

I had scouted the MTB trail options that would suit our family's range of abilities and the trusty old Pajero was loaded with our mountain bikes. It was time to hop aboard the Spirit of Tasmania for a two-week getaway and suss out some of lutruwita/Tasmania's trails.

My husband, Simon, has been riding trails for some 14 years and is well skilled. I am a trail runner who dabbles in MTB, and our boys (aged 15 and 11) have now been riding trails for many years. In our home state of Victoria, they've cut their teeth at Lysterfield, Anglesea, and Forrest where they confidently handle green and blue trails.

Like ski runs, MTB trails have a difficulty rating system. It's important to know the rating before you head off, as there's nothing worse than finding yourself on a trail that makes you question why you're there! Many trails are directional, so once you've started a run you are somewhat committed. You can hop off and walk but it's not particularly safe if other riders come flying down behind – for you or them!



Taking the Oonah Hill descent slowly on the gravel!

West Coast Trails

We decided to leave our tent behind for this trip and, although accommodation is somewhat limited in this remote part of lutruwita/Tassie, we managed to snaffle one of the last glamping tents at Zeehan Bush Camp.

Zeehan is a historic silver mining town deep in the wilds of the West Coast. Traditionally the country of the palawa people from the Peerapper and Tommeginne language groups, the main street is now lined with grand buildings from European settlement.

We were based here for 3 nights, and I chose it for a few reasons:

- it's conveniently located – about 30mins drive from everywhere else we wanted to go (Strahan, Queenstown, Roseberry)
- there's a fabulous collection of historic buildings (happy photographer)
- it also happens to have MTB trails (happy husband)

I had several riding adventures planned for our Tassie trip, but not all came to fruition for various reasons – mostly time constraints and weather. We started with the first purpose-built MTB trail on the West Coast at Zeehan.



Zeehan's historical buildings are a perfect photographic opportunity.

Spray Tunnel & Oonah Hill

Tassie turned on a stunning autumn day for our ride, with blue skies and no wind. We began at the trailhead of the Spray Tunnel track (near the golf course) with the plan to link up to the Oonah Hill trail. The Spray Tunnel is an abandoned railway tunnel leading to the disused Spray Silver Mine. Being a key attraction of Zeehan it can be busy with walkers as well as riders so take care, once inside the 100-metre long tunnel it's pitch black – a bike light or headlamp is handy! For a quick and easy family-friendly ride the Spray Tunnel trail is a good one and kids get a kick when they spot the glow worms in the middle of the tunnel – be sure to stop and look upwards.



Despite the daylight showing the exit, it's pitch black within the tunnel.

It's about 1.5km uphill to the tunnel, passing through a lovely fern-covered forest along a wide track. As you emerge from the tunnel's darkness, there are relics of buildings and abandoned boilers from the mine that can be explored, as well as the old collapsed shaft. From here you can either return the same way and enjoy the downhill or, if you're keen on a longer and more challenging ride, you could continue as we did.

Take a left onto the road once you're through the tunnel and a little way along, there's a track off to the left. This section is still a wide trail, but we found it rockier and much wetter. There were some decent puddles (fun!) and a bit of running water in places. I've read it can be more like a creek after rain so prior to attempting it be aware of the conditions!



The puddles made for some fun riding, but this section can get pretty wet after rain!

The track climbs steadily up for a kilometre, then is undulating before flattening out as you pass through a mine site. This area is exposed and there are open mine shafts around, so take care and stick to the track! We had now done just under 5km in 70mins, including time spent exploring the Spray Mine site.

On reaching Trial Harbour Road, turn right and follow it for a fairly easy 1.2km before turning left onto the Oonah Hill track. There's an incline to the top of the hill which is unavoidable regardless of whether you stay on the blue-rated, gravel surface of Powerline Hill, or take the green-rated 2.5km Oonah Hill Climb as we did.



This sign is not to be taken lightly and it's important to stick to the track!

It takes the average rider around 17 minutes to finish. It took us 40 minutes and we had a VERY cranky 11-year-old by the time we got to the top, but the spectacular view is worth it! Whilst fitness levels took a hit during Melbourne's extended lockdowns, I don't think that was the main issue. The trail is loose gravel and has many rather steep berms. These are banked turns, and they can be rather intimidating, especially if the surface is loose. They were a bit beyond the skill levels of myself and the kids, so we were often dismounting and walking them. This wasn't particularly easy either, as it was so slippery and I ended up going down one on my butt. Fortunately, we did not see another rider the whole time, so at least we weren't holding anyone else up with our berm navigating.



The sweeping view towards the top of the hill is worth the effort.

Once at the top, we collected ourselves and had a snack while appreciating the vast, open landscape. The downhill is 2.5km of groomed 'flow' track that increases in speed as you descend. Having now ridden it, I'd suggest it's not totally suitable for beginners.

Trailforks, a handy website for checking out trail details, describe this section as 'dark green' but, again, still enjoyable for all abilities. It certainly was fun but again, there were super steep berms that only my husband, with his experience, was game enough to try. I loved it when we got into the dense native forest and regained my confidence when the track changed from the loose gravel to dirt. The average time for the descent is 10 minutes and we did it in 45 minutes, again with a cranky child.



The final section of Oonah Hill where the gravel track leads down into the forest and changes to dirt.

After passing the 'MTB Trail End' sign, we came to Heemskirk Road where a right turn took our weary bodies back to town. We were cooked, but if you're keen for more you could turn left and add on the Mt Heemskirk Track for a total ride of 30km. Based on my research, I thought we would easily smash this ride out before lunch and have the afternoon to explore Queenstown. On the contrary, our efforts more than doubled the estimate and the whole expedition was just over 3 hours. By the end, we were famished, and we really should have had a packed lunch!



This is the route I mapped out using the app, [Strava](#).

If you have young children or less confident riders in your family, I highly recommend the Spray Tunnel track. For tackling Oonah Hill, however, you need to be a rider with a solid, intermediate level of capability. Simon would have loved to go back on his own to get the full experience without 3 anchors, but our itinerary was pretty tight. The scenery on the ride is stunning and one positive of going slow was time to take photos whilst waiting for the youngest to catch up.

Important side note: we didn't leave him on his own! Generally, I would ride ahead with our eldest who had better endurance levels on the day. Lucky for me, Simon got the grumpy kid!



Despite being hungry and exhausted, we were all smiling at the finish line!

We were really excited about backing this ride up with another green-rated trail to the [Montezuma Falls](#) - Tasmania's tallest waterfall. Unfortunately, the heavens opened the night before our planned ride. A fellow traveller in the [camp kitchen](#), who had attempted it before the rain, said the track was so boggy she had to turn back. We were very disappointed, and in more favourable conditions it sounds like a great family ride.

There are several other MTB options on the [West Coast](#), such as [Climies Track](#) (Trial Harbour to Granville Harbour), Sterling Valley (Tullah to Roseberry), and of course Queenstown - where they have just opened the first round of new trails to the public with more to come. We'll just have to make plans to return to this part of lutruwita/Tassie another time because the remainder of our two-week trip took us to the local MTB Mecca of Derby. Stay tuned for that!