



Lake St Clair

LAKESIDE WALK

Lakeside walk 5-7 hrs one way

A walk along the Lakeside Track will take you through ancient cool temperate rainforest, open woodland, buttongrass plains and thick pockets of tea-tree. This track is the southern most section of the famous Overland Track, which covers 80 km and links Cradle Mountain and Lake St Clair.

The Overland Track was used by European trappers, prospectors, artists and explorers in the late 1800s. Word soon spread to Hobart town of the beauty of this area and it became increasingly popular with tourists and bushwalkers throughout the early to mid-1900s. Since the first ranger was based at Lake St Clair in the 1930s, facilities have been upgraded to include tracks, bridges and huts, which not only make the walk safer and more comfortable, but also help protect the fragile environment.

The walk along the Lakeside Track takes about 5-7 hours, one way, and covers about 16.5 km. Before heading off, please record your walk details in the log book at the visitor centre.

How to get there

The best way to approach this walk is to catch the early ferry from Cynthia Bay to Narcissus and follow the signs back to Echo Point and Cynthia Bay.

An alternative is to start from Cynthia Bay and follow the Watersmeet Nature Trail. Continue until the junction with the Cuvier Valley Track and follow the signs for the Overland Track to Narcissus. Confirm with the boat operator the afternoon departure time of the ferry to ensure that you allow enough time to catch the return ferry.

If you intend walking both ways you will need to stay at either Narcissus or Echo Point Hut. Both of these have good camping sites in close proximity to the huts.

Narcissus to Echo Point

Starting from the northern end of the lake, the first point of interest is the Narcissus River and the surrounding environment. The river is the main watercourse flowing into Lake St Clair and is home to platypus, water rats, trout and freshwater crayfish.

Aboriginal people frequented the area, which would have provided them with a variety of foods. Small hunting parties camped around the lake, and stone debris has been found at Narcissus and other locations along the track, where they stopped to sharpen stone tools. These sites are held in high regard by today's Aboriginal community and they form an important part of contemporary Aboriginal culture and heritage.

About 20,000 years ago, this whole region was covered by ice. The area around Narcissus was the meeting point of two large glaciers, one that flowed down through the Narcissus Valley and the other originating at the base of the Guardians, a spectacular range of mountains to the northwest.

These glaciers carved out the sides of Mt Olympus and travelled south for about 70 km. The movement of ice through this region has formed Lake St Clair, which at about 200 m is the deepest natural lake in Australia.

The track continues through open woodlands, where you may be lucky enough to see wombats, which prefer the open grassy areas for feeding. The low-lying areas are subject to water inundation, which tea-trees *Leptospermum* spp are able to tolerate.

About 45 minutes from Narcissus the track starts to rise out of the low swampy areas and the vegetation gradually changes to rainforest. Species such as sassafras *Atherosperma moschatum*, Leatherwood *Eucryphia lucida*, celery-top pine *Phyllocladus aspleniifolius* and myrtle *Nothofagus cunninghamii* occur here. Tasmania's rainforests contain plant species that existed when Tasmania was part of the giant supercontinent, Gondwana. *Nothofagus* species also occur on mainland Australia, in New Zealand, South America and fossil remains have been found in Antarctica. This provides evidence that these continents were all once linked.

About 45 minutes later Echo Point Hut is reached. This is a good place to stop for lunch. From the beach you can get a magnificent view of Mt Ida, its peak rising abruptly on the opposite shore, flanked on either side by the Traveller Range. The water is clean to drink so please help to keep it that way by using the pit toilet and by taking water back up to the hut to wash dishes. Use gritty sand and a scourer instead of soap. Even biodegradable soaps harm fish and other aquatic life.

Echo Point to Cynthia Bay

As you leave the hut look for the large stands of horizontal scrub *Anodopetalum biglandulosum*. It is easy to recognise because as it grows towards maturity, the weight of its trunks, branches and foliage causes the tree to almost fall over. The trees then continue to grow in an almost horizontal position.

About one hour further on is an area of rainforest that has been severely damaged by bushfire. This happened in 1976 as a result of a bushwalker burning toilet paper. To prevent this recurring please carry out all your rubbish. Do not burn it. Rainforest is extremely fire sensitive and may take

hundreds of years to recover. This national park has been declared a fuel stove only area to help reduce the risk of fires.

In the rainforest areas you may have noticed large fallen trees. As trees age they become less resistant to disease or the impacts of bacteria, fungi and insects. Yellow-tailed black cockatoos dig deeply into the sides of trees looking for grubs, whilst the small platypus beetle or the mountain pinhole borer chews through the sapwood. High winds which sweep down the lake and over the top of Mt Olympus buffet these ageing trees which may be 500 years old or more. In time they may come crashing down creating a gap in the forest, exposing the forest floor to sunlight. This creates a favourable environment for new seedlings to sprout.

The track winds through rainforest for about another three hours until it enters an area dominated by cabbage gums *Eucalyptus pauciflora* and bracken *Pteridium esculentum*. The bracken usually grows in disturbed sites caused by landslides or fire. It is a coloniser and so plays a vital role in the re-establishment of ecosystems.

Continue past the turnoff to Cuvier Valley, towards Watersmeet, where the Cuvier and Hugel rivers meet. These rivers and the Narcissus River are the only major rivers that feed Lake St Clair.

What you need to take

The Lake St Clair region receives more than 1600 mm of rain each year. Often this falls as snow or sleet, even in summer. There are not many huts on the track so you should be prepared for any weather conditions and carry camping gear, including a tent, sleeping bag and a fuel stove.

Comfortable walking boots and a raincoat are essential. Carry a woollen jumper or thermal clothing, as these are ideal for insulating against cold wet weather, even when the

fabric is wet. On sunny days you should wear a hat, eye protection and sunscreen.

Drinking water is available from the rivers and lake. Even though the water may be tannin coloured it is safe to drink.

Further Information

A day map is available for a small charge from the visitor centre. It indicates all the day walks in the Lake St Clair region. Park fees apply for all walks in Tasmania's national parks.

