

The South Coast Track is a remote wilderness hike following the southern coastline of the Southwest National Park in Tasmania. The track is approximately 85km long and runs from a lonely airstrip in Melaleuca to Cockle Creek.

While you do follow the southern coastline, the track also takes you through some fairly rugged and thick bush with a couple of mountain ranges thrown in to keep it interesting. The South Coast Track is remote. You need to be able to carry all food and supplies for the entirety of the trip as there are no opportunities for food drops if you are walking it by yourself.

Typically, hikers are flown into Melaleuca, they then proceed to hike out to Cockle Creek where they can be collected by a pre-booked shuttle bus.

Unfortunately, due to the high winds forecast, we were unable to fly so Par Avion offered to drive us to Cockle Creek so that we could start the track in reverse.



Off we go! Beginning the adventure.

Cockle Creek to South Cape Rivulet

I think the track knew we were coming. After being dropped off at the Cockle Creek visitor centre, we popped inside to pay the park fees and register our walk intentions. Meanwhile, the grey clouds turned to black and the heavens opened up.

Suiting up in all our wet weather gear, we paused for an obligatory photo at the trailhead sign and then it was time to hit the track.

Within the first half-hour, I became the first cautionary tale of what to watch out for (or not) on a wet and boggy track. The track was riddled with tree roots which if trodden on directly, become an adrenaline-filled theme park ride that comes to an abrupt stop. After pulling my now bruised body and ego out of a convenient mud puddle, I also discovered my first leeches. Thank heavens for my gaiters.



The track, and those slippery tree roots.

Having now instructed everyone on what not to do, and what to watch out for, we continued to make our way along the rather boggy track amongst the rain and hail. Speed was definitely not a happening thing. Several days of rain had preceded us, making for thick and heavy mud that sucked you in and clung to your boots.

The bush is quite dense in many places and dappled light filters through the trees in between showers. Brooks babbled and birds serenaded us as we clambered over, under and around fallen trees making our way to the coastline.



The coastline along the Southern Ocean.

Arriving at our first campsite

We followed the beach for a few kilometres till we got to our first campsite for the night. It was well sheltered, so we made our way down the creek a bit for freshwater. The tannins in the water were quite dark and looked like weak tea in our drink bottles but were cold, refreshing and very drinkable.

Our Sea to Summit Escapist Tarp was a saving grace on our first night and most of the

following nights. We strung it up over our tent, which helped to keep the rain and hail off and provided us with a dry place we could all gather underneath to eat.


Sheltering from the rain and hail under our tarp.

South Cape Rivulet to Granite Beach to Prion Boat Crossing to Little Deadmans Bay

The next few days were like a ‘Tough Mudder’ event. In between rain, hail and the occasional dollop of sunshine, we made our way to Little Deadmans Bay over the next three days.

The morning of day two bought us to our first of many water crossings for the trip. From here on, our boots were to remain wet and muddy.

After procrastinating as to whether we should strip down to our jocks and cross, in the hope of putting dry clothes on afterwards, it was pointed out that big fat rain clouds were on the way and the tide was coming in. So, across we went.

The current was fairly strong so we made sure to unclip our waist and sternum straps on our packs. That way if we slipped and went under, we would be able to free ourselves easily. Thankfully the wettest any of us got was me and my rear end as I was the most vertically challenged.


Crossing South Cape Rivulet.

From here on, it was a bit of a slog through very boggy mud. Now some mud puddles are greater than other mud puddles in that they are deep sucking, hold on to your boots and pull you in up to your waist type puddles. One of our team found this out the hard way. It felt too cruel to take a picture, though I should have. We soon learnt to try and skirt around the bogs as much as we could, and also depth test them with our hiking poles. Those hiking poles were a saving grace many a time along this track.


One of the body sucking bogs along the trail.

Making our way to Little Deadmans Bay

It wasn't all climbing over trees and avoiding mud pits as we made our way to Little Deadmans Bay. On the morning of day three, we traversed a slippery path down the side of a waterfall, rock hopped along Granite Beach and climbed back up to the trees on the other side. What a blast!


Up the ladder, off Granite Beach.

Back into the bush, we pushed on towards the button-grass plains. These had fantastic long sections of boardwalks to keep us out of the mud. From here, we got some great views of the upcoming Ironbound Ranges, which had snow on top... brrr!


Walking on the boardwalks along the plains.

The old bodies were feeling it a bit by now and setting up camp on day three was a welcome relief. All the campsites had drop toilets, access to water from nearby creeks and many had raised seating to keep us off the ground, and we were further away from those bothersome



leeches.



Setting up camp at Prion Crossing.

New River Lagoon crossing

The adventures continued on as the following morning we had to row four of us across New River Lagoon. The wind was picking up, the current was growing stronger and it was only 8 am. As well as getting four walkers and four packs over to the other side, you also had to ensure a boat was left on either shore for future walkers.

Luckily, I was just a passenger and got to watch as the boys battled with the weather and current. At one stage, one of our party just rowed on the spot for nearly ten minutes. You couldn't help but feel for him but it was hard not to laugh (says the passenger). And no, it was not the man pictured below.



Rowing across New River Lagoon.

There is a fair amount of beach walking involved on the track. Some days the sun would come out and we had the opportunity to take off our raincoats that felt like a second skin at that point. It was a great feeling. Other days it was a 4 km push battling strong winds and sandblasting.

Little Deadmans Bay was like a little slice of paradise and the perfect place to declare a rest day.



Getting sandblasted along Prion Beach.

Little Deadmans Bay to Louisa River to Point Eric to Melaleuca

Now here is something everyone should pack, K-Tape. Unfortunately, the start of our rest day did not go so well. Upon waking, we discovered bush rats had been busy overnight and had chewed many holes in the bucket floor of our tent. Note to all, secure all your food items, including bowls and cutlery (as that is what they appeared to be going for) in dry bags inside your pack. Another option is to hang your food up from a tree, as that is what many hikers do to keep their food out of reach of animals. The morning was spent repairing our tent with the now beloved K-Tape ensuring it would be waterproof once again.

Feeling well-rested on the following day, we began to make our way towards the Ironbound Ranges with a little, dare I say it, trepidation. Through reading and hearing many stories, we had built this section up to be bigger than 'Ben Hur'. The Ironbound Ranges involves a 935m climb and 905m descent from our side through some thick and boggy terrain. And yes, more fallen trees.



Here I am climbing across one of the many fallen trees.

Things did go haywire

Unfortunately, this was the morning when things went haywire. Crossing a fast running stream I hit an algae-covered rock and went down faster than greased lightning, landing directly on my wrist. Five days later we were able to get to the hospital in Hobart and confirm that it was indeed broken.

In the meantime, I froze my wrist in the stream, wrapped it up, popped a couple of anti-inflammatories and carried on walking. Those trees and mud bogs became a little harder to navigate but it was all doable.

Coming down the other side of the Ironbound Ranges had us all thanking the weather gods for dictating that we walk the track in reverse. It was steep. It was very steep. I could see how my friend who had done it a couple of years before said that some people had dropped to their hands and knees in places.



Nearing the top of the Ironbound Ranges.

Finishing the track

The following couple of days were pretty much plain sailing. It gave us time to stretch our legs and look around without disappearing into a mud hole. Though we still had some water crossings, several beach walks and plenty of boardwalks to keep us busy.

Some of the beaches were just calling for us to stay a while but we had a plane to catch, and I was quite keen to get my wrist looked at by this point.

So, it was on the 8th day we arrived at Melaleuca airstrip, dirty, a bit smelly and let's not talk about the hair. But the stories we had to tell were great.



The walkers are done!

Favourite pieces of equipment:

- Hiking poles - as well as testing depths of mud holes they were invaluable for pulling myself up some of the very large steps throughout the hike.
- K-Tape - because rats make big holes in tents.
- Gaiters - because there's mud, lots and lots of mud.
- Etherlight Mat & Pump - this mat is 10 centimetres off the ground, and really is 'comfort plus' while listening to the rain and hail at night.
- Flame FmIII sleeping bag - It's small and lightweight and the pack down size allowed me to fit more food into my 50-litre pack.
- Back Country Cuisine Desserts - I can thoroughly recommend the Back Country Carrot Cake and Custard for a sweet treat after a hard day. It is the best dessert I have had out of the whole range.



Welcome to the jungle!



Songs for the hike

- *Slip Slidin' Away* by Paul Simon - those theme park ride tree roots.
- *Always Look on the Bright Side of Life* by Eric Idle - rain, hail, mud, broken wrist.
- *Welcome To The Jungle* by Guns N' Roses - cause it was!



I would do this track again, next time with less mud.

Would I do this track again?

Would I do it again? In a heartbeat. It would be awesome to try it from the other direction but with less mud, much less mud. It was physical, it was wet, it was muddy, it was exactly what I expected it to be and I loved it.

What's your favourite hike in Tassie? Let us know in the comments.