the meagre shelter of the escarpment. The steps climb, slowly becoming steeper, until towards the top of the first peak there's a chain-rope to help haul yourself up the rock face. ◀

After the first peak the track levels off to a steady climb following the ridge to a junction of a trail

descending to **Dove Lake**. Continue along the ridge for 250m – metal marker-poles indicating the route in dense fog or snow – until reaching a track junction near **Marions Lookout**. The lookout, 20m from the junction, has superb views over Dove Lake.

The **movement of ice** during the ice age scoured Marions Lookout and Cradle Plateau flat, while the surrounding peaks like Cradle Mountain and Barn Bluff were above the level of the abrading ice.

From the lookout continue up a final rise to reach Cradle Plateau – the most difficult climb on the track is now over. The track enters alpine communities studied with small, clear pools, cushionplants and creeping pine. ▶

About 1km from Marions Lookout descend into a shallow gully to cross **Plateau Creek** on a bridge, its clear waters trickling over white rocks. At 1271m, the ridge above the gully is the highest point on the Overland's main track.

Follow the boardwalk as it snakes down towards **Kitchen Hut**, ending near a junction with **Horse Track**, 1.6km from Marions Lookout. Neat paving and more boardwalk takes you the remaining 400m to the hut. Past Kitchen Hut the track becomes less frequented as it's beyond the range of most day-trippers.

The plants grow low to the ground to avoid the worst of the wind, with special adaptations like small leaves and tough stems to help them survive the extreme conditions.

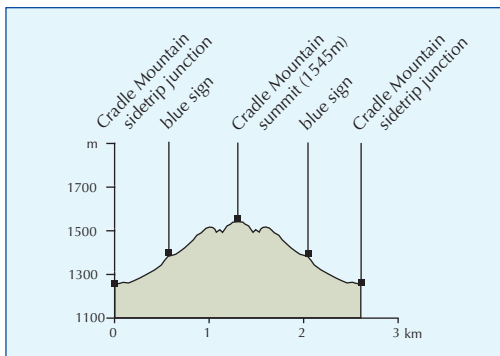
#### KITCHEN HUT

Kitchen Hut is a tiny two-level shingle building built on a raised rock platform, strengthened against the often ferocious winds by steel cables. A spade high up on the outside wall gives an indication of how much snow can sometimes fall in this area. The hut makes a great place for a break with a small table and bench inside, and the possibility of seeing one of the eastern quolls that frequent the area. It also makes a good place to leave your pack if doing the Cradle Mountain sidetrip, as the sidetrip junction is only 150m further south along the Overland. There's a toilet 80m south of the hut, just to the right of the track.

If you've brought too much gear this is where you'll realise your mistake.

**Sidetripping: Cradle Mountain**

2.6km, 2½–3½hr return. Total ascent/descent: 355m return. Grade: Medium–hard.



This is a steep, sometimes difficult climb requiring free hands to scramble over boulders towards the summit. While helicopter tours of Cradle Valley are available, those climbing Cradle Mountain (1545m) won't need to take one – the view from the top is one of the highlights of the walk.

The Cradle Mountain sidetrip begins 150m south-east of Kitchen Hut along a trail marked **Face Track**. Follow this track for 30m to reach a second junction. Turn right, following the sign to **Cradle Mountain** summit.

Initially the path is a well-defined, deeply furrowed, rocky track marked with white poles. The track soon gets steeper, scree turning to jumbled stones and larger rocks. About 550m from the last junction reach a blue sign indicating the route to Cradle Mountain summit. As the track continues to climb the rocks give way to boulders spotted with impressive collections of coloured lichens.

Picking your way through the boulders, the white pole markers become essential for following the track, the boulder-hopping becoming hand-over-hand climbing, with a few tricky sections that require great care.







*The route up Cradle Mountain is steep but well worth the effort on a fine day*

The view from the top makes the excursion worthwhile: a panorama with Barn Bluff to the south-west and Kitchen Hut far below.

A steep scramble leads to a saddle between huge dolerite columns. The track dips down, the strap leaves of the lily-like silky milligania growing in profusion, before a short, final scramble up and over the boulders to the summit. ◀ The Overland Track is visible as a fine white line etched into the landscape.

It was from the summit of Cradle Mountain in 1910 that **Gustav Weindorfer** declared, 'This must be a national park for the people for all time. It is magnificent, and people must know about it and enjoy it'. The brass direction plate on the summit was designed by Weindorfer to commemorate surveyor Henry Hellyer climbing the mountain in 1831, Cradle's first officially recorded ascent.

Retrace your steps to rejoin the Overland Track.

## STAGE 1 – RONNY CREEK TO WATERFALL VALLEY HUTS

### Kitchen Hut to Waterfall Valley Huts, 5.5km, 1½–2½hr

From Kitchen Hut pass the Cradle Mountain **sidetrip turn-off** after 150m (marked 'Face Track'), climbing slightly as the blunt rock nub of **Barn Bluff** appears ahead. The track continues across the alpine vegetation of the plateau, which includes cushionplants, pineapple grass and deciduous beech. Passing several idyllic tarns, Cradle Mountain's fractured columnar flank rears up to the east, before the track enters snow peppermint forest – the eucalypt most tolerant of Tasmania's harsh, high altitude conditions.

This **forest**, like many along the track, is littered with the bleached trunks of dead trees. These trunks are often the remains of pencil and King Billy pines killed by fire. In the last century alone, a third of the King Billy pine population has succumbed to flames.

The walking becomes slower as the track becomes a mix of rocks and mud, the jumbled hillside of **Benson Peak** appearing to the south-east. At the junction with the **Lake Rodway Track** (which leads to the **Scott-Kilvert Memorial Hut**, 2.1km way, named after the teacher and student who died of hypothermia in the area in 1965), you can see the distant chain of mountains stretching away to the south-east, the Overland passing between many of them on its way south. From here Waterfall Valley Huts are 2.5km.

Just after the junction, to the left of the track, is a bulbous green plastic pod known as the **Cirque Emergency Shelter**, looking eerily like a spacecraft. The shelter was installed in 2017, three years after a man died from exposure nearby.

Soon after you pass the emergency shelter the walking becomes easier as the track follows the gentle, curved rim of **Cradle Cirque**, with breathtaking views east to the bald double knob of Mt Emmett and the Forth River Valley beyond. ▶

Around 750m from the Lake Rodway Track junction, reach the **junction** with the Barn Bluff sidetrip and continue along Cradle Cirque, duckboards and boardwalks

The track is lined with wind-pruned shrubs, an indication of how exposed this section is to wild weather.

making for easy hiking until the track begins to descend into Waterfall Valley.

Descend steeply along switchbacks through scoparia and pandani, before arriving at a junction near the huts. A boardwalk leads off the main track to the huts, which are 160m east at the edge of the forest beside the plain – a beautiful setting.

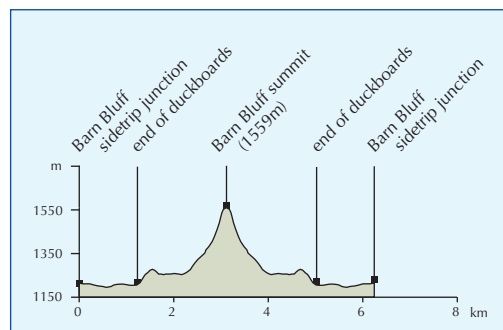
### WATERFALL VALLEY HUTS

There are two Waterfall Valley Huts, a larger one, located closer to the main track, which sleeps 24, and a smaller hut, 100m further on, a more basic affair which sleeps four. The larger hut is due to be knocked down and replaced by a better insulated 34-person shelter, scheduled for completion in May 2020. There are two toilets, a newer one near the main hut and an older one nearer the camping area. The campsites are on the grass near the old hut, with those further down the slope becoming quite damp. The group campsite is up the track behind the old hut.

A loud, cranky Tasmanian native hen often patrols the campsite and around the huts. Wombats are also common. Be sure to check out the beautiful waterfall behind the old hut. As with all overnight stays, make sure you keep your food and rubbish hung up inside a hut so the critters don't scoff the lot.

### Sidetrip: Barn Bluff

6.2km, 3–4hr return. Total ascent/descent: 480m return. Grade: Medium–hard.



Barn Bluff is one of the lesser climbed mountains on the track, which gives this sidetrip a bit of an intrepid feeling. The view from the top rivals Cradle Mountain, as it should – Barn Bluff, at 1559m, is 14m higher and Tassie's fourth highest mountain. ▶ Most of the hike is fairly level as it rounds Bluff Cirque, but the climb is very steep in places, requiring the use of both hands to clamber over boulders. Some sections can be muddy and slippery after rain. The route up the mountain is marked only with small cairns, so good visibility is vital.

From the junction, duckboards lead smoothly along a ridge of low alpine vegetation, including cushionplants, central lemon boronia and mountain rocket. Ahead the fractured face of the bluff seems insurmountable, the path up its northern side invisible.

After 1.2km the track leaves the duckboards and climbs a short, steep hill, then descends to follow the edge of **Bluff Cirque**, the views already superb. The cirque leads to the base of the bluff, the sides of the mountain littered with boulders cleaved from above by the splitting action of ice freezing and thawing in cracks.

Now the climb really begins. The rocky path initially rises gently, the bluff's spires beginning to loom overhead.

The sidetrip can be done on the first day, or on the second if hikers backtrack 1.7km from Waterfall Valley Huts to the junction.

*Cradle Cirque, on the way to the Waterfall Valley Huts, can be exposed to bad weather*





The stones gradually grow larger until the track picks its way through beautiful lichen-spotted boulders near the base of the dolerite cliffs. The track here becomes indistinct, marked only with small cairns leading up towards a break in the boulders between the columns above. There are a few tricky sections, and some scrambling up loose banks of scree. Towards the top the track branches into two; take the left turn as the route to the right soon peters out.

And then you are at the top, and, on a clear day, the king or queen of the national park. ◀ Beyond the lake the entire plateau is studded with smaller pools until you reach the bulk of Mt Pelion West. Looking north, the track just climbed appears as a chalk line tapering back to the shaggy head of Cradle Mountain. On a good day the track is visible far beyond, skirting all the way back towards Marions Lookout. Barn Bluff is well worth the effort.

Return the way you came and rejoin the Overland Track.

The 360° view is like an aerial map of the northern section of the walk, with Lake Will to the south, just below the jut of the bluff, its white beaches appealing on a warm day.



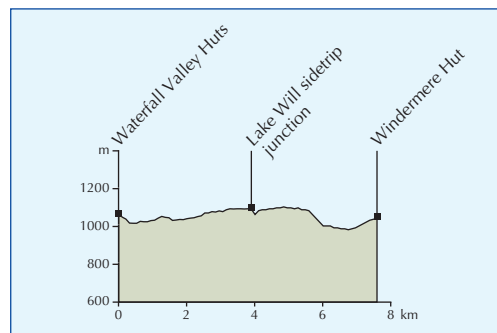
Barn Bluff from the junction with the main track

## STAGE 2

### Waterfall Valley Huts to Windermere Hut

<b>Start</b>	Waterfall Valley Huts
<b>Finish</b>	Windermere Hut
<b>Distance</b>	7.7km
<b>Total ascent</b>	200m
<b>Total descent</b>	230m
<b>Grade</b>	Easy-medium
<b>Time</b>	2-3hr
<b>Maximum altitude</b>	1112m
<b>Possible sidetrips</b>	Lake Will Beach (easy)

A relatively short, level day over exposed buttongrass and heath plains. Lakes are the feature of today, including a chance to visit Lake Will and a walk around the shore of the beautiful, island-studded Lake Windermere.



#### Waterfall Valley Huts to Lake Will sidetrip junction, 3.8km, 1-1½hr

From the main track near Waterfall Valley Huts the Overland gently descends to cross the plain, buttongrass returning as the track climbs again to a level, rocky path on the edge of Waterfall Valley. After 1.1km the track