



Frenchmans Cap Track

Franklin-Gordon Wild Rivers National Park

This track leads to the summit of the magnificent white quartzite dome of Frenchmans Cap (1443 m), the most prominent mountain peak in the Franklin-Gordon Wild Rivers National Park. The track is considerably more arduous than many other Tasmanian walks, including the Overland Track, so it is recommended that you gain experience on other Tasmanian walking tracks before attempting Frenchmans Cap. This track's surface is rough and muddy over extended sections, especially across the Loddon Plains, and it is steep in places.

Most walkers spend between three and five days completing the return trip, a distance of about 27 km each way. Around 800 people walk this track each year, with about 550 visiting from December to March.

The track starts from the carpark beside the Lyell Highway about 200 km from Hobart and 55 km from Queenstown.

Transport and tours

Bus companies and tours provide transport to the Franklin-Gordon Wild Rivers National Park. For further details contact the Tasmania Travel Information Centre on 1300 655 145.

Private vehicles may be parked in the carpark beside the highway at the start of the track. Walkers are warned, however, that some vehicles parked beside the highway have been robbed or vandalised. An alternative is to park your car at Lake St Clair and arrange transport with a commercial operator to the start of the track.

Fees

You are required to pay a fee to enter the National Park. The most convenient pass for this walk is the Backpacker Pass. The pass is valid for all National Parks for a period of two months. It is available from all park centres, Travel and Visitor Information centres and selected retail outlets. All money raised goes directly towards the maintenance and protection of Tasmania's National Parks.

Walker registration

For your safety please record your trip intentions in the registration book at the Franklin River (near the start of the walk) and also in the logbook at each hut. Your

entries may save your life should you become lost or overdue. However, the books are not checked regularly and a search will only be mounted if someone reports you as being overdue. Leave details of your trip with a reliable friend or relative. Be sure to advise this person when you have completed your trip. Please remember to sign out at the end of your walk.

Accurate logbook information also provides the statistical basis for proper management of the area.

Safety

The weather in Tasmania's high country can change rapidly. The track beyond Barron Pass is entirely above 900m and may be subject to high winds, mist, rain, hail and snow — even in summer.

Rain normally falls on 15 to 20 days each month during summer and more often in other seasons.

Essential items

Warm waterproof clothing, proper equipment and adequate preparation are essential. It is beyond the scope of these notes to cover all the appropriate gear and procedures necessary to walk Tasmania's high country so it is important that you get a free copy of *Before You Walk — Tasmania's Essential Bushwalking Guide and Trip Planner*. A map is essential and the *Frenchmans Cap Map and Notes* is recommended.

Walk softly

Try to minimise your impact with every step you take. Always walk in the centre of the track and be prepared to walk through the mud — attempting to skirt bogs only makes them bigger and causes more environmental damage. It is also usually much quicker to walk straight through. Keep your party size to less than six people to minimise social and environmental pressure.

Track upgrading is occurring in places, mostly at high altitudes where trampled vegetation is slow to regenerate. The alpine vegetation above Lake Tahune is particularly sensitive to trampling and is extremely slow to regenerate. You can assist in minimising damage by stepping on rocks, rather than vegetation, whenever possible.

Huts and camping

There are two unattended huts along the track, which have bunks but no cooking stoves or utensils. Lake Vera hut accommodates 20 people; and Lake Tahune hut accommodates 12 people. It is preferable to use the huts when possible, to reduce trampling of vegetation around campsites. However, it is essential that a tent be carried, as the huts may be full when you arrive. A tent also allows you to stop when it is unwise to proceed, due to poor weather, injury or tiredness.

The recommended camping locations are: Franklin River — a number of sites can be found just before crossing the river; Loddon River; Philips Creek — first crossing; Lake Vera — a number of suitable sites are located along the track a short distance after crossing the bridge near the hut; and Lake Tahune — take the track past the heli-pad. There are a number of sites in this area.

Coal stove

Supplying coal to the Lake Vera hut is expensive. As well, the stove generates a considerable amount of ash waste, which degrades the environment. Put all ash in the bin provided near the coal bunker. Think conservation — don't light the stove if the thermometer in the hut reads 10° C or more. Putting on extra clothing is a non-polluting way of getting warm.

The Parks and Wildlife Service is trialling a methylated spirits heater at Tahune Hut, and walkers are advised to bring their own methylated spirits.

Water

Take special care to keep water supplies clean, particularly around the huts.

Always wash at least 50 m away from streams and lakes, avoiding soaps and detergents.

Don't throw food scraps into streams or lakes.

Toilets

Composting toilets have been installed at both huts. To ensure efficient operation of the toilets, please follow the instructions provided.

In areas away from the toilets, faecal waste must be buried 100 m away from any watercourses or campsites. Carry a lightweight trowel in your pack, dig a hole 15 cm deep and bury your waste and toilet paper. Cover it well to deter animals.

Phytophthora—root rot

Phytophthora cinnamomi is a fungus that kills many of our native plants. Mud and soil, which are carried on vehicles, boots, gaiters and toilet trowel, help to spread the disease.

The Frenchmans Cap Track is currently free of *Phytophthora*. To prevent infecting this area, your boots and all gear that comes in contact with the soil should be cleaned of any mud or dirt prior to your walk. If you come across a washdown station please follow the directions.

Fires

Devastating wildfires have ravaged the Frenchmans Cap area twice in recent decades. In 1966 much of the area around Artichoke Valley and Lake Tahune was burnt. Regeneration of alpine plants is extremely slow and, in the case of the King Billy pines, 25 years later, there are still no young seedlings in localities where all the parent trees were killed. More recently, in 1980 a campfire at Lake Vera caused more than 6,000 ha of the Franklin-Gordon Wild Rivers National Park to be burnt. Both of these wildfires were the result of carelessness and could have been avoided.

Fuel stoves

A Fuel Stove Only Area has been declared for the whole of the Frenchmans Cap Track and the route to the Irenabyss on the Franklin River. Heavy fines can be imposed for lighting fires in this area. Fires are permitted only in the heating stove at Lake Vera hut.

Please remember

Your safety and the protection of our Wilderness World Heritage Area depend on you. Visits to these areas are increasing and if the area is to retain its wild nature all visitors need to do their best to minimise their environmental impact. With your help Tasmania's Wilderness World Heritage Area can continue to inspire others after you.

For more information

Ask for the brochure 'Before You Walk'

This brochure is free and available from the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service,
134 Macquarie St, Hobart 7000.
Phone: 03 6233 6285
email: publications@parks.tas.au.