

Trek
in
Tasmania

I. The Full Traverse of the Western Arthurs

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The fabled Western Arthurs are a compact mountain range in the Southwest National Park of Tasmania. These mountains, together with the neighbouring Eastern Arthurs, are largely composed of quartzite, which has been pressed and baked, into a hard erosion-resistant rock formations. Past glacial periods have eroded each range into their current rugged topography with steep jagged ridges and numerous corries on each side of the main spine. Many of these corries hold a lake and there are around 30 on the Western Arthurs alone. Some of these lakes, like Lake Oberon, have reached a mythical status especially with photographers.

The Western Arthurs bear the brunt of the very unstable weather in this region which is brought in on the prevailing westerly Roaring Forties. This brings rapidly changing wet and windy weather interspersed with occasional fine periods. However warm winds from mainland Australia or icy blasts from the Southern Ocean can quickly arrive. Some rain falls on 250 days a year and even in summer there can be a snowfall. So hikers must expect the worst and allow for a couple of weather days.

When the weather is bad a few of the sections, notably from Lake Oberon to Haven lake, become serious undertakings, and the scrambling along the steeper parts of the ridge become very challenging with little or no possibility to camp and find

shelter. The traverse of Mount Pegasus and the descent from Mount Capricorn on Day 3, and the traverse of the Beggary Bumps on Day 4 would be dangerous in bad weather.

There are extensive patches of vegetation on the ridge. These can sometimes be an obstacle to push through, but can also afford great holds for some of the steep scrambling involved. Most of the vegetation is a scrub composed of Nothofagus, Scoparia, Pandani, and Epacris and it can grow to 2-3 metres. At the established campsites there are some sheltered clearings among the shrubs, which would otherwise be impossible to camp amongst. Down on the Arthur Plains between the base of the mountains and Lake Pedder are extensive poorly-drained flatlands covered in tussocky button grass. Where creeks cross these plains there are belts of very thick scrub and eucalyptus along their shallow banks.

There is little fauna in the Western Arthurs. Skinks (lizards) are plentiful, there are sometimes ducks or grebes on the lakes. Mice, yabbies (crayfish) and the ever present Currawong are common. Most of the larger animals are seldom seen in the mountains as they inhabit the plains and are nocturnal. These include wombats, wallabies, possums and quolls. There are occasional small white lipped snakes in the mountains and tiger snakes lower down, with both being venomous.



Day 2. There are about 30 lakes along the spine of the Western Arthurs. The dark waters of the lakes are surrounded by dense vegetation. This lake is Square Lake with Procyon Peak rising behind it.



Day 2. The most famous of all the lakes in the Western Arthurs is Lake Oberon, which was immortalized by the environmental photographer Peter Dombrovskis. It is on the south of the ridge.

Western Arthurs



Honey Richea, *Richea scoparia*, is endemic to Tasmania. It is a spiky plant abundant in the alpine SW mountains.



Fragrant Candlebush, *Agastachys odorata*, is a protea which is endemic to the heaths and button grass plains of south Tasmania and the Tasmanian Christmas Bell, *Blandfordia punicea*, which is also native to the SW Tasmania.



Epacris gunnii is a species endemic to Australia. It is common in the alpine mountains of SW Tasmania where it grows in thickets.

Access to the Western Arthurs is usually from the Scotts Peak Dam. This is about 200 km from Hobart with the final 100km being on a minor road - the last half of which is gravel. There is no public transport. Hitching could take long and renting an old car might be an easier option. From here there is half a days walk to the base of the Western Arthurs.

To complete the traverse of the Western Arthurs one must be completely self sufficient. This means carrying 10 days of food, tent and camping gear, wet weather gear and spare clothes. Food must be simple and uncomplicated and freeze dried is probably best. The water from the lakes and the rare stream is good to drink. It will be difficult to keep the rucksack under 25kg, but you must, as it all has to be carried up to the spine of the range and then along the steep and rocky ridges.

The weather can be ferocious and very wet and one must expect one period of foul weather along

the traverse. Therefore the tent must be storm proof with a robust bathtub type ground sheet to cope with wet camp sites. It is common for people to start off doing the 8 day full traverse and then abandon the latter third after 5-6 days and come down Kappa Moraine from Mt Scorpio to Seven Mile Creek because bad weather has caused a delay. However, with luck the weather can also be clement for the entire 8 days and you will be able to enjoy the entire range in relative comfort.

The best time of year to attempt this is in the late summer during February and March but even then there might be a storm. During the winter from May to October it could be challenging with snow on the ridges and the raging torrents on the plains.

There are 3 large scale 1:25,000 maps covering the area produced by Tasmapi. The sheet names are 4222 Crossing, 4422 Razorback and 4421 Glovers. John Chapman's book "South West Tasmania" is all one needs for this trek ISBN: 9781920995034



Map of the Western Arthurs in SW Tasmania. This is the Full Traverse taking 8-10 days. The more common Short Traverse takes 6-8 days and does the same anticlockwise circuit to Mt Scorpio before descending to Seven Mile Creek. To view in the correct orientation rotate the page 90 degrees anticlockwise.



Day 2. Looking east from the top of Mt Hesperus, 1099m, down the length of the quartzite Western Arthurs ridge. The lake below Mt Hesperus on the north (left) side is Lake Pluto. Mt Hayes, 1118m, is above the middle lake in the photo called Lake Neptune and Procyon Peak, 1136m, is above Lake Triton.



Day 2. Lake Oberon, 851m, lies on the south side of the ridge between Mt Sirius, 1151m, and Mt Pegasus, 10693m, which are both out of the photo but rise steeply from it. The slopes around the lake are covered in Pandani, *Richea pandanifolia*, an endemic, often single-stemmed shrub growing to about 3-4m.



Day 1. Looking up Alpha Moraine from the base on the Arthur Plains .The route to the top follows a rough path up the shrubby slope for a couple of hours then climbs more steeply through crags at the top to emerge near Mt Hesperus summit.



Day 2. Looking from the summit of Mt Hesperus down the Alpha Moraine to the Arthur Plains below, which is a vast poorly drained button grass flat. In the distance is Lake Pedder, which is a shallow dammed lake. Mt Ann is in the distance.



Day 2. Looking east from near the summit of Mt Hayes. From here the route goes steeply down the south ridge then climbs up to the saddle on the right of Procyon Peak, on the left of the photo.



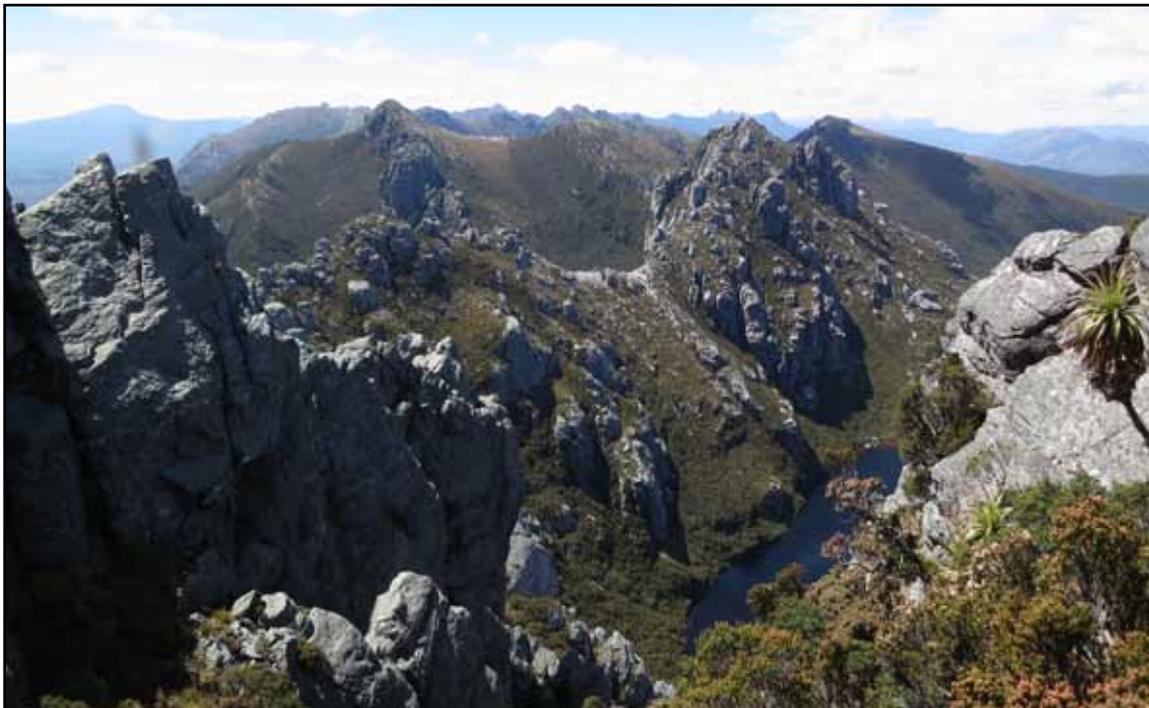
Day 2. The route comes down the south ridge of Mt Hayes. This is the first taste of the steep quartzite challenges which quickly become abundant as you proceed east along the ridge.



Day 2. The water in all the lakes is stained brown with the tanin which leaches out of fallen alpine vegetation as it rots on the ground. Nearly every lake has a golden beach near the inflow stream.



Day 3. Looking west from Mt Pegasus to the saddle between Mt Sirius (left) and Mt Orion (right). A steep route leads down from this saddle to Lake Oberon, here largely obscured by rock.



Day 3. Looking east from Mt Pegasus, 1063m, towards Mount Capricorn, just the other side of Lake Uranus. The climb from Lake Oberon up to Mt Pegasus summit is the most demanding section of the day with a hard 10 metre scramble and then a hole to wriggle through. The very steep descent from Mt Capricorn is a close second. High Moor is just beyond the long sloping ridge in the photo's middle right.



Day 4. Looking west from Mt Taurus, 1011m, down the western half of the range. The lake on the right is Lake Mimas, 637m. On the left of it are the Beggary Bumps. There are two halves to this obstacle: The lower bumps this side of the lake and the more difficult higher bumps the other side of the lake. High Moor is on top of the long sloping ridge to the photo's left. Haven Lake down behind us.



Day 3. The east ridge of Mt Capricorn is a very steep descent. There is an eroded route through the vegetation and in many places it is necessary to use roots as hand and foot holds. As this section becomes more eroded it will be harder.



Day 4. The notorious Tilted Chasm in the heart of the Beggary Bumps is perhaps the hardest section on Day 4, if not the entire hike. It is a steep, wet, gully whose surface is composed of cracked and shattered rock. Anything loose has already fallen.



Day 5. Promontory Lake, 836m, nearly lies on the spine of the ridge on a saddle between the rocky Carina Peak ahead, and the The Sculptor behind the photographer. After the rigours of the previous 3 days it is a relatively tranquil spot, with sheltered campsites in the protective scrub in the lake's SE corner.



Day 6. A lightening storm just about to break over Mt Canapus, 1061m, seen from the Centaurus Ridge, 1043m, to the south. Extreme weather in different forms is common along the ridge of the Western Arthurs and can arrive very quickly.



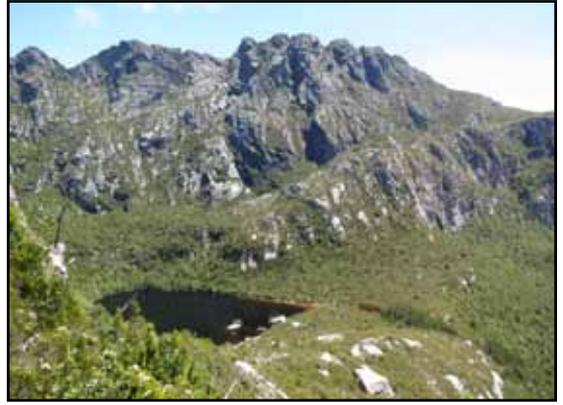
Day 6. Looking from the highest point in the Western Arthurs, West Portal, 1181m, towards the neighbouring Eastern Arthurs. The main peak in the distance is Federation Peak, 1225m, king of the Arthurs, and an exposed scramble to summit.



Day 6. Looking west over the whole of the Western Arthur Range from the summit of West Portal at the very east of the range. All the peaks and ridges which have been traversed over the last 5 days are laid out before you all the way to Mt Hesperus (just right of centre) which is just 18 km away in a straight line.



Day 5. Looking east down the range from Mt Scorpio, 1106m, over Promontory Lake and on to West Portal, 1181m, (right) in the distance. Most people finish right here returning to the shelter of the Arthur Plains by going down Kappa Moraine.



Day 5. Looking west from near Promontory Lake towards Mt Scorpio. The lake beneath Mt Scorpio is Lake Juno. The Kappa Moraine descends down Mt Scorpio to the right and follows a smooth rocky ridge down to the button grass flats.



Day 5. At the SE corner of Promontory Lake there are sheltered campsites protected from the gales by Myrtle Beech, *Nothofagus cunninghamii* which thrives in these mountains as an alpine shrub.



Day 6. Looking north from the lower slopes of The Sculptor over Promontory Lake in the middle distance. In the distance on the button grass flats of the Arthur Plains is the large Lake Pedder.



Day 6. Looking east from the saddle between The Phoenix and Centaurus Ridge. In the distant right is West Portal and sloping down to the left from it are the Crags of Andromeda, the last of the ridges.



Day 7. The Tasmanian Ground Parrot, *Pezoporus wallicus leachi*, is a secretive bird which likes the buttongrass and heathland of SW Tasmania. It feeds and breeds on the ground. It is rarely seen.

Tasmania: Western Arthurs Full Traverse

Day	Start	Finish	Km	Up	Down	Time	General
1	Scotts Peak Dam	Foot Alpha Moraine	12	270	270	5	From the hikers carpark just south of Scotts Peak Dam head NW through the woods on a good trail. The path passes through scrub and forest as it slowly veers to the south over a few km. Initially it is easy with well drained sections and boarded parts but after a couple of km this peters out and you are soon on the muddy paths of SW Tasmania. The path is called The Port Davey Track and you initially follow it for 7 km as it undulates gently towards Junction Creek. This creek can be difficult to cross if in spate but after dry weather is ankle deep. Just after this Creek is a path fork with McKays Track heading east along foot of the jagged Western Arthur Range while the Port Davey Track heads west. Take the latter for 4 km through scrub and across buttongrass plain towards the moraine slopes which flow down from the Western Arthurs. As the track nears the foot of the most westerly moraine, the so called Alpha moraine, flowing down from Mt Hesperus, 1099m, there is a small path which leads a km to the foot of it where there are campspots and water on the plain at around 300m.
2	Foot Alpha Moraine	Lake Oberon	10	1330	790	9	From the bottom of Alpha Moraine it is a steady 3 hour climb up the moraine with the upper part being quite steep before you burst out onto the moor. There now follows a pleasant undulating walk along the broad crest at the start of the range to Mt Hesperus 1099m, which is easily climbed above the first of many dark lakes with a golden beach fringing one side. From Lake Fortune there is more easy undulating walking across moorland before the path drops to Lake Cygnus where there are good campspots. After Cygnus the going gets more stony with a rocky ascent up Mt Hayes and a steep descent down a shallow gully on the east side to a gentle saddle. Another stiff climb takes you up to a higher saddle and a view over Lake Ceres. From here there is an easy descent to Square Lake surrounded by steep bluffs. Unfortunately there is yet another stiff climb up the slopes of Mt Sirius before the final very steep and wet descent, the first real difficulty, to Lake Oberon where there are campspots. The rich vegetation and small beach make this place a delight to camp at.
3	Lake Oberon	High Moor	4	650	530	7	From Lake Oberon head up to the saddle with Mt Pegasus where there is a small pond. Soon after the saddle the route encounters a 10m high crag. The difficulties ease somewhat but soon return at the top when you have to remove your pack and wriggle through a small hole. The views here over Lake Oberon and the range are stunning. Now there is a steep, but generally problem free, descent with occasional short downclimbs to reach the saddle between Mt Pegasus and Mt Capricorn both of which encircle beautiful Lake Uranos. It is a quick ascent up Mt Capricorn but the descent is very steep and dangerous in the wet as you lower yourself down peat and tree roots to a deep saddle at the bottom of the east ridge. From here it is pretty easy, but slow going, as you climb up from the saddle to High Moor hauling up on vegetation. There are great views here looking back to the rugged ridge over Pegasus and Capricorn which you have just traversed. It is further than hoped to reach the top and then drop down the east side to a small bowl where there are campspots and water.
4	High Moor	Haven Lake	4	560	630	7	From High Moor head immediately onto the Beggery Bumps - a series of aptly named gnarly rocky lumps. The path goes steeply up and then steeply down these for a short hour before it arrives at a notch between two steep lumps and the top of the notorious Tilted Chasm - a steep ravine which you have to scramble down. There are still a few more ups and downs before a steep descent to the saddle above Lakes Ganymede and Mimas. There is some respite now before the Beggery Bumps resume but while they have some slow and tricky passages they are not as difficult as the first series of gnarly outcrops. After some more clambering on small crags and tree roots you reach shallow saddle between the Beggery Bumps and Mt Taurus. The ascent up the west ridge of Taurus is surprisingly easy. From the top there are great views back over the last 8 km of the last two days. The descent to Haven Lake has a few easy scramble passages but soon enough you reach the lake which is surrounded by ancient bush with King Billy Pines. There are some poorly sheltered campsites here.

Tasmania: Western Arthurs Full Traverse

Day	Start	Finish	Km	Up	Down	Time	General
5	Haven Lake	Promontory Lake	5	460	520	5	From Haven Lake there is a gentle climb to the saddle to the west, and then a traverse across the east face of a rocky knoll. After descending knoll's north side there is a easy open walk to the next knoll which is easily climbed. The north side of this second knoll is very steep in places as you make your way down to the exposed Lake Sirona. From the lake the going is easy as you cross moorland to Mt Scorpio, 1108m. The optional complete ascent requiring a 10m scramble up a knife edge. From the summit the path continues north, with great views east and west, to what looks like an escarpment edge with the Kappa Moraine flowing down to the plains. Descend this escarpment for half hour to the top of the moraine where the path forks with a route heading NE down the moraine and another heading south to the barely visible Lake Vesta. Unless bailing out here take the latter and head down a stream valley first to Lake Vesta and then steeply down to Lake Juno. From Juno it is just a 100m climb to Promontory Lake. Follow the north and east shore to campsites in the very SE corner.
6	Promontory Lake	Lake Rosanne	11	930	1050	9	Head SE from the lake on a faint path through diminishing vegetation up past the rocky knoll of The Sculpture and then on up the bouldery mountain of The Phoenix, 1091m. Now the last section the Crags of Andromeda is just a valley away. To get there drop down to a broad saddle and cross the 3 km long undulating Centaurus Ridge. At the end of this the slopes up to West Portal start. At 1191m it is the highest in the Western Arthurs. Climb up its west ridge until the 1100m contour and leave your pack here. Scramble up to the top via the south side of its twin peaks to gain a marvellous view of all the ground over the last 5 days and also the Eastern Arthurs. If skipping this deduct an hour. Return to your pack and follow the faint path north along the stony slopes of the Crags of Andromeda, keeping to the crest or just west of it for an hour. At the north end of the Crags descend east down a valley then follow the difficult path as it pushes through thick scrub contouring to avoid the worst scrub below. Soon the scrub becomes grass and Lake Rosanne, 633m, is just below where one can camp.
7	Lake Rosanne	Seven Mile Creek	14	350	850	6	Skirt round the ridge on the south of Lake Rosanne, push through scrub at the outlet and then begin the long 400m descent down moraine out of the mountains and onto the flat Strike Creek Plains. Cross these wet button grass plains in a NE direction for a couple of km heading for the low Razorback ridge. Climb through these for a couple of km to reach the junction to the Huon and McKay Tracks just west of Cracoft Crossing. Now follow McKays Track NW as it skirts round the north side of The Razorback ridge and then veering west climbs back up to the low crest. Here there are great views of the Western Arthurs. By doing this the track avoids dense vegetation and keeps to drier areas on the hillside. It drops down the south side of the Razorbacks onto the Arthur Plains, a vast flat area to the north of the Western Arthurs. Follow these wetter muddy button grass plains NW for 5 km passing to the north of a wooded knoll on the plains. After these wet 5 km you reach Seven Mile Creek where the descent down Kappa moraine joins McKays Track. There are good sheltered campsites here.
8	Seven Mile Creek	Scotts Peak Dam	19	460	370	8	From Seven Mile Creek the reasonably dry path follows the Arthur Plains west. Mostly it stays on the slightly higher ground across the undulating buttongrass, where it is gravel underfoot, however it occasionally has to descend slightly into shallow valleys created by small creeks and here the vegetation is thick and it is often muddy. To the south throughout this walk are the jagged quartzite peaks of the Western Arthurs which was traversed so laboriously the previous week. After 4 hours on the McKays Track you reach the junction with the Port Davey Track and you are back on familiar territory. Turn right and retrace your steps 8 days previously for the quick descent to Junction Creek. Cross this and then continue north along the Port Davey Track for just under 4 hours to reach the carpark at the Huon River Campsite again. These 4 hours up the Port Davey Track are initially frequently muddy but after a couple of hours you meet some boarded and well drained sections and then a short section of primeval forest to finish the full traverse of the Western Arthurs.
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