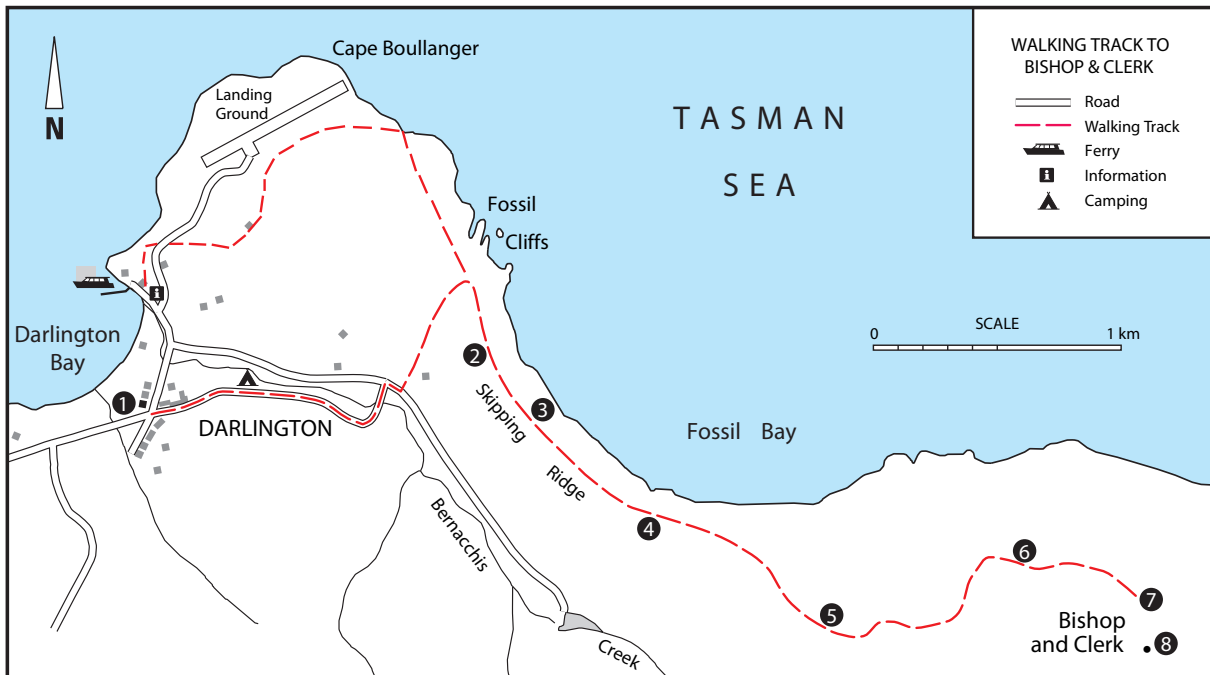




Bishop and Clerk

MARIA ISLAND NATIONAL PARK



Round Trip: 4 hours

At the northern end of Maria Island, stand the twin peaks of Bishop and Clerk. These towering dolerite columns were named because of the resemblance to a bishop, wearing a mitre, being followed by a clergyman. This walk takes you from grasslands along the edge of the Fossil Cliffs, through open forest and tall woodland, and then to rocky slopes and boulders to reach the summit. It is a medium grade walk with the last part scrambling over boulders. Care should be taken along the cliff edge and on the boulders, particularly with children. Please take adequate clothing as it is usually much cooler at the summit. Wear sturdy shoes and carry food and water with you. Take a camera and binoculars if you have them.

1. Darlington

There are two track options to commence the walk. One starts opposite the jetty and heads across the open grass area above the airstrip and then onto the Fossil cliffs. The other route commences at the Ranger Station

with a sign directing you along the road heading east. This gravel road takes you past big blue gums (*Eucalyptus globulus*), with their distinctive single, large gumnuts. You may also see a gum tree with smooth bark and very fine leaves. This is called a white peppermint (*Eucalyptus pulchella*). The road crosses Bernacchis Creek and continues past the ruin of the cement works. It then heads straight up the gully, where vegetation opens out into cleared grassland, to the signpost at the edge of the Fossil Cliffs. Look out for scarlet robins and yellow-tailed black cockatoos.

2. Skipping Ridge

Turn right at the cliffs and head along Skipping Ridge. You can see the layered cliffs sheer to the sea. Look up to your destination, Bishop and Clerk. From here you can also see Schouten Island and Freycinet Peninsula to the north, and Ile du Nord and Bird Rock just off the northwestern coast of Maria Island.

3. She-oaks

Here the track takes you through a stand of she-oaks (*Allocasuarina* sp.). These trees were prized for firewood by the early settlers because of their high heat production, minimal smoke and the little left over ash. Look out for currawongs fossicking in the litter beneath the trees.

4. Open forest

As the track begins to climb and moves inland from the coast, you will notice the she-oaks are gradually replaced by tall stringybarks (*Eucalyptus obliqua*). The blue gums are still present, but in the forest setting, they are tall and straight compared with their more open form in the woodland. There is also another smooth-barked eucalypt present, the manna or white gum (*Eucalyptus viminalis*). This tree sheds its bark from its upper branches in long ribbons, which frequently dangle from the forks of the tree. Unlike the blue gum, it has small gumnuts in clusters of three, and its leaves are narrower. This gum tree provides an important food source for the endangered forty-spotted pardalote. These tiny birds utilise the crystallised sugary fluid (manna) secreted by the manna gum especially during the breeding season when they are feeding their young. Watch out for the forty-spotted pardalote, as Maria Island has some of the few remaining colonies. Take a moment to sit quietly, this is a great place to see birds including the green rosella and dusky robin (both only found in Tasmania) the grey fantail, recognisable by its fan-shaped tail; and the ground thrush, a quite sizeable bird (25-29 cm) often seen on the forest floor scratching in the leaf litter.

5. A little bit steeper

Here the understorey varies as the track alternately climbs then levels out. Spindly blackwood (with their flat leaves) and silver wattle interchange on the wetter, more poorly drained flats, with cutting grass (so called because its leaves have tiny crystals of glass-like silica on their surface), dogwood, pink mountain berry, native pepper and native currant. Gradually the path gets rockier and you arrive at the edge of the scree slope.

6. Scree slope

This dolerite rock debris is termed scree. Over time, different climatic conditions have caused the dolerite mountain peaks to shatter, sending blocks of rocks plunging down the slopes with the resultant small loose stones at the bottom and boulders near the top. Here the track is steep and there are loose stones. The track is marked with yellow arrows and cairns (small piles of rocks used as land-marks). Continue on, as the view at the top is worth it. As you go higher some boulder hopping and scrambling is required.

7. Take a breather

After about 30 minutes you will come to a small sheltered spot. This is a good place to take a break. The last 50 metres to the top are steep with more boulders to scramble over and small flat areas with sheer drops. If you are in a large group it is best to divide up and do this final section in small groups.

8. Bishop and Clerk

When you reach the summit (620 m), it may be cloaked in a layer of cloud. This is a common feature of Maria Island. As warm air masses rise, moisture condenses. If the moisture cannot evaporate, then clouds form. Although the cloud layer may look stationary, turbulence within causes momentary gaps to appear giving splendid views. You have a bird's eye view of the Freycinet Peninsula, Schouten Island, Isle des Phoques and the east coast of the mainland, and views down to Cape Boullanger and the Fossil Cliffs. The dolerite columns directly in front of you form beautiful shapes and colours. From here you have an excellent vantage point to scan the sea below for whales and dolphins.



Bishop and Clerk and the Fossil Cliffs, Photo: Joe Shemesh