



OVERLAND TRACK

Looking forward on the Overland Track

In 2004 a new vision was announced for the Overland Track to address concerns about degradation and overcrowding. The changes included an online booking system and associated track fee, one-way walking during the peak season and a daily cap of 60 walker departures.

A vision for the Overland Track guided the changes that were introduced in 2005.

The Overland Track will be Tasmania's premier walking track, known worldwide for showcasing the values of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area and an appreciation of the natural and cultural heritage, demonstrating best practice environmental and management standards, and providing a sustainable quality experience for a range of users.

With the 10th anniversary of these changes approaching, Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair parks and reserves manager Nic Deka and his team undertook a comprehensive review of the Overland Track experience. Consultants were engaged to review the Overland Track experience, produce a community engagement plan, and prepare an economic impact assessment, the first to quantify the contribution of the Overland Track to the north-west region.

"The biggest achievements have been in three areas: environmental, social and economic," Nic said.

"We've arrested and in fact turned around the environmental degradation that was occurring. Our campsite condition reports indicate that degradation has been stopped and campsites are now stable. As a result of the introduction of the one-way system and capped daily departures,



Walkers at the new departure point for the Overland Track. Photo: Frank and Sue Wall

we've stopped the increasing damage that was occurring on the walking track itself, so we have started to return to a situation where the track is now environmentally sustainable.

"Socially, we've had big gains as well. Ten or 12 years ago, the experiences people were having on the track was, at times, far from a wilderness encounter in a World Heritage Area due to overcrowding. Now, because of the regulation of daily walker departures and one-way travel, people are having an experience that properly showcases the World Heritage Area and its wilderness values.

"Finally, we've made some real gains on the economic front. We have a sustainable funding model that enables us to operate the track on an annual basis. For example, in the 2013/14 season, the track enterprise generated \$1.2 million.

Having a reliable annual income means we can confidently plan for future operations and improvements."

The review also highlighted the fact that despite many improvements such as upgrades to the track, additional facilities such as huts and tent platforms and enhanced interpretation, the Parks and Wildlife Service recognises that visitor expectations continue to increase along with competition from other multi-day walking experiences.

"It's really important that we strengthen the Overland Track experience so it remains competitive and retains its international reputation," Nic said.

"We see the big opportunities as easier and more affordable access to the track, better gateway and departure experiences, improved services at Lake St Clair, and streamlined administrative processes, particularly for groups."

Hut upgrade, bridges replaced

Income generated by the Overland Track fee helps to maintain the infrastructure that supports walkers, including huts of varying ages, toilets and helipads.

Cradle Mountain's iconic mountain hut, Kitchen Hut, is set to provide a snug and safe emergency shelter for visitors to the Cradle Mountain Plateau for decades to come following a major restoration project earlier this year.

Works included reconstruction of the front wall, removal of internal plywood panelling, reinstatement of the cobblestone floor and replacement of doors and windows to make the hut more weatherproof. New stairs and an upper level landing have replaced the original upper level floor, giving access to the hut in times of high snow levels. New benches provide improved comfort for visitors.

PWS is liaising with a community workgroup established to plan conservation works for the Old Pelion Hut centenary in 2016. Anyone with an



Restoration work in progress at Kitchen Hut

historical association with Old Pelion, including photographs or items of interest, is encouraged to contact the Cradle Mountain office.

Other key infrastructure projects already completed include replacement of the helipad at Waterfall Valley. A new helipad with a fibre-reinforced plastic deck is located further from the hut to meet civil aviation guidelines.

A gateway trail head sign at Ronny Creek will provide an improved sense of

departure for walkers and photographic opportunity. This will be complemented by a similar sign at the Lake St Clair Visitors Centre.

At Frog Flats in the Forth River Valley a new bridge has replaced the old No 1 crossing – and not before time, as the log bearers had degraded badly. Cephissus Creek in Pine Valley has a new bridge. The old log crossing did not meet current safety standards and in late May a 12m long steel truss was flown into location.

Usage Guidelines

Last year the guidelines were developed to guide walkers intending to walk parts of the Overland Track during the booking season of 1 October to 31 May.

Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair parks and reserves manager Nic Deka said that everyone has a part to play in looking after the Overland Track.

The guidelines encourage walkers to walk in a north to south direction from Cradle Mountain to Lake St Clair. Exceptions to this are the sections of the track from Waterfall Valley to Cradle, Cynthia Bay to the Pine Valley turn-off, Pelion to Pelion Gap and Pelion to West Pelion.

Bushwalkers intending to use part of the track, and who do not pay the Overland Track fee, should not walk more than one overnight segment. The exceptions are entry onto the Overland Track from the Never, Never, Traveller Range and Du Cane Range.

The guidelines are available on the Overland Track web pages <http://www.parks.tas.gov.au/file.aspx?id=30021>. For further info contact the Cradle Mountain ranger in charge on 6492 1133.

Track rangers

The Overland Track rangers are a key cog in the well-oiled Overland Track machine. Five seasonal track rangers are out on the track in all weathers during the walking season of 1 October to 31 May. This season experienced rangers Paul Challen, Rob Lawrence, Alan Hillier, and Stuart Braid returned for yet another season and welcomed newcomer Rhys Wilson to the team.

The track rangers begin their shift by reporting on duty at either Ronny Creek at Cradle or catching the Lake St Clair ferry to Narcissus. And then they start walking and use the various huts as their

bases. Along the way they tackle track and hut maintenance, clean toilets and huts, check walking passes, provide first aid and answer any and all questions that come their way. They assist with helicopter operations delivering materials and flying out toilet waste and they help rangers and track work contractors with construction.

Feedback from walkers consistently highlights the invaluable contribution the track rangers make to walkers' Overland Track experience. They are said to be helpful, knowledgeable, friendly, laid back and even 'wonderful'!



Overland Track rangers (from left): Rhys Wilson, Eddie Firth, Eric Tierney, Rob Lawrence, Paul Challen and Allan Hillier.

Positive impacts of the Overland Track

The Overland Track has been a significant part of the Tasmanian tourism brand for many years, but it's also making an important contribution to regional economic development and the broader Tasmanian economy.

A recent report, The Socio-economic Impact of the Overland Track, identified the value of direct and indirect tourism expenditure from the track for 2012-2013 at \$16.36 million and estimated the business supports the equivalent of 85 full-time jobs.

Parks and Reserves manager Central West, Nic Deka, said the report confirms that the track is not only an Australian walking icon, but that the flow-on effects of the 8,000 people who walk the track each year to the Tasmanian economy, are considerable.

"The report highlights that the local businesses use the track as part of their identity and it provides an important training ground for staff in the adventure tourism industry," Mr Deka said.

"The track has a direct benefit to the many businesses that are associated with it through providing guided walks or transport for walkers to and from the track. Other businesses supply PWS with materials and/or services including track materials, products and services for the huts and toilets, energy supplies and helicopter services.

"In 2012-13, PWS spent \$905,000 on the track in staff costs, helicopter services and track and facilities maintenance, to provide a quality experience for walkers and maintain the very values that attract walkers to that experience."

Regional employment was identified as a significant benefit of the track, with PWS employing 10 staff (4.5 full time equivalent) on the Overland Track and a total of 42.8 full-time equivalent staff in Tasmania. When the total economic impact, including the supply chain that supports the tourism industry, is taken into account, it's conservatively estimated that the Overland Track supports 85 full-time equivalent jobs in the state.

A message from Minister Groom



Minister Matthew Groom,
Minister for Environment,
Parks and Heritage

Our Government has a goal of increasing visitors to Tasmania by 50 per cent in

2020 with our national parks and World Heritage areas set to make a major contribution.

In the recent State Budget, we've made a major investment in national park walking tracks which will help grow Tasmania's international reputation as a bushwalking destination and support this vision.

We are also stimulating interest in sensitive and appropriate tourism development in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area and national parks, to further improve and diversify the opportunities and experiences for all visitors.

The Overland Track is a shining example of how Government and private tourism operators can balance the integrity of natural areas with a quality wilderness experience. The Overland Track is a world renowned walk through a remarkable alpine wilderness. Our major partner on the Overland Track, the Tasmanian Walking Company's Cradle Mountain Huts Walk, has been operating for more than 25 years. Their walk experience, together with the public facilities provided by the Parks and Wildlife Service, has seen the walk consistently rank very highly in reviews of Australia's great walks and the Overland Track is a key part of Tasmania's tourism appeal.

We know that tourism experiences such as this contribute to regional economies and now we see the direct value of the Overland Track has been estimated at \$16 million for 2012-2013, with this economic activity supporting the equivalent of 85 full-time jobs.

It is satisfying to see a strong commitment by the PWS to continual improvement of this experience so that it remains competitive and retains its international reputation.

Walker quotes

A truly astounding walk! We enjoyed silent forests, chattering birds, cheeky pademelons...and are happy to report we got to use EVERY LAST BIT of our cold and wet-weather gear! Almost ate all our food, too! We really enjoyed the quality of the huts and the track maintenance – well-done OLT Rangers!

(Ruby & Daniel, Narcissus Hut, 26 Oct 2013)

...Fantastic father-son bonding event. 4 seasons in each day, sights, sounds and personal victories." (Andy Stuart, Narcissus Hut, 13 Oct 2013)

...Walking in fresh, unblemished snow; the sense of achievement scaling Mt Ossa; sleeping under the stars in Kia Ora and breathing in the views from the Pelion Hut helipad. Thanks Overland Track! We will be back soon!"

(Kat, Em, Peter, Narcissus Hut, 8 Nov 2013)

Volunteers – the unsung heroes

For the past 16 years, Wildcare Inc volunteer hut wardens have signed on to spend a day walking 10 kilometres into Waterfall Valley, to begin a 10 day shift as an Overland Track hut warden. Volunteers are based at Waterfall Valley, the first overnight stop on the track. They provide information to walkers about what to expect on the track, safety and minimal impact bushwalking practices. They also make sure the huts, campground and toilet are kept tidy.

At Waterfall Valley the wardens welcome the walkers, congratulate them on their achievement, and provide emotional and physical support to walkers. They provide

reassurance that the first day is one of the toughest, and that it does get easier. Pack fitting is a very popular service, as first time walkers have little experience in this crucial skill and are very appreciative of advice that can make a huge difference in comfort on the track.

The Wildcare Inc volunteer interpretation officer program begun three years ago, is going from strength to strength. The volunteers are based at the Cradle Mountain Visitor Centre during the peak six to eight weeks of the summer holidays and provide invaluable support to the visitor centre staff. The knowledgeable and enthusiastic volunteers add great value to the visitor experience.

Overland Track Annual Report

As a Parks and Wildlife Service Business Enterprise, the Overland Track generates its own income through charging walkers a track fee (currently \$200+ Parks Pass) and selling merchandise. In 2013/14 booking season 7403 visitors walked the track. Some of these walkers purchased an information package (including guidebook and map) or just a map. From these sales, the business enterprise generated \$1,247,551 of income. This income was reinvested in the management of the Overland Track through the employment of staff and contractors to undertake maintenance and project work, and the purchase of materials and tools to support this work. The chart at right provides a basic breakdown of how funds were utilised.

Major projects planned for the 2014-15 season

- Track works – finish works on Pelion Plains before starting works between Pelion Gap and Kia Ora.
- Narcissus Hut Node – Renovation of existing hut with new front verandah and construction of camping platforms.
- Narcissus Jetty – Structural repair and re-decking.
- Old Pelion Hut – Conservation works.
- Pinestone Valley Bridge – replacement.
- Waterfall Valley, Pelion, and Kia Ora Toilets – essential building maintenance.

