



— TAS —

## The Overland Track

WRITTEN BY **admin** • January 12, 2012





The Cradle Huts Walk, Tasmania.

This multi-day walk through World Heritage-listed landscapes should be on every Australian's must-do list. But if you want to collapse into a real bed each night, there's only one way to tackle the track, as

**Bruce Holmes**

discovers.

Striding out purposefully, our group of ten hikers begins our trek along Tasmania's iconic Overland Track, which covers 65km over six days through magnificent World Heritage-listed wilderness. We're accompanied by two guides from Cradle Huts, the only company allowed to use the eco-huts that are scattered along the path through this pristine environment.

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On a hike graded moderate, the steepest main track section is on our first day – up to Marion’s Lookout. We’re blessed with sunshine (something you can’t count on here) and great views of Crater Lake and Cradle Mountain. Further on, we lunch by a stream, drinking clear mountain water, before the track leads us towards Barn Bluff and our first overnight hut.

All the huts are similar in layout, with a kitchen/dining area with one large table to build camaraderie. Meals are prepared by the guides and people pitch in to help with chores. Five twin rooms cater for guests, each with two comfortable bunk beds. There’s a drying room for wet gear, adjacent to which are shared showers and toilets. Don’t use too much water as you’ll be the one pumping the handle longer to reinstate the supply afterwards.

The huts are built for minimal impact on the environment, using rainwater, gas and solar power. They are resupplied by helicopter twice each season and waste is taken out. I laugh at the sign on the door about the “batching toilet, the contents of which are given a first-class helicopter flight out of the national park”.

Our second day includes a short detour to a lake where, as the mist rises, our guide Will decides on a brisk early morning dip in Lake Will. I kid you not. The guides are twenty-somethings with boundless energy and enthusiasm, knowledge of the environment and training to ensure our safety. They’re also obviously oblivious to the cold.

We examine a quoll’s footprints before stopping for lunch by Lake Windermere. Other highlights are Forth Valley Lookout and the Enchanted Forest, where I spot a small wallaby. Each day there’s five to seven hours of walking at your own pace, followed by a communal dinner with people who become friends very quickly.

Seeing the magnificent wilderness isn’t cheap. The Tassie experience is about 15 per cent more expensive per night than tackling the Milford Track in NZ. But while other companies offer Overland Track guided walks for quite a bit less, you don’t benefit from the comparative luxury of a roof over your head – instead, you camp out in tents and have to carry about 6kg more a day. Our cosy hut, warm fire and glass of wine certainly seem the better option.

Day three brings beautiful landscapes, including a forest so peaceful it’s worth dropping to the back of the pack so you can walk solo. We check out Old Pelion Hut, a disused copper mine and a creek where fossils are easy to find.

The fourth day could be easy but some of us, including yours truly, take up the challenge of a five-hour detour, climbing Mt Ossa. Our guide points out two rocky towers, nicknamed The Gates of Mordor after that dire place in The Lord of the Rings.

It’s as steep as it can be for hiking without climbing gear – in places the path morphs into a scramble up the rocky mountain face. But at the summit the view is one of clouds sweeping across mountain peaks, and the moody spectacle is indeed reminiscent of cinematic Mordor. We reach our hut that night with a definite sense of achievement.

The fifth day’s highlights include a former trapper’s hut and Fergusson and D’Alton waterfalls. There’s a half-day walk on day six across flatter ground and over a swing bridge before reaching the magnificent Lake St Clair.

The walking over, those who’d given swimming a miss at earlier spots now decide to take the plunge from the jetty. It’s February, after all: how cold could the lake be?

Yow!

#### **THE AT VERDICT:**

Bruce Holmes, who paid his own way and visited anonymously, says:

“The Overland Track gets such hype, you wonder whether it’ll be all it’s cracked up to be. Unequivocally, it is! Many people in the cities will never see this beautiful landscape. For anyone of reasonable fitness and good health, pull on the boots, challenge yourself and see this amazing part of Australia first-hand. Forget your age, as six in our group of ten were over 60 and took it in their stride (excuse the pun). Cradle Huts is a well-organised outfit with committed and cheerful guides, comfortable huts and a dedication to preserving the fragile environment. Definitely recommended.”

#### **The Details**

**Where** Hikers are picked up and dropped off at Quamby Estate, west of Launceston. The hike itself journeys through Tasmania’s World Heritage area, following the Overland Track from Cradle Valley to Lake St Clair.

**Notes** The walk takes six days and five nights and includes transfers from Quamby, all meals, accommodation and expert guides. There are a maximum of 10 and a minimum of four hikers, and you average 10km per day. **Prices** for 2011-2012, twin share:

Jan 1-Mar 31 (peak) costs \$2800 per person; there is also a four-day itinerary. Apr 1-May 1 (off-peak) costs \$2600 per person. For accommodation before and after, ask Quamby Estate or Pepper’s Seaport Hotel Launceston about special rates for walkers.

**Contact** Cradle Huts, (03) 6392 2211; [www.cradlehuts.com.au](http://www.cradlehuts.com.au)

Quamby Estate, (03) 6392 2211.

Pepper’s Seaport Hotel Launceston

(03) 6345 3333.

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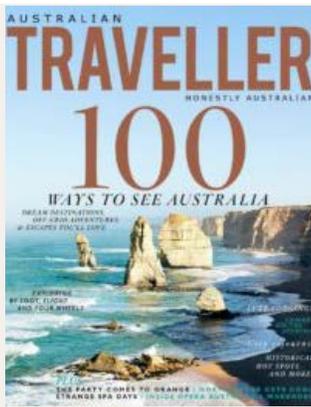
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