



Maria Island National Park

RESERVOIR CIRCUIT



This easy walk is sheltered from the coastal winds and provides a glimpse of Maria Island's wildlife and history. The walk takes you through open woodlands into tall eucalypt forest, and returns via ruins of the old cement works. The area near the reservoir is a pleasant place for a picnic.

Round trip: 1 hour 30 minutes Shorter circuit: 45 minutes

1. The Twelve Apostles

Begin the walk at the Ranger Station and head along the road which passes behind the penitentiary. On the top side of the road you will see the foundations of 12 small houses. In the 1880s an Italian named Diego Bernacchi had high hopes for Maria Island as wine-producing country. These houses were built to house the workers from his vineyards. In the 1930s after his schemes had failed, the houses were removed to Hobart and rebuilt in Maria Street, New Town.

2. Blue gums

The road curves to the right and enters open woodland. The big trees you can see are blue gums (*Eucalyptus globulus*), Tasmania's floral emblem. These gums are easy to distinguish because of their large single gum nuts. As with many eucalypts, the immature plants have different looking leaves from the adults. In the case of the blue gum, these are quite distinctive. The young leaves have a waxy blue colour, are oblong shaped and form directly on squared stems. If an adult tree is damaged severely by

fire or by cutting, these young leaves may sprout from the trunk of the adult tree.

3. Turn off to the Reservoir

If you are doing the complete circuit, take the marked turn off to the right. **(For the short circuit go straight on to point 11: Cement Works.)** As you walk along look out for noisy green swift parrots feeding in the flowering blue gums. This migratory bird returns to the east coast of Tasmania in August to nest in the hollows of trees and breed. It is a nectar-eater and has a specially adapted brush tongue, much like that of a honey eater, with which it obtains nectar from the large blue gum blossoms.

4. Off the road

Take the track which branches off to the left. Here you will notice more understorey plants, such as silver wattle, blackwood, sunshine wattle and native currant. Here you will see another eucalypt with long furrowed fibrous bark, and a rather stringy appearance, the browntop stringybark (*Eucalyptus obliqua*). The stringybark's nuts are smaller and form in small groups.

5. Open forest

This is a good place to look for birds. The black-headed and the strong-billed honeyeaters are birds restricted to Tasmania and found together in forests containing the browntop stringybark. They look quite similar, with a slightly curved beak, an olive brown back and a black head. The strong-billed honeyeater is slightly bigger

and has a white stripe extending from one eye, round the back of its head, to the other. The black-headed honeyeater's head is totally black.

6. Native cherry tree

This tree has a bright green almost luminous appearance. During summer it bears small edible yellow to red fruit. A member of the 'sandalwood' family, it is a root parasite. A parasite is an animal or plant that lives on another at the expense of that plant or animal. In this case the tree grafts itself onto the roots of another tree (the host) and taps into the nutrients being absorbed by that tree. The host tree may be seriously affected, the lack of nutrients preventing new leaf production and eventual death.

7. The Reservoir

During the first convict period (1825-1832) the convicts constructed a dam on the creek in order to make a reservoir to supply the settlement of Darlington. Enlarged by each generation of settlers, it is still in use today. Look out for tree martins. These birds are similar to swallows, but have a short square tail instead of a long forked tail. They are often seen scooping insects from the surface of the reservoir

8. The manna or white gum

If you look away from the reservoir near where the track continues you will see another eucalypt, the manna or white gum (*Eucalyptus viminalis*). Have a good look. Are you looking at a manna gum, a blue gum or a stringybark? The manna gum has a smooth greyish yellow trunk and sheds bark from its upper branches in long ribbons, which often dangle from the forks of the tree. Its leaves are smaller than either of the other eucalypts and its fruit are small and in clusters of three. This gum tree is of particular interest because it provides an important food source for the endangered forty-spotted pardalote.

9. 40-spotted pardalote

These tiny birds are only found on the peninsulas and islands of eastern Tasmania, in woodlands where manna gums grow. They utilise a crystallised sugary fluid (manna) secreted from these trees, especially during the breeding season when they are feeding their young. If you look up into the tops of the trees you may see some very small birds, however, even with binoculars it is hard to tell whether it is the rare forty-spotted, or the more common spotted and striated pardalotes.

10. More birds

Stand quietly and make this noise "pssh...pssh...pssh pssh... pssh" or a squeaking noise. This sound makes small birds curious. Birds you might see include the scrub wren, a small brown bird with a white brow, usually seen hopping around fossicking for insects on the forest floor. The

ground thrush is a big bird (25-30cm) whose brown colours merge perfectly with its surroundings, leaving a shadowy image of a bird noisily fossicking in the low scrub. The grey fantail, so named because of the shape of its tail, is common in this area. As you walk down the track you may notice a quarry off to your right, where limestone for the cement works came from. When you reach the gravel road, turn to your right.

11. The Cement Works

The large red brick ruin dates from Bernacchi's cement works and was built around 1889. Situated on the hill behind are some kiln structures, parts of which are thought to be of convict origin. During the convict era this area was used to fire bricks with clay obtained from above the reservoir. Later, after the discovery of limestone, it was used for lime processing.

12. Manager's House

Once a substantial brick and timber house, this was built in the same period as the cement works as a residence for the manager. The house was set in fenced grounds and you can see the remains of the gate posts. During the industrial period it was used again by the engineer from the cement works.

13. Workman's Cottage

This was probably built a little after the manager's house. It is remarkable for having survived the years so well. Its decoration and detailing are quite elaborate for its size and display the best remaining joinery on the island.

14. Wallabies

Returning to the track which passes from the cement works to the Manager's House you will see an old road. This is the original track that connected the Manager's House to the main settlement. If there is water in the pond on Bernacchi's Creek listen for frogs. The eastern banjo frog sounds like a person playing notes on a banjo, unlike the brown tree frog, which has a ree-ree-ree-ree call. Walking quietly you may see some wallabies and pademelons. You can tell them apart by looking at their posture or shape. Further up, the road divides. The track going up the hill follows the old tramline, which connected the cement works with the harbour and the fossil cliffs. The other track takes you straight back to Darlington.